

## **A Participatory Approach to Poverty Eradication**

Importance of the participation of *all* people, particularly those living in poverty

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The motto of persons with disabilities is: *Nothing about us without us*. *Picture the Homeless* says: *Don't talk about us, talk with us*. One of my friends said: *Nothing for the Poor without the Poor*, and yet "the poor" is not like "us", "we".

Mayor Bloomberg had created a panel, *New York City Commission on Economic Opportunity* to tackle and end poverty in New York. He presented his initiative during a meeting in Washington in which he gathered local authorities and services providers from the whole country. The objective of the mayor is to reduce in 2/3 the homeless before 2009. He said: *We will work with respect but firmly so that **these people** will be able to have a house, go to rehabilitation programs or go to shelters*. But I can assure you that for "these people", this initiative sounds more like a threat. You could read in the newspaper el Pais in Spain: ***El alcalde de Nueva York quiere limpiar de mendigos su ciudad (The mayor of New York wants to clear the homeless out of the city -July 9, 2006). The same newspaper, in August 20 had this heading "Barrer de las calles a los 'sin techo" in Madrid. (Sweep up the homeless from the streets).***

Is this a participatory approach? "*these people*" *poor ones*, seem to have nothing to contribute. But when the programs fail, *these people* are the ones to be blamed.

During those 23 years living in the Philippines I had the opportunity to walk, work, share joys and tears with many people who live in extreme poverty. (For the term "poor", the Filipino language use 2 words: *Kawawa*=worthy of pity, and *Mahihirap*= living in hard conditions.) I had been involved together with them in setting a multipurpose cooperative, income-generating projects, feeding programs, scholarship programs, day-care, housing, electrification program, dormitories to bring indigenous children close to the public schools, drop-in centers for drop-out children, and residential 'homes" for abandoned and maltreated children. In the process, the formation and building up of communities.

But a "participatory approach" takes much more than planning and implementing projects and services with *them* and for *them*. In fact I can assure you that not even one of these communities I had been in, poverty had been eradicated from; in most cases, things are worse today. Looking back, all I can be happy about are the tears, and joys we had shared that remain as expression of genuine friendship and love, of mutual appreciation, which might have help some to grow in self-esteem, to experience healing.

During the year 2002 I gave time for a comparative study: to assess the emotional reality in six different groups; three groups were composed by people who were born, grow and live until that day in "hard living conditions", mostly people I had lived and worked with; the other three groups, people who were living in "good enough" conditions. The three

first groups, though they varied in age, sex, place, educational attainment, etc. They all shared one thing: a *crashed* emotional life.

Today we all know that the emotional development of the person depends almost fully on how individuals and society in general have treated her. And vice versa, the capacity to relate properly, to make free decisions, to express herself, to receive and give love, to be happy with what one is and has and be able to live fully in all her potentialities, depend basically of the emotional development of the person. (I can give a sad recent example later)

This is the aspect I want to emphasize. A person can't participate fully, sharing his/her own talents, letting her/his creativity find solutions to what he/she knows best: *hard living conditions*, if nobody had made her/him feel important, equal, 'rich' in inner resources and made believe that he/she is not *insignificant*, but significant in this world.

This was the main reason I came to USA. I was looking for *programs* where I could learn how to help people who had been so "crashed down" in their emotional lives. After 5 months of my arrival, I felt attracted to live with the street people in this city. Not trying to 'serve' them but just sharing life and friendship, walking with them, sleeping with them, eating with them, working with them, becoming one of them. Believe me! I'm learning a lot! Much more than what I was looking for.

