



**PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY:
*On the People's Plans for Housing and
Housing Budget***



Laying the objectives of the People's Assembly

Last September 30, 2021, the member organizations of the Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP) – Philippines together with the urban poor leaders and communities held a *kamustahan* session via zoom meeting that coincides with the conduct of People's Assembly in line with the Global Week of Action for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The People's Assembly's theme mainly focused on the present condition of the country in terms of the social protection. Particularly, it laid an emphasis on the people's plans for housing and budget especially on the disposition of the urban poor communities amidst the pandemic. For GCAP Philippines, the People's Assembly also served as mechanism and a great start to reactivate its membership as it also envisions to reorganize and engage the coalition through the conduct of regular meetings, assemblies and webinars that will focus the different advocacies and campaigns of the member organizations.



Ms. Beckie Malay, the National Coordinator of GCAP Philippines, spearheaded the discussion and presented the primary objectives of the People's Assembly. First, to touch base on the member organizations of GCAP Philippines and the endeavors and challenges they have encountered in terms of their advocacies and campaigns. Second, to give a platform for the member organizations to share the experiences and assessment of social protection policies within their communities. Third, to discuss the recovery path that the member organizations will follow and direct amidst the global health crisis.

She also shared the global campaigns of GCAP and presented the overview and background of the People's Assembly which started in 2019, parallel to the United Nations General Assembly, in order to discuss and monitor the implementation of SDGs in a global level. In this connection, the youth's effort to assert their role in national development in line with the SDGs was also shared where the Kabataan Kontra Kahirapan, the youth arm of GCAP Philippines, conducted the Tugtugan Para sa Kinabukasan: An Online Busking Effort for SDGs last September 24, 2021.

People's Proposal for Housing and the Housing Budget

The opening discussion was followed by a situationer and update from Mr. Buboy Magahis, coordinator of Kilos Maralita, on the people's proposal for housing and the housing budget. The discussion presented the current face of the administration's budget on the housing plan of the country. Mr. Buboy laid an emphasis on the challenge of the ever-increasing population of the country residing in the urban areas. He also shared the struggles encountered by the urban poor especially by the Informal Settler Families (ISF) that were mainly affected by the underutilized budget for socialize housing.

The discussion also scrutinized how the government, from the past and present administration, responded in terms of the people's proposal and plan especially on social housing development. Mr. Buboy further presented the assessment on the current people's proposal and plan and how it can be put forward and institutionalized through strengthening the participation and role of the people's organization.

Social Protection: The Bayanihan Law and the Social Amelioration Program in the Philippines

The social protection condition of the Philippines amidst the pandemic was shared by Ms. Raquel Castillo, board member of Freedom from Debt Coalition. Primarily, her discussion focused on the



social amelioration program of the country during the pandemic, to which she further described as “*too little, too late*. In her presentation, she provided a brief background of the COVID-19 Active Response and Expenditure Support Program (CARES), which aims to dedicate programs for social protection and relief to affected people and economic stimulus for affected sectors.

The challenges for the social amelioration program of the country were highlighted which are as follows: (1) delays and protracted aid distribution and implementation; (2) inadequacy of subsidy; and (3) disparity on the planned coverage of the social amelioration aids and on its actual coverage and completion on distribution. Ms. Raquel registered that these challenges defeated the very purpose of the social amelioration program of the country for the urgent mitigation of the adverse impact of the pandemic for the marginalized sector.

Equitable Access to Vaccines

In terms of the campaign for equitable access to vaccines, Ms. Beckie Malay presented the current condition of the vaccine distribution in the region. She highlighted those vaccines are a public good and therefore should be equally accessible to all because everyone is vulnerable and susceptible to COVID-19. The poorest citizens and countries, especially the Philippines, must have the same rights and access to immunization as the richest so that we reach at least 60% of people across all countries by the end of 2021 and a vaccine for all who need one by the end of 2022.

