

Initiating Women Empowerment and Youth Development through Involvement in Non-Formal Education in Three Selected Parishes: An Action Research on Poverty Alleviation

Divina M. Edralin,

De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines

divina.edralin@dlsu.edu.ph

Maria Victoria P. Tibon

De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines

Florenz C. Tugas

De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines

This article elaborates on an action research undertaken by three researchers from a business school of a leading university in the Philippines on the contribution of non-formal education programs in poverty alleviation, aimed to initiate women empowerment and youth development among selected women and youth in the parishes they belong to. Non-formal education programs such as home-based livelihood program, parenting for women, leadership, character building, values clarification, and priority setting for women and youth were administered as a way to reduce the selected parishioners' vulnerabilities arising from poverty. Using outcome mapping as a project cycle management tool, changed behaviours, attitudes, and values were identified not as final indicators but as an indicator of progress in empowerment and development to which the non-formal education programs contribute.

JEL Classifications: O15, O17, J13, J32

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PURPOSE AND RATIONALE OF THE RESEARCH

The Philippines is the stronghold of Catholicism in Asia. It is also common knowledge that poverty is a rampant, perennial, and pervasive problem in the country. With poverty comes vulnerability. Women and youth from poor families are powerless (Racelis, 2003). Most of the Filipinos are Catholic. It is in this regard that the Catholic Church through its parishes become involved not only in the spiritual development of the community of the faithful but they help in the integral development of the parishioners.

This action research was conducted in the parishes where we, as academic researchers, reside. In these parishes, namely, Parish of the Our Lady of the Abandoned (POLA) in Mandaluyong City, Our Lady of the Assumption Parish (OLAP) in Manila City and San Jose de Agudo Parish (SJDA) in Caloocan City, programs or activities are conducted to help in the integral development of the parishioners.

The study sought to determine the socio-economic status of selected women and youth in terms of their access to education and training, health, employment, and food. It described their vulnerabilities as well as their aspirations in life. Anchored on the analysis of these data, the researchers designed and implemented a few interventions in the form of non-formal education aimed at poverty alleviation by way of initiating women empowerment and youth development among parishioners.

This research chronicles our experiences as researcher-parishioners as we introduce interventions aimed to address the vulnerability of the poor in our parishes. Is non-formal education a viable way to address vulnerabilities of poor people? How does it help make poor people less vulnerable and begin the path towards empowerment and development?

We felt that as researchers, we would be able to make productive use of our God-given

talents and attributes, exposure, and current engagements to help effect positive change in the part of society where we belong through this research-oriented parish involvement. All of us are faculty members. We, as well as our colleagues, can help identify and impart the technical knowledge of business we find suited to the needs of the women and youth participants in our parishes.

Being Lasallian educators, we are also moved to act by our strong faith in God and love for country. In this regard, in the long term, based on the level of acceptance and openness to change of the parishioners, the three Parish communities are community engagement sites of the Ramon V. del Rosario College of Business, De La Salle University.

Poverty

Definitions of poverty have transcended the traditional association with low income levels (Govinda, 2008). "Poverty is not only about not having money. It is an unacceptable condition of human living since it deprives people not only of adequate resources but of their human dignity" (Tullao, 2009, p. 395). Essential to poverty is a state of deprivation (Matin & Hulme, 2003). This deprivation, for example, can manifest in low educational status and powerlessness as a result of a lack of capability to access resources (Govinda, 2008).

The Need for Women Empowerment and Youth Development

Women concerns. Women, in most parts of the world, do not play an active role in matters pertaining to financial, monetary, commercial, and other economic policies, as well as tax systems and rules governing pay (Mooney-Cotter, 2013). In spite of these realities, women are the backbone of economic development in many developing countries (Ndemo & Maina, 2007). In many countries, too, women are the primary

earners for their families. But because they are discriminated in terms of wages, land ownership, and lending, they are inhibited from contributing to their respective nation's economies. Women continue to be mainly responsible for the "care economy." They often have a double or triple workload, combining economic activities while looking after the household and providing family care (Mehrotra, 1998). It is also documented by International Labour Organization (ILO, 2006) that women continue to have less access than men to investments in skills, knowledge, and lifelong learning. Half of the world's labor is in sex-stereotyped occupations, with women dominating those occupations which are lowest paying and least protected. Thus, poor women are not able to have good nutrition, access to adequate health care for herself and for her children, better mobility, and networking.

Empowerment. Empowerment is a process by which individuals become proactive in addressing their situation such that they are able to gain control and improve access to resources and transform their consciousness through their beliefs, values, and attitudes (Kar, Pascual, & Chickering, 1999). In their capacity building projects, Oxfam GB, an NGO, identified four dimensions of empowerment, namely, psychological, economic, social, and cultural, which they aim to develop in their beneficiaries through different activities. These dimensions with its manifestations are portrayed in the following diagram:

Empowerment methods enhance the different dimensions of empowerment accordingly through programs or activities (Kar et al., 1999). Different non-governmental organizations employ empowerment methods accordingly:



Figure 1. Dimensions of Empowerment (Flintan, 2008, p. 116).

