

From Informal Settlers to Homeowners: Community Organizing as a Process and Strategy for Empowerment

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Abstract

This paper examines the use of community organizing as an approach to community development in the context of TCVHOAI (Tomas Cabili Village Homeowners Association). Two main reasons are addressed for this sociological investigation 1) the land was privately owned that confronts eviction of the informal settlers 2) a coastal community in between two huge oil depots vulnerable to disasters. Utilizing community organizing as a tool for community empowerment in TCVHOAI, this paper argues that the strategic factors of empowerment such as processes, networks and partnerships, leadership, local organizational capacity, and challenges and outcomes are necessary for transformation of a community. This paper suggests that empowerment must be the ultimate goal of any community development project. Drawing from in-depth interviews with community organizers, government and non-government officials, members of the community, this paper supports that community organizing helps to achieve an empowered community with visible improvements in housing ownership, socio-economic conditions, access to basic social services, community participation, and other meaningful impacts in the lives of the people in the community.

Keywords: community organizing, empowerment, informal settlement, sociology

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INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of informal settlements in the Philippines has become a phenomenon associated with big cities and expanding urban centers. The National Housing Authority (NHA) in coordination with the local governments estimate that the number of informal settlement families place at about 1.5 million or 15% of the Philippines total urban population. UN Habitat defines informal settlements as areas where groups of housing units have been constructed on land that the occupants have no legal claim to and where housing is not in compliance with current planning and building regulations (NISUS Final Report, 2014).

I am interested and challenged in understanding the accomplishment of TCVHOAI (Tomas Cabili Village Homeowners Association Incorporated), in effectively addressing the basic needs of its members and sustainably advancing their interests in a collective and participatory manner. The members of the association lived in the informal settlement in Barangay Tomas Cabili, Iligan City, in a perilous coastal area between two huge oil depots. In 2010, the association won the resettlement award through project UPSURGE (Urban Partnerships for Sustainable Upliftment, Renewal, Governance, and Empowerment) by PHILSSA (Partnership of Philippine Support Service Agencies, Inc.). As informal settlers and residing in a location vulnerable to disasters, eviction notices are regularly served. This issue became their motivation to organize their community to negotiate meaningful resettlement options. They went through community organizing process under the auspices of non-government organizations which are the Hope for Change in 2005 and LIHUK in 2006.

In this sense, non-government organizations contribute to community mobilization and local participation, to provide training to the poor and to share their extensive on-the-ground knowledge. NGOs commit to deal a central development challenge which is the empowerment of people through increased participation in the development process (Ortigas, 2000). Hence, this process involves the participation of people through conscientization to gradually developing a collective consciousness during community organizing (Manalili, 1990).

Historically, community organizing was a fundamental approach in social development during the 70s, where the socio-political context of the country is so different from today. Before, the struggle for social development is in the context of social inequality under an authoritarian and repressive regime. Hence, at that time, community organizing was used in mobilizing people for empowerment which primarily aims to transform a situation of societal injustice, inequality, and poverty. Community organizing was both a

process and an orientation for genuine liberation and social transformation (Dreier, 2003).

At present, socio political context is characterized by liberal democracy, nationally and internationally, where there is “decentralization of powers granting more resources to local governments... including the strengthening local representation all the way to local government being responsible for fiscal matters in the region which were formally allocated to state authority before (Cline, 1999). Applying community organizing is significant for people empowerment in an era of liberal democracy under the tutelage of globalization, where empowerment is used as a vehicle to address basic and developmental needs of marginalized sectors.

The processes of community organizing in TCVHOAI is the fundamental reason why it has become an effective and dynamic people’s organization (PO) that addressed informal settlement issues. This paper examines the usefulness and validity of community organizing as an approach to community development in the present context. As argued by Duthy and Bolo-Duthy (2003), community organizing creates action for social change as community organizations and individuals and build relationship within and beyond the community. CO is both a process and a framework where people’s organizations (POs) are the primary actors of social change (Hermoso, 1994). This paper also attempts to theorize on the empowerment of marginalized sectors in the present socio-political context through the process of community organizing.

