# Interrogating Poverty: Rhetoric, narratives and concepts

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*In an era where inclusive growth, participatory and sustainable development take prominence, the task of understanding poverty must go beyond academic debates and intellectual inquiries. Its meanings are often reflected and measured in terms of statistics and development metrics, with corresponding indices and graphs. But the analytical frameworks used to define poverty must also be subjected to re-examination.*

*This paper tackles reflections on poverty from both academic and practice-based experiences. It presents various definitions of poverty and the dominant narratives that prevail in society which influence the relationship of the poor with the state, with the society and with and among themselves. The reflections also tackle observed and experienced realities of how development workers and CD practitioners engage the poor in their development agenda based on the experiences from the Field Instruction Program of the Department of Community Development, UP-CSWCD. Community integration and organizing process are viewed as part of the enabling mechanisms for enhancing pro-poor and people-centered approaches in engaging and mobilizing the poor towards their own agenda of development.*

Key concepts: poverty, development, community organizing, community integration

## Introduction

Recently, I visited an Ayta community in Porac, Pampanga for a culmination activity of the two graduate classes I teach in the Department of Community Development (DCD), College of Social Work and Community Development (CSWCD), University of the Philippines, Diliman. With me were Masters in Community Development (MCD) students, aboard two hired jeepneys that usually ply the UP-Katipunan Route.[1]

I must admit that I began to feel some discomfort and  sensed the same from my company somewhere halfway through the travel -- perspiration wiped, faces covered against smoke and dust, occasional shifts in sitting position, but everyone was polite enough not to complain.

We arrived at the town proper of Porac at 11:00 a.m. where our community contacts met and led us to, as they forewarned, another hour's ride on a (very) rough, uphill road. Barely five minutes into the remaining travel, they signaled us to stop and politely asked if two more passengers could ride with us. We, of course, conceded. They were Ayta girls. Both in skirts, plain shirts and slippers, carrying school bags that resembled the eco-bags we buy from groceries and supermarkets. And indeed, it was an hour long ride! The jeepney under-chassis parts squeaked and screeched all throughout, as we held tight to the bars for safety inside.

I was waiting for the two girls to tell us that they had reached their drop off point, but they rode with us all the way to the end of the rough road and the "gates" of the community they, the Ayta, called home. We learned later that there was no public transport available along the rough ride. Had we not passed by, the two students would have walked to their homes, in the heat of the noontime sun, through the volcanic dust that has remained from the Mt. Pinatubo eruption of 1991.

It was then that I realized it was poverty that rode with us through that long, rough and weary ride. And I suddenly felt ashamed that I gave thought to the discomforts I felt when riding along the smooth roads of a national highway. If my students had come to the

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1  These jeepneys are granted a franchise for mass transport to offer service to the community of UP-Diliman.

*same realization and felt the same way I did, I wouldn't know. Perhaps, excited about the community engagement that awaited them and eager to dive into the experience, none expressed feeling so.*

As our college vision says, the CSWCD, "In pursuit of academic excellence, upholds integration of theory and practice and infuses its programs with passionate scholarship, critical thinking, innovativeness and creativity, anchored on people's participation and empowerment, personal and social transformation, solidarity with marginalized groups, and gender-responsiveness" (CSWCD manual).

A graduate of MCD myself and currently a professor in the DCD, I am aware of how the program inculcates among its students basic community development principles which include, among others, bias for the poor and the marginalized. There is no doubt in my mind that both the graduate and undergraduate programs of the department have exhaustive curricula that provide for the learning and interrogation of development-related concepts such as power, participation and empowerment, change and transformation, social justice and wellbeing, and poverty, foremost.

There are, however, observations that prompt me to reflect on how I – both as practitioner and a professor in the college – am effective in influencing the students to take a standpoint and viewpoint that consistently uphold bias for the poor; in how they understand the narratives of poverty; and in how these narratives explain the relations among the poor and the state, the poor and the development workers that my students are assumed to become, and the poor with themselves in the context of their communities.

This paper was written in reflection of said observations and personal experiences in classroom and field settings, both as a student of the past and a professor at present. I hope to highlight what I deem to be apparent gaps in the cognitive (theoretical and conceptual) understanding of poverty (and the poor) vis-à-vis contextual and pragmatic appreciation of realities by students and development workers alike. It is also my intention to highlight deemed rhetoric, specifically those propagated by the state, in these reflections. And lastly, it is with admission that I come from a standpoint that takes a strong bias for the poor that urges the re-examination of our

perspectives of them vis-à-vis their attitudes, behaviors and, in general, their ways of life, and to introspect on our actions for and towards the poor vis-à-vis theoretical and conceptual moorings.

