

SURVIVING THE PANDEMIC

SAPANG MUNTI WOMEN'S STORIES

DURING THE ECQ

Lisa Victoria N. Rosel
Victor G. Obedicen

Abstract

This article discusses the experiences of women leaders and members of the Samahan ng Kababaihan para sa Kaunlaran at Kinabukasan ng Sitio Sapang Munti (SK3SSM) in Sitio Sapang Munti, Brgy. San Mateo, Norzagaray, Bulacan during the implementation of the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The lockdown seriously affected the lives of families in Sitio Sapang Munti. This was most felt by women in the community because of existing unequal gender roles. It put a halt to women's livelihood activities. Reproductive and care work were felt to be heavier due to limited or no incomes which affected responsibilities in securing food and health care.

The women responded to their situation by securing food for their families and going back to farming to augment food needs. Most families were also recipients of different forms of aid from external organizations and the government.

SK3SSM played a vital role in responding to issues encountered by families during the lockdown by taking the lead in conducting a census of families in the community and in the planning and distribution of food packs. Despite the pandemic's impact on women, it also served as an opportunity for members of SK3SSM to strengthen their leadership roles by actively taking part in decision making, especially in relief work.

The article concludes by reflecting on the importance of recognizing women as partners in resolving community issues, organizing them, building their capacities in disaster risk management, and making organizational processes more gender inclusive and responsive.

Keywords: indigenous women, gender-responsive disaster risk management, women organizing

Introduction

This paper is about the experiences of families from the perspective of women from Sitio Sapang Munti, Brgy. San Mateo, Norzagaray, Bulacan during the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. It presents some of the key issues and challenges in the implementation of quarantine measures, and the socio-economic impacts on the residents of Sitio Sapang Munti such as mobility, livelihood opportunities, access to social services, and overall well-being. This paper also presents the initiatives and capacities shown by the women and the community to address the issues related to the ECQ, and how ongoing community organizing efforts contributed to enhancing the leadership role of women in times of emergency. This paper concludes by analyzing the experiences of the women of Sapang Munti through a gender-responsive Disaster Risk Management framework to highlight how pandemics as disasters magnify gender inequalities, and how the community stands to benefit in managing disaster risks when women's capacities and roles for community governance are recognized and strengthened.

Sitio Sapang Munti is located within the Ipo Watershed which is part of the Angat-Umiray-Ipo network. The watershed supplies 96% of Metro Manila's water needs. As of July 2020, there are 116 families living in Sitio Sapang Munti, mostly composed of the Dumagats who consider the watershed as part of their ancestral domain.

The World Wide Fund for Nature-Philippines (WWF-Philippines) is implementing the Forest for Water Program that aims conservation efforts towards the protection, conservation, and management of forests and wetlands in the Ipo Watershed (Alcantara et al., 2017). The Forest for Water Program uses the Assisted Natural Regeneration (ANR) approach which involves the participation of community residents inside the watershed for land preparation, planting, and maintenance of forest land.

Since 2016, WWF-Philippines and the Department of Community Development (DCD) of the College of Social Work and Community Development (CSWCD), University of the Philippines have been partners under the latter's Field Instruction Program (FIP) to help

organize and build capacities of Sitio Sapang Munti residents and other communities inside the Ipo Watershed. Under the FIP, Community Development (CD) students are required to live in the community for one to two semesters. It is through community integration that “students become more grounded, analytical/critical, and incrementally gain deeper understanding of the complex local situation and dynamics as it relates to national and even global conditions” (Department of Community Development, 2019, p. 10). Specific to the partnership with WWF, the students’ integration and community organizing work aims to increase capacities of community members so that they can participate in decision-making in programs of institutions engaged in the preservation of the watershed such as the Forest for Water Program.

The Samahan ng Kababaihan para sa Kaunlaran at Kinabukasan ng Sitio Sapang Munti (SK3SSM) is an organization of women that aims to address the needs of women in Sitio Sapang Munti. Since its formation in April 2018, the organization has been involved in increasing livelihood opportunities and access to health services by women in the community. Currently, the organization has 70 members. Students under the FIP are directly working with SK3SSM in terms of leadership development, organizational strengthening, and capacity building.

Methodology

This paper presents the results of a qualitative research conducted after the Modified General Community Quarantine (MGCQ) was declared in Bulacan. Interviews were conducted with six women leaders of SK3SSM, aged 26 to 58 years old. They were selected because of 1) their active involvement in the different activities of SK3SSM during lockdown, and 2) their representation of different areas within Sitio Sapang Munti. The interview data were validated during a general assembly (GA) of SK3SSM members. The attendees also shared their experiences during the lockdown which were also used in this research. There were 40 members present during the GA, with ages ranging from 18 to 62 years old. All the women leaders and members who shared their stories have families and children.

Conceptual Discussion

A considerable amount of literature on disaster risk management points out that disasters affect women and men differently because of existing gender inequalities brought about by their differing condition and position in society (Ariyabandu & Wickramasinghe, 2004, in Ariyabandu, 2009; Ciampi et al., 2011; Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery [GFDRR], 2020; United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2017b). Socioeconomic conditions, cultural beliefs, and traditional practices have continuously put women in a subordinate position. Gender roles and gender relations have rendered women poorer and more vulnerable compared to men in the same social group or class (Ariyabandu, 2009). In poor communities, women tend to have less access to and control over resources and less power which marginalizes them and makes them more vulnerable. Different sectors of society, including women, that are poor and marginalized are more vulnerable when disasters happen (Ciampi et al., 2011).

