The Transformative Value
of Research in CD Practice:
The Stories of Women Coco Coir Twiners and
Weavers in Brgy. Monbon, Iroson, Sorsogon

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This article demonstrates the transformative value of research in community development (CD) practice – research grounded in CD values and principles as participatory, action-oriented, empowering and transformative. It shows how research could bridge the gap between marginalized women and the CD practitioner in enacting change and serving as evidentiary basis for policy advocacy to improve the lives of women coco coir twiners and weavers in a community frequently ravaged by recurrent typhoons and disasters. Ethical concerns in conducting research are also raised by the article in terms of being non-extractive and giving back to the women whatever benefits could be generated as outcomes of the research.

The study used the life story method. As a research method, it does not only serve as a venue for marginalized women's voices to be heard but also as a means to raise their awareness about their common condition, eventually propelling them to change their condition. Their ability to tell their life stories is an exercise of power. As storytellers of their lives, they have the power to direct the course of their stories for the listener, the researcher. Through the life story method, the relation between participants also shifts from a researcher-respondent to a listener-storyteller relation. Seeing the women as storytellers rather than research respondents provides an egalitarian way of treating them. The method also allows the researcher to see the context of a phenomenon through the lenses of the marginalized women, thus a more empowering process.

Introduction

The article shows how community-based research utilizing the life story method can be instrumental in transforming the lives of rural women and their households in Brgy. Monbon, Irosin, Sorsogon. The article explores the link between participatory action research and Community Development (CD) as a transformative practice.

The article is divided into five sections. The first section discusses the progression of Community Development practice from being welfarist to being transformative and the evolution of CD practice at the College of Social Work and Community Development (CSWCD). The second part traces the role of research in CD practice at the CSWCD. The third section demonstrates, through a case study, how marginalized women coco coir twiners and weavers took action to change their present condition. The fourth section discusses how the research findings were utilized for policy advocacy and for program development of the local government and the non-government organizations (NGOs) in the barangay. Lastly, the fifth section presents reflections on the research experience and its implications in promoting transformative scholarship in CD practice.

Community Development (CD) as a Transformative Practice

Over time, the practice of Community Development (CD) in the Philippines has undergone great transformation in response to changing conditions. Introduced as a "welfare" strategy in the 1950s, CD gradually evolved and took on a progressive stance during the dark years of the martial law period and eventually emerged as the holistic and integrative discipline that it is today.

In the Philippines, CD found its niche in several universities and came to be offered as an applied social science discipline. Through the years, it evolved not only as an academic discipline but as a development approach as well. In practice, its approaches and strategies have been fine-tuned by academic scholars and practitioners on the ground. The CSWCD of the University of the Philippines-Diliman, in particular, has a long tradition of CD practice. On this basis, the CSWCD has evolved its own definition and framework of CD, thus distinguishing it from CD practice elsewhere.

In the 1970s, the CSWCD defined CD as "a commitment to the creation of a society that provides equal access to social, economic and political opportunities and benefits through popular participation" (ISWCD, 1978, as cited in Luna, 2009, p.19). In operational terms, Luna (2009) further elaborated what CD means: it is about "recognizing and building up the people's innate potentials and capabilities, enabling them to define their direction and participate in the process of change through collective actions that will ensure the well-being or welfare of the people" (pp. 4-5).

Moreover, Luna (2009) noted that the primary goal of CD is social transformation and people's empowerment in which all aspects of the community – the socio-economic, political, and environmental – need to be transformed so that the people's welfare as well as the community's sustainability would be realized. To achieve this goal, the following have to be realized: "[1] enhancement of people's potentials and capabilities; [2] participation of the people through collective action in the process of change and transformation; [and, 3] promotion of the people's well-being and welfare" (p.5).

In addition, this CD framework has three interrelated fields, namely, community education (CE), community organizing (CO) and community resource and disaster risks reduction management (CRDRRM):

- **Community education** as a field of CD is about the enhancement of the potentials and capabilities of the people. It recognizes that people have innate potentials that could be enhanced for self-development as well as for the development of their communities. Conscientization, community value formation and skills development are the three elements of community education (Luna, 2009). Tungpalan (1991, as cited in Luna, 2009) noted the crucial role of education in social transformation, particularly in improving people's welfare and in establishing new structures and equitable power relations.