“Oxfam’s work aimed to achieve psychological empowerment particularly through its work with community groups, by providing exposure to new ways of working, by providing education and learning to inform individuals of their rights and enabling sharing of experiences between groups. Social empowerment was targeted by working with community groups, building solidarity and sharing skills and resources. KPDP supported economic empowerment by providing assets to be owned, communally or individually, by the disempowered and by providing the necessary skills to enhance income security and economic independence. Cultural empowerment was tackled through work with marginal groups to challenge perceptions of their position in society.” (Oxfam GB Uganda, 2004 as cited in Flintan, 2008, p.116).

When self-set goals with regard to the dimensions of empowerment are met, then the methods are said to be effective (Kar et al., 1999). However, adopting women’s empowerment as a goal is for the long term (Flintan, 2008). Empowerment movements originate, gain momentum, become viable, and get institutionalized (Kar et al., 1999). Regardless of specific goals and methods used, programs’ empowering effects include first, an improvement of the women’s subjective well-being, self-esteem, and self-efficacy; and second, an enhancement of social status as a consequence of the acquisition of technical and organizational skills (Kar et al., 1999).

Youth concerns. Republic Act 8044 (1995) also defined “youth” as a stage in a person’s growth and development starting from adolescence to adulthood that is mature, responsible and self-reliant. There are also definitions of “youth”, according to age brackets. Some international organizations define youth to be persons between 15-24 years of age, some others as those below 18 years old. Presidential Decree 603 (1974) defined the youth to be individuals below 21 years old. Republic Act 8044 (1995), on the other

hand, defined them to be between 15 to 30 years old. The latter is the prevailing standard in the Philippines. In the Philippines, as of 2004, they comprise almost 30% of the population and are mostly found within or near the metropolitan areas (Maslang, 2005).

Due to personal vulnerabilities and negative environmental influences, many Filipino youth do not go through the normal youth life course. They get sidetracked or they skip a stage, ending up raising a family or getting employed too early. Youth concerns include reproductive health, drug and substance abuse, access to and quality of education, employment, and vulnerability of specific youth groups to discrimination, exploitation, abuse, and disintegration in society (Maslang, 2005).

Poverty may not be the direct cause of many problematic youth outcomes but is frequently cited as a risk factor or “a marker for a host of risk processes” that heighten vulnerability, when they lack assets essential for growth in their development (Small & Memmo, 2004).

Youth Development. Among the approaches to youth development, positive youth development is the most recent and popular among traditional youth-serving agencies because it focuses on the promotion of positive development and conditions that contribute to the well-being of the youth. (Small & Memmo, 2004).

According to Maslang (2005), the Filipino Youth as envisioned in the Philippine Medium-Term Youth Development Plan (2005-2010), is:

Empowered and enlightened youth;
Actively participating in governance and decision-making;
Self-reliant and confident;
Recognized as agents of change;
Globally competitive, productive, and well-informed;
Patriotic, with a strong love for country and culture; and
Physically, mentally, and spiritually healthy.
(Maslang, 2005, p.9)

These attributes are also similarly embodied in the 5C's (competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring) identified by a study made on positive youth development by Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, and Lerner (2005). In a similar study on positive youth development, Guerra and Bradshaw (2008) identified five competencies of a healthy youth, namely: (1) positive sense of self, (2) self-control, (3) decision-making skills, (4) a moral system of belief, and (5) prosocial connectedness. Developmental interventions, to be effective, have to be anchored on these competencies or individual attributes that define positive outcomes of healthy youth (Lerner et al., 2005).

POVERTY ALLEVIATION

Approaches to Poverty Alleviation

According to Govinda (2008), poverty alleviation “poses the challenge of transforming the physical and social context in which the poor lives” (p. 4). The living standards of the poor are usually declining, causing hunger and starvation, alongside other forms of deprivation. Poverty alleviation, according to Matin and Hulme (2003), takes the form of either livelihood protection or livelihood promotion. The former reduces the vulnerability of the poor while the latter increases incomes, productivity, and employment prospects. Both are closely interlinked (Matin & Hulme, 2003).

The Catholic Church as the “Church for the Poor”

The Catholic Church worldwide, guided by its Social Teaching, is known for its service to the marginalized groups and its humanitarian work (Sarbah, Yeboah, Quaye, & Obeng, 2014). The Philippine Church, as the “Church for the Poor”, empowers the poor to change their situation. It

works for and with the poor. It has a special love for the poor and preference for the poor. It does not discriminate the poor and is in solidarity with them. It defends and vindicates the rights of the poor. It collaborates with them and encourages their active participation in the Church's mission (Yuzon, 2009).

