

Intervention

Thank you mdm moderator for the question and having me as a youth representative to talk about SDG 11.

Before I respond to the question, I want to tell you a story.

As someone who work with marginalized groups, I have this one encounter with a young girl name Jessica. She was living in a slum of a fast-growing city in our region.

She did not have formal residency documents, so she struggles to access subsidized housing. She lived in a crowded settlement, far from public facilities. And when she finally reaches out to get services, she faced stigma for working as a sex worker and discrimination for being HIV positive.

The reason why I want to share her story, because it does not reflect the development of the city, instead it exposes the inequalities within it.

This is just one of thousands—if not millions—of lived realities across our region.

So to answer your question, mdm moderator,

First, governance must begin with systems that are rooted in lived realities.

Yes, new buildings are rising, transport lines are expanding, and development plans look impressive on paper. But when cities expand without understanding about how young people actually live, work, and earn, they unintentionally push youth like Jessica further to the margins.

We know that housing policies do not always reflect unstable incomes. Transport systems are not always designed with safety in mind. Plans may speak about inclusion, but if young people are not part of the conversations where decisions are made, those plans often failed.

Second, we must move beyond consultation to co-creation.

From the CitiesForWomen initiative led by UN-HABITAT, we have seen examples where women and girls worked directly with city officials to redesign public spaces, identified unsafe areas, and helped shape the solutions. As a result, they feel safer, more welcoming, and more opportunities to participate and contribute to the city.

Imagine if Jessica had been involved in designing and planning of healthcare system in her city. She would have said that safety is not just about infrastructure. It is also about dignity, about being treated without stigma. It is about whether services and the city understand her reality.

Lastly, urban governance requires shared power and resources.

This morning, Joey from the LGBTIQ+ constituency of APRCEM said it the best. We need government to work with the right holders for budgeting and indicator development, through community-led monitoring to strengthen accountability beyond reporting.

With stronger accountability, we can ensure resources can be distributed more equitably, services to be provided with better quality, and healthcare and other sectors could deliver those indicators effectively.

As a result, these investments bring better returns — economically, socially, and in terms of public health.

At the same time, it creates collective accountability, where multiple actors are jointly responsible not only for decisions, but also for implementation and outcomes.

To put in practice, we need city, like Quezon city, to work with young people and community-led organizations who can support the facilities or urban agenda. In Jessica's cases, she needs the system to be sensitive with her situation so that she can access housing, healthcare, and social support without judgement and barriers.

Closing remarks

To conclude, evidence has shown us that cities only become sustainable when human rights and gender equality of the people are protected and respected.

Because for us, especially the marginalized youth. We, have nothing, if we don't have all of you, the policymakers, UN agencies, and different actors who willing to listen and work with us, even we have so much to offer.

If we really want to achieve SDG 11, our governance must always start with the people who live in them, making sure that no one is overlooked or left behind.

Thank you.