Community Development for Transformation:

The Role of Community Organizations as Negotiating Leverage in Conflict-Affected Communities

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In different parts of the country, various communities of marginalized sectors have been faced with a lot of conflicts, rooted in their assertion of their claims over rights to land, housing, just wages, and decent working conditions, among others. Government policies aligned with its adherence to liberalization policies aggravated this situation. More projects that will result to displacement of already marginalized communities in urban and rural areas are allowed, even if these encroach on productive farmlands or threaten the remaining ancestral lands of indigenous peoples. These projects have been met with opposition by the affected communities.

Affected sectors are in a better position to negotiate their collective interests if they are organized. As articulated in this paper, an organized community especially in a conflict situation is in an advantageous position to press for its demands and negotiate for better terms in an interactive manner. This means engaging with proponents and government through a combination of negotiations, legal and meta-legal actions. Organizations are channels to express the collective strength of the people – especially those who have less in power, so they will have better chances of being heard. Community participation in governance is now institutionalized. There are many mechanisms whereby marginalized sectors can engage with government and proponents to better argue their positions on certain policies, programs and projects that have negative impacts on them. There is need therefore to strengthen and enhance community organizing work to include a conflict-sensitive approach so that leaders are better trained to engage and be able to negotiate their interests.

Introduction

Community Organizing (CO) is an important component of community development. It is "a social development approach that aims to transform the apathetic, individualistic and voiceless poor into a dynamic, participatory and politically responsive community" (Batistiana and Murphy, 2002). The 1994 National Rural CO Conference defined CO

as a collective, participatory, transformative, liberative, sustained and systematic process of building people's organizations by mobilizing and enhancing the capabilities and resources of the people for the resolution of their issues and concerns towards effecting change in their existing and oppressive exploitative conditions (Batistiana and Murphy, 2002).

In the Philippine experience, the bias of community organizing is the marginalized groups such as workers, peasants, and informal settlers who have been sidelined by development. There are many people's organizations and community associations all over the country which have been advocating for their rights and welfare, demanding that government hear them and act on their concerns. History shows that the better organized groups are able to effectively put forward their agenda, achieve gains in their struggles, and, in the process, effect changes.

This paper seeks to put forward the importance of community organizing especially in conflict-affected communities as a bargaining leverage in asserting their concerns and demands to the government.

The Importance of Community Organizing in Conflict-affected Communities

Cosier (2003 as cited in Formilleza, 2011) defined conflict as:

a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure, or eliminate their rivals. It can happen between individuals, between inter-groups and intra-groups. Conflict leads to change and it can also stimulate innovation. Conflicts between inter-groups and intra-groups are part of social life.

Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall (2011) also defined conflict as "the pursuit of incompatible goals by different groups"(p.30) and traced its origins to "economic differentiation, social change, cultural formation, psychological development and political organization – all of which are inherently conflictual" (p.7).

Haider (2012) mentioned that conflicts are "context-specific, multi-causal and multidimensional due to a combination of factors, such as inequality, exclusion and marginalization…poverty…and unjust exploitation of resources".

Laue (1990, in Sharoni, 1994), on the other hand, treated power relations as an essential aspect of conflict. Laue argued that "conflict may be defined...as escalated natural competition between two or more parties about scarce resources, power and prestige. Parties in conflict believe they have incompatible goals, and their aim is to neutralize, gain advantage over, injure or destroy one another" (Laue, 1990 in Sharoni, 1994, p. 257).

Competing use of scarce resources such as land has been the source of conflicts among informal settlers, farmers and indigenous peoples. Workers, meanwhile, demand an equitable share in the profits of corporations through just wages and humane working conditions and respect for their right to unionize in order to negotiate fairly in Collective Bargaining Agreements. Affected groups and sectors contend that there is unjust utilization of resources favoring the rich and powerful, pushing them further to the sidelines and a life of abject poverty.