Utilizing community organizing as a tool for community empowerment in TCVHOAI, this paper analyzes the strategic factors of empowerment, processes, networks and partnerships, leadership, and challenges and outcomes.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING AS A TOOL TO EMPOWER COMMUNITIES

The paper puts forward the discussion on the validity of the community organizing process to empower communities that brings transformation and community development. The TCVHOAI as a community-based people’s organization of informal settlers that went through CO process, warrants sociological investigation. This study posits that empowerment must be the ultimate goal of any community development project and the community has to undergo community organizing process as exemplified in the experience of TCVHOAI. That empowerment can only be achieved through community organizing.

This brings me to reflect on some works on community organizing and empowerment lenses to draw my theoretical and conceptual framework

for this paper. In the context of organizing people, Victoria Apuan (1987) suggested that community organizing operates within the boundaries of communities' achieving effective power for themselves, in favor of the poor but requires participatory processes wherein the whole community is involved in organizing experience stemmed from concrete awareness and consciousness raising and act upon it. This view also reflects to Paulo Freire's work on Pedagogy of the Oppressed, that conscientization or awareness is an important part of the intervention in community organizing work to mobilize towards achieving social transformation (Freire, 1970). Thus, community-based organizations allow people to overcome their powerlessness and develop their capacity to maximize their control over their situation and place their future in their own hands.

Achieving such aims, empowering communities is important. The work of Deepa Narayan in the World Bank is essential for this paper. Narayan argues that "empowerment is the expansion of the freedom of choice and the means to shape people's lives (Narayan, 2002)." He adds that empowerment is the process of enhancing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform these choices into desired actions and outcomes. Measures which both build individual and collective assets and improve the competence and equality of the organizational and institutional context which govern the use of these assets are important aspects.

Consequently, the key elements underlie empowerment includes access to information in which government, non-government organizations, and citizens exercise two-way communication that would allow the people to take advantage of their opportunities and access to basic social services. Another key element is the inclusion and participation which allows people to become co-producers and co-actors in decision making, planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluation to bring about transformation (Narayan, 2002). In the same manner, Hermoso (1994) argues that people's organizations such as informal settlers are primary actors of social change since they appear to be the most affected sectors by the existing social inequity.

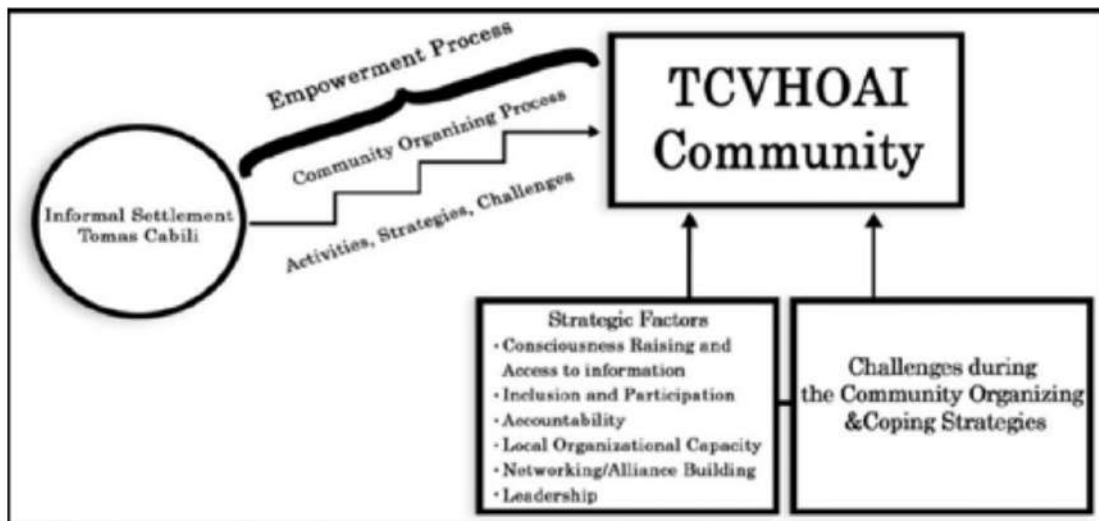
The element of accountability refers to the government officials, non-government personnel, and members of the organization made answerable for their policies and actions which affect the well-being of citizens and other stakeholders (Narayan, 2002). In the Philippine context, the government implements RA 7279, an Act to Provide a Comprehensive and Continuing Urban Development and Housing Program or the Urban Development Housing Act of 1992 (<http://hlurb.gov.ph>). This policy provides a mechanism uplifting the conditions of the homeless citizen and informal settlers in urban

areas and resettlement. It also supports giving the people the available, decent, and affordable cost of housing with basic social services and employment opportunities. The policy allows people to actively participate in the urban development process together with local government units and other supporting agencies.