It is also because of these gender roles and relations and the gender division of labor that women and men are perceived to have different skills and capacities (Ariyabandu & Wickramasinghe, 2004, in Ariyabandu, 2009). Gender stereotypes have led society to believe that women are weaker and mere victims of disasters, when in fact they are active agents and first responders when disasters strike (Ciampi et al., 2011; UNDRR, 2017a; Yonder et al., 2009). Women's skills and capacities in performing and balancing their productive, reproductive, and community management work have made them capable to lead and be active in rebuilding their communities, calling for community meetings, and organizing disaster response coalitions to address their communities' immediate needs (Enarson & Morrow, 1998, in Yonder et al., 2009). More women than men are leaders and members of grassroots organizations focused on addressing disaster issues, and communities with strong women's organizations respond more quickly when disasters strike (Delaney & Schrader, 2000; Enarson, 2000; Fothergill, 1998; in Yonder et al., 2009).

In disaster preparedness and disaster mitigation, it is vital to organize women and recognize their potentials and capacities (Ciampi et al., 2011). The Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR) also explains that women's empowerment is an essential approach in building community resilience and contributing to sustainable development and this can be realized through gender-responsive disaster

risk management which involves “analyzing how gender differences and gaps—in terms of access to political, economic, and social resources—affect women and men’s resilience to natural hazards; planning concrete actions to address those differences/gaps to reduce underlying vulnerabilities; and assessing the impacts of those actions” (GFDRR, 2020, para. 2).

Empowerment and participation of women are also given priority in the Guiding Principles and Priority Action 4 of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 (Sendai Framework) (United Nations, 2015).

At the forefront of facilitating empowerment and participation among marginalized groups, including women, is Community Development (CD). CD covers an extensive field of processes, practices, principles, and actors relating to collective action of communities to address common problems. While there are varying interpretations and definitions of CD as an approach to development, working with communities often involves raising awareness and enhancing capacities of community members to articulate their needs, identify and mobilize their assets and resources, and develop collaborations between communities and other actors who can facilitate and support community empowerment and expression (Kenny, McGrath, & Phillips, 2018, p. xxv). The activities inherent in CD processes aim to raise the capacities of the community in realizing their goals relating to their well-being (Homan, 2016, p. 61).

CD-oriented projects have been shown to create positive impacts on women’s economic, social, and political empowerment even among conservative cultures as their participation has made them more self-assured in their interaction with their families and communities (Independent Evaluation Group, 2017, pp. 29–37).

Gender roles in Sitio Sapang Munti before the pandemic

This portion discusses the existing gender roles of men and women in Sitio Sapang Munti since before the COVID-19 pandemic. It describes the types of work that men and women perform in their households and community: productive, reproductive or care work, and community management work.

Productive work

Most men in Sitio Sapang Munti are *Bantay Gubat* (BG) or “forest watchers.” The main function of the BG is to assist the foresters of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) in implementing the laws and policies governing the protection, rehabilitation, and maintenance of the Ipo Watershed. Currently this is the main source of regular income inside the watershed. Part of the duty of the BG involves guarding and patrolling the forests for illegal loggers. These operations take several days at a time. Historically, salaries of the BG have almost always been delayed,¹ causing BG families to incur large debts from the Maligaya Grocery, one of the main grocery stores in the barrio where the BG members have a credit line.

There are also male members of the community who are involved in Sining Ipo, a group organized by the water services provider Maynilad to make woodwork and crafts out of driftwood, with the products being pre-ordered by Maynilad. This arrangement provides an additional, but not regular, source of income for the families.

Stick-making (sticks made of bamboo, used for barbecue and other street food) is another income-earning activity engaged in by most women in Sitio Sapang Munti. Although most of the activities in stick-making are done by women, men also help by harvesting the bamboo.

Before the pandemic, stick-making provided a regular source of income for the families since the earnings helped in making ends meet and sustained everyday needs. Women also sold fruits, root crops, and vegetables harvested from their *kalaanan* (ancestral land assigned to the family by the tribe). These crops were bought by middle persons both from inside and outside the community. Since BG salaries were usually delayed for months, the women relied heavily on these other income-earning activities to address their daily needs.

Through the SK3SSM and its partnership with the Community Crafts Association of the Philippines, Inc. (CCAP), the members of the organization have also honed their skills in crafts making. The members of the organization were trained by CCAP on production of crafts made of bamboo. Then, CCAP would pre-order these products from the organization and pay for them at a fair-trade price. The organization’s partnership with CCAP, the UP Institute for Small-Scale Industries

(UP ISSI), and Miriam College has helped them in terms of financial literacy, pricing, and marketing of their products. These engagements also open opportunities for SK3SSM to participate in trade and school fairs to sell their products, as well as extend these income-earning opportunities to other members of the Sitio Sapang Munti community.

Reproductive or care work

Household tasks that are associated with heavy work such as house repairs, fishing for the family's consumption, gathering firewood, and fetching water are performed by male members of the household.

Reproductive work or care work which involves maintaining the household and child-rearing is considered as the primary role of women. Men seldom help in these tasks. Women are also the ones who negotiate for loans in the form of food supplies from Maligaya Grocery and other shops in the barrio. Purchasing food and other household goods in the barrio entails walking one to two kilometers (depending on the season, with drier seasons entailing longer walks), riding a boat (which costs PhP15.00) and a tricycle (PhP25.00). This difficult and expensive trip to the barrio is the reason why the women of Sitio Sapang Munti try to schedule and minimize their trips, often buying in bulk if their resources permit it.

Community management work

The Tribal Council of Sitio Sapang Munti is dominantly male led. The BG, aside from their main task as forest watchers, also perform peace and order functions inside the community.

As an extension of their reproductive or care work at home, women also perform these roles at the community level. They participate in activities that involve accessing services and social protection such as medical missions, Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) activities, and school-related activities. Women, through the SK3SSM, are also involved in the management of exposure visits to the community organized by different partner organizations and universities.

The COVID-19 pandemic and declaring community quarantines nationwide

On 12 March 2020, President Rodrigo Duterte placed the entire Metro Manila under community quarantine from 15 March to 14 April 2020 (PCOO, 2020). On 16 March 2020, the rest of Luzon Island was placed under ECQ to prevent the spread of COVID-19 (Parrocha, 2020). On 25 March 2020, Republic Act 11469: “Bayanihan to Heal as One Act of 2020” was signed into law, giving the President special powers to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic.