Land, especially in urban areas like Metro Manila, is a scarce resource and there are many competing interests to use this resource, hence it is a source of conflict. In the case of informal settlers, they are occupying high-value properties eyed by developers for business development which is most often supported by government as this falls within their concept of urban development.

For the indigenous peoples, the rich resources in their lands such as forests and minerals have been the subject of interests of logging concessionaires and mining companies. Abundant water sources in thickly forested areas are also an interest of hydropower developers. Such, however, threaten not only the livelihoods of indigenous peoples but their ancestral domains and identity as well.

On the other hand, most of the fertile plains in the rural areas are in the hands of a landed few who have partnered with large agricultural corporations and turned these lands into pineapple, banana and palm plantations in many parts of Mindanao; and sugar estates or coconut plantations in some parts of the Visayas and Luzon, to name a few.

When claims over these scarce resources are asserted by one interest group and opposed by the other, conflicts arise. Either party may choose to fight for its interests or just walk away. Parties in conflict who chose to fight for their claims engage in various forms of actions to convince,

if not pressure, the other party to change his/her position in favor of the other. The strength of both parties is important to consider in this process. Definitely, the more powerful party is in an advantageous position.

This is where community organizing is very important.

Organizations are channels to express the collective strength of the people – especially those who have less in power – so they will have better chances of being heard by government, private corporations and other power brokers. Community organizations serve as avenues where the members will be informed and educated of issues that affect or will affect their lives – be it their place of abode, their livelihood, their surrounding environment and their identity as a people. Ideally, through their organizations, community members, after a thorough study and exchange of their thoughts and feelings, will make informed decisions on their issues and problems.

In communities where projects are proposed by government or private entities, the collective decision of community members, including their conditionalities of acceptance or non-acceptance, will be more powerful because they can use their numbers as leverage. This is akin to what White (1996) described as representative participation involving the voice of community members in the decision-making and implementation process of projects or policies that affect them. For the more powerful, representative participation increases the chances of their intervention being sustainable; for the less powerful, it may offer a chance for leverage (White, 1996).

More importantly, community participation has been institutionalized in our processes as stipulated in the Local Government Code of the Philippines.

> It is likewise the policy of the State to require all national agencies and offices to conduct periodic consultations with appropriate local government units, non-governmental and people's organizations, and other concerned sectors of the community before any project or program is implemented in their respective jurisdictions. (Book 1, Title 1 Sec. 2 (c); Title 6)

It is also an important requirement in the permitting process for projects that require Environmental Compliance Certificates (ECCs). The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) in 1996

issued Administrative Order 96-37 detailing Social Acceptability and Public Participation requirement procedures as an integral part of the Philippine Environmental Impact Statement System (PEISS). An important mechanism is the Multipartite Monitoring Team System (MMTS) where host communities of environmentally critical projects can participate. It is organized to encourage public participation, to promote greater stakeholders' vigilance, and to provide appropriate check and balance mechanisms in the monitoring of project implementation. The MMT is recommendatory to Environmental Management Bureau (EMB). MMTs have the primary responsibility of validation of Proponent's environmental performance (EMB, n.d.).

In large scale development projects like mining, power and dams, there are many avenues for organized communities to express their questions, views and proposals through these institutionalized processes. If communities are organized, their presence could effectively be asserted and their positions can be collectively articulated such as in public consultations of government projects, policies, ordinances; or when there are corporations who go through the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process or the Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) process for indigenous peoples.

Organized communities can likewise do their own independent studies and information and education activities among their members so they can arrive at an enlightened decision on the matters facing them. Their informed participation in the debates concerning each project will enable them to negotiate for better terms or influence the decision of the project proponent.

Participation can indeed make or break a development project. A project with low social acceptability may still result in delays despite meeting the technical requirements of the EISS because of strong public opposition (Amador, 1998).