## Poverty: Concepts and Narratives

Probably one of the most poignant descriptions of what poverty is was said by a poor woman in Latvia, published in a study of the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) that goes:

> Poverty is humiliation, the sense of being dependent and of being forced to accept rudeness, insults, and indifference when we seek help (IMF 2000).

There had been several attempts by various thinkers, institutions and development practitioners to define poverty. IMF, in the study cited above, documented definitions and perceptions of poverty by poor people and it established:

> First, that poverty is multidimensional and has important non-economic dimensions; second, that poverty is always specific to a location and a social group, and awareness of these specifics is essential to the design of policies and programs intended to attack poverty; and third, that despite differences in the way poverty is experienced by different groups and in different places, there are striking commonalities in the experience of poverty in very different countries... Poor people's lives are characterized by powerlessness and voicelessness, which limit their choices and define the quality of their interactions with employers, markets, the state, and even non-government organizations (NGOs). Institutions both formal and informal mediate and limit poor people's access to opportunities (IMF 2000).

The Asian Development Bank (2013) describes (urban) poverty as "...defined by lack of essential goods, services and assets and opportunities." These definitions and descriptions are generally upheld in the development arena and are made bases of intervention programs and projects directed at alleviation of the poor's living conditions.

Burkey (1993) and Sachs (2005) both defined poverty by identifying

levels and providing for the general characteristics of each of these categories.

According to them poverty may be categorized into:

1.  Absolute poverty - characterized by a failure to meet basic needs for survival which include food, access to health care, amenities of safe drinking water and sanitation, basic education, decent abodes and basic clothing; it is also characterized by lack of physical, emotional and mental security and rest;

    Burkey (1993) further posits that "survival of the human race depends not on the survival of a single individual, but on the survival of communities. It is thus necessary to expand the list of basic individual needs to include those of a community".

2.  Moderate poverty - a state where basic needs are met, but only hardly. In contemporary terminology, this may be equated to the "almost poor" or "near poor" category; and

3.  Relative poverty - a condition where basic needs are met but does not provide for opportunities to address perceived needs and desires, such as higher quality of life, higher education, endeavors towards cultural enrichment and recreation; it may also refer to a condition where a household income falls below (relative to) an average national income.

In an era where inclusive growth and participatory and sustainable development take prominence, cognizance of poverty has gone up the plane of academic debates and intellectual inquiries. Its reality is reflected and measured in statistics and development metrics and indices, graphs, figures and frameworks. We, as development practitioners, take part in and contribute to these endeavors because they inform our practice, provide us knowledge on which we build and formulate responsive action plans, frame our perspectives and operationalize our visions.

But how are we when we come face to face with poverty? How are we when the poor actually try to reach for our hands, or sit beside us, or ask for a piece of the food that we eat? How are we when we share the same air they breathe, when we are drawn into their daily routine, when we get to see their biases, when we are compelled to

move around with them in their small, limiting and inhibiting worlds? To understand poverty is to go beyond definitions or finding out the extent and severity of the condition. We must also have a sound analysis of its causes. And in so doing, be definite that we are looking at the real root causes and not merely the symptoms and/ or manifestations. Differentiating between root causes and symptoms may prove to be difficult, though, as we will find out in many cases of the "vicious circle of poverty"[2] (Burkey, 1993). The challenge must be faced, though, and we, as community development practitioners, must avoid the temptation of taking the short cuts and cheat on the process because, as Burkey says, "Trying to alleviate the symptoms without first identifying the real underlying causes will not lead to sustainable results."

This brings to mind an anecdote from a Basic Community Organizing Workshop[3] among NGO community workers that I, along with other UP CSWCD faculty, had a chance to facilitate and be a resource speaker in. When asked for their views on the main causes of poverty, some of the participants answered, with certainty and confidence (!): laziness – uncooperative attitudes, lack of ambition, idleness, and apathy. Yes, even students, "freshies" to the CD program of the college, sometimes provide the same responses, too!

