



THE INTERNATIONAL
PLATFORM FOR LGBTIQ+
INCLUSION AT WORK

FREE TO
BE ME

MANILA

2023

ROUNDTABLE
DISCUSSION
REPORT



Workplace Pride brought together the Business community and Civil Society organizations in Manila for a productive dialogue on LGBTIQ+ inclusion. The discussions revealed the invisible spaces and communities that intersect in significant ways, and exposed the areas needing bold collaboration to better define what Socio-Economic Development means for LGBTIQ+ people of the Philippines.



Government of the Netherlands

SUMMARY

The five-hour event was hosted by IBM and brought over 25 representatives from the Business Community and Civil Society organizations including Student organizations, to tackle the theme Building a More Inclusive Socio-Economic Environment for LGBTIQ+ in the Philippines.

Cristine Brevia, Workplace Pride Regional Lead for Asia and event moderator welcomed everyone. She then introduced Raul Hular, Project Manager of Yayasan Hivos who spoke briefly to give the audience an overview of the Free to Be Me Program. Thereafter, the Dutch Ambassador, Marielle Geraedts, made her opening remarks and was followed by a welcome message from IBM's Client Delivery Center Leader for Business Process Operations, Long Inton. Graham Sparks, Workplace Pride Project Manager, then proceeded to provide the group an orientation of Workplace Pride, their mission and why Workplace Pride is prioritizing creating spaces to discuss socio-economic development.

Graham then presented the Civil Society Toolkit – a guide to support civil society organizations in their interaction with businesses. Introductions and an audience discussion on stereotypes and challenges was facilitated shortly after.



Breakout discussions on socio-economic development for the LGBTIQ+ communities in the Philippines followed after lunch. Representatives detailed their personal experiences and their views on where the work lies to push the inclusion and socio-economic development for LGBTIQ+ agenda further. Finally, a panel discussion on bridging the gaps between business and civil society took place with good audience participation. Graham and Cristine made closing remarks and reminded the attendees that the day's conversations were only the beginning, to expect more collaborations, and to keep the conversation going.

This event was made accessible to Deaf attendees through sign language interpreters.

Opening Remarks

Ambassador Marielle Geraedts The Netherlands Embassy in the Philippines

The ambassador referred to the Netherlands' journey of becoming one of the most inclusive countries with LGBTIQ+ rights and proposed that this is a possibility when societies are mindful that gender expression is an inherent value and not grounds for discrimination and violence. She reiterated that the Netherlands Ministry will continue to champion and support LGBTIQ+ rights. She acknowledged the struggle that the community continues to experience in many parts of the world, and referred to most of these struggles as basic human rights in living out one's life. She then stressed the importance of society's acceptance, tolerance and alliance. She reminded the attendees that many gender inequalities are not only codified in policies and laws, but challenges can at times be more deeply rooted in culture and religion.

The ambassador expressed appreciation for the people in attendance from the various sectors and commended them for their ability to transform words into actions. She encouraged everyone to think creatively to achieve socio-economic opportunities for their cause and urged them to form stronger alliances. She commended the projects of Hivos, Workplace Pride, and those in attendance saying, *"No act is too little or too small in making a difference to gender equality."*

"No act is too little or too small in making a difference in gender equality."



Loida "Long" Inton IBM Client Delivery Center Leader, BPO

Long welcomed the ambassador and all those in attendance to the vibrant IBM office at the U.P. Ayala Technohub. On behalf of IBM, she expressed their pride and honor as hosts for this event. Long referred to the children's book "Free to Be..." by Marlo Thomas, stating that 50 years since its release, the book's message still resonated today and continues to inspire a better, more inclusive tomorrow. She made an analogy of her tenure with IBM where she continues to feel empowered by the company's long-standing commitment to inclusion. She reminded the attendees to keep fostering an environment "where people can thrive because of their differences and not in spite of it".

Long commended the IBM-sponsored Business Resource Groups (BRGs) who were well-represented at the event, for their dedication and hard work in supporting the event hosting. She wrapped up encouraging everyone to leverage the networking opportunity to push the gender equality agenda together.



Civil Society Business Toolkit

by **Graham Sparks**

Graham Sparks, the Program Manager of Workplace Pride for the Free to be Me project presented the Civil Society Business Toolkit – a guide designed for CSOs to help them work closely with the business world. The toolkit aims to enable CSOs in building their confidence and capabilities through practical guidance, specific actions and steps in achieving sustainable progress. Graham began by discussing how business and civil society can move in different spheres but beyond the stereotypes, there is more that connects than separates. Graham also mentioned the timeliness of the toolkit as intersectionality in several social movements are growing more evident every day and LGBTIQ+ inclusion matters to more social groups now. Graham explained how businesses are faced with dilemmas with the challenging times brought about by populism and ideology being embedded in many communities. He proposed that the toolkit can help CSOs get the voices of the community heard by interacting with businesses more productively.

Graham moved on to cover socio-economic development in the lens of Workplace Pride with its pillars built on collaboration, confidence building and creating connections. He then invited the participants to deepen the conversation and think about the dilemmas and challenges each are faced with at work, and to come up with ideas to sustain the momentum in socio-economic development opportunities for LGBTIQ+ communities.