The last key element of empowerment is the local organizational capacity which means the ability of people to work together, organize themselves and to solve problems of common interest (Narayan, 2002). According to Saul Alinsky (1971), people's organizations facilitate processes whereby people from government, non-government organizations and from the community, build alliances and linkages around a shared interest or concern, collectively identify targets, garner resources, mobilize an action campaign and consequently help realign power within the community. This paper presents that TCVHOAI community has established networks from different agencies and became a beneficiary of a project which was externally funded.

In addition, Steve Dodds argues that community development and grassroots participation offer the key to maintaining or improving individual and social well-being through aligning resource use with the wants and needs of particular communities (Dodds, 1994). Hence, putting in perspective the community organizing process and empowerment with the underlying elements and principles indicate that fundamental human needs satisfaction is related to community development. Based from the United Nations Human Development Report (1990), people set their own goals, develop their own approaches and make their own decisions, human activity and local-problem solving skills are released, and the development is more likely to be self-sustaining.

Thus, using the perspectives mentioned above frame the aim of this paper which is to examine TCVHOAI as a community-based people's organization that underwent the processes of community organizing. This CO processes eventually produced relatively an empowered community with visible improvements in housing ownership, socio-economic conditions, access to basic social services, community participation, and other meaningful impacts in the lives of the people in the community. However, I say relatively because the challenges and outcomes of the CO processes in TCVHOAI also warrants investigation as it provides gaps to the existing community organizing and development works.



The diagram shows the community organizing and empowerment processes to TCVHOAI community with its strategic factors, challenges, and coping strategies

While it is important to highlight good practices of community organizing process that empowers community, such as the TCVHOAI's case, this paper unpacks community organizing not just a framework but also as a practice. As I have mentioned, the present socio-political context is characterized by liberal democracy where powers are decentralized to local governments (Cline, 1999). In the era of neoliberalism, applying community organizing is essential to empower communities to address developmental needs of the marginalized sectors. Robert Fisher and Eric Shragge debate that community organizing practice casts out social action which embodies struggle for social change through organizing people to pressure government and private agencies (Fisher and Shragge, 2000: 1-2). This paper limits the use conflict perspectives to characterize community organizing as a means to challenge inequalities, but rather as a tool that brings shared interests of people to address the well-being of the entire community.

EMPOWERED COMMUNITY ENGAGED IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF TCVHOAI

The people of Tomas Cabili Village Homeowners Association Incorporated (TCVHOAI) lived in an informal settlement situated in a coastal community and in between two oil depots. The levels of vulnerability include natural hazards and the lack of legal protection. The said vulnerabilities confront the residents to organize themselves. The TCVHOAI was able to champion relative improvements to the lives of its members by winning a

housing resettlement program through the framework of a community organizing process, empowerment, and community development. Particularly, this paper takes into account the TCVHOAI and the processes and outcomes it underwent through community organizing. In the modernized or globalized world, community organizing process is still significant in making people's lives more meaningful and transformation of societies.

Background of the Case Study

The beginnings of TCVHOAI can be traced from the 1970s community organization with the sawmill located in Barangay Tomas Cabili specifically Puroks 10A, 10B and 10C. There was a court order demanding the settlers to vacate the area which prompted the occupants mainly from Purok 10B to form an organization to challenge the eviction order. The eviction order was suspended with the assistance of the city mayor. The group was named Tanglaw which means light; however, it became inactive. In 1986, another eviction notice was served which brought the formation of a new organization which is the Tomas Cabili Urban Poor (TCUP). It was mainly concentrated in Purok 10B but became inactive because of leadership issues. It was in 1992 that the TCUP was revived under the leadership of a resident who lobbied for the acquisition of a relocation site which is now the present TCVHOAI and composed of members from Puroks 10A, 10B, and 10C (Homillano, et al., 2010). A community leader in TCVHOAI shares this narrative:

“Even before TCVHOAI, there was an association created at the previous settlement, but they kept on finding for a relocation area. The late former president was the first to organize this and he was also the community leader. It was on the year 2000 I think that there was a relocation area intended for the informal settlers in Tomas Cabili which I was also a resident. I applied for relocation, but I was rejected since I was working at the National Steel Corporation (NSC) and I was not considered as an urban poor. After the purok president's death due to an accident, he was replaced with a new leader and the association became unstable and inactive. There was no more move to apply for relocation because the order for eviction has never been served.

In 2001 the NSC was closed. I lost my job and now I am a fire truck operator. I was elected to be the Purok 10B president and I became close to the barangay government unit particularly to the late former barangay captain, Cabot. I then reviewed the papers and

status of the purchased land. I checked if it is really intended for relocation since I knew that it was for the informal settlers of Tomas Cabili. I managed to work on the process and the barangay captain told me to seek for assistance. I was introduced to a non-government organization (NGO) which was the Hope for Change (HFC).”

In that sense, there were groups formed before which were not formally organized. The order of eviction notice was notably the reason that drove them to form organizations which unfortunately did not succeed.

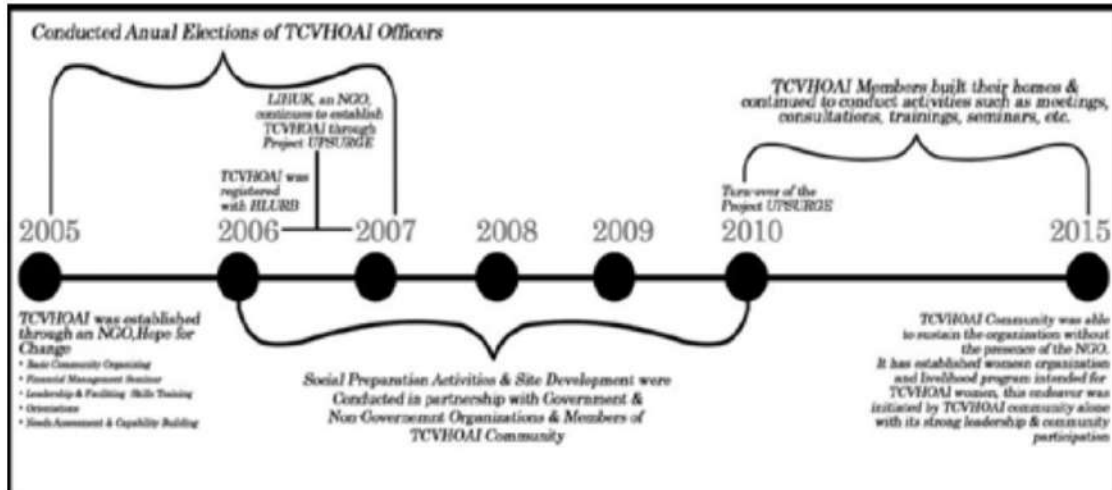
It was in 2005 that the TCVHOAI was formally established and underwent community organization process with the partnerships of government and non-government organizations as well as the residents from the informal settlement in Tomas Cabili. The community needed to organize to prepare for the relocation project.

This study highlights the TCVHOAI experience when it was established in 2005 by the Hope for Change (HFC) which is a local NGO that offered assistance and helped the establishment TCVHOAI and registered with the HLURB (Housing and Land Use Regulation) in 2006. The LIHUK (“Lig-ong Hiniusang Kusog sa Kabus” and translated as “united strength of the urban poor) was a local NGO which focused on urban poor issues in Iligan. It facilitated and introduced TCVHOAI to the Project UPSURGE (Urban partnerships for Sustainable Upliftment, Renewal, Governance, and Empowerment) which was funded by a grant to PHILSSA (Partnership of Philippine Support Service Agencies, Inc.) under the Japan Social Development Fund (JSDF). This was financed by Government of Japan administered by The World Bank.