- **Community organizing**, which is the core method in CD "refers to the activities aimed at the grouping of people to struggle for their common needs and aspirations in a given locality (Third World Studies Center, 1990, pp.5-6, as cited in Luna, 2009, p.7).

- **Community resource and disaster risks reduction management** is the third field of CD. Community resource management "includes the acquisition, generation, production, development and conservation, protection, rehabilitation of community resources and the redistribution of benefits from the collective management of these resources" while community disaster risk management "involves the assessment of risks and vulnerabilities, the development of people's capacities to enable them to come out with plans and responses to mitigate disaster impacts and to effectively respond to disaster events" (Luna, 2009, p.8).

In practice, the basic methods in this CD framework include the following: "community research, community organizing, community education, community resources management, community planning, and community mobilization and advocacy" (Luna, 2009, p. 10). In CD processes, research is a cross-cutting method used in the three CD fields. As part of the problem-solving processes of CD, community research is crucial in the assessment of the community situation, particularly the identification of problems and issues in a given community. In CE, research is conducted in the identification and analysis of training needs as well as in the evaluation of the training. In the CO process, research is instrumental in community needs identification, social analysis and identification of potential leaders.And in CRDRRM, research is used for the inventory and analysis of the resources in the community, in hazards, vulnerability and capacities assessment, in the assessment of environmental impact and damage, as well as in monitoring hazards.

The Role of Research in the CSWCD Practice

According to Mikkelsen (2005), research in general is "about knowledge production, seeking answers to questions through inquiry" (p. 139). Cognizance of the importance of research in CD practice, the CSWCD posits that a transformative scholarship views research, extension and teaching as integrative as well as service-oriented (CSWCD, 2015). Participatory action research (PAR) has always been a familiar term to both students and academics at the CSWCD. But what is PAR in CD practice?

As the literature revealed, this type of research is referred to in various terms – PAR, action research, partisan research, participatory research, dialogic research, etc. For Mikkelsen (2005), action research considers knowledge as power and noted that the line between it and social action is blurred. Schrijvers (2000) noted that the inclusion of "direct action for change," usually called "action- or partisan research" (p.25) defines the transformative character of PAR. Further, Schrijvers (2000) averred that:

> action-research [does] not merely allow for inter-subjectivity in the construction of situated knowledges. The researcher explicitly takes sides with a certain category or group of people who want to change their situation. The aim is primarily to create knowledge which directly helps to bring about socio-political change such as desired and defined by the participants in the research. .. One of the participants is the researcher who acts as a facilitator in the process of change. (p.25)

Using the term dialogic research, Cameron et al. (1992), cited in Wright and Nelson (2000), argued that it is "not just with people but is on , for and with them" (p.49, italics supplied). Further, Wright and Nelson (2000), using the term participatory research, elaborated its principles:

> The principle of participatory research is that people become agents rather than objects of research… the first aim is for the research to increase participants' understanding of their situation and their ability to use this information, in conjunction with their local knowledge of the viability of different political strategies, to generate change for themselves. (p.51)

Moreover, Wright and Nelson (2000) averred that, in participatory research, there is change in the purpose and flow of expert knowledge in which the purpose is no longer to extract knowledge from the marginalized groups to "generate disciplinary or world-ordering knowledge" but rather to "use comparative and theoretical knowledge" (p.51) so participants could understand their situation and thereby act upon it. Instead of creating expert knowledge as "professional property" (p.52), participatory research aims to develop local people's knowledge.

Despite being called different names, the varied types of action research, share common features as expounded by Neuman (2000 and 2003), as cited in Mikkelsen (2005): the respondents participate in the research process; the research integrates "ordinary" or popular knowledge; it aims to conscienticize or raise awareness; and it is directly linked to political action. All the features described by these authors underscore the transformative character of participatory action research. In addition, these characteristics of PAR have been further sharpened by feminism. Feminist standpoint theory emphasizes that:

> Starting thought from women's lives decreases partiality and distortion in our images of nature and social relations. It creates knowledge… that is… still partial in both senses of the word, but less distorted than thought originating in the agendas and perspectives of the lives of the dominant group, [the] men. (Harding, 1992, p.181, as cited in Schrijvers, 2000, p.22)

According to Guerrero (2002), feminist participatory research adds these objectives: "to understand, to advocate, to transform, and to empower" (p.67). The advocacy and action objectives, in particular, ensure that research is not only about "knowing and explaining" (p.67)

but on how to use this knowledge by taking action to change the existing condition, such that the research is not extractive and neutral. Instead, it serves as a vehicle in assisting women and men to change their lives.

