



Partners in development Listening to the voices of families living in extreme poverty

Participatory action-research on housing and education issues
A contribution to the post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda

Guarantee access to livelihood opportunities at near-city and off-city relocations

Background and rationale

ATD Fourth World - Philippines has taken part in a two-year participatory action-research program, conducted in twelve countries and directly involving people living in extreme poverty as primary research participants. They evaluated the impact of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in improving the quality of their life and their experience and knowledge contributed to identifying ways that help policies and services reach and benefit the poorest populations in the post-2015 Development Agenda¹.

The research carried out in the Philippines has involved 90 individuals from four informal settlement communities in Metro Manila (Quirino Avenue, Paco/Pandacan in Manila; Manila North Cemetery; C-3 Road, Navotas), academe and grassroots practitioners, from September 2011 to September 2013. The participants focused on issues related to housing and education, relating in large part to MDG Targets 1, 2 and 7. Policies and programs in these two domains have serious impact on the livelihood and well-being of their families and their children's education. The following summary gives an overview of the main outcomes of the research in the Philippines².

The present paper elaborates more specifically on the issue of **livelihood, access to income opportunities and services at the relocation sites**.

I. Life strategies of poor families confronted with relocations

Relocation to near-city or off-city (about 40km away or further) means displacement of families from their current sources of livelihood, school and other services they previously had access to. Such relocations are only sustainable if the existing securities are maintained or if income opportunities and livelihood activities are available or guaranteed to develop at the relocation sites in a reasonable time span.

Families who live in the informal settlements are fully aware that the places are precarious, dangerous or inhospitable. They reside there, however, because they can find work and earn their living in the area, have access to services nearby, including schools for their children, and health facilities. Mutual help and social bonds forged within their communities over time are also essential for them.

Many of the families have experienced the demolition of their homes and being relocated off-city. Their experiences, including that of the 'returnees,' who subsequently abandoned their lots or houses in the new place, provide important insights that can help improve new rehousing programs, as off-city relocation will continue to happen despite the national government directives to "*shift the emphasis of our housing program from off-city relocation to area upgrading and in-city resettlement*"³.

¹ See summary findings of the action-research [Towards sustainable development that leaves no one behind - The challenge of the post-2015 agenda](#), June 2013. A comprehensive final report will be published end 2013.

² See executive summary: *Partners in Development. Listen to the voices of families living in extreme poverty*, October 2013

³ 10-Point Covenant of the President with the Urban Poor,
<http://www.pcup.gov.ph/html/about%20pcup/Covenant.html>

Difficult time in the relocation sites in the beginning. The participant families recounted the many difficulties they had to deal with at the same time. They were relocated in two different sites. In each site they received a plot of bare land full of tall grass; it took them more than one week to weed, clean, and flatten the lot before being able to build their houses. Water, electricity and sewage were not installed either. In one relocation project, the relocatees did not receive any financial assistance or material to build their houses. In another project, they were given financial assistance to build their houses that did not last long enough to continue building their houses. They instead had to spend the funds to buy food because they were cut off from their current livelihood, were without a job in sight in the near future and had absolutely no savings. Their children's schooling was disrupted and they struggled to find a school in the new place that would accept the children.

Meanwhile, the Urban Development and Housing Act (UDHA) of 1992 states that *"the local government unit, in coordination with the National Housing Authority, shall provide relocation or resettlement sites with basic services and facilities and access to employment and livelihood opportunities sufficient to meet the basic needs of the affected families."* (UDHA, Article VI, Urban renewal and resettlement, Section 29, Resettlement).

The most critical problem is the prolonged absence of income opportunities. Meanwhile, the relocated families could not continue their usual livelihoods. Street vending was impossible since there were no traffic lights or highway entrances in the surroundings; some of the participants observed that the lack of social diversity, with only poor people in the same place, made it more difficult to earn a living. For instance, there is no family who can afford or provide services like washing clothes, because nearly everyone in the area are people living extreme poverty.

A person explained: *"My husband continues to work in Manila. He is pedicab driver. We have no livelihood here."* In a relocation site that research participants visited in 2012, recycling scraps and bottles was forbidden, which is one of the livelihood people who experience extreme poverty do.

Without any prospect of finding a job and earning their living in the new place, the bread winners of the families had to continue their former work elsewhere. Because of the distance and the high cost of transportation, they were only able to be with their families on weekends. As a result, the families were separated most of the time. Mothers or fathers would continue to live by themselves in Manila, often in very precarious conditions given their meagre income. Some families said they experienced hunger during their time of the new settlement. Others decided to sell their lots or houses to come back to the city, settling in informal settlements where they could find some support or knew previous acquaintances, and were thus labeled 'professional squatters'.

II. Livelihoods and skills training– Insights from experience

People living in poverty have skills and work experience, even though they work mostly in the informal sector. About forty of such skills⁴ have been listed during the action-research. They are eager to learn new skills and have better chances of finding work.

In the city, many people who participated in this research shared that they are aware of various training organized by NGOs, church groups, government agencies and educational institutions, at *barangay*, municipal and national levels, and have attended some of them. Very few of these groups and trainings are present and available in the relocation sites that the people have been sent to.

⁴ Examples out of the forty skills/jobs mentioned: street vendor, pedicab driver, tricycle driver, factory worker, construction worker, salesperson, babysitter, laundry woman, waste picking/recycling, janitor, car park attendant, shop attendant, tomb caretaker.