Hertz, La Viña and Sohn (2007) reinforced the above statement. They argued that the consent of a community affected by development projects, either public or private, makes good business sense because the risks created by failure to secure community consent, as well as the benefits obtained with meaningful consultation, are significant and quantifiable. They stressed the importance of including community involvement and consent procedures in the planning and decision-making processes of the proponent and the permitting process of the host government.

Thus, community organizations have the potent force to influence the debate on the project if they will realize their strength and power and assert their right to accurate information on and participation in processes concerning projects proposed to them.

Community participation is also emphasized in community-driven development projects. In 2013, the Government Procurement Policy Board issued a Manual on Community Participation in Government Procurement. It focuses on how communities can participate in monitoring procurement by being involved in planning, procurement and implementation and also on how they can participate as service providers or contractors under negotiated procurement through community projects.

Further, community participation needs to ensure the representation of the voices of both women and men. The Harmonized Gender and Development Guidelines for project development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation released by the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA) and the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW) released in 2010 is aimed to contribute to efforts towards ensuring a gender-responsive program and project that will contribute to the protection and fulfillment of women's rights, the promotion of gender equality, and the improvement of the quality of lives of both women and men (NEDA, PCW, and ODA-GADN, 2010).

In a conflict situation, effective means must be found for the community and its organization to further expand its power so that the other party, especially if very powerful, will be convinced to listen to the community's demands – thus enabling both parties to sit down at the negotiating table to discuss their options and find solutions to their problems.

In facilitated conflict resolution processes, a careful study of the sources of power of the stakeholders is very important.

Power can be broadly described as actual or perceived ability of one person to exert influence upon another person's behaviour or thoughts. Sometimes the use of certain power is obvious, sometimes it is hardly visible. Sometimes certain types of power are accepted, while often times, the use of certain powers are deeply resented and resisted (Wade, 1994).

For Mayer (1987 in Wade, 1994), there are at least ten sources of power that parties in negotiation exercise. These are:

1. Formal authority. The power that derives from a formal position within a structure that confers certain decision-making prerogatives;

2. Expert/information power. The power that is derived from having expertise in a particular area of information about a particular matter;

3. Associational power (or referent power). The power that is derived from association with other people with power;

4. Resource power. The control over valued resources (money, materials, labor, or other goods or services). The negative version of this power is the ability to deny needed resources or to force others to expend them;

5. Procedural power. The control over the procedures by which decisions are made, separate from the control over those decisions themselves (for instance, the power of a judge in a jury trial);

6. Sanction power. The ability (or perceived ability) to inflict harm or to interfere with a party's ability to realize his or her interests;

7. Nuisance power. The ability to cause discomfort to a party, falling short of the ability to apply direct sanctions;

8. Habitual power. The power of the status quo that rests on the premise that it is normally easier to maintain a particular arrangement or course of action than to change it;

9. Moral power. The power that comes from an appeal to widely held values. Related to this is the power that results from the conviction that one is right; and

10. Personal power. The power that derives from a variety of personal attributes that magnify other sources of power, including self-assurance, the ability to articulate one's thoughts and understand one's situation, one's determination and endurance, and so forth (pp. 6-7).

In a conflict situation, parties engaged in negotiation use a combination of the above powers. For community organizations, it is

important to be aware of their powers and how they can effectively use these in leveraging agreements in their favor. Nuisance power (some organizations, as observed in the author's personal experience as a trainer in conflict resolution, prefer the use of the phrase "power of their number to exact discomfort or annoy the other party" rather than nuisance) has been effectively used by many community organizations in the country.