Similar to the transformative goal of CD participatory action research, the goal of feminist research is liberatory. Maynard and Purvis (1995, as cited in Paredes-Canilao, 2002) noted the liberatory goal of feminist research:

> Feminist research should elicit and analyse knowledge in a way that can be used by women to alter oppressive and exploitative conditions in society… the crucial question for all feminist researchers is to ask, does the analysis re-inscribe the researched into powerlessness, pathologized without agency? (Maynard and Purvis, p. 87, in Paredes-Castillo, p. 55)

Particular to CD practice at the CSWCD, the above features of PAR have been incorporated in the research studies/projects of academics, staff and students. Over time, the CSWCD has fine-tuned its research orientation towards one that is participatory, empowering, action-oriented and transformative. The research undertaken by the faculty, research staff as well as the students, is not only intended to enhance classroom teaching and learning but also to respond to community problems and issues with the ultimate goal of empowering people and improving their lives. As posited by the CSWCD, "research will not bear fruit if it does not result in action that benefits the people" (CSWCD, 2015, p.19).

Moreover, PAR informs the strategies and processes of CD to ensure that development interventions are appropriate and relevant to the needs of the marginalized groups. At the same time, a research-grounded analysis of the marginalized groups and the community conditions can identify appropriate strategies in mobilizing these groups to act and define the course of their own development. Thus, CD research affirms its transformative orientation.

CD research has likewise been flexible and adaptive to the changing times. With the pervasive issues that affect women in communities, CD adopts a gender-responsive stance in research. Over the years, CD practitioners at the CSWCD have explored the use of the method known as "life story" in learning about people's lives, especially the lived experiences of marginalized women. The life story approach is not new in CD practice. As Luna noted (2009), talambuhay or tala alam ng buhay (life story) has been an important process in CD classes as well as in CD practice.

Life story is a method that has long been employed by feminist researchers in studying the lived experiences of ordinary women. Denzin (1990, as cited in Guerrero, 2002, p. 69) defined life story as a "record of one's inner life" from a personal point of view. It could be in the form of complete retelling of one's life story "covering the entire sweep of a [person's] life experience" or "topical, covering only a phase of one's life." Studying the life of ordinary women and men in the community is not alien to CD practice. In community organizing, for instance, the organizer shares her/his life stories with the people as a means of establishing trust and a means of 'breaking the ice'. Likewise, the life story method is similar to CD research in terms of the process being given as much importance as the outcomes of the research as a collective effort between the researcher and the community participants. In CD, this approach is termed as community-engaged scholarship.

De Vault and Gloss (as cited in Barrameda, 2015) noted that researchers of social science developed interdisciplinary interests in narratives, of which life story is one type, which could be considered fundamental to a people's identity and how they make sense of the world around them. Perhaps the best exemplar of the transformative character of life stories is that of Harriet Jacobs. Brooks (as cited in Barrameda, 2015) narrated that Jacobs wrote her life story that raised the awareness of women from the American North of the horrors of slavery and eventually led to the growth of the anti-slavery movement. Such life stories have aided feminists in generating knowledge from the actual experiences of women, capturing its various contexts and nuances, and changing women's lives for the better.

Another example is the study of Pineda-Ofreneo (1999) presented in her book, *Tinig at Kapangyarihan: Mga Kuwentong Buhay ng Kababaihang Manggagawa sa Bahay*, highlighting the empowering feature of the life story method in raising homeworkers' awareness of their exploitation in the value chain of sub-contracting work. Through the life story method, the embroiderers, smockers, crocheters, and seamstresses called the piece-rate homeworkers in the clothing industry of Bulacan were able to locate their subordinate position in their homes as mothers and wives in a patriarchal society, as well as their exploited condition in the global chain of sub-contracting home-based workers.

To illustrate the above points, the succeeding case study discusses how research using the life story method becomes a means of transforming the lives of women and their households in a coconut farming community.

The Case Study: A Research on Rural Women's Lived Experiences of Poverty, Recurrent Typhoons and Disasters

The Research Problem and Objectives

This study sought to explore how recurrent typhoons and disasters impinge on the lived experiences of rural women living in poverty and on gender relations in their households, as well as how gender and class relations produce both vulnerabilities and capacities. The study aimed to describe rural women's lived experiences of poverty and recurrent typhoons in different stages of their lives and to examine the contexts surrounding these lives to see how gender and class relations mediated in the structure, processes, and dynamics in the institutions of the household, the community, and the State (LGU).