In their experience, these courses have some drawbacks; for example, they do not always match the interests and abilities of the trainees. Short trainings, for a few hours or days only, do not allow acquiring real competence; this does not help them access a stable job and a profitable livelihood to feed their families. As it has been practiced, Cash for Work programs were conducted over short term, paid under minimum wage, and offered little personal fulfilment and limited chance of securing a permanent job.

DILG Memorandum Circular n. 2011-182, in Section on Relocation, Point 6, states that: *“To generate employment and income opportunities for the relocated families, the resettlement project should act as a conduit for the families to avail of manpower training and livelihood program through sustained networking and resource syndication activities.”* The relocated families would like this provision in the law be put effectively into action.

Families participating in the research have suggestions to help improve or adapt the trainings to be proposed in relocation sites. For them, it is important that trainers be present in the relocation site and accompany them during job applications and offer assistance during the initial period of employment, to make sure that the trainings yield positive results.

Similar support and accompaniment are expected when the families set up their small businesses after joining a micro-finance group. Trainees who are prepared to set up small businesses (selling groceries and snacks, providing manicure-pedicure, producing crafts, homemade soap) face different challenges including: raising the start-up capital to purchase necessary equipment, renting a safe place to stock goods and materials, building a network of customers, acquiring financial literacy and entrepreneurship skills, and providing for their families during a low season, etc.

Research participants also expect that all technical-vocational trainings are recognized by a diploma, and do not necessarily require that the trainee has at least high school level.

Drawing on good practices. Some relatively successful experiences show that it is possible to reach solutions that allow the relocated persons to continue their livelihood or mitigate the loss of income.

For instance, the North Triangle Development Project in Quezon City showed different interesting steps that helped ensure a smooth transition to the new settlement. The community affected was able to visit different possible areas before they eventually chose a relocation site in Montalban themselves. The National Housing Authority (NHA) agreed to hire half of the number of dismantlers from the community itself, thus giving them some income that offset the earnings they temporarily lost as they stopped working for a few days in preparation for relocation. The community members were also given transportation assistance that allowed them to keep their jobs and sources of livelihood in the area near their former community and students to continue going to their old schools before finally transferring to new ones. The community added a counterpart sum of money and put up a community transportation cooperative to have buses that carry the residents between the Montalban relocation site and the area of North Triangle.

In another relocation project involving informal settlers living in Manila⁵, the organization is planning to provide shuttle service between Intramuros and the relocation sites outside the capital. They also plan to provide a hostel in Intramuros which can be used by breadwinners or heads of the relocated families who need to work in Manila on weekdays.

A third example relates the way a community residing in Tondo Manila proceeded: Many of the persons from that community earn income through making charcoal in a traditional way, which is quite harmful for the health and the environment. Supported by an NGO⁶, they chose to relocate in Bulacan, 40 km North of Manila and planned to ‘import’ their livelihood to their new place. There, they started to use a

⁵ Gawad Kalinga project in Intramuros.

⁶ Urban Poor Associates.

new technology through smokeless kilns. By using this method, the charcoal making will be less damaging to their health and more environmentally friendly, and generate more income as well.

The community members also bought a vehicle by themselves to facilitate commutes back and forth the city. This vehicle was purchased from savings made through running a cooperative for water distribution between community members as part of an agreement they had with Maynilad Water Services, Inc. when they were living in Tondo.

When relocation is off-city, transportation is a key element to maintain the previous livelihood for the relocated families while waiting to find or develop another one in the relocation site. This is one example that advocates for a 'transition period' that has to be initiated before the effective relocation.

III. Toward successful relocation that leaves no one behind

Relocations programs are more likely to be successful if they involve the people, families and communities working as partners in the project and rights holders under the law. Based on insights gathered from research participants on their past experiences of evictions and relocations, and by drawing on examples of good practices, the following courses of action are proposed for consideration by all stakeholders in their areas of responsibility.

Prior to the execution of the relocation program.

- **Foresee a preparation period, during which time the families concerned:**

- Can make visits at the various relocation sites proposed to them, and receive logistics or financial supports necessary for relocating;
- Obtain precise and comprehensive information regarding livelihood and services at the proposed relocation areas so that the families to be relocated can make informed decisions so as to where to move.

- **In the preparation period, the authorities responsible for the relocation:**

- Can assess the needs and interests of the people to be relocated, their existing and potential skills, with the intention of giving them adequate orientation to job and livelihood opportunities in the relocation site.
- Offer already skills and livelihood trainings that fit the needs and interests of the people as well as fit the livelihood possibilities in the relocation site.

At the relocation sites.

- **The transition period right after moving in is critical.**

- Work out among the different stakeholders transport solutions that allow the relocated families to maintain their existing livelihoods and ensure income for their families. Contributions made by each party help sustain the solutions found and nurture the spirit of cooperation and partnership.
- Start credit-savings projects to support each other and build up a new community.

- **Provision of livelihood programs and skills training**

- Offer skills and livelihood trainings that are affordable, making sure that the skills acquired lead to a stable job and regular income. Devise courses for members of the community who are illiterate or who have not completed primary education, and respond to their desire to be enrolled in skills and livelihood trainings.
- Work with TESDA to assess and give accreditation to skills and knowledge acquired through life and work experience. Advocate these skills even in the absence of high school, college or technical-vocational credentials.
- Offer financial literacy courses; put in place savings and micro-finance programs in the spirit of self-help groups and cooperatives.
- Together with skills and livelihood training, provide relocated people and families with the assistance they need – financial support as well as presence, guidance and accompaniment to ensure they can continue to access basic services.