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Quezon City as an Inclusive and Caring City: Delivering SDGs through Gender-Transformative Governance

Expert paper prepared by:

Ma. Josefina G. Belmonte*

Mayor of Quezon City

* The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent those of UN Women, the United Nations or any of its affiliated organizations.

This paper seeks to further examine the ways in which global commitments can be translated into local realities, while also exploring the key challenges encountered in their implementation at the local level.

As the largest urban center in the Philippines, with over 3.3 million citizens, Quezon City has chosen to make equality intrinsic to governance. We have spent almost two decades building our systems, guided simply by the belief that our people deserve a government that leaves no one behind.

Our work is strengthened by an active network of nearly 3,000 accredited civil society organizations – including a strong women’s sector and others like the cooperative sector and urban poor sector that are women-led. It took us almost two decades to build this movement, capacitating them for meaningful engagement in government decision-making. Our civil society organizations shape our development priorities through our People’s Plan, and they help us determine how public funds can meet their needs through participatory budgeting.

Parallel to this is the massive digital transformation of our government, which streamlines access to a wide range of services, and our unified identification system, which builds a comprehensive record of every individual within our jurisdiction. Our data is disaggregated by gender, age, disability, geographic location, income and sector. With those systems in place, we have been governing with intention – reaching sectors that have long been considered invisible: women in detention, those living with HIV, vendors and others in the informal economy, migrant workers, among others.

Our data infrastructure has guided us in concretizing our commitments to equality, with over half of our annual budget dedicated to social services, and our allocation for gender and development programs going well beyond the national mandate of 5 per cent. Departments are trained to design their work through a gender lens – weaving equality into our interventions on gender-based violence, livelihood, health, education, disaster risk reduction and climate resilience.

By being deliberate with inclusivity and targeted interventions, we were already developing a care system – even before we were formally introduced to the concept. Today, we are bringing our interventions into a formal Comprehensive Care Framework, with the help of partners like UN Women.

Complementing this work is our stronger commitment to our people under our Open Government agenda, where we are setting transparency and self-accountability mechanisms: institutionalized access to data, feedback platforms and stronger channels for citizen action.

Without ever consciously ticking Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) boxes, we have done the work that advances those goals. And in a country where national guidance has been thin, we

set our own standards, because our close work with civil society, especially our women's sector, made it clear that equality could not wait for a framework to demand it.

Quezon City has been able to pursue this level of reform because we have a wider fiscal space and a strong network of collaborators: academic institutions, national offices headquartered in our city, private sector partners. Most localities in our country do not have the same capacity, leaving care delivery exposed to patronage politics, where funding follows political alignment rather than need. Under those conditions, gender-transformative governance remains the exception, and it is left almost entirely to the values of whoever happens to hold office.

Given these challenges, I offer three recommendations for a post-2030 framework:

- (i) First, redesign monitoring to capture local outcomes. The current architecture measures compliance, not delivery. National governments should institutionalize local reviews, establishing a real channel for local data to flow upward, so that what is reported to the world reflects what is actually happening on the ground. More importantly, regional collaboration must be built up. In our case, through the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, common standards can be developed closer to local contexts. Setting regional standards is an opportunity to bridge the translation gap.
- (ii) Second, design a strategy to close the gender data gap. We cannot change what we don't measure. Today, too much of what happens to women, girls and gender-diverse people goes unseen and uncounted. Closing this gap is a design problem. Disaggregated and open data must be the default across every level of government – and mechanisms must be set, across agencies, to actively deploy these for evidence-based decision-making. Digital and data infrastructure of local governments must also be invested in, to ensure that we capture the most granular data.
- (iii) Third, institutionalize a seat for local governments and strengthen their capacity to deliver. Most of the outcomes the SDGs aim for are delivered by local governments, but we are largely absent from the venues where decisions are made. What we need is sustained technical guidance to navigate global frameworks – and a formula that directs resources and capacity-building to the localities that have long been left behind.

As the global community considers a successor framework beyond 2030, it is imperative that sub-national governments – particularly local governments – be recognized and resourced as frontline implementers of gender equality and women's empowerment.