Research Method Used: The Life Story Method

According to Guerrero (2002), one of the principles in the choice of research design is appropriateness of the method to the research problem. In

this particular study, the life story was used as the core research method[1]. It was chosen on the assumption that the life story is the most appropriate method in understanding the lived experiences of the women and how they make sense and meaning of these from their own perspectives.

The life storytelling focused on three domains of the women's lives: (1) as women in rural households; (2) as women workers; and (3) as women who experienced recurrent typhoons and disasters. The life cycle approach – from childhood-to-adolescence-to-adulthood – was used in the storytelling process through the use of a single trigger statement: "Please narrate your life story from childhood up to the present as women…" in each of the three domains.

After the gathering of the life stories, a participatory validation was conducted in which data from the life stories were analyzed collectively by the researcher and the women-storytellers. In addition, prior to the final writing of the life stories, the draft life stories were presented to the women-storytellers for comments. The researcher also asked their consent to use either their real names or fictitious names in the life stories.

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[1] Secondary methods used include key informant interview and secondary data or review of related documents to gather information about the bio-physical, economic, political, and socio-cultural conditions of the research area.

The entire study was guided by participatory, consultative and action-oriented principles that have roots in participatory action research and feminist ethics. The women- storytellers were consulted in the major processes of the study – from the direction and content of the life stories, to the schedule and venue of the storytelling sessions, to the final write up of the stories, and ultimately the decision to use their real or fictitious names in the life stories.

The Research Area: Barangay Monbon, A Natural Hazard-Prone Community

The study was conducted in Barangay Monbon, one of the 28 barangays that compose the inland municipality of Irosin, a second class municipality in the province of Sorsogon. Classified as a rural barangay, Barangay Monbon is subdivided into seven puroks (zones) with a total land area of 736 hectares.

As of 2014, the barangay had a total population of 3,999 (no sex-disaggregated data available) with a total of 802 households and an average household size of five (Monbon Barangay Profile, n.d., as cited in Barrameda, 2015). Of this total number of households, 265 (or 33.04%) are beneficiaries of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) or the conditional cash transfer program of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) (Barrameda, 2014). This is a very low target despite the fact that Barangay Monbon is one of the five barangays in Irosin with the highest number of documented poor households based on the National Statistical Coordination Board poverty estimates, as reported in the 2014 comprehensive land use plan of Irosin (Municipal Planning and Development Office LGU-Irosin, 2014, as cited in Barrameda, 2015).

Barangay Monbon is an agricultural barangay in which the main source of livelihood is rice and coconut farming. Other sources of livelihood, ranked in this order, include petty trading, services in the informal economy, professional services, government and private employment and overseas work (Monbon Barangay Census Report, 2012, as cited in Barrameda, 2015). Those that are engaged in farming include tenants, small owner-cultivators and landless farmworkers. Other groups involved in the agrarian economy in Barangay Monbon are the rural entrepreneurs (e.g., owners of palay/copra buying stations) and the informal moneylenders. In tenanted rice and coconut farms, the common sharing arrangements are the 60/40 (owner/tenant) and the *tersiohan* (1/3 of harvest goes to the

tenant) systems, respectively. In both rice and coconut farms, production costs are shouldered by the tenants. Farm workers, regardless of sex, are paid Php200 as daily wage with free snacks or lunch (Barrameda, 2015).

As a single source of income is insufficient, majority of the Barangay's farming households are engaged in multiple livelihoods – both on- and off-farm – such as piece-rate work, subsistence gardening, backyard hog and livestock raising, and provision of services in the informal economy. Since farming is gravely affected by climatic variability and farm work is seasonal, many households, especially those of the farm workers, prefer piece-rate work such as coco coir twining and net weaving in which the work is continuous and the pay is steady. On the other hand, small farm owner-cultivators have converted portions of their farms to raise high-value crops like lettuce, cabbage, cucumber, and carrots for better profits.