ECQ protocols implemented included: work suspension, flexible work arrangements in non-essential sectors, work continuance in essential sectors, enforcement of the rule of law, i.e., strict adherence to safety protocols, travel ban, ban on crowded gatherings, and school closures (NEDA, 2020).

To address the economic impacts that resulted in work suspension among low-income and vulnerable sectors of society, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) was tasked to lead the government’s Social Amelioration Program (SAP) (Gita-Carlos, 2020). Under the SAP, emergency subsidies were provided to 4Ps beneficiaries, informal economy workers, indigenous peoples (IPs), the elderly, persons with disabilities (PWDs), and the underprivileged and homeless.

In the succeeding months of the ECQ, the government received various criticisms over the handling of the lockdown, particularly from the basic sectors, regarding the heavy-handed treatment of violators of the ECQ measures (Billing, 2020; Gonzales, 2020a), selective and preferential treatment (Mendez et al., 2020), and violation of human rights (Movido, 2020).

The SAP was also marred with various controversies such as slow and/or delayed distribution of cash subsidies (dela Cruz, 2020), corruption (Gonzales, 2020b), and inadequacy (Bisenio, 2020).

A week prior to the transition from ECQ to General Community Quarantine (GCQ) of Metro Manila and nearby provinces, the total reported cases of infected patients reached more than 14,000 and the death toll above 900 (Esguerra, 2020), unemployment was at its highest in the last 15 years (Roa & de Vera, 2020), and the total economic losses had reached more than a trillion pesos (de Vera, 2020).

Norzagaray, Bulacan under ECQ

The provincial authorities of Bulacan issued guidelines for local implementation of the ECQ measures through Executive Order No. 14 (Provincial Government of Bulacan, 2020, March 18) and Memorandum DRF-03192020-94 (Provincial Government of Bulacan, 2020, March 19). These included strict implementation of a province-wide curfew, strict home quarantine except for purchasing food and medicines, no travel except for those employed as front liners and essential workers, closure of non-essential establishments, house-to-house distribution of quarantine passes (with only one quarantine pass per family), house to house distribution of relief goods, observance of physical distancing, and no public transportation.

On 20 April 2020, Norzagaray—the town to which the Ipo Watershed belongs—declared its first two COVID-19 cases (Municipality of Norzagaray, 2020, April 20). It was among the last municipalities of Bulacan to have a COVID-19 case. Norzagaray implemented its own ECQ measures, based on the official memos from the national and provincial government (Municipality of Norzagaray, 2020, April 18).

The Modified Enhanced Community Quarantine (MECQ) was implemented in Bulacan on 16 May 2020 (Provincial Government of Bulacan, 2020, May 15). It maintained the same protocols for health, allowed establishments to open at a limited capacity, and allowed operations for tricycles with one passenger only. Home quarantine was still implemented, with movement limited to securing essential needs. Only those involved in essential services were allowed to go out, including employees of establishments given clearance to open.

As of October 2020, Bulacan was placed under a Modified General Community Quarantine (MGCQ) which allowed for more movement, shorter curfew hours, regulated public transportation, limited operations of malls and establishments offering services beyond food and medicine production, and observance of minimum health protocols (Provincial Government of Bulacan, 2020, October 30).

On 10 November 2020, the Municipal Health Office reported that the town of Norzagaray had a total of 186 cases (Municipality of Norzagaray, 2020, November 10); while, as of 16 November 2020, the province of Bulacan as a whole had 8,739 COVID-19 cases (Bulacan Provincial Health Office, 2020, November 16).

Sitio Sapang Munti under lockdown²

“Nabalitaan sa TV at narinig din sa radyo...naku hindi na daw tayo pwedeng lumabas-labas.”- Nanay Basyon (“We learned about it [COVID-19] from the TV and radio. We are not allowed to go out anymore.”)

As in most of Luzon, residents of Sitio Sapang Munti learned of the ECQ restrictions from television and radio news reports. Although Sitio Sapang Munti has no electricity, some residents had been able to power their appliances with generators, car batteries, or solar panels. Representatives of nearby Brgy. San Mateo also went to Sitio Sapang Munti to inform the residents of the lockdown and to distribute barangay quarantine passes.

From what the residents understood, the lockdown was meant to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus, which they compared to *peste* or an epidemic that sometimes befalls livestock. According to them, the news painted COVID-19 as highly contagious. Therefore, the residents of the community understood, and believed necessary, that the lockdown was meant to prevent COVID-19 from reaching the barangay so that people would not get infected.

The Brgy. San Mateo LGU implemented the following lockdown measures with a warning that violators would be charged in accordance with the law:

- Issuance of barangay quarantine passes to limit the number and movement of people in the barangay. Under this measure, only one family member may go out to buy food and other necessities, and only within the barrio or the barangay proper. The quarantine passes also indicate which day of week the holders can use them (e.g., persons with passes indicating Monday and Wednesday may only go out on the said days).
- Strict curfew from 8:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m.

- No public transport from Bigte (the nearest urban center to Brgy. San Mateo) and back. However, some tricycles were allowed to operate within the barangay provided that they only service one customer per trip.
- Use of face masks in public and strict observance of social distancing protocols.

Specific to Sitio Sapang Munti, the Manila Water Sewerage System (MWSS) also directed the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) detachment to limit the entry and exit of people at the gate of Ipo Dam to residents with a quarantine pass from various *sitios* inside the dam and MWSS employees; and to implement the barangay curfew. Sitio Sapang Munti, through the BG, also banned the entry of non-residents to ensure safety of the residents.