Karina C. David, a former faculty member of the CSWCD, in her article "Community Organization and People Participation: The Philippine Experience" laid down bases of the poor people's seemingly unproductive, un-driven and uncooperative attitudes and behaviors, and these include: the colonial legacy, the poor people's context and realities, and the organizing and participation fatigue among them (David, 1985).

The colonial legacy (David, 1985) explains that, since the colonial period in the Philippines, we, the colonized, were told and taught that what we had and how we were, were not good enough.

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2  The vicious circle of poverty, as illustrated by Burkey, show how "from a root cause, we find symptoms becoming causes in themselves which bring forth more symptoms to a series of several linkages until we find ourselves right back where we started" (Burkey 1993).

3  KCOC Basic Orientation on Participatory Development and Community Organizing held in September 2017, Quezon City, Philippines

We were seen and treated as third class citizens[4] and were given prescriptions on how to improve ourselves in various aspects of our lives, including the way we dressed, how we were to act and behave (especially women) in public gatherings, the better language to use, and even what faith to believe in!

And so we were told, taught and given of what would be good for us, the what and how to be a "better us". This mindset of colonialism has been retained to this day by the country's ruling elite. And some independent, private and non-government organizations, which bring and implement development programs and projects to communities, are no less guilty.

It is a known and common practice for development workers – from government and NGOs alike, and with the purest intentions for the poor at heart – to define concepts, formulate objectives, make plans, implement programs and projects, and then evaluate impacts of the same on the lives of the people, all on the organization's own initiative.

Hence, several such organizations would come to pre-identified depressed communities assessed to be lacking in health and sanitation facilities, for example, with their pre-identified packages that would, more often than not, include toilet bowls. Quoting Dr. Lito Manalili (in his many lectures on CO-CD) on the travesty of such a top-down development intervention and the usual community reaction:

> "*Ay, bibigyan mo kami ng paglalabasan. Nasaan naman ang aming ipapasok para kami ay may ilabas*?" (You give us something to which we can deposit human waste, but what of the food that we need in order to have this waste?)

As Kabeer (1995) puts it, it is important to scrutinize the methodological and conceptual lenses that planners use to see and understand the poor and their needs. "Do they share or have empathy with the experience of those whose needs they are defining? Who has the last words in determining the legitimacy of a particular need within the 'decisionable' agenda?" In other words, who has the power

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4   First were the colonizers, second were the "hybrids" – products of intermarriage among the colonizers and the colonized

to give meaning to and operationalize concepts of, and to, ultimately decide on what should and should not be for the poor.

*The poor people's context and realities* are factors often subsumed under statistical data and traditional social analysis of poor communities. Mainstream practice of data gathering and analysis is often blind, if not numb, to the nuances of the poor's day-to-day struggles. Hence, assessment of needs and the means to address them are reduced to tangible inputs, measurable outputs and outcomes. For instance, the "need for education" translates to construction of school buildings, rehabilitation of classrooms and school facilities, children of school age being instantly expected to avail of the "free education" program, notwithstanding other circumstances in their lives such as being an income earner of their household, or having a dysfunctional family (abandoned or worse abused by parents or any other member of the family). In many cases, "lack of skills" translates to provision of skills building activities such as sewing, rug-salted egg-slippers-bags making, activities deemed to capture the interest of mothers and women household members who desire to augment incomes. It is often overlooked that these mothers are part-time informal service providers (laundrywomen, househelp, nannies, etc.) who would not wish to lose their source of income, albeit meager and part time, over learning new skills the use and benefits of which they have no clear notion of, much less of their sustainability in the context of their lives.

And finally, *fatigue from participation in endeavors of organizing and development intervention programs and projects* emanates from a series of failed interventions and resulting failed promises towards fulfillment of dreams and aspirations.

In 2012, as an academic requirement, I, with my teammate, frequented a community in order to document the organizing experiences of Kabalikat, an urban poor people's organization (PO) based in Baseco, Tondo. In informal interviews that were initially undertaken, the people in the community appeared reluctant to share their stories, tentative in their commitments to participate in the whole study and cynical of its (and our) overall objectives. As it turned out, they had just barely recovered from a recent experience with students from four universities, whose students came to fulfill the requirements of the National Service Training Program (NSTP) in their community. The success story of "Rags to Riches" was still

fresh then, and the community did not hesitate to take part in the rug-making activities proposed by the students, hoping that these would bring about change in their lives as "Rags to Riches" had been able to do for its own workers. Two semesters passed and the students completed their requirements. The community participants had produced thousands of rugs, of different shapes, designs and sizes; the students left Baseco with gratitude; while the people and their thousands of rugs were left hanging, wondering where they would find the "riches" that were supposedly packaged with the "rags." One of the community members expressed, although in jest, that they would never again entertain anyone trying to convince them to venture into rug making and speaking of its promises.