Ms. Beckie also shared the importance of waving the patents for the COVID-19 vaccines, in line with the campaign of vaccines for all global roadmap. Wherein, the temporary waiver of intellectual property protections on all COVID-19 technologies will ensure the vaccine know-how is shared as soon as possible to drive down the cost and scale up production in all continents as part of an emergency plan for universal coverage.

Community Health: Kalusugan Team sa Panahon ng Pandemya (Health Team amidst the Pandemic)

Ms. Jen Marbella from Institute for Popular Democracy, presented how the creation of the *Kalusugan* Team or the Health Team assisted the communities on the ground in terms of disseminating factual information on COVID-19, direct coordination to the community and health clinics, monitoring of the community for possible contraction of the COVID-19 virus and creating an organized elements for a community solidarity in mitigating the effects of the pandemic. The health team produces volunteers and leaders from the community, particularly those members from



the people's organization, volunteers from cooperatives and associations and even extends its membership to the family members of the volunteers itself.

The health teams are a vehicle to direct and coordinate the general health concerns of their communities. In which the CIVIKA, IPD, IPCSED and KM assists and guides these community leaders for their activities and also creates the mechanism of the health teams for sustainability of their program. The volunteer barangay health workers from the local government units (LGUs) and other health providers, also helps the Health Teams in terms of facilitating the queries and concerns from the community members.

Particularly, the health teams conduct a surveillance within their area of jurisdiction that monitors the following:

1. Checking of the temperature, oxygen level, and symptoms of the community members that will be given to each family through a monitoring sheet and form. Those who will be needing additional health assistance will be coordinated to undergo testing, isolation, or tracing through the strategic partner institutions of the health teams.
2. Identify the community members who are willing to be vaccinated and those who are in need of medical certificates especially those who have a comorbidity.
3. The list of PhilHealth members in order to assist the community members in availing services from the accredited PhilHealth community doctors and clinics. This will also serve as a guide for the Health Teams to monitor and urge the households to have active PhilHealth member among them, in order to be eligible to the health services that they can avail through PhilHealth.

Ms. Jen also shared the PhilHealth consultation package under the Memorandum Circular No. 2020-00021 which aims to provide consultation and assistance package to its members. Wherein, the PhilHealth members listed by the health teams will guide and assist the community members to register and enroll in these services. With this program, the community members will be able to avail online health consultation, prescription of medicines, lab tests and among others.

With the recent condition of the hospital capacity and the exponential surge of COVID-19 positive cases in the country, the Filipino people found it harder to seek medical consultation from the hospitals and clinics, especially if their health condition is not COVID-19 related. Ms. Jen highlighted that through the presence of Health Teams and PhilHealth Consultation Package, the communities will still be able to avail immediate health assistance and services without the need to go to a hospital or clinic.



Sharings and Insights from the Community Groups

1. Ms. Osang, one of the leaders from the Malinta Waterways Alliance Housing Cooperative and also a Purok leader in their Barangay, shared their efforts on how they ensure that the implementations of the Community Health Programs are being mechanized. She also shared the experiences from their communities and the stigma that the COVID-19 has brought within them. For instance, she shared those households that experiences symptoms or has a COVID-19 positive case should be immediately reported to the barangay for isolation. However, the family members have requested to her that if they will be brought into an isolation facility by the ¹*astronauts*, they are asking to be transferred during midnight because they do not want to be identified by their neighbors.

She also shared the importance of having a community leader, especially on the isolated and depressed communities, as it empowers their communities to submit themselves into an immediate proper health protocols in order to prevent the possible spread of the virus within them. Further, the community leaders also disseminates factual information on the COVID-19 virus, that eventually eliminates the stigma and false information within their community.

Ms. Osang also highlighted how the Health Teams are able to help their community and how it eases the burden experienced by the community members in terms of availing immediate health services from hospitals and clinics. She shared the appreciation of their community for the Community Health Program because for one, it gives them an access to health services, and second, it saves their families from the supposed medical consultation expenses which they now use to finance and sustain their living such as in food, water, and utilities. It is notable for her that some community members who were not able to seek health services at all, are now able to see and consult a medical professional.