Like the rest of the barangays in Irosin, Barangay Monbon experiences rainy weather almost all year round with an average of 234 rainy days a year. Due to the northeast monsoon, heavy rains are experienced from November to January, while the month of May has the lowest rainfall with only nine days of rain (Municipal Planning and Development Office, Local Government Unit-Irosin, 2014, as cited in Barrameda, 2015). In addition, since the province of Sorsogon is within the country's typhoon belt because of the northeast and southeast moonsoons (Provincial Government of Sorsogon, n.d., as cited in Barrameda, 2015), Barangay Monbon, like the other towns of Irosin, experiences an average of 17 typhoons a year (MPDO LGU-Irosin, 2014, as cited in Barrameda, 2015).

The barangay somehow reflects the condition of the Philippines with regard to typhoon risk. As noted by the CBDRM Training and Learning Circle-Philippines (2010, as cited in Barrameda, 2015), the country is prone to climatic hazards – monsoon rains, thunderstorms, typhoons, and inter-tropical convergence zones – as it lies along the Western North Pacific Basin. Thus, an average of twenty (20) typhoons hit the Philippines every year.

In addition, the municipality of Irosin is one of the 48 municipalities in the Bicol Region that is considered by the Meteorological and Geoscience Bureau of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (MGB-DENR) as geologically hazardous – flood and landslide prone induced by tropical storms, typhoons and strong winds that hit the Bicol Region every year (MPDO LGU-Irosin, 2014, as cited in Barrameda, 2015).

Aside from recurrent typhoons, Barangay Monbon is also prone to volcanic hazards, including pyroclastic, lava and lahar flows as well as ash fall, as it lies within the seven-kilometer radius around the Bulusan volcano. In 2006-2007, Barangay Monbon was one of the five barangays affected by the lahar flow from the explosion that deposited ash in gullies on the slopes of the volcano (MPDO LGU-Irosin, 2014, as cited in Barrameda, 2015). A woman respondent noted that the lahar flow was triggered by Typhoons Reming and Milenyo in 2006. Another lahar flow occurred in October 2007, resulting in the evacuation of 1,596 residents living near and downstream of the gullies. And in 2011, an ash explosion reached a height of three kilometersabove the volcano's summit, and affected distant islands like Masbate Province (MPDO LGU-Irosin, 2014, as cited in Barrameda, 2015).

Profile of the Women Storytellers

This study used purposive sampling with a sample of 10 women as 'respondents'. In positivist research, this sample is quite small to ascertain adequate and reliable representation. However, Hesse-Biber and Piatelli (2007) affirmed the adequacy of a small sample in research, and asserted that "in situations of oppression, where it may not be safe or possible for an oppressed group to speak, the testimony of one becomes representative of the testimony of many others" (p. 508). Likewise, Leavy (2007) noted that, despite a very small sample, feminist researchers were able to study various women's issues. As cited by Leavy (2007), Slater (2000) had studied how the economic and social contexts posed constraints on African women through the oral histories of four African women, Sparkes (1994) had examined issues of discrimination and heterosexism in the workplace through an oral interview with a lesbian worker, and Heward (1994) had used the oral history of a female academic in understanding the 'glass ceiling' issues in universities.

Since, in this method, the decision to direct the storytelling rests on the women, the term storytellers was used to replace 'research respondents' and the term active listener was used instead of 'researcher' to express a more egalitarian relationship between the researcher and the women. All the sample women-storytellers are from poor coconut farming households. They were selected based on these criteria: (1) had experienced the disasters from Typhoons Reming or Milenyo2; (2) is a member of a poor agricultural household; (3) has been a resident of the barangay for the preceding ten years who had experienced recurrent typhoons and disasters; and (4) is

willing to participate in the study. Both female-headed and male-headed households were represented.

Of the ten women-storytellers who were selected, seven are married, two are widows and one was abandoned by her husband. The average age of the women is 46.7, with the oldest being 57 years old and the youngest 39 years old. In terms of age distribution: one is in her late thirties, six are in their forties, and three are in their fifties. Having experienced poverty early in life, they have very little education. The average number of years spent in school is 6.7, with the highest educational attainment being completion of the secondary level and the lowest being Grade 2. As compared to their husbands, majority of the women-storytellers have slightly higher educational attainments. Their average number of children is 4.8, with the highest number of children being eight and the lowest being two. These women have been residents of Barangay Monbon for an average of 29.6 years. Of the ten women storytellers, two are migrants who married local residents.

