

# LESBIAN, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

## MAKING IT WORK IN THE PHILIPPINES

Women's economic empowerment is of critical importance for the achievement of human rights, gender justice and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Philippines. However, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (LBT) women are not fully benefiting from efforts to advance towards women's economic rights and equality in the country. Many remain trapped in poorly paid, unstable jobs and are forced to rely on extractive loans or support from friends and family to supplement their low incomes.

### BARRIERS TO LBT WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN THE PHILIPPINES

#### Unenforced legal protection

Even where legal provisions exist to protect LBT women's rights, such as local Anti-Discrimination Ordinances (ADOs), they are not fully implemented or enforced, meaning LBT women remain discriminated against.

#### Violence, abuse and harassment

Despite anti-bullying legislation, LBT women continue to face abuse in schools, workplaces and in the home. For example, bullying and discrimination in the education system by both students and teachers is common. Hostility towards them can cut short LBT women's education, limiting their employment opportunities later in life.

#### Exclusion from public service provision

Social protection does not fully cater to the needs of LBT women and their families. For example, LBT women have reported being left out of post-typhoon disaster relief and having their partners excluded from schemes such as PhilHealth.

#### Discrimination in the labour market

LBT women also face discrimination in the labour market at all employment stages, with transgender women reporting the highest levels of discrimination. As a result, LBT women are often restricted to certain kinds of work they may not have chosen otherwise. For example, lesbian women often find themselves working in stereotypically 'masculine' jobs such as security guards, while trans women typically end up working in stereotypically 'feminine' jobs in salons, beauty pageants and/or in commercial sex work.

#### Gaps in understanding

Differences in understandings of and language used around sexual orientation, gender identity and expression (SOGIE) and empowerment often limit the impact of efforts to support LBT women's economic empowerment. Divergence between policymakers' and LBT women's concepts of discrimination, for example, can result in prioritization of policy changes that do not necessarily meet LBT women's needs.

This factsheet is based on findings from a study on the economic empowerment of LBT women in the Philippines, conducted in 2019 by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and GALANG, with support from the Being LGBTI in Asia and the Pacific Programme.



# RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADVANCE LBT WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

## National government

- Strengthen the national legal framework for women by passing the SOGIE equality bill and ensuring different anti-discrimination legislation and women's human rights laws such as the Magna Carta for women are inclusive of LBT women.
- Expand initiatives to tackle violence, abuse, harassment, stigma and discrimination faced by women in the public and private spheres.
- Ensure LBT women's full and equal access to education, training and skills development.
- Ensure equal access to services including quality health care and social protection.
- Support access to quality employment for LBT women, including those groups that may face additional barriers such as disabled or older LBT women.
- Invest in improving the capacity of the Philippine Statistics Authority to gather robust sex- and gender-disaggregated data.

## Local governments

- Ensure effective, enforceable and adequately staffed reportorial and redress mechanisms are in place for LBT women that have been discriminated against.
- Scale up efforts to adopt and implement local ADOs and increase stakeholders' knowledge and understanding of them.
- Institute and build the capacity of barangay lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) helpdesks, ensuring they are staffed with SOGIE-sensitive staff, as a one-stop source of information and guidance to those seeking to further LBT rights and economic empowerment.

## Private sector

- Develop and enact inclusive workplace policies and procedures, and SOGIE sensitization trainings to tackle workplace discrimination at all stages of employment, including recruitment, retention and promotion.
- Ensure SOGIE-responsive workplace environments, including gender-inclusive restrooms, and actively support freedom of gender expression in relation to LBT women's self-expression and dress codes.
- Share good practices and 'success stories' of initiatives which have worked with other private sector actors to increase inclusion of LBT women.

## Civil society organizations

- Map out formal and informal support currently available to LBT women to identify gaps and inform critical areas for investment in research and interventions.
- Forge strategic alliances with champions within government, women's organizations and LGBT activists to further LBT women's economic empowerment, to share expertise and learnings and develop joint initiatives, including advocacy at all levels.
- Incorporate specific challenges faced by LBT women and the priority actions needed to address them into advocacy and programming of diverse civil society organizations.

## International organizations

- Amplify LBT women's voices through research and advocacy on their priorities and needs, and through financial support to LBT women's organizations.

## All actors

- Ensure that approaches to LBT women's economic empowerment are rooted in LBT women's own priorities, needs and understandings and respond to their evolving lived realities by engaging LBT organizations in regular and meaningful dialogue and ensure their voices inform policies and programmes.



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