Since the establishment of TCVHOAI, community capability building and organizing was conducted. After the project turnover, the community was able to sustain their organization on their own and they initiated livelihood projects and organized women and built alliances with the local government particularly in addressing the access to basic social services. The projects and programs in TCVHOAI were initiated independently, without the presence of NGO, through effective leadership and active participation of the members. A former LIHUK officer and community organizer commented that “we are still here because we are part of the monitoring but for now, we trust the organization because they already know what to do just like creating a “talipapa” livelihood project for women. It means they have the capacity”.

In this sense, the empowerment process of the TCVHOAI community is also a work in progress. Having built their homes already indicates empowerment but other dimensions still need to be put in place concretely. This can be achieved through engaging into community development.

The figure below shows the timeline from 2005 during the establishment of TCVHOAI until the conduct of this research in which the empowerment process is still in progress.



The time frame of the establishment of TCVHOAI and its community organizing processes

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study examines TCVHOAI as a community-based people’s organizationable to make visible and substantive improvements in the lives of its members as informal settlers living in a vulnerable location to becoming homeowners in a better location. This study inquires the experiences, processes, and strategies TCVHOAI have undergone in community organizing. Specifically, this paper aims to 1) examine the residents’ experiences on community organizing processes and outcomes in TCVHOAI, and 2) analyze the strategic factors of empowerment in TCVHOAI.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a qualitative research utilizing a case study research design. Graziano and Raulin (1993: 116) state that case studies have been used to study subjective processes in the community and most often it is carried out with one subject at a time, usually in an interactive face-to-face situation. This study collects detailed information through variety of data-

collection methods particularly interview guide questions and non-participant observation.

The TCVHOAI development site is a multi-sectoral endeavor which signifies that communities and both public and private entities can effectively address the problems of informal settlers in the cities. This paper includes thirteen (13) interlocutors representing the government and non-government organizations, community leaders, and members of TCVHOAI community. My interlocutors possess primary knowledge and experience during the TCVHOAI organizing process. They were selected through purposive sampling which, according to (Bailey, 1987:94), the researcher does not necessarily have a quota to fill from within various strata, but he or she just picks on the basis of convenience.

Furthermore, I employ multiple approaches in generating primary data, using qualitative approach. I utilize in-depth interviews aided with a structured interview guide to generate qualitative and descriptive information on the social and political process the TCVHOAI had gone through. The participants of the interviews include community leaders and members, community organizers and government officials. The interview guide consists of open-ended questions to generate descriptive responses and, more often than not, required the respondents to express extemporaneous statements on a topic which he or she may not have thought before (Bailey, 1987). The interviews were conducted in Biasaya (respondents' language) transcribed and translated to English language. The responses are classified and analyzed according to its themes. This thematic approach captures the perspectives of the key informants, and important aspects and dimensions of the resettlement program. In so doing, the names of the participants are anonymized in observance to research ethics. All the results of the data were interpreted through highlighting the major findings supported by the existing literature and theories applicable to this study.

Empowerment Processes: Activities and Strategic Factors

Several experiences of the key informants during the resettlement process are identified in this paper based from Narayan's (2002) suggested factors of empowerment processes. These experiences are drawn from their involvement in various activities and programs in community organizing process. I argue that these activities and strategies are necessary for the organization to raise awareness in terms of their other needs aside from owning a home. Capacitating community members through their involvement in the organizing process provides skills and practical knowledge to

advancing their living conditions. In the succeeding part of this paper, I present specific results of the processes underwent by TCVHOAI community.

Social Investigation and the Need for Resettlement

The need to TCVHOAI members from their previous settlement is grounded in two primary reasons: 1) the land was privately owned that confronts eviction 2) a coastal community in between two huge oil depots vulnerable to disasters. “Most of those households and families who are resettled are informal settlers and face threat of demolition in a privately owned land”, shared by an informant. This particular issue calls for resettlement since the community members lack legal claims of the land where their home is built. According to a local public official, “they must be resettled since they are situated in a danger zone. But since they were threatened for eviction, they are a priority for resettlement.” In this sense, their vulnerabilities include legal issue and natural hazards. Many informal settler families, according to the Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council of the Philippines (NISUS, 2014) live in chronic urban poverty, confronted by physical, economic, social, legal, and environmental risks on a day-to-day basis. They have limited or no access to security of land tenure, capital, social networks, environmental safety, and legal security.