The Norzagaray Municipal Social Welfare Office (MSWO) facilitated the implementation of the SAP for those economically displaced by the ECQ. The cash grants benefited 4Ps beneficiaries, senior citizens, and PWDs. The SAP recipients list was also expanded to cover families that were not included in the original list. However, there were questions raised by some mothers regarding the transparency and criteria of the SAP.

Issues and challenges of the lockdown on women

The implementation of lockdown measures has been especially hard on the mothers of Sitio Sapang Munti. Women, by default, are the ones managing their households and community. BG operations were still active during the lockdown, requiring the men to be gone for days. Therefore, household concerns such as food, health, education, budgeting, and earning additional income were mostly the responsibilities of the mothers.

Livelihood activities were interrupted

“Natakot kami...wala pang sweldo ang Bantay Gubat. Paano na kung hindi na magpautang?”- Nanay Elsie (“We were worried... the Bantay Gubat have not yet received their salaries. What if we cannot get a loan [from Maligaya Grocery]?”)

The lockdown came at a time when the BG had yet to receive their salaries equivalent to six months' work. Women's incomes, which addressed their family's everyday needs, were affected because they could not sell their barbecue sticks due to the suspension of public transport. Also, many of their contacts in the market stopped taking orders because of low sales due to the reduced public consumption.

Women had to resort to advancing food and essential goods on credit from the various grocery stores in the barrio to be settled during payday. However, this also stopped when they reached their credit limit.

Health issues were more challenging

The timing of the lockdown coincided with the season for coughs and colds in Sitio Sapang Munti. What used to be ordinary symptoms became a source of fear and suspicion because these were similar to COVID-19 symptoms. The common practice of mothers bringing their sick child to the health center resulted in a dilemma—traveling could expose them to people with COVID-19, but the condition of their child could worsen if not given proper medical attention.

Buying medicines was also problematic when these were not available in the barrio. Only private vehicles were allowed through the checkpoint in Bigte, so some mothers resorted to renting private motorcycles which added to their financial burden.

There was also the risk of discrimination from hospitals. A case was reported of one resident who died due to a non-COVID-19 ailment, because the hospitals refused to accept him out of fear that he may be contagious.

Home quarantine affected mental well-being

“Nahirapan na hindi na makakilos...mas nakakabalisa ng isip... mas nagmamamanman sa mga anak na hindi mapalayo.”- Nanay Ine (“It was hard not to be able to move/ travel... it is worrisome... we watch over our children so that they will not stray far.”)

The presence of the pandemic has instilled fear in many Sitio Sapang Munti residents. Some have been very worried about family members getting infected because they do not have money for medical consultation and hospitalization. When the women and their families

started farming to augment their food supply, they would bring the family members along to their *kalaanan* to avoid contact with strangers.

Before the pandemic, going outside of Sitio Sapang Munti and visiting family members and relatives had been a common form of recreation and a source of social support. Because of the lockdown measures, the residents' inability to visit and connect with others has given way to worrying. Home quarantine is compared to being in prison.

Challenges brought by the lockdown were hard and exhausting

The women expressed that their multiple responsibilities in reproductive or care work felt heavier during the lockdown. It was up to the mothers to look for or supplement the family's food requirements by going outside of Sitio Sapang Munti either to buy or to borrow from neighbors, while their husbands who are members of the BG had provisions for food during their operations. The women had to manage the meager budget of their family given that BG salaries were delayed and their own sources of income were cut off. When asked why they were the ones who secured food for the family by going to the barrio, negotiated with Maligaya Grocery for a loan on food supplies, and suggested farming to their families, the women of Sapang Munti said that their families depended on them to take care of the household ("*Siya ang inaasahan na kumilos sa bahay.*"). As mothers, they were worried about food and health. They knew that it would be difficult if a family member were to get sick and needed to be hospitalized. They also had to exert extra effort in ensuring the safety of their children by constantly monitoring where they were and making sure that they did not interact with strangers. Thus, for the duration of the lockdown, it was the women, as mothers, who took charge of food, relief goods received, and money received as assistance from the government.

The women were likewise the ones who held the quarantine pass for their family because of their availability and capacity to transact outside of their community. Despite the ECQ measures limiting movement of persons below 18 and over 65 years old, senior citizen women had no choice but to do the transactions on behalf of their household because they are more able and capable compared to their other family members. Aside from taking care of the children and the household and doing farming tasks, the women made the physically taxing trips to the barrio to get food supplies. Since the

lockdown happened in the summer when the river was shallow, the previously available boat rides were shorter, so the women had to walk a longer distance while carrying heavy loads of supplies.

With economic activities stalled, mounting debts with no clear way of repaying them also became a major source of concern during the lockdown. The women voiced out that they felt a sense of frustration because they are not able to perform livelihood activities to augment the family income. Overall, they shared that the lockdown was very tiring for them.

Responses of women to issues experienced during the lockdown

1. Securing food for the family

“Sinigurado namin na may bigas.” – Nanay Bingkay (“We made sure that we had rice.”)

When news of the lockdown reached the community, families who had disposable income were able to buy a month’s worth of rice from Maligaya Grocery. Those who had good credit standing were also able to purchase on credit rice and other grocery items they needed to survive the lockdown. Since the salaries of the BG were delayed and the lockdown was impending, Maligaya Grocery announced that it would stop giving out loans until the BG could start paying. This further heightened the women’s insecurity since Maligaya Grocery was their nearest source of food supplies even if they did not have money, and they were the ones who had to transact with the grocery for a loan on food items.

During the lockdown, the diet of the families also changed because they began to rely on their crops for food. The mothers shared that, aside from canned goods and noodles from relief goods, they ate mostly bananas and *kamote* (sweet potato).

Aside from their own crops, other sources of food for the families were the series of relief operations from SK3SSM, the barangay, and churches. Families who were beneficiaries of the SAP and the 4Ps or belonged to the IPs were able to get cash and buy more rice. The women said that it is important to have rice even if the viand consists only of cooking oil and soy sauce.