Non-Formal Education as a Poverty Alleviation Strategy

Non-formal education is programs for adults that addresses their learning needs and enhances their capacity to be independent, effective, and productive in all the facets of daily life. It focuses on the acquisition of basic literacy skills and functional skill building. Its basic concern is the education of the disadvantaged. It is an effort to link education with poverty alleviation (Govinda, 2008).

Integral Human Development in the Local Church or Parish Level

Integral human development, that is, the total well-being of the human person, is an indispensable part of the mission of the Church. The Church acts as a change agent by taking on community mobilization programs that build individual capacities so as to live a quality of life people aspire and which God intended for everyone. The task involves the movement of people “from less human conditions to those that are more human” (Paul VI, 1967 as cited in Sarbah et al., 2014, p. 3). It is a “people oriented process of transformation that gives the people the opportunity to live a good and abundant life which implies having a long, healthy and creative life, a decent standard of living, freedom, dignity, self-esteem and respect for others” (Sarbah et al., 2014, p. 3).

In its development work, the Jasikan diocese of Ghana adopted the following framework:

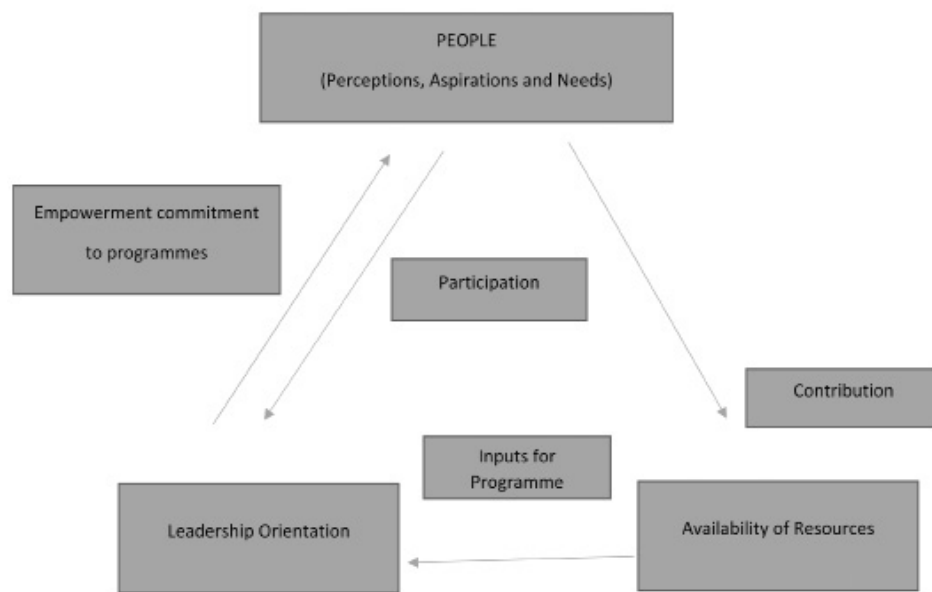


Figure 2. Conceptual framework for the development of Jasikan Diocese (Sarbah et al., 2014, p.5).

People are at the center of development. Through them and for them, development efforts are pursued. They are considered “the architects and the beneficiaries at the same time of any development effort” (Sarbah et al., 2014, p.5). Leadership, provided by the local Church, empowers the people and is committed to meet the needs and aspirations of the people through programs. Resources are physical, financial, human, and social inputs that are used to implement programs. These three main elements of the framework are linked (Sarbah et al., 2014). This study adopted this framework.

Specifically for this action research, we refer to the “people” as the 100 women and 100 youth selected in each parish to participate in the non-formal education programs designed by the researchers with the help of their colleagues. “Leadership” is provided by the parish priest, the Parish Pastoral Council, and the heads of the concerned ministries in the parish in close coordination with the researcher-parishioners, who are all committed to the goal of women empowerment and youth development pursued

by these non-formal education programs. “Resources” such as venues are provided by the parish, financial support from the university to which the researchers are affiliated, and time spent by the selected parishioners, trainers, researchers, research assistants, and parish leaders alike.

Methodology and Methods of Inquiry

The study’s research design is action research. Action research is carried out by a member of the research organization so as to chronicle the sequence of events and the approach to manage change, experienced by him and those involved. These sequence of events or actions are meant to improve or solve problems in the organization. It is research “in action” and is collaborative and participative. It has four steps: constructing, planning action, taking action, and evaluating action. These four steps consist one cycle. An action research project can have multiple action research cycles operating concurrently (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010). This is depicted in Figure

3. This action research will only cover Cycle 1, that is, the initial actions undertaken to start the process of empowerment and development among the women and youth in the three parishes where the researchers are also parishioners.

