

An environmental planner from Manila, The Philippines, and outspoken advocate for getting women and girls on bikes, Keisha Mayuga is the founder of Life Cycles Philippines, a group dedicated to providing bikes to frontline workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. She is an integral member of Move As One Coalition and AltMobility Philippines, two groups which push for better public transport and safer bike infrastructure in Metro Manila.

Keisha Mayuga

DIRECTOR OF ALTMOBILITY PH

THE PHILIPPINES

In your view, what is a feminist transport system?

A feminist transport system liberates people, it does not confine them. It allows women to retain control over their autonomy. My mother would spend hours in traffic on her 50km daily commute from our home in Las Pinas to Quezon City. As a kid, I struggled to stay up late enough to say goodnight. My story is not unique in The Philippines, and it has impacted me to this day. It is not ok for children to miss out on their parents because of the way we travel. In The Philippines, because of the nature of women's work, somewhere between three and six hours a day is wasted on travel – either waiting on public transport or in traffic; they should be using this time with family doing things they love and resting instead.

Why bikes?

My dream would be that every parent could get home to their kids in under 30 minutes. Fueled by this goal, I set my sights on bikes. Why sit in Manila's never-ending gridlock when you could jump on a bike? Take control of your own time and your wallet. With that idea in mind, I started working for UP Bike Share, the first and longest-running bike sharing system in The Philippines. When I started, there were no women willing to brave Metro Manila's roads so I was received by everyone with shock: Isn't it unsafe? But you're a woman. I wanted to be that one woman that people used to see and say hey, women are cycling.

From crisis to opportunity, how did COVID-19 impact your work?

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, scores of women commuters who had previously relied on public transport turned to cycling. I decided to take advantage of this opportunity to make sure cyclists remained once public transport services resumed by founding Life Cycles PH, a bike donation drive that lent bikes to women and frontliners for their daily commute. At the same time, I took my advocacy with AltMobility PH and Move As One up a notch to ensure city and national governments were aware and proactive in providing solutions for the growing number of bike commuters. With the noise from urban cycling advocates and the help of multilateral institutions such as the World Bank, The Philippines' national government allocated more than 22 million USD for active mobility infrastructure. This translated into the largest bike lane construction program in the country's history: almost 500 km across Metro Manila, Metro Cebu and Metro Davao.





Has there been a transformative experience that has guided your work and motivation in the field?

Whenever I entered a boardroom or meeting, I'm one of a few or sometimes the only woman in a sea of men. Up until recently, all my co-workers and bosses have been older men. And here I am pushing for segregated bike lanes to be put up on dangerous roads or steering the conversation away from cars and the notion of the linear (male) commuter on bicycles to acknowledge the female/zig-zag commuter. After seeing the success of cycling among women during Covid-related closures, these men realize I was right and have a newfound respect for me. I would love for more women to be part of the Philippine mobility sector so that our voices can be heard. Because we matter.

What advice would you give your younger self if you could?

Don't be scared to dream big! I never imagined there would be bike lanes in one of the most dangerous roads in Metro Manila. With the right push and people, we were able to realize our vision faster than we could have imagined.