2. Farming

“Kahit papaano may mabuting dulot ang lockdown sa pamamagitan ng pagtatanim ng mga tao.” (“The lockdown contributed something good because people went back to farming.”)

The lack of income and food sources from the barrio due to the lockdown made the women decide to return to farming. Historically, the families in Sitio Sapang Munti were already engaged in farming in their *kalaanan* when *kaingin* (slash and burn farming) was still allowed. They relied more on their own produce to sustain their families and to sell for cash. This practice ceased, however, and fewer families engaged in farming when the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) put a stop to *kaingin* in its program for watershed rehabilitation. It was also around this time when the families heard the news that those living inside the watershed would eventually be asked to move out.

Before the lockdown, most families already had bananas and root crops planted for extra cash. When the lockdown was implemented, it was the women who first suggested to their husbands that they should plant more crops or start farming (for those who were not engaged in farming as a source of income). As a result, most of the families in Sitio Sapang Munti turned to farming to augment their food supply. They planted bananas, cassava, sweet potato, taro, string beans, corn, spinach, okra, eggplant, ginger, avocado, *guyabano*, *rambutan*, and purple yam for their own consumption and for selling, as well as herbal plants which they used as health remedies for colds, cough, and fever since access to health care was difficult. The seeds were previously given by East West, an NGO for sustainable agriculture that gave trainings to the members of SK3SSM, and the Indigenous People Mandatory Representative (IPMR) who distributed seedlings through the tribal chieftain. The resulting crops sustained the families for the succeeding months of the lockdown since their main sources of income (stick-making and the BG salary) were not reliable. The excess produce was sold to the nearby markets (in the barrio and nearby Sampol) when quarantine measures became more relaxed. Thus, the women expressed that the families’ renewed involvement in farming was one positive result of the lockdown.

The families also engaged in farming to avoid or lessen the possibility of encountering people from outside the Ipo Dam area. Their farms are located in the outskirts of their immediate community and they built huts so that they could stay longer while working on their farms. This also made the mothers less worried about possible exposure of their children to other people, especially those from outside the community.

3. *Accessing aid*

The community members of Sitio Sapang Munti also received aid (*ayuda*) from several organizations during the ECQ period: the AFP, Brgy. San Mateo and the Municipality of Norzagaray, the Provincial Government of Bulacan, the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), ABS-CBN Lingkod Kapamilya, and three batches of relief distribution from the fund drive initiated by the CSWCD FIP students assigned to the community. The relief goods received from these organizations and the crops that families were able to harvest bridged the food needs of the community during the lockdown.

In terms of financial assistance, some families were recipients of the government's different forms of the SAP: the Emergency Subsidy Program (ESP), the Expanded and Enhanced 4Ps, and assistance for Indigent IPs. The recipients of the SAP shared that they received payouts in April and September 2020. However, the basis for qualifying for the SAP was not clearly explained to the members of the community, and the mothers were further discouraged from going to the barangay to inquire and seek clarifications because they would have to borrow money for the tricycle fare which was expensive.

Role of SK3SSM in responding to the issues of the community during lockdown

During the lockdown, SK3SSM was involved in the planning and distribution of three batches of food packs from the fundraising initiated by the CSWCD FIP students. The partner organizations and institutions of SK3SSM (Ateneo High School, Miriam College, and University of the East Ramon Magsaysay Memorial Medical Center, Inc.) also made donations for this fundraising initiative. For all the batches, women leaders

identified what kind of goods would be purchased, then coordinated the purchase from Maligaya Grocery, the repacking of the food items, and the distribution of the food packs.

For the last batch of food packs, a separate fundraising for all families inside the Ipo Watershed was done by another organization. The funds raised were not enough to cover the cost of a substantial food pack per recipient-family. So the women leaders of SK3SSM decided to combine the remaining funds raised for families in Sitio Sapang Munti with the funds raised for the families in the whole of Ipo Watershed to purchase goods to complete substantial food packs. SK3SSM also took charge of planning, repacking, and distributing the food packs.

The organization also conducted a census of all families in Sitio Sapang Munti; and for the third batch of relief distribution, they also visited the other *sitios* inside the watershed to get a complete list of families. The census and list were also used as references for the distribution of relief goods from the other organizations.

The members of SK3SSM have come to recognize the importance of being part of an organization and having partners outside of their community. They have gained the recognition and respect of other community members, such that women from other *sitios* asked to be part of the organization, increasing SK3SSM's membership.

SK3SSM members and leaders take pride in their efforts to help their community. They admit that being able to help gives them a good feeling and motivates them to continue working for the organization, despite the challenges they experienced during the lockdown. The leaders expressed that, if the organization can help families in the community, it is their hope that the members will continue to support the organization.

On improving government's response to the pandemic

The members of SK3SSM think that the government could have done better in terms of imposing travel bans earlier and being more prepared for the pandemic. Specifically, the members think that the government should have addressed the pandemic in the following ways:

1. *Distribution of relief goods*

The women shared that relief goods from the barangay were not enough and there were stories about the barangay not giving the right allocation of relief goods to the families. Because of this, the members of SK3SSM would rather have the municipal government give the goods directly to the community instead of going through the barangay. In terms of distribution, given the location of Sitio Sapang Munti, the women suggested that goods be dropped off at the Ipo Dam gate and the tribal leaders, SK3SSM members, and BG would take charge of the distribution. Allocation of relief goods should be based on family size and should consist of rice and other items for everyday needs including soap, coffee, sugar, salt, and other food items needed for cooking. The food distributed should also consider the staple food eaten by Dumagats. In the interviews, the mothers asked, “Noodles *at sardinas na lang ba ang alam nilang kinakain ng Dumagat?*” (“Do they think Dumagats only eat noodles and sardines?”)

