



## **Bridging the Digital Divide in the Philippines through Education: Interview with Hon. Bernadette “BH” Herrera Dy**

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*March 3, 2017*

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Technology competency plays an increasingly crucial role in adapting to today's changing economies and global needs. According to the World Economic Forum, 90% of the entire population will be connected to the internet within 10 years. Ensuring quality learning and equity, where all individuals have opportunities to learn digital skills, is key to promoting an inclusive society and sustainable development. The Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD) is pleased to share an interview with a member of AFPPD's Standing Committee on Investing in Youth, Hon. Ms. Bernadette “BH” Herrera Dy (Member of Parliament, Philippines), on her work in promoting computer literacy to students and beyond in the Philippines. Hon. Herrera Dy is a member of the Philippine Legislators’ Committee on Population and Development (PLCPD), the member National Committee of AFPPD in the Philippines.



## BACKGROUND



### **Hon. Ms. Bernadette "BH" Herrera Dy**

*MP, Philippines and Member of AFPPD Standing Committee on Investing in Youth*

Hon. Ms. Bernadette "BH" Herrera Dy serves as Member of Parliament representing the Bagong Henerasyon Party List. She is the Vice Chairperson of the House Committee on Welfare of Children, and Member of the Committees on Rules, Foreign Affairs, Small Business and Development, Metro Manila Development, Ways and Means, and Accounts. She is a member of the Philippine Legislators' Committee on Population and Development (PLCPD), the member

National Committee of AFPPD in the Philippines. Hon. Ms. Herrera Dy has numerous accomplishments in health and education advocacy, having initiated the Supplemental Feeding Program for the Risk Group or the Malnourished Group, and established the First Free Mobile Clinic and several community-based Computer Learning Centers in Quezon City. She has also founded a multi-awarded non-government organization called Bagong Henerasyon Foundation, Inc. (BHFI) which has become her backbone in providing quality service to those in need.

## INTERVIEW

*January 27, 2017*

**We understand that a major part of your work on education advocacy is related to computer education. You established the Computer Learning Centers in 2001 and the innovative Computer-on-Wheels project in 2004. What has motivated you to start these initiatives?**

I started the Computer-on-Wheels project in 2004 after witnessing a computer learning gap in public schools. At the time, many public schools in Quezon City lacked computer laboratories and it was difficult for children to learn how to use these tools with mostly pictures rather than hands-on trainings. However, due to the budget constraints, supplying computers to schools was also a challenge.

**To address this issue, I started the first computer school on wheels in the Philippines. With the help of a grant by Australian Aid, a simple container van was converted into a classroom equipped with computers.**

I was able to take this mobile classroom to different schools and teach anyone who wanted to learn basic computer literacy. Prior to this project, I initiated the creation of various Computer Learning Centers in Quezon City. However, the idea of a mobile classroom came to me because I wanted

to reach out to more individuals and bridge the digital divide in the Philippines. If students could not come to the computer centers, I thought it would be easier for me to go to them.

**Can you comment on the impact of these trainings on your students?**

**Through these initiatives, I have trained computer literacy to public school teachers, mothers, government employees as well as students from primary and secondary schools.**

Many public high school students today have a hard time competing with those who come from private schools because they did not have access to computer education. Therefore, bridging this gap is crucial for their future. Furthermore, I have also seen public school teachers receiving promotions after undergoing my trainings as they were able to teach basic computer skills to elementary school students. I would also like to highlight that it is crucial for women and girls to have access and knowledge on how to use these technology correctly and responsibly. This is a form of empowerment itself. Without these access and skills, you risk being taken advantage of, and you risk being left behind.



**Can you comment on any challenges that you've seen in relation to the gender gap in computer education during your experience? For example, were there more male students than females?**

From my experience, I did not witness any pressing gender gaps and the classrooms were generally gender-balanced. In fact, there were often more women who came to my trainings than men, including stay-at-home mothers.

**Are the two previously mentioned projects on-going? Were you involved in any recent projects related to technology and education?**

The two projects are still on-going today. We have recently established the Department of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in the Philippines which focuses on technology development in the country. It is currently running in its first year. A part of my role as one of the heads of the department is to ensure a gender-sensitive perspective is incorporated in all plans and programs.

**The internet may also pose some safety risks, especially to young girls. How can parliamentarians play a role in overcoming the digital divide while taking account of the risks associated with technology?**

We have several initiatives that tackle these risks which involve monitoring internet access, including age restriction and blocked access. Additionally, when we teach computer literacy in schools, we also teach about online risks.

For instance, it is important to empower women and girls on how their vulnerabilities can put their lives in danger in the digital space.

The Congress has also passed several laws, such as the Cybercrime Prevention Act of 2012, to address issues related to online interactions, to ensure that information dissemination on the internet is safe for all, including women and children.

**As an AFPPD Standing Committee Member of Investing in Youth, how do you see your role as well as the role of a parliamentary group like AFPPD in strengthening youth empowerment in the region, particularly the empowerment of young girls?**

I certainly believe that bridging the digital divide is a relevant issue today. Everything around us have become computerized and it is crucial that individuals have access to technology so that they will not be left behind.

I also want to stress on another crucial issue that affects youth which is reproductive health. We have to empower women and girls about their bodies: how to cope with uncertain body reactions, how to take care of their bodies during pregnancy, and how to prevent sickness. Currently, the Department of Health in the Philippines wants to distribute condoms in schools. This initiative has been widely discussed and there are disagreements. However, this is a present issue that I am trying to protect with other legislators because we strongly believe in its importance for the health and well-being of women and girls in the country.