As an action research project that runs one full cycle, we employed a recent project cycle management tool developed by the International Development Research Centre, Canada (IDRC). Known as Outcome Mapping, its focus is on people with whom a program is administered, specifically, the changes in their behaviors, relationships, networks, actions, and activities. These changes are what are referred to as “outcomes.” This is apt for the framework (refer to Figure 2) the study is using, that is, centered on people. The various elements of outcome mapping as a methodology bands the relationships among them, as adopted in this study are depicted below:

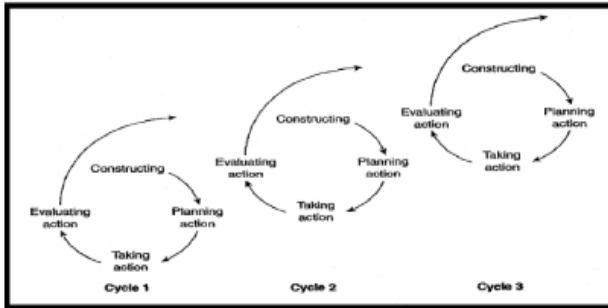


Figure 3. Spiral of action research cycles (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010, p.10).

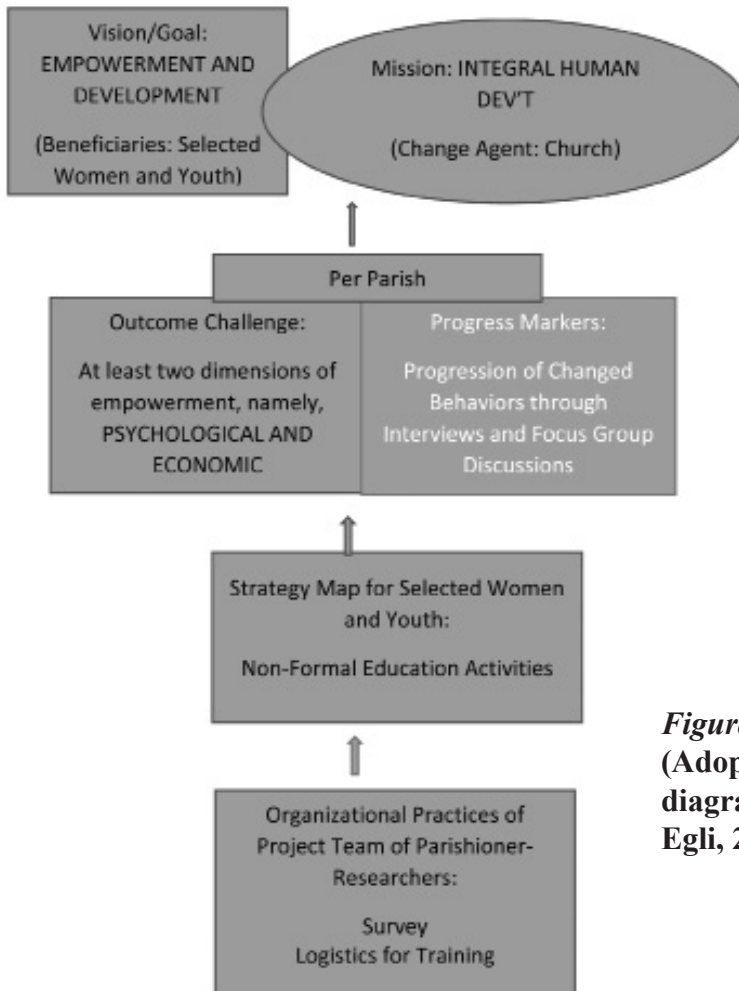


Figure 4. Outcome mapping (Adopted from various OM-related diagrams, Roduner, Schappli, & Egli, 2008).

Data Collection

To determine the perceptions, aspirations, and needs of the selected parishioners, we, assisted by our research assistants and some parish volunteers, conducted a survey by posing the questions individually face-to-face, to each of the respondents using a Filipino translated eight-page pre-tested questionnaire patterned after the community-based monitoring system (CBMS) standardized questionnaire for households.

Through quota and judgment sampling, 100 women and 100 youth were selected from each of the three parishes using the following criteria: (1) Women-parishioner, lives in the parish community, economic status of the family is below Php15,000 as monthly income, has a child/children, of any age, preferably with unemployed spouse, has not availed of any assistance from the Parish, willing to participate in the data collection, operation, and evaluation phases of the project, endorsed by any Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) leader; and (2) Youth-parishioner, lives in the parish community, economic status of the family is below Php15,000 as monthly income, single, preferably not more than 21 years old, has not availed of any assistance from the Parish, willing to participate in the data collection, implementation, and evaluation phases of the project, endorsed by any PPC leader.

The survey results were presented to the respective parish priest and Parish Pastoral Council after conducting the survey. Interventions in terms of non-formal education initiatives were finalized with key Parish leaders.

Implementation

Non-Formal Education initiatives were administered to these selected parishioners based on the results of the survey. Depending on the topic, the seminar or talk can last from a minimum of three hours to one day. The Parish provided the venue and contacted the selected

parishioners for the scheduled seminars. The researchers took care of other logistical matters such as speaker, food, materials, and handouts.