The issue is that poverty had been so embedded in the social, economic, and political lives of the people that its symptoms manifests in their latent attitudes and behavior. Understanding these attitudes and behavior would take more than gathering statistical data of the poor's living conditions. Our understanding of these must take root in grasping their experientially-and historically-evolved attitudes and behaviors that ultimately bring forth an altered culture.

Below is an illustration drawn from Burkey's (1993) discussion of the "vicious circles of poverty." This is an attempt to show how the effects of poverty become causes in themselves that lead to effects and symptoms which become causes of another and then another and that eventually brings us back to poverty itself. The purpose of this illustration is to highlight how certain effects-turned-causes, instill, influence or alter the behaviors of the poor, resulting in a cycle which then makes poverty an even more complex condition.

While we know that poverty and its causes and effects have several and complex dimensions, this figure illustrates simplified interconnections and interrelations of the causes and effects of poverty. The figure simply tells us that one of poverty's main causes (and effects) is having low (household or individual) *income*; low income translates to *low access to or limited opportunities* in terms of education (among many other aspects); having low educational attainment instills in one *inferiority and low self-confidence* that could then lead to *passivity and acceptance* of one's condition – some even call it fate – which then tightens the bonds of poverty even more.
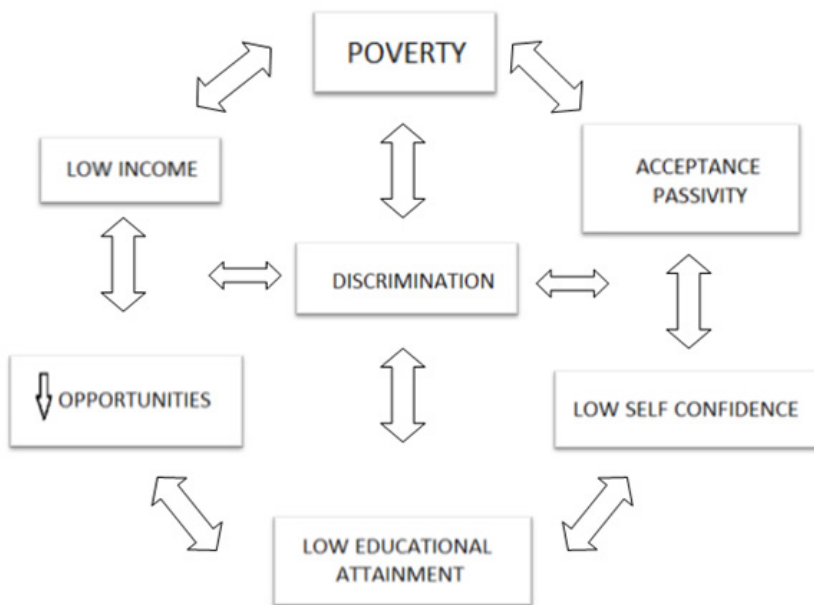
Figure 1 - Poverty and Culture

*Acceptance and passivity* inhibit initiatives towards pro-active measures that could change one's circumstances. These limit the choices that the poor could even imagine they could have access to and "curtail their ability to know other ways of being" (Kabeer, 1995). Pronouncements like "we were born poor and will die the same," neither are mere rhetoric nor mindless rants. Rather, they are an expression of the poor's mindset, of their frustration perhaps, and definitely of their acceptance.

Such acceptance manifests in mothers bearing long queues in health centers, in poorly ventilated rooms, to avail of free vaccine for their children; in men and women (including grandmothers!) submitting to random drug tests being conducted by different government agencies in local communities, and most recently, in the bus terminals. Acceptance also manifests among patients being turned down by private hospitals because they cannot provide the "down payments," or patients "getting used" to the unspeakable conditions in public hospitals – lacking in basic facilities such as oxygen tanks

and bed sharing. The same can be said of children walking almost a mile from their rural homes to their schools in barrios or town centers only to end up in "back-to-back" classrooms[5]; of vendors availing of credit facilities from the informal sector where they are compelled to pay higher interest rates; and, most sadly, in how these people have gotten accustomed, even resigned, to the treatment they get as they try to avail of services to which they are, unknowingly, entitled to.