The desire for relocation ignited the members especially the community leaders to seek help from government and non-government organizations. The TCVHOAI asked assistance from a local NGO, the Hope for Change (HFC). The former president and community organizer of HFC who is one of our key informants, says that some active members of the community asked for help to avail of government programs for housing, she says, “somebody from the community went to the office in Hope for Change and asked assistance on how to avail of the government programs for home lots. I was the president of the HFC, and we addressed the problem”.

When the formal notice of eviction was served from the court, the members of the community initially organized themselves to oppose the notice and demanded a place for relocation. An officer of TCVHOAI narrates that, “because of the eviction order, we had to organize to oppose the demolition. We should be given a lot”.

Consciousness Raising and Access to Information

The local government, and non-government organizations, and the community members work collectively to address the resettlement issue. Prior to the final formation of TCVHOAI, the HFC conducted series of

activities and trainings to inform community members the necessary requirements for resettlement. According to my research informants, needs assessment and capacity building were conducted at the community level. The said activities discussed the other needs of the community such as socio-economic, water system, and the technical aspects of the relocation. A member of TCVHOAI community shares that, “before the relocation, we have conducted needs assessment to know the other needs of the community, may it be economic, and the water system. That is why before organized, we had to capacitate ourselves as members of the association and to know about the organization through capacity building. We also conducted finance management, basic community organizing, leadership and facilitating skills, and raising awareness to be formally organized”. I argue that these activities create meaningful impacts to TCVHOAI leaders and members in terms of consciousness and awareness about the aspects of an empowered community. Several literatures in community organizing believes these are essential in building community development. In Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), he stressed that conscientization or awareness is an important intervention in community organizing work to mobilize the community through strategies and activities towards achieving social transformation. One informant shares that CO preparations such as consciousness raising “capacitates the people and informed them what they should do, then they will be educated and empowered, and eventually they could work on their own”. Anicia Sayos (1998) suggested that capacity building and needs assessment activities are necessary to be conducted in an organization in its goals towards achieving development programs.

Inclusion, Participation, and Accountability

Another strategic factor that made TCVHOAI successful in acquiring the relocation site is the inclusion and participation of members during the organizing and decision-making process. The members of the community participated general assemblies and meetings to conduct consultations. These actions allowed the members to express their concerns and get involved in planning. One informant narrates that community organizers requested their participation. He stated, “they urged us before that we need to know and learn because it is us who will benefit from it”. The inclusion of the TCVHOAI members in consultation and planning can develop sense of ownership for their community.

This also implies that participation is necessary for the members to learn informant matters about TCVHOAI as people’s organization. It benefits not just to the members but to the entire organization. The inclusion and

participation allow people to become co-producers and co-actors in decision making, planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluation to bring about transformation (Narayan, 2002).

This leads me to my next point that during the organizing process of TCVHOAI, the participation of the members and leaders of the organization, government, and non-government personnel, provides significant clarity of the role each one performs to win the resettlement project. The role of the local government in facilitating the purchase of the land for relocation is an example to this claim. The barangay captain (or village chief) shares that, “in the barangay level, facilitating the purchasing of lot for the informal settlers in coordination with the city government is our primary role”. With that being said, stakeholders as co-actors and co-producers to bringing community transformation can develop sense of accountability. Putting this forward into the discussion, accountability pertains to the members’ ability to manage the organization as their own, and other stakeholders’ (NGO and government) capacity to perform and accomplish their roles. I argue that this aspect is essential in developing a community that is empowered, and an organization that upholds accountability. To echo the work of Narayan (2002), this paper suggests that the level of accountability creates impact to community and stakeholders.

And lastly, the study of Sayos (1998) on “Kaantabay sa Kauswagan: (Partners in Development) Mass Housing Strategy in Naga City, one of the strategies in implementing urban informal settlement programs include government and people are working together. With this, the implementation of programs to provide the housing needs of the urban poor communities have been achieved.

