
The Issue of Poverty in the Philippines and Its Prevention

Throughout the decades, poverty and inequality have been the main challenges the Philippines has been facing. Poverty incidence has increased from 24.4% in 2003 to 26.9% in 2006, affecting over 4.7 million Filipino families (World Bank 2014) with 36% of those living in rural areas living below the poverty line, primarily because they have minimal access to education, capital & assets, and services (International Fund for Agricultural Development n. d.). As a response, the flagship program Kapitbisig Laban sa Kahirapan-Comprehensive and Integrated Delivery of Social Services (KALAHID-CIDSS) Project was launched in 2001 (World Bank 2014). KALAHID-CIDSS is a project by the Department of Social Welfare and Development Board, funded by the national government together with other local and international non-government organizations including the World Bank (WB), Asian Development Bank (ADB), and New Zealand Agency for International Development (NZAID) among others. Kapit-bisig laban sa kahirapan means 'linking hands in the fight against poverty', and the model is patterned by the community-driven development (CDD) approach that empowers citizens to take part in identifying their own needs and designing, proposing, implementing, and monitoring projects of their own initiative (World Bank 2014). It is with the belief that to make the responses of the government more effective, the involvement of the poor is a must (Ateneo de Manila School of Government 2006) because sustainability can only be achieved if there is a collective ownership and responsibility in the community.

Empowering communities

KALAHID-CIDSS is an effective model of empowering communities and implementing effective local poverty-reduction strategies because it involves a participatory and democratic approach in the whole process. This is evident from the planning to evaluation stage of localized projects. During the planning process, all community members especially the poor are involved in assessing and analysing the situation. This supplements Cohen's (1985) stance that communities can only be meaningfully described by the people in it. They know their needs more than the government or funding agencies. KALAHID-CIDSS utilizes a bottom-up approach, as opposed to having projects dictated and implemented by external institutions. This resulted to better and quality plans that are in line with the village's strategic direction. To ensure constant participation, in Mulanay, Quezon, the barangay development council was institutionalized to ensure involvement in the participatory situation analysis (PSA). Agenda in the mandatory meetings included reporting of priorities of surveyed households, proposed projects, and ranking of problems and proposals in order to lay them down in a 5-year plan (Asian Development Bank 2012). In the implementation phase, studies conducted by the World

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Bank (2014) have also weighed that KALAHI-CIDSS is more cost-effective than infrastructures provided by the public sector, because community members and volunteers were willing to assist in the construction process, thereby reinforcing ownership among members.

In Mulanay, Quezon, residents are part of the evaluation committee, and are encouraged to go to construction sites to see the progress first-hand. The participative monitoring phase is not the case for all though. Because LGUs have the power to create their own monitoring scheme, in Barotoc Viejo, Iloilo, the evaluation committee created by the local government unit only included village captains and heads of the LGU departments. Residents only responded to surveys, but are not part of the committee (Asian Development Bank 2012). This poses one major problem to KALAHI-CIDSS, in implementing a constant participative model in all its projects throughout the country. During evaluation, a community-based evaluation tool is used wherein residents evaluate their own participation and how they were able to contribute to the project. They also have the accountability review and reporting tool, where they assess the commitments and lapses of stakeholders. This is important because it makes community members critical and discerning of their involvement and the whole process, rather than being merely receptive on the interventions implemented.

Diffusing power

Alinsky's (1971) approach to combatting oppression is to utilize conflict to enact action. Although this method can be used for an immediate response from a stagnant institution, he misses one important alternative community members can make before taking on a "common enemy" stance; and that is to approach the 'enemy' as a colleague through dialogue. KALAHI-CIDSS is a model of power transference because communities are taught how to communicate with their local government officials and how they could access technical and financial assistance that could address their needs-based issues (World Bank 2014). They learn how to verbalize and propose actionable solutions, building leadership and proactiveness.

The Barangay Assembly is an essential feature of the project because leaders orient the residents of the plans and are given the chance to validate the issues identified in the PSA, assuring that the decision making process involves those who aren't in key leadership positions, promoting inclusivity. Community facilitators, also play an important role. They are recruited, trained, and deployed to take on the role of mobilizing, organizing, and building capacity for collective action. They work closely with the communities and the local government by providing technical assistance for key project tasks.

They are responsible for implementing a "robust facilitation framework that ensures participation of poor and marginalized groups, minimize gender bias, and avoid elite capture" (World Bank n. d.). Utilizing the Freirean approach in their practice, community facilitators act in

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a directive manner rather than manipulative, treating community members and local authorities as equals and equipping them with necessary skills for them to think of their own solutions (Ledwith 2005). They accomplish all these even with all tremendous constraints, high demands from community members, and external pressure from stakeholders.

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