*Acceptance* is about people living their lives in routine, uncaring for, if not refusing, diversion because this routine provides for their survival. It is about the community people we engage in livelihood projects who find it difficult to attend meetings, trainings and discussions we have planned and set for them. These are the same people who we think have no interest in improving their lives, simply because they "refuse" to cooperate with our initiatives of development interventions.

*Passivity*, meanwhile, is when people somehow feel that something is wrong but refuse to go beyond the feeling. They end up allowing fate to determine what happens next, keeping faith that things would turn for the better, if not soon, maybe later. It manifests in long queues at job openings even when the pay is below the minimum wage; in people living in flood prone areas, refusing to buy new home appliances because the floods "will just keep destroying them, again and again"[6]. This is the case of the women of Brgy. Batia, Bocaue Bulacan, laboring on laundry-clip-making for a whole day which earns them Php 60 at most; or the residents of Parola, Tondo peeling a sack of garlic that pays them Php 120 for one and a half days of work.[7]

Passivity is when they are maltreated, mocked, insulted or humiliated by those in authority and are able to shrug it off; when they let hurting words, looks and treatments pass, without so much as a word, much less a fight, to defend themselves. It is when their own president speaks of them, the poor, with disgust, and curses them to death and gets away with it.

5  Back to back classrooms are known conditions in rural schools where two sets of classes share one room with their backs against each other
6  This was a statement from a resident of Brgy. Banaba, San Mateo, Rizal, when asked why he hardly has anything inside his house. According to him, he lost almost everything after Typhoon Ondoy. All he was able to save were a few pieces of plastic plates, plastic chairs, a mosquito net, and what's left of his sofa made of bamboo.
7  These based on interviews among respective communities during various field visits and exposures

*Passivity and acceptance* are about a failure to fight for and uphold their rights and to exact accountability from those in authority, the duty bearers, not out of conscious choice but from growing accustomed to what they consider normal – as a way of life, a life that has been subject to deprivation, marginalization and discrimination over a long period of time.

*Discrimination* among the poor is a reality so palpable that they feel this under their skins. Discrimination manifests in how they are displaced indiscriminately in cities, moved to relocation areas lacking in the most basic services, resources and access to their "former worlds"; in how the vendors of Baclaran are harassed and their goods confiscated if not destroyed whenever there is a clean-up drive; in how the trikes[8] in Quezon City are bulldozed and pulverized because they violate the parking rules of the city; and many other actions taken against them, without regard for their (well) being and much less accountability of those carrying out these actions.

Is it because they are poor that they are not feared? That they are not expected to fight back? They would not, after all, have access to legal recourse due to wanting resources. Their representations, albeit efforts by some organized sectors, are brushed off and drowned by arguments on law implementation, keeping peace and order and upholding the welfare of "all."

Without a sustained organizing effort, their limited means of survival and limited knowledge of and access to mechanisms to uphold their rights, the poor fear for their lives, give up on protecting their interests and simply accept tragedies like these. And the cycle goes on. When generations, one after the other, are subjected to such discrimination, it becomes an accepted normal, one that is not challenged, and is rather lived with, in resignation and acceptance.

Again, this brings to mind a grandmother of a casualty of the war on drugs of the Duterte Administration. Speaking in a forum[9], she narrated how her grandson was unarmed and was not, in any way, fighting back when arrested by the police. She heard the cries of the boy for help and for mercy. Then, she heard the gun shots! Soon after, she saw her grandson bleeding and lifeless. In the days

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8    Three-wheel mode of transport made of a motorbike and a side carriage
9    Forum on Extra Judicial Killings (EJK) held in CSWCD in August 2017

that followed, her grandson was one of those reported to have been armed and attempting to fight back, hence his death was justified. This grandmother ended her narration saying:

> "*Kahit naman gusto kong mag reklamo, may makikinig ba sa akin? Meron ba akong magagawa*?" (Even if I wanted to file a complaint, would anyone listen to me? Is there anything I can do about it?)

What resounds in this statement are the words that were not said – words about being poor and thus voiceless and powerless; that what they have to say, what they have in their hearts and minds do not matter.

This is the culture that poverty instils: *passivity and acceptance*.