The case of the Sumilao Farmers of Bukidnon is a very significant and inspiring experience where the farmers were able to build and expand their power over 10 years of struggle. In a presentation during a national mediation conference organized by Mediators Network for Sustainable Peace (MedNet) in 2008, Atty. Arlene Bag-ao, the farmers' legal counsel, mentioned the following strategies that were utilized:

1. The farmers, through their organizations, were able to get the support of an alternative law group, Balaod Mindanaw, Inc., to stand as their legal counsel. Through Balaod Mindanaw, they were educated on the law in relation to their case and the legal parameters of their actions to proactively assert their rights;

2. Together with Balaod Mindanaw, the farmers built support groups, especially among influential people both in Mindanao and Manila, as well as internationally. These support groups provided the needed moral, financial and material support that enabled them to sustain their struggle for over a decade highlighted by their 1,700 km. walk. These support groups linked the farmers' issue with other groups working in various sectors – students, teachers, other farmers' groups and the media. They got the biggest boost from the respected Bishops of the Catholic Church who sent out appeal letters to all the parishes along the route of the walk;

3. They used various media platforms to communicate their cause to the different publics – email, blogs, websites, texting and good media relations – which eventually convinced the government to recognize the value of responding to their case;

4. They visited schools and different communities to explain their cause and raise awareness on agrarian reform; and

5. They used a combination of legal and meta-legal tactics so as to avoid confining the issue to mere technicalities and legalities.

The farmers were able to build a wide network of support that expanded their associational power. They had the moral power as well, as the land used to be part of the ancestral domain of the Higaonon, and therefore government has the obligation to respect, promote and fulfill their right to land. The legal maneuverings of the landowner to evade the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) coverage further bolstered the moral claim of the farmers to their land.

The Sumilao farmers effectively used what Roger Fisher and William Ury, authors of the bestselling book *Getting to Yes, Negotiating without Giving In*, termed as Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement (BATNA). This is the alternative action should negotiations fail, and it is critical to negotiation because you cannot make a wise decision about whether to accept a negotiated agreement unless you know what your alternatives are (Sprangler, 2012).

Over their more than 10 years of struggle, the farmers used hunger strikes, rallies and demonstrations as their BATNA. However, the 1,700 kilometer walk was their most significant and successful BATNA to gain the attention of San Miguel Corporation (SMC) to listen to their demands. The whole conflict landscape changed in their favor when they gained national and international attention, so much so that then President Gloria Arroyo could no longer ignore their presence when they walked around Malacañang. The farmers were able to attract negotiators such as then Archbishop Cardinal Gaudencio Rosales of Manila, Archbishop Broderick Pabillo (Auxiliary Bishop of Manila) and former COMELEC chairman Christian Monsod. They also got the sympathy of parishes along the route of their march from Bukidnon to Manila, and catch the attention of media who followed their journey and gave the public raw footages and descriptions of their persistence and perseverance.

What is important to consider is the capacity of the organization to effectively use its BATNA to bring the other party back to the negotiations. The farmers engaged in internal preparations, too, such as their commitment to pursue the struggle, readiness to withstand the long walk, food that will be left to their families, security, health, among others.

However, there are many communities threatened with large-scale projects where the affected populations are not organized.

In the case of communities to be affected by the Pulangi hydroelectric power project proposed by First Bukidnon Electric

Cooperative (FIBECO), only two organizations asserted their position. These were Nasavaka'n Tarigunay't Bukidnondo't Kalindaan (NATABUK), an umbrella organization of 18 people's organizations of indigenous Manobo, and Save Pulangi Movement, a multi-sectoral grouping. They were against the project. NATABUK members were scattered in barangays with Manobo population in some towns of Bukidnon and two towns in President Roxas, North Cotabato.

However, the greater number of people in 26 communities were silent. They were not organized. The existing organizations where some of them were members were not concerned with the Pulangi project and its social, environmental, and political implications.

Since the large number of community members were not organized, they had no avenue to express their independent views and feelings on the project, its implications, and their possible future. Their voices were not heard. Results of the perception survey conducted by MedNet showed a higher percentage of indigenous Pulangihon (Lumad) over the settlers (Dumagat) preferring to keep silent (31.7% and 18.7% respectively) when asked of the potential effects of the project on their livelihood. In the validation meeting, participants attributed this to be due to two kinds of fear: 1) fear that their responses will reach the proponent and will be a ground for non-payment of their lands in the event that the project pushes through; and 2) fear of harassment from groups that they feel may not like what their genuine positions are on the project (Peteros, 2013).