When my own sisters and some friends questioned me: *why to go and "add" the number of homeless people, when in fact we all need to help so that they all have a roof?*. This parable came to my mind: Is like going in a train –the train of life we live in today. Some people are seating down, but many, (like in the trains in Mumbai, the jeeps in Manila,) are holding to the doors half body out and in every curve many of them are thrown and left behind. . . the train can't stop. . .and the number of those left behind grow and grow every day. For the past 23 years I was in the train and have tried with all my strength to hold on some of them around me, so that they would not be totally thrown. But the hunger grew up, the homelessness grew up, the unemployment grew up, the school drop-out grew up. . .drugs grew up, violence grew up. . . around me. . . the train did not slow down but go faster and faster. . . more and more are thrown away. Lately I was invited to step down from the train and be with those who were thrown out not in order to help them run faster and get back into the train, no, it's useless. But, knowing that God is most specially with those thrown down, I was invited to walk with them in their speed, allowing the Spirit to lead us, learning God's way, which is quite different than the way of the "train". And, believe me, I have no desire to go back to the train.

I want to share the words of a great friend I found in the streets who frequently says 'the street has been my home since childhood':

**Though my reading and writing is perhaps no more that 3<sup>rd</sup> grade level, I commit myself to put in writing what has been a crucial experience in my life because I believe it is worthy to do so, it may help others. I had gone through the pain of depending on others to say what I wanted to say. . . I'm thankful that God**

sent a few people that helped me who did not laugh at me but understood my difficulties. For the writing of this book, I count with a committed friend who is willing to put in writing what I want to share. Later, other friends who are skillful writers, may be willing to polish it. Now I'm convinced that what is most important is the story you have to share.

In the evening before my 49th Birthday, coming down on the train while thinking on all the crazy things I've done and imagining that if I just stop, how much better things would be, this poem came to my mind

### *IMAGINE ME*

*Just imagine that the Most High talks to me  
O whispers inside my ears  
That all the pains are gone  
This goes for all the people who suffer like me  
and go through the pains that I go;  
drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, love hurts. . .  
all the pains people go  
Can you imagine all the pains gone?*

And I end with one of his prayers he wrote:

*Thank God for every thing that he do for me.  
thank God for the best thing in my life is GOD.  
GOD is the best thing.  
Thank GOD for keeping the power on me to the day I die.  
A treasury of inspiring words of wisdom, that is what I pray for **wisdom**.  
I have only this moment of this day to sparking like star because in my heart I melting  
like a snow flake. Let me use it before it is too late.  
Thank my GOD for all the thing that he do for me thank GOD for the power that he  
giving me, and I will try to use the power that God have giving me thank GOD for the  
best and most beautiful thing in the world cannot be seen nor touched but are felt in my  
heart thank GOD for letting me know that he is in my heart .that is all I can ask for and  
to ask and hope that he hear my pray one of my pray is to stop CIGARETTE and to  
stop doing DRUGS right now.*

Through friends like this one I'm learning to grasp what Jesus could mean with "Blessed are you poor". Some would translate "Honorable" are you. . .

Maraming salamat din sa pagtulong sa pamilya ni Jesusa. Napahaguhol ako sa iyak talaga in front of the computer. I know her situation and almost can not sleep. I talked with the community how to help especially the house. babagsak na, very inhuman condition, nakakaiyak talaga, everytime i come nagdurugo ang puso ko! You know me, in situations like this, my God! di talaga ako mapakali, how much i prayed na sana matulungan namin sa delegation, I tried with nelly before already pero, napagalitan pa ako.. Rhoda told me, when you were still here, you help na to arrange the house only they do'nt maintain she said. I went to masagana again, I asked the mother of Jesusa about it she said ang natulungan noon sa pabahay ay yung nasunungan lang. MARAMING MARAMING SALAMAT TALAGA sa tulong nyo sa family ni Jesusa please extend my gratitude to Florence. Yes, I will prepare a project for them on livelihood. Ok until here, I will just fetch Jesusa na lang kina Sr. Cely. Yes, WE WILL CELEBRATE WHEN JESUSA COMES, AGAIN THANK U VERY VERY MUCH! Regards and take care too.  
LOve and prayer,  
Margie