2. Ms. Teody, one of the leaders of the SRCC, shared her insights in terms of the housing topic. She gave an update regarding the relocation of the San Roque members where 400 of them are already transferred in Pasong Tamo. However, majority of their members are still not transferred. She also shared the challenges they have encountered upon their transfer, such as the attempt of the other groups to occupy their units and the on-going signing of the loan agreements of the housing beneficiaries. She also registered some of their demand priorities such as on the issues they encountered on water, electricity and some units who lacks the equipment for their living.

¹ Astronauts is the term used by the communities to call and describe the health workers wearing a full personal protective equipment



Highlights on the struggle experienced by their community amidst the pandemic was also shared by Ms. Teody, which affirmed the discussion of Ms. Raquel that the aid distribution were not given to them, at least on their community. On the other hand, she shared that majority of the SRCC members are already vaccinated. Same sentiments with Ms. Osang were also raised by Ms. Teody in terms of the health teams, which have greatly helped them in easing their immediate health concerns.

3. Ms. Noemi from CWSB raised a question regarding the social amelioration package of the country. In her question, Ms. Noemi shared her experience that during the distribution of the social amelioration package worth 4,000 PHP, the office concerned has informed them that if they are not able to get the cash aid within 2 to 3 days, it is already forfeited. Her question in particular is, where are they going to allocated the forfeited cash aid, and if it is right to forfeit it given that it is already earmarked in the budget?

Ms. Raquel responded that it is really questionable how the government would reallocate the forfeited cash aid of the beneficiaries, while in fact this should be solely entitled to them. She also shared that they have a tendency to really delay and keep the cash aids in order to put it back in the government savings. It is manifested in one of the senate hearings, when they were also questioned on the cash aids that was declared forfeited, they have answered that the directives in their offices to hold the unclaimed aids it to give a priority too on the waitlisted members that should also be given of cash aids.

4. Ms. Ami from IPCSED, affirmed that the social amelioration program is really problematic and has a lot of irregularities because relatively, there are still a lot of people who are not able to receive cash aids. She also shared that the area of Bagong Silang, especially the area near their cooperatives, has an alarming rate of COVID-19 positive cases that is why a granular lockdown was implemented in their barangay. However, the problem that she pointed out that due to the increasing number of population in their area, even the contact tracers found it hard to detect and monitor the spread of the virus and even those who have been already contacted with the virus.

She also shared that there are also some declared deaths that were not actually identified if the cause is from COVID-19 or not. Ms. Ami noted that there is an evident problem and poor contact tracing mechanism within their area, plus the factor that the even their LGU was not able to handle their pandemic response accordingly.



The sharing of insights from the community groups ended with Ms. Beckie's affirmation to all the concerns and experiences raised from the communities and the data presented by the resource speaker. It is truly undeniable that the COVID-19 pandemic have a debilitating impacts across all sectors and communities in the country, and Ms. Beckie further registered that there is a dire need to consolidate the member organizations, the community groups and other coalitions to create and have a collectively effort, program and campaign for the recovery path of the country in order to urge the government and its administration to push forward the genuine people's plan and agenda.

Mr. Erik from IPD concluded the program with his insights on the actual condition of the people's plan and agenda. For him, since the start of the Duterte Administration, the people's plan did not have any significant progress for the past five years. He also shared the challenges encountered why the people's plan was not pushed through especially on the utilization of the housing budget and it is just to assert for the efficient utilization of this budget for the socialize housing. He has also expressed the interest and commitment of IPD to support and help in terms of the campaign for equitable access for vaccines as he affirms the importance of vaccine equality especially in the poorest countries across the globe.

Further, he also stressed that the Community Health Program should be supported by every communities as he sees its critical and vital role in ensuring a safe, informed and healthy communities across the country.