The strong presence of the New People's Army (NPA) in the area was another important factor to consider in the political dynamics of the area. They were not part of the formal processes that the proponent and government had to observe in relation to securing social acceptability of the project. However, they exercised influence and control in some communities that reflect their position on the project. Even local government officials who had formal authority and sanction power felt powerless over the NPA. In a meeting with the Sangguniang Bayan of one of the affected towns, one councilor shared how some of them were summoned to the mountains by the Front Commanders of the NPA operating in the area. They were asked to explain if they indeed endorsed the project based on information that had reached them.

On the other hand, the power of the proponent to push through with the project was also hampered with a very basic and important

requirement – enough resources to fund the project. At that time, the company was still looking for a partner to ultimately fund the construction of the dam and pay the relocation and compensation costs of affected communities. Its resources were only limited to the pre-development preparation.

Alternative Ways of Resolving Conflicts

As illustrated in the above cases, tensions rise and the behavior of either party becomes destructive and violent in the course of asserting the respective demands of the parties in conflict. Many landowners, especially in the case of farmers claiming their lands under the CARP use their various powers to evade coverage or deny the right of farmers to till the lands awarded to them. Many resort to legal manueverings.

A case study of land conflict in the Philippines described the legal maneuvers that are used to undermine the award of land to beneficiaries, including the filing of often groundless cases for: a) Certificate of Land Ownership Award (CLOA) or emancipation patent cancellation; b) land conversion; c) CARP exemption or exclusion; d) agrarian reform beneficiary disqualification or exclusion; and e) nullification of the award. The study also found that decisions rendered were most often adverse to the interest of the farmers and farm workers because their claims and defense have not been fully explained in the courts or agencies where the cases are lodged. Sometimes, the farmers and farm workers concerned are not even included as party-litigants (Olano, n.d.).

In the early 1990s when the CARP law was in its inital years of implementation, non - government organizations (NGOs) supporting farmers in their struggle for land often raised money to defend the farmers in court. As a result, some farmer-leaders have been successfully defended and those imprisoned have been released. But other farmers have been slapped with other charges and imprisoned. It was an endless series of tedious, long and expensive legal battles. And the legal defense fund was also dwindling. This situation led NGOs and farmer organizations along with DAR to search for alternative ways to resolve conflicts.

Under the auspices of former Secretary Ernesto Garilao of the Department of Agrarian Reform, some NGO and farmer-leaders advocating for agrarian reform were trained in Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) and applied their new skills in selected areas in the country. The results were encouraging. Similar initiatives were undertaken at the DENR. In

early 2000, individuals and groups who were convinced of the benefits of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) started advocating for the enactment of a law institutionalizing this strategy. Some of them formed a network and thus MedNet was born, with the advocacy of helping communities faced with public disputes.

In 2004, President Macapagal-Arroyo signed R.A. 9285 or the Alternative Dispute Resolution Act. The law defines ADR to mean any process or procedure used to resolve a dispute or controversy, other than by adjudication of a presiding judge of a court or an officer of a government agency, in which a neutral third party participates to assist in the resolution of issues, which includes arbitration, mediation, conciliation, early neutral evaluation, mini-trial, or any combination thereof. It aims to provide disputants with means to achieve speedy and efficient resolution of disputes, curb a litigious culture and to de-clog court dockets (R.A. 9285, Article 1.6).

Mediation as defined in the law means "a voluntary process in which a mediator, selected by the disputing parties, facilitates communication and negotiation, and assists the parties in reaching a voluntary agreement regarding a dispute" (RA 9285, Sec. 3, q.). Mediation is also referred to as a facilitated negotiation process.