Moreover, seven of the women-storytellers are beneficiaries of the 4Ps. As paid farm work is intermittent and seasonal, the women and other members of their households are also engaged in piece-rate work, subsistence gardening, backyard hog- and livestock-raising, and provision of services and goods in the informal economy. When farm work is slack, female and male members of farming households shift to coco-coir twining and net weaving as a 'fall back' source of livelihood. Similarly, when demand for coco coir work is low, women and other members of their respective households resort to other sources of livelihood. Of the ten women-storytellers, eight are into coco-coir twining and coco net weaving as their primary source of livelihood, while two are farm workers in either rice or coconut farms.

The Women-Storytellers and their Households' Participation in the Coco Coir Social Enterprise

A social enterprise owned by three NGOs and a people's organization has operated in the community since 2005 and is engaged in coco coir production. It provides livelihood to a total of 100 households (12.2%) in Barangay Monbon. The thrust of this social enterprise is not only to provide livelihood but also to contribute to poverty reduction in the community. In fact, in the spirit of democratic governance, it envisions itself being controlled or owned by the workers in the near future (Barrameda, 2014).

The social enterprise engages in coco coir production using coconut husks, the waste materials in copra production. Its products include coco peat (used as farm mulch and compost materials), baled fiber (used for upholstery manufacturing) and coco coir nets known as geo-net/textiles (used for soil erosion control). These products are either for export or for domestic use. Domestic users of the coco coir nets are the engineering companies that have projects with the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH). The production process involves various entities: from husk suppliers, to plant workers, twiners and weavers. Their roles are as follows:

- **Husk suppliers** include owner-cultivators in small coconut farms, agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARBs) and tenants in coconut plantations in which copra production is their main source of livelihood. Coconut husks are used as firewood in copra processing and the excess husks are sold to the social enterprise at the price of 33 centavos per husk or Php500 per truckload of husks.

- **Plant workers** are the factory-based workers who perform husk collection/hauling, decorticating, drying and baling the coco husk fiber. They are regular employees of the enterprise and are paid on a daily basis with a daily wage of Php236.

- **Twiners** and geo-net weavers are the women, men and children who produce coco coir ropes/hanks and geo-nets out of dry coco coir fiber. The twiners are paid in pairs, with a pair of twiners receiving Php2.50 for every 15-meter hank they produce. A pair of twiners can produce 80-100 hanks a day, depending on their level of skill and the length of time spent at work. The weavers also work in pairs and are paid Php300 for a 50x50 piece of coco coir geo-net. It takes two days for a pair of weavers to finish one geo-net. Weaving is done at the factory of the social enterprise as weaving requires a special machine (Barrameda, 2014).

The twining operation involves three persons – two persons working as a pair to make the coco coir ropes or hanks, while a third person – locally called the birador or driver – 'drives' the manual equipment for twining the dry coco coir fiber. The pair of twiners pays the birador one

hank for every six hanks they produce. Usually, the birador is a child, an elderly person, or a twiner's husband who has no work at the moment.

Although the social enterprise considers the twiners and weavers as the primary stakeholders, these workers are at the lowest rung of the coco coir value chain and earn the least. However, since income from farm work is intermittent, a large number of farm workers' households prefer to engage in coco coir twining and net weaving, despite the lower pay they receive from such work. And since coco coir twining is done at home, women also prefer it over other work because it complements their reproductive responsibilities. In most cases, the home-based twining work becomes a household enterprise in which the female and male adult members, as well as the children, are involved (Barrameda, 2014).

Children's participation in coco coir work is mostly voluntary and they work only during off-school hours and during weekends. The age range of these children is from six to 16. They are enticed to participate because they are given money by their mothers to help in making the coco coir twines. Although the income from coco coir work has enabled these households to meet their food needs, they have no savings. Thus in times of emergencies, they resort to making loans from relatives and friends or from informal moneylenders. The steady income from such work has helped these households survive food scarcity, especially in times of recurrent typhoons. However, as typhoons become more frequent and intense, these coping strategies may not be enough (Barrameda, 2014).

Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations of the Study

The pre-disaster vulnerabilities of women in rural households are rooted in their limited access to and control over resources, their marginalized positions in decision-making in their households and in the community, their subordinate position in their households, and their limited employable skills. Yet despite such conditions and amidst inadequate social services, they have been able to maximize their limited capacities: mobilizing the labor power of household members, tapping social networks, accessing common natural resources available, and making full use of their resourcefulness (*diskarte*) to survive poverty, economic crises and recurrent typhoons.