Audience Discussion

The audience discussion was revealing and reinforced some of the stereotypes mentioned above:

- Stereotypes exist. Some negative characteristics are instinctively attributed to LGBTIQ+ communities: Business is only concerned with profit and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are too radical or politicized.



- CSOs are sometimes criticized by the business sectors for espousing equality perspectives that can be used for trade unions which can create business problems.
- CSOs see businesses engaged in rainbow washing, leveraging equality principles haphazardly and mostly for profitability.
- Driving change for gender equity and equality is a journey for businesses. Risks of association (with CSOs) carry branding concerns and they are given cautious consideration.
- CSOs are challenged when it comes to research data and evidence based arguments. There is heavy reliance instead on the critical perspectives or over-arching principles of socio-economic equality to guide their actions.
- Businesses and CSOs experience roadblocks in their conversations when they don't see the same value for the issues on-hand. Hence the toolkit can be a reconciliation of such differences.
- CSOs appreciate learning to navigate conversations and scenarios that have more value to the Business.
- CSOs need to continue engaging the businesses despite previous unreadiness and rejections, to give businesses a chance to work towards a common goal.

Graham closed by encouraging participants to stay curious. He reminded them that business cases aren't hinged on just one aspect (e.g. human rights), and proposed to bridge gaps through discussion, and growing awareness of the intersections and shared values.

Socio-economic development for LGBTQIA+ in the Philippines

Cristine invited the representatives to break into groups and discuss how they view socio-economic development or what this means to them.

Audience Discussion

- All groups acknowledged constantly grappling with fear – the fear of being stereotyped, the fear of conflict or rejection, and the inability to steer the conversation productively
- Powerful coming out stories of Deaf representatives of the community portrayed acts of courage and the biases that persist rooted in Filipino culture and religion. Families are viewed as the single most powerful unit for potential safety of gender expression, and likewise the most debilitating source of shame.
- While there are strides in formal education institutions, informal education is needed to reach more social groups.
- Youth, People with Disabilities and members of religious groups intersect in invisible spaces that need to be factored into the equality efforts. Members are invited to look for who is not present in discussions, such as the current one, and make a targeted effort in reaching out.
- Larger and global organizations who are already bought in can have greater influence by bringing the agenda to their customers and suppliers.
- Smaller businesses can be influenced to take on an umbrella approach to begin equality efforts. CSOs can start conversations about diversity and inclusion prior zooming into LGBTQIA+ agenda
- Experiences in government funded support such as vocational training specific to LGBTQIA+ communities come in stereotypical form and lacks the feedback loop to understand equality needs. CSOs can step up in highlighting the gaps and communicating the actual experiences and struggles better.
- Pride network leaders should push legal teams to sign up for the SOGIE Equality Bill and UN LGBTQIA+ Standards of Conduct for Business. There is greater influence when companies declare their support.
- The network should help grassroots CSOs become registered and legitimate.

"The union amongst us represent the amplification of the things we truly deserve as people." -Mela Habijan



Panel Discussion: Bridging the Business & Civil Society

The Panel

Rich An Cruz - Diversity and Inclusion Leader for IBM ASEAN Region and Korea
Mela Habijan - Media Personality, Actor and Content Creator, Ms. Transglobal 2020
Jonvi Faustino - CIC PH Hybrid Cloud Transformation Service Line and Philippine IBM Associates Program Leader
Moderated by Xirlangela Dela Pena, IBM HR Delivery Process Owner and Co-Lead of EAGLE ASEAN

The panelists were asked to share why they were passionate about pushing the LGBTQIA+ agenda, why unity is important and how can the groups collaborate.

Key take aways

- Everyone deserves equal access to success.
- Before workplaces, the earliest exposure to society is with churches, schools, families. The more of us speak of equality, the more influence there is.
- Our differences can complement each other if we can learn to listen better.
- Grit, will, and the acceptance of realities are all necessary to sustain the progress.
- Allyship and intersectionality can further the agenda while more LGBTQIA+ representation with opportunities from the business can go a long way.

FREE TO BE ME ROUNDTABLE AGENDA

March 10, 2023 Quezon City, Philippines

TIME	DESCRIPTION
09:30	REGISTRATION
10:00	WELCOME AND ORIENTATION - Moderator, Cristine Breva <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cristine welcomes everyone, introduces welcome remarks speakers, Workplace Pride, and the Free to be Me campaign• Orientation by HIVOS Program Officer Raul Hular• Welcome remarks from the Dutch embassy• Welcome remarks from host company, IBM• Orientation by Workplace Pride, Program Manager, Graham Sparks
11:00	PARTICIPANTS INTRODUCTIONS
11:10	CIVIL SOCIETY BUSINESS TOOLKIT - Facilitator, Graham Sparks <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Presentation (20 minutes)• Q&A (15 minutes)• Audience Discussion (30 minutes)
12:15	LUNCH BREAK & SOCIALS
13:15	SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE PHILIPPINES <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What does it mean for us? - Moderator, Cristine Breva• Audience Discussion
14:00	PANEL CONVERSATION ON INCLUSION: BRIDGING THE BUSINESS AND CIVIL SOCIETY Q&A with Business Leaders and Advocates <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Why does this matter to you?• Why is it important for the business & CSOs to have a united front?• How can we better unite in the cause?
14:30	CLOSING <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Remarks from Graham Sparks• Photograph Opportunity• Snacks and Networking• Guests leave at their pleasure



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