2. *Distribution of financial aid*

Some of the women expressed that receiving financial support during the lockdown was better than getting relief goods. They also realized that it is important to have savings or receive cash support in situations like the lockdown. Not all women in Sitio Sapang Munti qualified for the SAP even though they are eligible based on their identity and context. They said that they are unaware of the qualifications to be a beneficiary, and also that the SAP should be given every month of the lockdown instead of just two payouts.

3. *Livelihood and health*

From the perspective of the women, quarantine measures could be implemented without sacrificing the people’s livelihood and other sources of income. Limited movement and the closing of non-essential industries and businesses affected part-time work, selling, and other sources of income of the women and other community members. In terms of accessing health services, the women suggested that markets and drug stores be made more accessible to their community given the quarantine measure on limited movement. Availability of medicines and doctors to check on them and assure them that they do not have COVID-19 could also have been very helpful during the lockdown.

Analysis and conclusion

Gender roles in Sitio Sapang Munti were already unequal prior to the pandemic, as reflected in the scope of work, responsibilities, and benefits in women's triple role as they bear more responsibilities compared to men.

Men have more access to regular and higher income work such as serving as *Bantay Gubat* (BG), while women only have access to informal work. The community's belief that the woman's domain is at home—caring for children and addressing daily household concerns—has denied women of opportunities for more dependable sources of income. Women remain responsible for ensuring that the family has food, which oftentimes entails borrowing from family, neighbors, and Maligaya Grocery, while community governance and decision-making regarding community concerns are still predominantly male-led. Although the SK3SSM is not officially part of the tribal leadership, the organization has actively worked with the existing leadership in addressing safety and security concerns, accessing resources for the community water system, and exploring alternative sources of livelihood for families such as crafts-making, trainings with different government and non-government organizations, and participation in trade fairs.

The lockdown experiences of women in Sitio Sapang Munti is consistent with existing literature in that disasters (in this case, the pandemic) render poor and marginalized sectors of society more vulnerable (Ciampi et al., 2011). Gender inequalities worsened during the lockdown, with women still expected to perform their gender-based responsibilities which placed them at a higher risk of exposure to COVID-19 since they are required to go outside the community for marketing, buying medicines, accessing relief services, etc.

The ECQ measures that limited physical mobility had the most impact on the women of Sitio Sapang Munti, resulting in disruption of their informal forms of work, accessing social services, and socialization. These are resources and networks that the women had heavily relied on pre-pandemic. With these being cut off during the lockdown, more pressure was placed on the women, making their performance of reproductive or care work more difficult.

These outcomes have added to an already high sense of insecurity among the residents of Sitio Sapang Munti by exacerbating long-standing issues of the community—limited economic opportunities, isolation, state neglect, and poor access to social services.

Despite the above, the pandemic presented opportunities for SK3SSM to strengthen women's leadership roles in community management work by having them take part in the decision-making and implementation, especially in relief work. The networks and partnerships established by SK3SSM with the UP CSWCD FIP, WWF, and other organizations proved vital in mobilizing assistance during the lockdown.

The SK3SSM was also recognized by the tribal leadership as a reliable source of information in ensuring that a correct census was conducted and goods from donor organizations were properly and efficiently distributed to the different *sitios* in the Ipo Watershed. It should be noted, though, that this opportunity for participation in decision-making was still geared towards addressing basic needs, therefore fulfilling women's roles in reproductive or care work.

While health protocols need to be observed, the women recommended that government should implement quarantine measures that are sensitive to, and inclusive of, women's needs and interests. They should not impede on their economic activities, access to health services, and right to information.

When women perform their gender roles in productive, reproductive or care work, and then extend these to their roles in community management work, women see themselves as active agents in addressing the needs of the wider community.

Currently, the efforts of the women of Sitio Sapang Munti and SK3SSM are centered on addressing women's existing conditions. There is much to be done in terms of women organizing and gender-inclusive and responsive DRRM to address gender inequalities and improve women's position in the community.

Contributions of Community Development (CD) in enhancing the roles of women in responding to the pandemic

The ECQ measures implemented during the pandemic magnified unequal gender relations and women's multiple burdens. However, the experience of the SK3SSM has shown that, if the processes before, during, and post disaster are inclusive of women, these can build upon their capacities and enable them to contribute to addressing community needs.

The challenges of the pandemic lockdown in Sitio Sapang Munti provided opportunities for the women to take on leadership roles. Through this experience, SK3SSM was able to mobilize resources for the community's needs; and through community organizing, they have learned to be more articulate about their needs, to build networks with partners, and exact accountability from government and other organizations.

The experiences of SK3SSM also proved the importance of recognizing women as partners in resolving community issues. This gives weight to organizing women and building their capacities in disaster risk management, and making organizational processes such as needs assessments, meetings and consultations, and community mobilizations more gender inclusive and responsive.

Furthermore, it can also be inferred that, to genuinely achieve disaster resilience in crises like the pandemic, the fundamental issues of poor and marginalized communities, like Sitio Sapang Munti, must be addressed with the long-term view of arresting the roots of their vulnerabilities. The *sitio's* limited livelihood opportunities, poor health conditions, and lack of basic infrastructure are mainly the consequences of the community's isolation—politically, socially, and economically. Strengthening the community's capacity for self-sufficiency was a common theme among the women interviewed—a robust community economy; access to quality social services such as health, education, and information; and improvement of basic physical infrastructure such as shelter, a viable water system, and electricity. These are concrete areas where external actors can make significant contributions in terms of capacity-building and facilitating access to vital resources needed towards realizing this longed-for self-sufficiency.

Recommendations

The application of the CD Approach can be seen as having a significant contribution to the women of Sitio Sapang Munti's role in collectively responding to the negative impacts of the ECQ protocols. However, the issues experienced during the lockdown are fundamentally rooted in the isolation of the community and should be addressed with long-term solutions. As articulated by the women of Sapang Munti, their aspirations are areas where CD can be instrumental towards their realization.