As mothers, caregivers and food providers, the women storytellers play key roles in the daily survival of their households; and as among the hardest hit by poverty and recurrent typhoons, they likewise play vital roles

in recovery from such disasters through the use of a wide array of survival strategies. The disadvantaged condition experienced by these women is due to the unequal gender relations in their households and is further reinforced by other social institutions – LGU and community – through their rules, practices, structures, and processes as manifested in the Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM) programs experienced by the women-storytellers. As they see it, any DRRM program that does not consult them may not be attuned to the needs of their households. Thus, there is a need for a rethinking of DRRM programs that would be gender-responsive and empowering to all marginalized women in the community.

In view of these findings, the study concludes that poverty reinforces the pre-disaster vulnerability of the women and their households; that both poverty and recurrent typhoons have gendered effects that gravely impact on women more than men in poor rural households; welfare-oriented DRRM programs implemented by social institutions such as the LGU reinforce gender and class biases and are inadequate in responding to the needs of these households in times of recurrent typhoons.

To address the above concerns, the women-storytellers gave the following recommendations for households, the government and the NGOs – in order to address their vulnerabilities before, during and after recurrent typhoons and disasters:

- for households to establish backyard gardens for the cultivation of typhoon-resistant crops to serve as the households' source of food security before and after typhoons; and toprepare the things needed for eventual evacuation such as rice, water, clothes, flashlights, matches, sleeping materials, important documents and children's school materials;

- for the government to provide livelihood and employment opportunities instead of the 4Ps, to extend the 4Ps educational support up to the college level, and to provide affordable and typhoon-resistant housing to address the pre-disaster vulnerability of poor households; in emergency situations, to include other needed goods in the relief packs, to base the quantity of the relief goods on the household size, and to provide relief goods to both families who are in evacuation centers and those who are not; and, right after a typhoon or disaster, to provide livelihood and employment for both women and men as well as to lower the price of commodities.

- for the NGOs to provide livelihood opportunities to women to strengthen their capacities and resilience to typhoons and disasters.

In addition to the recommendations posed by the women-storytellers, the study put forth the following key recommendations: (1) the revival of backyard gardens/communal gardens to ensure food security in the households; (2) LGU implementation of local laws on women's representation in DRRM decision-making and provision of programs that are responsive to women's conditions (i.e., land reform that ensures women's ownership and provision of assistance to enable productivity of awarded land; reorientation of the Conditional Cash Transfer to include the participation of men, etc.); and (3) the promotion of livelihood and food security programs by the local government and civil society groups in the barangay.

Utilization and Outcomes of the Research

As a CD practitioner and at the same time a feminist researcher, the researcher resolved that this study would not remain on paper but would serve as a mechanism in making a change in the lives of the women-storytellers and their households. Aware of the feminist ethics of not being "extractive," the researcher shared the results of the research to the women-storytellers in order to validate the data and to discuss with them what actions to take to respond to the concerns surfaced by the research. Likewise, the results were shared and presented to the NGO that is part owner of the coco coir social enterprise as well as to the barangay LGU.

Through a participatory validation workshop, the researcher presented the results of the research to the women-storytellers for feedback and assisted them in drafting an agenda for action. At the same time, the validation workshop was used by the researcher as a venue for consciousness-raising among the women-storytellers of the need for organizing their ranks so they could participate in the governance of the social enterprise in the future and could thus adapt to recurrent typhoons and climate change. As an outcome of this, an initial plan on the formation of a coco coir workers' cooperative was drafted by the women-storytellers. At present, they are convincing other coco coir twiners and weavers to join the cooperative as well. Initially, 12 core members (ten women and two men) initiated the formation of the nascent cooperative and have started building up their capital share through weekly forced savings. To date, the informal core group has established an initial capital fund of Php12,000.

However, the members have expressed their need for capability building, since none of them has community organizing and cooperative building experience.

Likewise, the research findings – particularly on the economic conditions of the women- storytellers, their vulnerabilities and their capacities for coping with recurrent typhoons and disasters – were shared by the researcher to the NGO that co-owns the coco coir social enterprise. Through the study, the NGO was informed about the low daily earnings of the coco coir twiners and weavers. As a result, the NGO was so concerned about how to improve the economic lot of these workers so they could participate in the governance of the social enterprise (i.e., from workers to collective sub-contractors of higher activities in the value chain of the coco coir industry, to eventual owners). As an initial step towards this goal, the NGO requested the researcher to conduct an impact study of the social enterprise on the socio-economic condition of the households of the coco coir twiners and net weavers. The study was conducted from September to December 2014. The results were then used by the NGO to formulate its medium-term development planning towards enhancing its development intervention in Barangay Monbon in the coming years.