Evaluation

Depending on the type of non-formal education, we undertook an assessment at least one month after the intervention was implemented. It focused more on the changes that occurred among the women and youth on the dimensions of empowerment that are psychological and economic in nature. We delved on the changes specifically related to economic, personal, relationship with others, and what they intend to do in the near future. With the help of our Research Assistants, we conducted either one-on-one, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), personal observations, and plenary sessions to triangulate the changes that happened to all the participants who attended the non-formal education intervention. We also asked the opinion of parish officers or members of the different parish councils as third parties, on what they saw as change among the participants.

STORY AND OUTCOMES

Presentation of Survey Results

It took us eight months to complete the survey. It was completed not without difficulty. Some women respondents come with their children, which can be distracting. It was even more challenging to interview the youth. For one, we were able to interview many of them in the evening since they go to school during the day. Second, they were so shy in answering the questions. We have to motivate them and repeat the questions several times before they give their reply. Third, there were a few cases where the identified youth respondents have behavioral problems. Fourth, they appear hesitant in

answering the questions especially when a family member can hear the responses to the questions. In this case, we have to drop them and ask for replacements from the Service Ministry heads.

Socio-Economic Status of Women

Women from POLA. The typical POLA women parishioners have reached high school and they all can read and write. They are Catholic, married in the church, have an average of two to three household members, and claimed they own their dwelling place. Aside from formal education, they have also attended trainings on sewing and basic computer. More than 60% are not working and not looking for work due to housekeeping responsibilities. Those who are working (38.6%) are predominantly vendors. Others are laundrywoman, cook, dressmaker, or kasambahay, whose work status is short-term or casual. These working women expressed that they earn about less than Php5,000 monthly. In the past year, more than 90% of the women cited that a member of their household got sick in the last 12 months of influenza or asthma. About 61.6% confirmed that they experienced hunger, without any food to eat in the last three months.

Women from SJDA. Women parishioners of SJDA in Caloocan typically share their dwelling place with another family or families with at most 17 members residing. Though the incident of living together outside marriage is 32%, majority (54%) of them still are married (either church or civil). They are predominantly Catholic (96%) with some who are Born Again, Islam, or Iglesia ni Kristo. All of the respondents know how to read and write as evidenced by their educational attainment ranging from elementary (15%) to vocational (5%) with majority (64%) of them finished high school. In terms of being active in the community, only 21% are active. Of these, 52% are active in religious organizations and 35% in political organizations. Majority (57%) of them are not working for reasons that they have

to stay at home to take care of their children and do the household chores. Those who are working are predominantly laundrywomen and vendors which are not permanent in nature. From these work, only 20% are earning P5,001-10,000 while the rest are earning below P5,000. In the past year, hypertension (17%), asthma (16%), and influenza (14%) have been the top reasons for their family members getting sick. About 43% of them experienced hunger in the last three months citing lack of money to buy food. Some of those who said did not experience hunger were able to get food from relatives and neighbors.

Women from OLAP. The typical OLAP women are Catholic and married in Church. Half of them own their houses. Their family normally consists of 3-5 members. All of them can read and write. More than half of them reached high school and even a third have college credits. Aside from formal education, most of them have also attended other trainings such as food processing, computer, sewing, and cosmetology. Almost all are not working and not looking for work due to housekeeping responsibilities. For those who are working, they predominantly have work that is short-term and non-permanent. Their earnings are minimal. They are active in organizations, mostly religious in nature. Their common health problems are diarrhea, pneumonia, and influenza.

Women's Vulnerabilities Related to Poverty

Due to poverty and discrimination, almost 70% of the poor women in POLA feels that they have low self-esteem. As expressed by one of the mothers: *"Sinabihan kami ng kapitbahay na patay-gutom kami at binato rin ang bahay namin ng basura."* Another mother said: *"Namimintas maliit ang tingin sa akin kasi mababa ang natapos ko. Hindi rin ako pinakikinggan dahil mahirap lang kami."*

Seventy-one percent of women interviewed in SJDA experienced discrimination from their neighbors, relatives, and even immediate family

members. These instances include, among the notable ones, *“panlalait, minumura ng ibang tao kahit tahimik... pinag-uusapan ng mga tao na ang anak ko tamad nag-asawa agad,..dahil walang trabaho kami mag-asawa, nanghihingi ng tulong sa mga magulang namin, nakakarinig ng salita sa mga magulang...”*

Women in OLAP have likewise suffered discrimination and have feelings of low self-esteem. Thirty one percent of the respondents suffered discrimination while close to 35% has feelings of low self-esteem. One commented, *“Masakit...dahil ayaw ka pakinggan at ayaw paniwalaan. Marami ang mata-pobre.”*

Aspirations of Women

In POLA, when asked about their aspirations in life, four out of every five women replied that they aspire to finish college so that they can get a better paying job. They dream to get a job (66.7%) that is regular and more stable as a source of income. They also aspire (89.5%) to help their family in whatever way they can so that they will be able to have enough food on the table, send their children to school, pay for housing and utilities, and buy medicines when they are sick.