Broadening the scope of community organizing

The latest report from UN Women (2019) indicates that families prosper when women have access to independent income, and when women have a greater say within their position in the household. Community Organizing (CO) in Sapang Munti can continue to open opportunities for women to have access to more stable, regular, and sufficient sources of income. A major avenue for this would be to strengthen the social capital of SK3SSM with institutions and organizations that can assist in accessing other forms of assets. CO can also contribute in bolstering the organization's advocacy for representation in decision-making institutions such as the Barangay Development Council.

Expanding the membership of SK3SSM to other women in Sitio Sapang Munti should also be a priority in the short term.

CO should also contribute to engendering men in the community which will lead to improved conditions on care work (traditionally relegated to women), pushing for timely release of BG salaries, and inclusion of SK3SSM in spaces for participation and decision-making.

A major principle of CD is self-reliance. Thus, Community Education (CE) should focus on strengthening SK3SSM's organizational capacities to create and maintain social networks that can lead to the inclusion and recognition of the organization, and to enhanced capacity of women in accessing social services, social protection, and information. Through CE, the organization can enhance the knowledge and skills of women in the areas of sustainable livelihoods, gender rights, and disaster risk management. Together with the men of Sapang Munti, CE should facilitate the discussion, analysis, and addressing of women's immediate needs and long-term interests that can lead to a change in existing gender inequalities.

End Notes

¹ At the time this article was being written, the *Bantay Gubat* salaries had been delayed for eight months.

² The term “lockdown” was commonly used to refer to the period wherein ECQ measures were implemented, particularly the strict regulation of people’s movement in entering or exiting the Ipo Dam area.

References

- Alcantara, R. C., Jimenez, J. M., & Nachura, M. S. (2017). *Integration Paper, CD 280 Field Instruction Program* [Unpublished report]. Quezon City, Philippines: College of Social Work and Community Development, University of the Philippines Diliman.
- Ariyabandu, M. M. (2009). Sex, gender and gender relations in disasters. In E. Enarson & P. G. Dhar Chakrabarti (Eds.), *Women, gender and disaster: Global issues and initiatives* (pp. 5–17). India: SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd.
- Billing, L. (2020, April 16). Duterte’s response to the coronavirus: ‘Shoot them dead’. *foreignpolicy.com*. Retrieved from <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/04/16/duterte-philippines-coronavirus-response-shoot-them-dead/>
- Bisenio, X. (2020, July 28). SAP exaggerated, millions left behind. *IBON Foundation*. Retrieved from <https://www.ibon.org/sap-exaggerated-millions-left-behind/>
- Bulacan Provincial Health Office. (2020, March 11). *Bulacan COVID-19 updates*. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/PHOBulacan/photos/1262121217320260>
- Bulacan Provincial Health Office. (2020, November 16). *Bulacan COVID-19 updates*. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/PHOBulacan/photos/1472857122913334>
- Ciampi, A., Gell, F., Lasap, L., & Turvill, E. (2011). *Gender and disaster risk reduction: A training pack*. Oxfam GB.
- De Vera, B. (2020, May 22). 45-day ECQ cost PH economy P1.1 trillion, says NEDA. *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. Retrieved from <https://business.inquirer.net/297960/45-day-ecq-cost-ph-economy-p1-1-trillion-says-neda#ixzz6e1pMDJj1>

- Dela Cruz, J. (2020, June 23). House probes SAP distribution delay. *Business Mirror*. Retrieved from <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2020/06/23/house-probes-sap-distribution-delay/>
- Department of Community Development. (2019). *Field Instruction Program (FIP) manual*. Quezon City, Philippines: College of Social Work and Community Development, University of the Philippines Diliman.
- Esguerra, D. J. (2020, June 01). Philippines' COVID-19 cases accelerate to 18,638. *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. Retrieved from <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1284414/philippines-COVID-19-cases-hit-18638#ixzz6e1rDDahb>
- Gita-Carlos, R. A. (2020, May 12). DSWD to 'solely' take charge of SAP distribution: Duterte. *Philippine News Agency*. Retrieved from <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1102552>
- Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery. (2020). *Gender and disaster risk management*. Retrieved from https://www.gfdrr.org/en/gender?fbclid=IwAR3SVpTRQlja8uMozgs_KCHfhk3LwrLXvdv71U8jp18flcX9cH6NVrOG1TI
- Gonzales, C. (2020, April 29). QC unit under fire for 'excessive force' on fish vendor not wearing face mask. *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. Retrieved from https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1266426/labor-group-on-beating-of-qc-authorities-to-a-fish-vendor?fbclid=IwAR0sDVSR5g3UhhSwn1VB-V0-54WFnKZSJF2uY5bPrBD-m8aT4bH170n_TkU
- Gonzales, C. (2020, May 11). 183 barangay officials being investigated by PNP for 'corruption' in SAP distribution. *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. Retrieved from <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1272955/183-barangay-officials-being-investigated-by-pnp-for-corruption-in-sap-distribution#ixzz6e1gNQrea>
- Homan, M. S. (2016). *Promoting community change: Making it happen in the real world* (6th ed.). Boston, MA: Cengage Learning.
- Independent Evaluation Group (IEG). (2017). Women's empowerment in rural community-driven development projects. Retrieved from <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/25968/112263-WP-PUBLIC.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- Kenny S., McGrath, B., & Phillips, R. (2018). Introduction. In *The Routledge handbook of community development*. New York, NY: Routledge.