Have you ever observed how the attending staff of certain establishments such as malls, groceries or supermarkets, are extra wary when "poor looking" people roam their stores? Yes, we ask, how do they know these people are poor? Is it because they are in old clothes, out of fashion or too much (tasteless) fashion? Is it because they are in slippers and dirt shows on their feet? Is it those old and tattered shoes they wear? Is it their sun-burnt dark, wrinkled and shriveled skin that tells us they do not work in air-conditioned rooms, much less sleep in one? Or is it simply that they have that "distinct" smell and "distinct" look that tell us they are poor even when we do not even know their names or where they come from.

Do we think the poor do not feel this? Of course they do! So they would act awkward while being followed and observed, making the attending staff even more wary of their presence. As a result, going to street markets such as Divisoria, Quiapo and Baclaran becomes a better alternative for them. Apart from the availability of less costly items, in such places they would not have to contend with and bear the judgment of the suspecting eyes that follow them.

Ultimately, passivity and acceptance bring forth the more prominently known and discussed "culture of silence." Silence is an alternative means to live life and survive a poor man's struggle. Silence will not earn the ire of the people in power. It will not draw attention to them that would further tell them of their insignificance -- because

silence is where the voices of the poor belong, unimportant and unheard.

**The Rhetoric**

As a practitioner, it pains me to hear poverty being sung, as if in chorus, all over the world in different tunes and hymns, with various notes and verses, with strong and indignant – while the poor remain the least heard.

Kabeer (1995) observed that "despite the rhetoric of participatory development, the power to identify and determine the priorities has remained where it has always been, in the hands of the minority at the top." And, to add my thoughts, the poor are left to cooperate, accept or even simply watch, as their lives are defined for them and their futures drawn in blueprints, otherwise known as the development agenda.

Very recently, these lines were delivered in a speech by no less than President Rodrigo Roa Duterte (October, 2017) addressing the jeepney drivers and operators who protested the program of modernization for public transport (Romero, 2017):

> *Mahirap kayo? P**** i**! Magtiis kayo sa hirap at gutom. Wala akong pakialam* (You are poor? Son of a b****! Endure hunger and poverty. I don't care). It's the majority of Filipinos. *Huwag ninyong ipasubo ang tao* (Do not defy the people)."
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> I'll give you until the end of the month or until the end of the year. Comply because come January 1, if I see an unregistered jeepney, old ones, I will have it towed in front of you. If you want disarray, I have lots of policemen, … I am the president. Either you kill me or you follow me. If the law is not followed, son of a b****, we have to kill each other.

His indignation emanates from a firm resolve to implement the said program despite protests from the affected sectors, because it is (the program) *for the people*.

I must admit that this speech brought shivers to my spine, momentarily arrested my breath and as anger loomed, I had the urge

to abandon all hope and turn my back on my ideals.

For what could be worse than to hear the person holding the highest position in the land speak to and of the poor with such abhorrence, mocking poverty in their face, in utter disrespect of their dignity and their rights? My thoughts groped for rationality, trying to make sense of these lines in the context of state accountability and responsive (good) governance. I failed. And while others merely shrug these off, with the President's many other outbursts and mindless utterances in past speeches, I cannot, for the life of me, let this pass, for chastisement of the poor is no matter to shrug about.

To my mind, the manner by which power was flaunted is a reaffirmation of the hollow rhetoric that translates to narratives and how these further reinforce the helpless conditions of the poor.

## Pondering on how poverty is addressed

Most poverty reduction programs are designed to address the basic needs of the poor through direct provision of basic services and enhancing the capacities to gain access to more resources (Kabeer, 1995). Provision of basic services include health and education in the form of medical and dental missions, free vaccines for children 0-2 years, free iron and other vitamin supplements for pregnant and lactating mothers, free access to day care centers for children 2 -7 years (depending on the local government policy) and free primary and secondary education, among others.

Efforts to increase capacities to have better access to resources tend to center on skills-building endeavors. These include various training on skills that may contribute to finding additional sources of income or finding better paying jobs. As was discussed in the preceding pages, skills training in rug making; *bangus* (milkfish) deboning; formulation of laundry soap, fabric conditioner, dishwashing liquid, bath soap, shampoo, cologne, among so many others abound in depressed communities. Some programs even include starter kits that are expected to set off home-based income-generation.