The circumstances that women in SJDA are in right now barely affected the hope in the aspirations in life they still keep. Finishing college (78.5%) is still their top aspiration so they will be more financially stable. Getting a job (64%) is next on the list while helping their family (62%) being the third.

Similar to SJDA and POLA, the top two aspirations of women in OLAP are to finish college and get a job. The third aspiration, however, is to be able to travel most probably to find better opportunities abroad.

Socio-Economic Status of the Youth

The typical POLA youth parishioners are in high school and they claimed they can all read

and write. They are Catholic, have an average of five to six household members, and believed that they own their dwelling place. Aside from formal education, they have also attended trainings on basic computer, leadership, cooking, and cosmetology. More than 90% of the youth are not working and not looking for work because they are studying and too young to work. For a handful (8.3%) who are working, they are helpers or sorters in junkshops and service crew or bartender in restaurants. They were hired either as permanent or contractual worker with an average monthly income of less than Php5,000. The remaining 1.7% are unemployed, out-of-school youth. In the past year, most of them (71.6%) got sick of influenza (48%), asthma (12%), or stomachache (13.3%). Almost 40% said that they did experience hunger in the last three months.

Almost all of the youth participants of SJDA are Catholic. All of these youth participants can read and write, while 64.4% at least reached high school and only 67% are currently studying. More than majority (57%) believe that they own their dwelling places with an average of six to seven household members. More than 80% of them are not working because they are either studying, too young to work, or they lack the necessary knowledge and skills. Those who are working are vendors, serving as Sangguniang Kabataan officials, doing labor jobs such as janitorial and repairs, which are mostly seasonal. From these work, only 6% are earning P5,001-10,000 with the rest earning below P5,000. In the past year, influenza (26%), hypertension (18%), and asthma (10%) have been the top reasons for the family members getting sick. About 46% of them experienced hunger in the last three months citing lack of money to buy food. Some of those who said did not experience hunger were able to get food from relatives and neighbors.

OLAP youth usually come from families with four to six members. More than half own their houses. All of them are Catholic. All can read and write but less than half are studying.

Most have reached high school. Many are active in organizations, usually religious. They have relatively simple health problems such as diarrhea, stomachache and influenza. However, 13% experienced hunger in the last three months.

Vulnerabilities of the Youth Related to Poverty

Due to poverty and marginalization, more than the majority (59.6%) of these poor young people in POLA feels that they have low self-esteem. As shared by one of the youth: *“Nandidiri sa amin dahil sa nagbobote kami at minamaliit kami dahil sa mahirap kami.”* Another youth pointed out: *“Pinagtitripan at sinasabihan na bobo at walang alam.”*

Nearly 50% of youth interviewed in SJDA experienced discrimination from their neighbors, relatives, and family members. These instances include, among the notable ones, *“nagagalit ang kapitbahay pag gumagamit sila ng tubig, pero sa amin naman yun... nung naglarong basketball, yung iba walang tiwala sa kin, mga classmate sa school sinasabi di daw kami magaling...mga kapitbahay minumura ako, siniraan...”*

Few or close to 10% of the youth in OLAP have experienced discrimination but more than half (59.6%) have felt low self-esteem. One respondent said, *“Malungkot na makita na nahihirapan ang mga mahal mo sa buhay.”*

Aspirations of the youth

Most of the youth in POLA (85.7%) aspire to finish college so that they can have greater opportunities to be employed. Their second wish is to get a job (60.7%) that is permanent and will provide an adequate source of income to help their family and they will never experience hunger anymore. Their third aspiration is to travel (49.1%) in places that they have never been before.

Sparks of hope are still apparent among the youth interviewed in SJDA. Finishing college (94.2%) is still their top aspiration so they will be more financially stable. Getting a job (86.7%) is next on the list while opportunity to travel abroad (78.2%) being the third.

The aspiration of the OLAP youth are the same as that of POLA and SJDA: to finish college, get a job, and travel in order to find better opportunities.

Implementing the Action Programs

After data collection in POLA, our team finalized with the Service Ministry and key Parish Pastoral Council leaders during a meeting, the training interventions we plan to undertake. For the women, we selected the “How to start your own business” given by the Caritas Manila staff and “Parenting and dealing with Neighbors” conducted by Dr. Emil Hudtohan of De La Salle University. It was whole day training for two batches of 25 mothers each. For the youth, we chose “Leadership with self-discovery” facilitated by Ms. Mary Ann Rafols from World Vision Philippines. It was half day training for two batches of 25 youth each. Since the training is conducted in the Chapel of the sub-parish, each activity ends with a mass which was presided by our Parish Priest.