- Mendez, C., Tupas, E, & Go, V. (2020, May 21). A tale of two ECQ violators: Mang Dodong out of detention; Duterte defends Debold Sinas. *onenews.ph*. Retrieved from <https://onenews.ph/a-tale-of-two-ecq-violators-mang-dodong-out-of-detention-duterte-defends-debold-sinas>
- Movido, A. (2020, April 27). Rule of men? IBP denounces ‘inhumane penalties’ vs quarantine violators. *ABS-CBN News*. Retrieved from <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/04/27/20/rule-of-men-ibp-denounces-inhumane-penalties-vs-quarantine-violators?fbclid=IwAR0vkTnUAMwblQOaf12OqU2N8ODxcpi8aFWt10fJVAjnjvqGcFvTed3v4g>
- Municipality of Norzagaray. (2020, April 18). *Executive Order No. 2020-04-16 Series of 2020. An Order Placing the Entire Municipality of Norzagaray under Total Lockdown*. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/mayorfredgermar/photos/3360466483968139>
- Municipality of Norzagaray. (2020, April 20). *COVID-19 monitoring and surveillance*. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/mayorfredgermar/photos/3367515246596596>
- Municipality of Norzagaray. (2020, November 10). *COVID-19 monitoring and surveillance*. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/mayorfredgermar/photos/3979611095387005>
- National Economic Development Authority (NEDA). (2020). *NEDA report: Addressing the social and economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic*. Retrieved from <https://www.neda.gov.ph/addressing-the-social-economic-of-the-COVID-19-pandemic/>
- Parrocha, A. (2020, March 16). Duterte places entire Luzon under ‘enhanced community quarantine’. *Philippine News Agency*. Retrieved from <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1096801>
- Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO). (2020, March 13). Gov’t imposes community quarantine in Metro Manila to contain coronavirus. Retrieved from https://pcoo.gov.ph/news_releases/govt-imposes-community-quarantine-in-metro-manila-to-contain-coronavirus/
- Provincial Government of Bulacan. (2020, March 18). *Executive Order No. 14: Adopting the Memorandum from the Executive Secretary, dated 16 March 2020, directing LGUs, among others, “To Adopt, Coordinate and Implement the Guidelines on the Imposition of an Enhanced Community Quarantine and Stringent Social Distancing Measures” in the Province of Bulacan*. Retrieved from https://bulacan.gov.ph/government/images/ECQ_COVID19/EO14/EO14.pdf

- Provincial Government of Bulacan. (2020, March 19). *Memorandum DRF-03192020-94: Mahigpit na Pagpapatupad ng mga Alituntunin sa Enhanced Home Quarantine at ng Curfew sa Buong Lalawigan ng Bulacan*. Retrieved from https://bulacan.gov.ph/government/images/ECQ_COVID19/MEMO%2003192020-94/memo_03192020.pdf
- Provincial Government of Bulacan. (2020, May 15). *Executive Order No. 18 Series of 2020: An Executive Order Implementing the Modified Enhanced Community Quarantine (MECQ) in the Province of Bulacan from 16 until 31 May 2020*. https://bulacan.gov.ph/government/images/ECQ_COVID19/EO18.pdf
- Provincial Government of Bulacan. (2020, October 30). *Executive Order No. 36 Series of 2020: Extending the Modified General Community Quarantine (MGCQ) in the Province of Bulacan from 01 until 30 November 2020*. Retrieved from https://bulacan.gov.ph/government/images/ECQ_COVID19/eo_36.pdf
- Roa, A., & de Vera, B. (2020, June 06). Pandemic raises unemployment to 15-year high. *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. Retrieved from <https://business.inquirer.net/299294/pandemic-raises-unemployment-to-15-year-high>
- United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. (2015). *Sendai Framework for disaster risk reduction 2015-2030 (Sendai Framework)*. Retrieved from <https://www.undrr.org/implementing-sendai-framework/what-sendai-framework>
- United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. (2017a). *Global programme in support of a gender responsive Sendai Framework implementation: Addressing the gender inequality of risk and promoting community resilience to natural hazards in a changing climate*. Retrieved from https://www.unisdr.org/files/globalplatform/59267e0eba219GIR_in_brief.pdf
- United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. (2017b). *Women must be central in disaster prevention*. Retrieved from <https://www.undrr.org/news/women-must-be-central-disaster-prevention>
- UN Women. (2019). *Progress of the world's women 2019–2020: Families in a changing world*. Retrieved from <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/progress-of-the-worlds-women?fbclid=IwAR07YYV8XnFTUPD55b6oERsX7uZQyGjdM4SVIJEjxL1iHzTIFLUGrikiG8>
- World Wide Fund for Nature-Philippines (WWF-Philippines). (2019). *Humble heroes: Supporting the Bantay Gubat rangers of the Ipo Watershed*. Retrieved from <https://wwf.org.ph/resource-center/story-archives-2017/supporting-bantay-gubat/>

Yonder, A., Akcar, S., & Gopalan, P. (2009). Women's participation in disaster relief and recovery. In E. Enarson & P. G. Dhar Chakrabarti (Eds.), *Women, gender and disaster: Global issues and initiatives* (pp. 189–211). India SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd.

Lisa Victoria N. Rosel is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Community Development (DCD), College of Social Work and Community Development (CSWCD), UP Diliman, where she has been teaching perspective and planning courses to BS Community Development students since 2012. She has worked with SK3SSM and families of Sitio Sapang Munti under the DCD Field Instruction Program since 2019. Aside from teaching, her work with communities involves community health development, gender and energy.

lnrosel@up.edu.ph

Victor Gorantes Obedicen is currently teaching Community Development at the University of the Philippines Diliman. His work currently centers on organizing vulnerable and marginalized communities in managing disaster risks. His contribution to this publication is focused on how the intersecting forms of oppression of women, as well as the role of community organizing, impacts both their capacity and vulnerability to disasters in a pandemic setting. He is also a former NGO worker in the fields of community resources and community disaster risk management.

vgobedicen@up.edu.ph

How to cite this article in APA 7

Rosel, L. V. N., & Obedicen, V. G. (2021). Surviving the pandemic: Sapang Munti women's stories during the ECQ. *Philippine Journal of Social Development*, 14, 59–85.