The mediator, considered to be a neutral and impartial third party, facilitates dialogue in a structured multi-stage process to help parties reach a conclusive and mutually satisfactory agreement. A mediator assists the parties in identifying and articulating their own interests, priorities, needs and wishes to each other. Mediation is a 'peaceful' dispute resolution tool that is complementary to the existing court system and the practice of arbitration (Sgubini, Prieditis, and Marighetto, 2004).

Mediation is an alternative recourse for communities to resolve conflicts. They have to be organized and they collectively agree to enter into mediation with their appointed representatives.

In the Pulangi case, the affected communities were not aware of mediation until after it was presented with the recommendations of a conflict map prepared by MedNet that promotes ADR among communities confronted with conflicts. The map was undertaken in response to the request of the Bishop of the Diocese of Bukidnon. The Bishop acted as the Convenor of the process.

The affected communities and the proponent agreed to work together to address a data conflict through the facilitation of MedNet as mediator. The Bishop also supported their decision. The Manobo-Pulangihon were represented through NATABUK and a town-level Council of Elders, Kibawe Tribal Council of Elders, while the affected settler population in 26 barangays were represented by six barangay captains through an election process facilitated by the mediator.

In the research on land conflict in the Philippines, the use of mediation and negotiation to arrive at a mutually gainful agreement was acknowledged as important. However, it cited the need for capability-building because this requires a different set of skills. Local NGOs in partnership with national resource institutions that are able provide technical support can undertake capacity-building programs (Olano, n.d.).

International Finance Institutions (IFIs) like the World Bank also utilize mediation involving host communities of development projects and private companies as proponents. This happens when the proponent secures a loan from the IFI and there is resistance from the community. In the case of the World Bank, its Compliance Advisor Office (CAO)/ Ombudsman looks into the concerns of the community. The following experience shows a successful mediation of a conflict through the intervention of World Bank.

The conflict was between the affected communities of the Binga and Ambuklao Dam and Aboitiz Company, the new owner of the dam. Aboitiz assumed ownership after the government, through the National Power Corporation (NPC) and the Power Sector Liabilities Management (PSLAM), sold the dam. The Ibalois, whose lands were submerged 60 years earlier when the dam was constructed, claimed back a portion of their land. The mediation process was facilitated by Conflict Resolution Organization (CORE), a local mediation office through the World Bank's Compliance Advisor Office (CAO)/Ombudsman. Aboitiz Company had applied for a loan from the World Bank, so when it was found that the project was faced with some conflicts, a mediation process was recommended.

CORE convened the parties which included representatives from the Ibaloi people's organizations, NGOs, the local and provincial government, Aboitiz and NPC. The presence of a representative from NPC as government agency overseeing the watershed was crucial as the land adjacent to which the plant is located is owned by the government.

The preparatory workshop held prior to the mediation process was a venue for the community leaders to vent out the deep-seated anger kept for the past 60 years. It facilitated the openness of the parties to negotiate, and resulted in better relationships between the Ibaloi communities and the proponent. More importantly, the Ibalois were able to reclaim a portion of their land to be used as a cultural heritage site to bury their dead, build museums and teach their younger generations about their culture. For them, the site would serve as a reminder that they were the original inhabitants of that land (Philipps and Stott, 2011).

Personal Insights

As a part of MedNet, I had the opportunity to be involved in some conflict resolution processes in different parts of the country. When members of a bigger community are involved as one of the parties, the presence of a strong, dynamic and autonomous community organization is very important. They can articulate their demands better because they are able to carefully study their options prior to agreeing to the formal negotiations. They are also in a position to put pressure on the other party if it fails to meet its obligations in the agreement. They also have their internal processes to learn from their mistakes and make their organization stronger.