For the women of SJDA, we selected the “Home-based Livelihood” training, which was conducted by Ms. Fe Edelloran of the Women of Progress Multipurpose Cooperative, a social enterprise of women in Pasig who make use of water lily as the raw material in making bags. This was attended by 55 women. She also conducted the session on “Awakening the Entrepreneurial Spirit” among the youth which was attended by 27 participants. After this, another intervention on “Being with the Family” was conducted by a group of young professionals which aims to rekindle the spirit of Christmas among the young children of women

respondents. This was attended by 27 participants including the Parish Priest. Another intervention on “Values Clarification and Prioritizing Issues in Life” was conducted by Dr. Jaime Cempron to women and youth. This was attended by 15 women and 8 youth. The sessions ended with a declaration of embraced values among women and youth participants.

In OLAP, interventions for women were on Leadership and Entrepreneurship. These two topics revolved around themes dealing with sense of mission, sense of responsibility, and combining family life and service. All three seminars were conducted by faculty members of De la Salle University. Each time at least 25 women came. Dr. Emil Hudtohan led the Leadership seminar, being a past President of the Parish Pastoral Council. Ms. Shieradel Jimenez and her husband-entrepreneur talked about the life and family of an entrepreneur to encourage the OLAP women to pursue entrepreneurship. Dr. Vixie Tibon talked about women entrepreneurs who can be emulated and the practice on entrepreneurship among women in another occasion. For the youth, Ms. Agnes Perpetua Legaspi, Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) director, talked to 15 youth on Leadership and Self Concept and Character Building.

Evaluating the Program Impact

We monitored the changes to participants at least within one month after the conduct of training through interviews, personal observations and/or focus group discussions. In POLA, it is very interesting to note the patterns of changes that happened to our women participants after the “how to start your own business” and parenting trainings that they have undergone. Among many women, it seems that economic empowerment has begun when some of them started to have their own micro business, got a job, learned to save, learned to budget, improved their existing micro business, and even thought of starting another business

that is more profitable. The income that they reaped from their business has helped them to have food on the table. Their micro business has also enabled them to provide for their children’s allowance to go to school. Their morale and self-esteem increased since they have a little extra money and they can buy something more other than the food on the table.

Moreover, the parenting training made an impact on the behavior of the women personally. They have gained self-confidence, became more patient and understanding, as well as learning to love oneself and become more prayerful. The training has also improved their personal relationship with others especially to their family and neighbors. Asked about their plans in the near future after the training, many of them would like to start their own business, look for start-up capital, guide their children better, ensure that their children will finish their studies, become more active in the Parish, and attend more seminars that will teach them how to manage their own business and how to become more empowered as a person.

With regard to the youth (aged 15-24), economic development in terms of having a job or own business is only obvious to very few people since their priority is to study. The greater impact on the training intervention is more on increasing their self-confidence and leadership competency. This manifested in their ability to deal more comfortably with other people and initiating conversations with friends and neighbors. They also learned to become more responsible in performing their duties at home and became more respectful of their parents. Their leadership skills are now shown when they accepted position of responsibility in the Parish. Though young, they intend to share their learning’s with people of their age, convince them to join Parish organization like the Youth Ministry, they want to deepen their relationship with God, and are more determined to finish their studies to get a more stable job.

For SJDA, women and youth participants were initially thinking that the partnership of DLSU with the Parish was more of dole-out. This prompted us to explain to them that dole-out is temporary and participating in the interventions made them realize that the way to better themselves more sustainably should start from within. They also appreciated how we conducted the home-based livelihood interventions by bringing in a resource speaker who was once like them and is now successful in making a decent livelihood. They were motivated to start small businesses consequently.

The women participants also realized that values and business should go together. The session on values clarification and prioritizing important things in life enabled them to be reminded of what they value in the before which should still hold true today.

As for the youth participants of SJDA, they see education as their passport to freedom from poverty and discrimination. Being active in the Parish by either joining the youth or choir ministry is something that they are looking forward to after the interventions. Also, they want to pursue entrepreneurial gifts some youth believe to have when the right time comes as inspired by the water lily social entrepreneur.

All the participants realized that family is still the most important security that they can have. Though most do not have ideal family set-up, they still believe that family members should help each other with a simple affirmation or financial support if possible.

In OLAP, the effectiveness of the interventions was monitored from interviews and focus group discussions that revealed changing patterns of thinking and action among respondents. The OLAP experience shows that the interventions enabled the women and youth to capitalize on opportunities that are available and deal with challenges they face. This may be attributable to the teachings of the Church as propagated by the parish through the homilies in the mass

and the basic ecclesial community trainings done by the Education Ministry. They have also seen the importance of the family as a support system. They realized that time management is essential to being a more productive individual. The exposure to new knowledge was also instrumental.