Maraming Salamat! Jesusa arrived safely and very energetic and happy. They arrived in the airport at 1:00am. I fetched Jesusa in the house of the sister in the morning. I already talked with susa's mother regarding the house repair and also arranged things with Toto the carpenter. They were very, very happy. tomorrow they will start the house repair. I prepared a letter to the manager of the store or hardware where they will buy the materials so that they can get a discount. For lunch kanina I ate with them in the house of Jesusa. Pagdating namin dried fish( tuyo) pang ulam nila. Bumili na lang ng pandagdag: chicken, vegetables etc. with P200.00 worth of pang ulam marami na nakakain at first time daw nila nagkasamasama kumain, kasama sina Liliani at Lilia . May natira pang ulam, nashare pa nila sa neighbor. Konti lang nga yun pero may natira pa, unti unti lang sila mag ulam. Bakas na bakas ko sa mukha nila ang kasiyahan. then after lunch, we went to Cherry Foodorama to change the dollars Jesusa brought bale P 51.45 ang exchange rate. Nagrocery kami for her family: bigas, pang ulam at mga iba pang kelangang pang araw-araw sa bahay worth P 1,700. the rest of the money she will use to celebrate with some girls that she gathered before for sharing and interview bago sya umalis

Since the time I wrote you I try to follow up Jesusa and family. Something happened in the family that until now the problem is not solved. It goes like this: From the start of the house repair, Jesusa's mother ( Lolit) and her sister (Lilia) they had a heated argument, almost we can not start the repair of the house.

Lilia said, she is the real owner of the house where they are staying right now and Lolit was allowed by her only because when their mother was still alive, the mother asked Lilia to allow Lolit to stay in the ground floor because they have no place to go. On the other hand, Lolit claimed that she has the right to stay there because that house was owned by their mother even though that house was already sold by their mother to the husband of Lilia. Even we told Jesusa's mother to let go of it because someday we will find a place for them. In short, they will be there only temporarily, because it is not easy to find a lot for sale with a clean or clear title of ownership. Their conflict began actually since childhood. They kept a lot of grudges between them. And they decided not to reconcile even until death. How they can work together then? How they can be partners in business?

We had several sessions already of meeting, sharing, etc. I think it would take time. We all suffer, especially Jesusa and Annabelle( the cousin of Jesusa who grew up with Lolit). Jesusa would like to propose that the help you will extend to her family will be used then for the college scholarship of Annabelle. But, the mother of Jesusa got angry with Jesusa for this suggestion. Lolit like to be helped but if possible only her family ( selfish is'nt it?). So, I hope you can bear with us. How much I like to help them too and I am very happy that you are there very much willing to help. As for me, I still hope that things will go right. Let us continue to pray for them. For the mean time, we are still looking for a place where the family of Jesusa can transfer. If it is okey for you, the business will only be for Jesusa's family, they are suggesting to have a carinderia (food stall) or a sari-sari- store (store of food items and household supplies, etc.)or a tricycle for Jesusa's brother. But you know, I learned that Jesusa's brother was a drug addict before( and seemed not yet recovered). To have a tricycle, he will be with friends, and the money be spent for drugs, gambling etc. It is not advisable. For the store, the mother of Jesusa does not know how to cook and manage business, besides she has a lot of relatives all around and I am sure they will just get things in the store on credit and will not pay and they will just have fight. Whatever business they will do, it is a risk. We can try, and take the risk. But first, in my opinion, it is good to look first for the place where Jesusa's family can stay and from there, to have the business. What do you think? It is not easy to help the poor, but in spite of it, I will do my best to help them. With the help you are extending, if you are willing, you can send the money already little by little and deposit in our account so that it would be ready when we will need it. I inquired already in 2 places nearby Quezon City ( our convent) but the lot is big and expensive (600 sq meters x P 20,000/sq. meter) we can not buy only little or part. the owner like to sell it whole. In tagaytay (our place) near our house, we can buy at 3,500-4500 per sq. m. but the problem, we can't buy part only. I am still following that one of the other lot a little far from our house if the title is okey, but sure it cost millions too! Last year, we were able to buy 612sq. m at only P1,800 because the owner needed the money very much already and that house was for our demolished neighbors in tagaytay. So, Florence I will update you

again later. Okey? again I am very sorry for this delay and for the difficulty we are sharing with you.

Regards to your family and God bless.

Love and prayer, Sr. Margie,ccv