Development has always been directly correlated with economic growth, premised on it being a natural process nourished by application of correct and timely inputs (Burkey, 1993). In fact, the basic needs approach was adopted by the International Labor

Organization (ILO) in 1976 as an alternative development strategy (Burkey 1993) that inspired many development intervention models in the Philippines and everywhere else.

The Field Instruction Program (FIP)[10] of DCD in the CSWCD, while equipped with knowledge of other development models and frameworks and (assumed to have) a good grasp of the framework and principles of People Centered Development -- still employs this approach given the context of limited and time-bound community engagements. Being both an academic and practical endeavor, measureable outputs are (deemed to be) expected in the FIP.

As results, students in the FIP lay down their work plans for the semester filled with training and educational activities for the community in the name of empowerment. These would include: seminars on various topics such as human rights, rights to housing and relocation, rights to education, cooperative development and institutionalization, organizational formation and strengthening, leadership development. The skills training, usually through mobilized resource speakers and knowledge providers, may include abaca weaving, soap making, financial literacy and management, organizing, and a whole range of topics imaginable that are relevant to the joint and mutual objectives of the program and the partner organization.

These are deemed empowering endeavors that increase people's capacities: *to learn* by way of providing knowledge about their basic rights and awareness of processes and mechanisms. They can access these despite limitations of their material ownership and control of resources. There are varying ways how it can be done: *to do*, indulge in activities where they would gain competence and skills that enable them to engage in and carry out productive activities; and *to be*, the ability to define their being -- who and what they are and who and what they envision themselves to be.

Lest we fall into the trap of reinforcing hallow rhetoric, I believe that there is a need to review the framing and appreciation of these activities. While they may, indeed, foster community involvement and participation, provide spaces for interaction with the

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10   FIP, also known as the Fieldwork Program is an integral part of both the undergraduate and graduate degree programs of the DCD. Among its requirements is community integration and engagement of students through partner agencies.

community members, possibly initiate a process of learning with and from the people by engaging them in discussions and analysis of their social realities, there must be a realization that short term, sporadic or fragmented engagements do not easily nor necessarily translate to individual and collective transformation.

The documentation of an FIP experience in Brgy. Banaba, San Mateo, Rizal, revealed from the reports of the community members themselves that projects initiated by FIP students come to an end and are forgotten when the students leave the community. These included initiatives on waste segregation, leadership training and organizational strengthening (Papa & Quijano, 2013).

I believe that there is a need to re-focus and reinforce the processes of integration. This has to do with – the students' learning of and empathizing with the people's ways of life – not just from literature but from experiencing the life that they intend to understand, from understanding the language (spoken and unspoken) of the poor, from having an appreciation of their dreams and aspirations and the capacities they (the people) already have to achieve these.

To begin with, there must be a constant and conscious effort towards conscientization, throughout the whole course of integration. *Conscientization* is a dialogical learning process of developing critical awareness of one's social realities through collective reflection and action (Freire Institute, 2013). It may start with, but cannot end at knowledge provision and enhancement. It must create among the people a burning desire to take action, not for a short-term objective of project implementation but for a strategic vision of creating positive changes in their lives.

While time limitation is a practical concern in FIP, the challenge is to come up with a work plan and community integration design that would address academic learning and production of outputs without sacrificing the principles and goals of the program.

Upholding the belief that the people would find a way towards an envisioned change themselves, and that our presence is to simply catalyze the process, might help in framing a work plan that would yield sustained outcomes, despite time limitations. The challenge is to start off genuine participation – that is, the community taking genuine interest in what we have to offer them. Perhaps the mentality that we

have something to offer, something to give, must be changed first. Again, while it is understandable for students to desire immediate measurable outputs, sustained outcomes, such as transformative change, would always lag, if not fail, unless the people themselves truly give value to their participation and engagement.

Transformative change is attained when there is shared learning (Soedjatmoko, 1986) – the discovery of common experiences, common frustrations, common dreams and, most importantly, the common resolve and identification of collective capacities to act on things the people would want changed.This resolve is a change in mindset -- a break-away from passivity and acceptance. The setting-in of empowerment that takes root in their belief that something can be done and that they have the capacity to do it. Only with this change in mindset could transformative changes be attained, and these changes we shall see in sustained outcomes and positive impacts on the people's lives.