SELF-REFLECTION AND LEARNING OF THE ACTION RESEARCHERS

Parish Our Lady of the Abandoned (Mandaluyong)

After hearing their stories such as: *“my family responsibilities is one of the reasons I turn to precarious and informal employment because it provides the degree of flexibility and proximity that enable me to fulfill household and child care responsibilities,”* I learned to respect them more, appreciate their ability to be resilient to live in spite of their poverty. I unearthed examples of how our poor women in our Parish became empowered through our training as a form of education and how that empowerment was expressed through their dealings with their family members and neighbors. Over the course of 12 months, many of these women discovered their capabilities, which were more than they had initially expected. The women’s experiences and the youth’s struggle taught me to be more grateful for what I have in life.

As a parishioner, I find it unbearable and disturbing to see so many poor women and youth experiencing discrimination and powerlessness. I also feel angry because exploitation continues to exist. I am so thankful that I am in a position to help them. I am challenged to do something to lessen if not to completely eliminate the powerlessness of women and the underdevelopment of the youth in our parish community. Like King David in the Old Testament, I realized that I want to be “the defender of the poor and promoter of justice.”

But I realized that I should refrain from imposing any process or program that will make them dependent on me and my team of researchers. We need to make them aware that we ought to work as a one parish community resolves to overcome poverty and discrimination in order to achieve their aspirations. These women and youth should believe that they have the power to shape their life for the better, while we help them reach their dreams, one at a time. It is my fervent desire that I will be able to bring hope of lasting change to women, youth, their families, and the communities they live in.

Parish of San Jose de Agudo (Caloocan)

Stories I have heard from the women and youth of San Jose de Agudo Parish are a microcosm of the general situation of my fellow Filipinos in the country. Having immersed with their stories enabled me to see and experience what they experience almost first-hand. I would never forget that interview in the cemetery where I had to climb a wall and passed through a narrow opening just to be in that place, they, left with no choice, call home. I felt sad for them physically living beside the dead but surprisingly that feeling was not evident in their faces. I went there prepared and ready to absorb whatever adversity in life they would share in the hope that I can be that agent of change but something different happened. Instead of me changing them, I was the one who was changed. I never knew that happiness can exist in that place, with their situation, but apparently they managed to get by and teach me an important lesson: that happiness can be everywhere. They find happiness in togetherness, wherever their family is, wherever that may be—in a shanty pile of galvanized iron sheets or an elegant hotel room embraced with sparkling chandeliers. That was the ultimate lesson I had that day and it was almost a fill.

As more interviews took place, I have learned to appreciate more their existence in the society.

The best way to approach poverty is not to deny its existence but to embrace and recognize it as a social concern that has existed even during the time Jesus Christ. The poor constantly remind us that God exists and that He is the only one who can fill all our needs. God can use us all to fill the needs of each of us, be that financially, emotionally, psychologically, among others. What is more important, I believe, is that sensitivity to be used as an instrument by God to bring His kingdom into this world.

As my personal plan of action, I intend to do what I do best with a consciousness that the poor exist and my actions could either alleviate or worsen the situation. As such, I have to be more respectful and responsible. As an academician, I intend to help reshape the society by extending my learning and sharing place beyond the walls of the classroom and even outside the pages of my research publications.

Parish Our Lady of the Assumption (Manila)

The stories of the women and youth I have encountered in the course of this research developed in me magnanimity in spirit. I saw what sharing of talents meant and how even a small act can make a big difference in their lives. I felt a sense of mission, joyfully fulfilling what Divine providence may have set from all eternity. I saw myself partaking into God's task of bringing good tidings to the poor.

The effect of the interventions was varied in nature, scope, and magnitude. Though they were simple people, the change was edifying. They have weaknesses but they struggle to become better persons not only for themselves but for their family and immediate community. It is fulfilling to be part of a positive change in people. It is a privilege to have been part of the process by which they rediscover their value as persons and affirm that they can lead better lives.

EXTRAPOLATION TO A BROADER CONTEXT AND ARTICULATION OF USABLE KNOWLEDGE

This action research saw women empowerment and youth development in progress. Despite the unique milieus of the three parishes, we got to know what powerlessness meant, specifically in terms of discrimination and feelings of low self-esteem. We journeyed with the women and youth as they regain their ability to make life decisions. Those women who experienced discrimination and feelings of low self-esteem because of poverty responded to the interventions positively, while the youth development were manifested in their marked positive contributions to self, family, and parish community.

In a broader context, the powerlessness of women and underdevelopment of the youth are critical issues of our time, affecting millions worldwide. These important issues demand serious work in social legislation to protect these sectors of society. Greater political commitment both at the local and national levels is needed, supported by a more vibrant Parish community action. Our vision is a Filipino society where sectors in the communities are increasingly and verifiably free of poverty and discrimination. As researchers and parishioners, the elimination of these worst conditions of women and youth should be our priority platform which we could undertake on a long-term basis. People all over the world have found it unacceptable to discriminate women and youth. We should be able to propose and implement programs that can contribute substantially to changing the social landscape such as developing their interpersonal and technical competencies, providing support for income generation and creating opportunities, lobbying for legal reforms, generating and sharing knowledge about poverty and discrimination for capacity building, and attracting donors for support system to these programs.

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