With the formation of the cooperative's core group, the researcher informed the NGO about the need for capability-building as expressed by the group members. In response, the NGO is now looking for potential partners – people's organizations (POs) and NGOs with organizing programs – to provide assistance to the twiners and weavers in forming the cooperative. The NGO has also expressed its willingness to fund the capability-building activities.

At the same time, the researcher also presented the study to the barangay LGU which requested the researcher to facilitate a meeting with the NGO to explore possible partnership in terms of livelihood projects to enhance the adaptive capacities of the coco coir workers and their households to recurrent typhoons and climate change. Further, the researcher continues to visit the community and extends assistance to the women-storytellers and the core group through linkage/network building as well as the provision of training/education support.

Lessons Learned and Insights from the Research Experience

The crucial role of research as a transformative CD practice is best captured in the words of Guerrero (2002), that the "advocacy and action

components ensure that research goes beyond knowing and explaining. It is important that we use this knowledge… or act upon this knowledge to change reality. In this way, research ceases to be 'extractive' and neutral; it becomes a means towards helping women and men achieve changes in their lives… a design that closely links and connects research with action" (p. 67).

What then can be gleaned from this research experience? What are its implications to CD as a transformative practice?

First, the research experience affirms the importance of research in CD practice. Information drawn out from research serves as a guide in designing development interventions that are responsive to the needs of the women, men and other marginalized groups in a community.

Second, a research study that is grounded in the principles and values of CD is always action-oriented. Its transformative goal is the utmost consideration. To be of service to the people, however, research must not remain on paper. It must serve as a means to change the lives of marginalized groups through policy advocacy to the government to fulfill its obligations to the people, as well as through mobilization of other stakeholders in the community, like NGOs and POs, to respond to the people's needs.

Third, the study brought to the fore the issue of ethical concern in research that is often raised in CD discussions. Transformative CD strongly posits that research should not be extractive but rather a form of scholarship that takes action in transforming the lives of marginalized groups. As G. T. Castillo (2002) warned, "any research that gives nothing in return to the research participants is unethical" (p. ix). CD further refines this position and asserts that what is to be given in return must be defined by the people, thus, distinguishing its own research orientation from other social sciences research.

Fourth, research that is grounded in a transformative or liberatory goal is an empowering tool for community organizing. The information surfaced by the study served as material for consciousness-raising of the women-storytellers. Recognizing the commonalities of their experience of everyday poverty, recurrent typhoons and disasters, the women-storytellers resolved that they need to act to change their condition; and to do this, they saw the need for them to get organized.

Fifth, especially for the women-storytellers, the study has been instrumental in making a difference in the lives of poor rural women as it pursued action to influence public policy even at the barangay level. At the same, it built a bridge among the women coco coir workers who were unorganized and isolated prior to the study. In addition, the study provided a venue for the women to see the similarities of their personal experiences, eventually raising their awareness on the need to bond together to improve their present condition.

And, lastly, the research could serve as a mechanism for dialogue among stakeholders in the community to address the condition of its poor households. The evidence-based information in the research could serve as basis for policy advocacy, as has been done by the researcher.

What then are the implications of the above points to CD practice?

One, the life story as a research method provides a venue for unorganized and voiceless groups, like women, to learn about power. The process of the research method gives an opportunity for marginalized women to practice the exercise of power in which each of them steers the direction of her life story, and decides on what to include, omit or change in the story. As such, this method could be used in CD not only to gather personal data but also to teach about power.

Two, since the life story method invades the respondents' privacy, ethical concerns have to be considered. The researcher has an obligation to do something to change the storytellers' lives. Thus, action is an inherent feature of the method, also an important posture in transformative CD practice.

Three, by placing importance on giving voice to ordinary people in the community, the life story is a means to understand various issues from the perspectives of ordinary women and men and other marginalized sectors in the community.

And, lastly, the life story method in particular and CD research in general posit a standpoint for the marginalized and voiceless individuals and groups in a community and aim to mobilize them to action to change their situation. In this way, this kind of research contributes to a transformative CD practice.

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