So we begin, *not* by telling people that we have something to offer, or that we are bringing them solutions to their problems, or formulae to improve their living conditions. We start by encouraging them to talk, by allowing them to listen to themselves (before we ask that they listen to us) and by letting them know that what they have to say truly matters. Let us help them break away from the culture of acceptance by letting them dream of an alternative vision of life and being. Let us help in their realization that they have rights that they can claim, that they should claim, and that they are, themselves, the actors in effecting the change that they want.

Then, we can expect a build-up of their desire for that change While in the past, they had experienced how to set aside their individual dreams, to live a life of passivity and acceptance, as a recluse from others, alone and "safe" in their silence, with this change comes their own realization of the importance of coming together, to take collective actions in pursuit of their collective dreams, and that collectively, they have more power. This condition sets a time ripe for organizing.

*Organizing* is not just about organizational formation. It is not simply about getting together a group of people to hold elections, identify their officers, formulate the organizational vision, mission and goals, and come up with an organizational constitution and by-

laws. While these may be steps in the process towards institutional formation that are necessary for legal representation and engagement with the state and its institutions, these must be borne out of a ripened condition and the people's readiness, and not of predetermined, time-bound objectives with measurable outputs of community engagement and mobilization.

Organizing is a process (and a strategy) that comes spontaneously with conscientization. Through organizing people begin to give shape and body to their dreams. They also identify their roles as active agents in pursuit of these dreams; and they make concrete, doable plans of actions towards making their aspirations happen. Organizing is about the mothers in the community day care who take turn in watching over their children so that each one of them would have the chance to work and contribute to their respective household income; about the men[11] of Brgy. Banaba, San Mateo, Rizal who take turns in monitoring their local flood monitoring system; about the members of Kabalikat who keep a livelihood project active through their community leaders and members as managers and workers, respectively, in anticipation of their dream to finally own the land promised to them.[12] There are more examples of local people's initiatives that show how communities work together to turn their dreams into realities, their visions into actions.

A successful integration is that which takes on the challenge of employing these processes, of conscientization and organizing, albeit within time limitations. It is that which yields results where the people become planners and identifiers of the activities that are only facilitated by the students. And this, too, is what leaves sustained outcomes and impacts that would ultimately lead to transformative changes. This is what leaves a legacy of the FIP to the communities we have engaged, learned from and worked with.

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11   The people of this Barangay came up with their own flood monitoring system, mobilized resources  on their own and began a volunteer system for tasking and monitoring after they drew lessons from their "Ondoy" experience. (Papa & Quijano 2013)

12   KABALIKAT was formed to act on the land tenure issue of the community. Realizing that the housing and land tenure struggle is a long and continuing process, the devised a way to make its members continuously work together and hold them intact as the process unfolded. Baseco is a 56-hectare land proclaimed by former President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo as a socialized housing site for the actual occupants in 2002 (Land Proclamation No. 145). (Quijano, S., et al., 2012)

*To end, I leave the following for us to ponder on....*

Poverty is real. Poverty is wrong. Poverty must be ended.

And poverty is more than an issue of "lackness". It is both a material and a subjective condition of deprivation that defines people's inferior status in a society and thus influences the quality of their social relations. These consequently construct a frame for their behaviors, attitudes and perceptions of themselves and of their roles and (in)significance in a community. It also influences their perception of their rights and entitlements (or lack thereof), and their capacities (or absence of such) to define their being and to change the quality of their lives. Living in poverty for a long period of time shapes a culture, a way of living, a means to survive ---that of acceptance, passivity and silence.

What we have before us, as future CD practitioners, is both a great challenge and an opportunity to contribute to these goals in our field practice. And we can contribute significantly to development efforts by upholding principles based on our understanding of the poor, of poverty and of the processes that put people at the center and make them the main actors of their development objectives.

To address poverty is to do more than provide for their basic needs and services; more than providing spaces for their participation and access to opportunities; and more than enhancing their skills and capabilities through trainings and the like.

It is about changing the poor people's self-limiting mindset – of powerlessness and voicelessness. It is to re-kindle in them the courage to learn and re-learn from their shared experiences; the courage that tells them that they can change their lives through a conscientized, collective action. It is about providing them enabling mechanisms that would allow them self-expression and self-determination to pursue their dreams and collective aspirations. And most importantly, it is about a tilting of the power relations in their favor, a process that entails systemic changes that would result in substantive social transformation. And this could only be started when the poor begin to believe, and act on that belief, that they too, collectively, have the power to challenge these power structures, to reclaim their rights and to assert their beings.

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