For example, in February 2010, two years after the celebrated 'win-win' agreement with San Miguel Corporation, the Sumilao farmers used their nuisance power again. They set up streamers and camped out in front of the hog farm of SMC. The company had given them land that had a lot of problems. I was then invited to give an orientation on mediation to the Sumilao farmers. In the discussion on the value of a written agreement, some of their leaders realized their weaknesses when they signed the mediation agreement with the company two years earlier. They felt there were some important data regarding the details of the agreement concerning the 94 hectares of land that should have been included but which they failed to assert their claim to. For them this was a hard lesson, but one that has now made them wiser.

On the other hand, I was inspired to see them working together in the 50 hectare land that had been awarded to them. It felt good to see them enjoying the initial fruits of their hard won victories.

In the Pulangi conflict, I as MedNet facilitator faced the challenge of getting the various perspectives of the people on the project because

majority of the affected Dumagat residents were not organized. During the conflict mapping phase, for example, I had very few women participants in the various meetings. In one focus group discussion held inside the premises of a parish, the priest assured me not to worry that I did not have women participants because the men present represented the views of their wives as well. Representatives to the mediation panel as well were all men. I was the only woman among them.

In the course of the mediation process through the conduct of the perception survey, I felt the fear and hesitation of many ordinary participants to express their genuine sentiments in the series of validation meetings that we conducted. Due to their lack of organization, they were not exposed to a systematic process of exchanging varied ideas and views of the project. There was no active women's organization that articulated the implications of the project on women. As a result, genuine participation of the affected communities was not maximized as there was lack of autonomy on their part to freely express their views given the context they were in.

It was in those situations that I wished there were UP-CSWCD students to assist these people to organize themselves and help educate them about their situation and explore wider options. I surveyed the colleges within the province but I was told that Community Development-related courses are not offered. I realized that this need should be articulated and hopefully more schools will consider offering this course.

Conclusions/Synthesis

Community organizing work especially in situations of conflict has its gains and challenges and organizers can learn a lot from the examples discussed above. As articulated in this paper, an organized community particularly in a conflict situation is in an advantageous position to press for its demands and negotiate for better terms in an interactive manner. It is important that these organizations have their own internal processes which are inclusive and transparent, where all members are able to participate in decision-making wherein the views of both women and men are represented, their different concerns addressed, and their participation in activities encouraged and defined.

Community organizations need to continually educate their members and equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills to understand and do something about their situation. It is important that they appreciate their internal strengths as an organization and identify areas

that they need to improve on to increase their power to further build their negotiating position. They need to be capacitated to be able to gather data that will bolster their knowledge of the conflict and sharpen their analytical abilities to be able to propose better options. They also need to continually harvest the lessons learned to deepen the commitment of members as well as prepare them for new challenges ahead in their envisioned future with a better quality of life.

Signed agreements are not a hundred percent guarantee that all parties will fulfill their commitments. It is important for community organizations to carefully study the contents of an agreement and to be vigilant for any delaying tactics by the other party. They must also be prepared with their BATNAs and be able to execute these effectively.

Many organizations enter into negotiation or mediation without the benefit of training or at least orientation. Based on experience, it is very helpful if leaders and members undergo training to better prepare them to participate in an interactive conflict resolution/management process. In addition, community organizations need to prepare other options especially when they are in a weaker position. There is need to think out of the box, and not be limited to street actions and other pressure tactics.

The rise of information techonology is a good opportunity for community organizations who have access to this medium to inform people of their issues, solicit support and expand their reach. These organizations should harness their creativity to use social media as an advocacy platform and be able to catch the attention of the public.

Funding is also an important component in the success of alternative conflict resolution processes such as mediation. Parties will be able to trust in the neutrality of the process if they are assured of the impartiality of all those involved in the process.

Lastly, the avenues for community participation in development projects and government processes are now institutionalized. Social acceptability of host communities is an important requirement for any project to be approved. It is up to these organizations to use these spaces to access resources for the benefit of their members as well as to put forward new ideas and concerns that will enrich the debate to make sure that development projects and government services truly benefit the people.

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