Local Organizational Capacity

Upon the establishment of TCVHOAI, it was linked by HFC to UN-Habitat (United Nations Human Settlement Program). The UN Habitat extends support through capacity building to the community. This is significant in securing the HLURB registration of TCVHOAI, in partnership with the local government and NGO. To quote one member of TCVHOAI, “the UN Habitat supported our project; they provided us seed money for capacity building. They did not just provide us money to purchase land, instead, they assisted our loan at the bank”. Unfortunately, the project of UN Habitat in TCVHOAI did not succeed as planned. When they facilitated the loan in DBP, the TCVHOAI president shares that,

“We went to DBP Manila, but we were forwarded to the Cagayan and eventually to Iligan branches. We prepared the requirements based

on the consultation and meetings together with the members, and with the NGO. We were informed of the 3% per annum interest which we thought was affordable. We knew that the bank wanted to collect the initial payment of 10% of the entire loan. We were also told to pay 2900 Php monthly or otherwise the bank will confiscate the house and lot. We called for a general assembly and inform the members about the situation because we knew that at the end, these people cannot pay for the amortization. Instead of having their own house and lot, they will end up nothing. We initiated a signature campaign informing the Hope for Change that we cannot be able to pay for the loan).

In this case, the leaders played an important role in facilitating the steps in advancing the interests of the community by looking at the capability of the members and understanding their future as important concerns of the organization. However, there was a miscommunication about the technical aspect particularly in terms of the housing resettlement load. The aspiration of acquiring their own house might result to nothing if people cannot be able to pay the charges. This prompted the community leaders to withdraw with the UN Habitat. In organizing process, problems like this are inevitable. Looking at this issue in the context of TCVHOAI, leadership seems to one good factor. In the community level, informing the members of irregularities about the process signifies organizational capacity. The secretary of TCVHOAI adds, “there were hidden charges which were not part of the minutes of our meetings and it is expensive and a disadvantage to our members that is why we decided to withdraw. It was difficult to leave with the meaningful partnership with the NGO and we have spent a lot of resources, time, money, and effort. The UN Habitat went to see us, and we talked about the issue and told them that we cannot do anything about it because it was the people who decide”. In this case, consultation was applied. I want to emphasize that it takes leadership to initiate decision in the middle of the process. Nurdan Ozaralli (2015) links empowering leaders to creativity. He pointed out that leaders are catalysts that manage and create success in the organization wherein they appeal to the members’ higher-level needs and the resulting decisions are significant sources for a meaningful organization.

It was in 2006 that another NGO, LIHUK came into the scenario and took over HFC in organizing TCVHOAI and assisted in the acquisition of a housing resettlement project. The former official of LIHUK organization had built a partnership with the Housing and Resettlement Office (HRO) because of their previous housing project. The LIHUK adds,

“I told the HRO head that we have project and looking for an area. I did not know that HFC organized TCVHOAI. We presented the project to the HRO and waited who wanted to bid. I told the HRO at the local housing board to call for those who wanted to have relocation project because there are a lot of relocation sites in the city which do not have development. They just provided the land scheme without development like drainage, concrete roads, because prior to relocation, basic services should have been in place as part of the LGU counterpart.”

The HFC has indeed contribute to the initial development of TCVHOAI including HLURB registration as the major requirement to acquire land title. However, due to unfortunate circumstances, the partnership never succeeds. Through the help of LIHUK, the association applied for another resettlement grant under UPSURGE, funded by the World Bank. Various associations applied for the said grant including TCVHOAI. The president of the association shares, “there was a funding from LIHUK in partnership with HRO, we applied competing other but since we have already the requirements (HLURB registration), the project was granted to us. We revive the association; we go through other processes such as seminars and capacity building.”

The success of TCVHOAI in acquiring the new resettlement project and besting five (5) other associations that applied for the draws from its previous organizing processes. It turns out that the association is well-organized and capacitated, aside from the urgency to resettle a community that is vulnerable to hazards. The head of the Human Resettlement Office affirms this claim, he states that, “the HLURB registration is the requirement for getting the land title, and they have to be organized as homeowner’s association. They were prioritized because of their location and the threat of eviction.”

This paper puts forward the argument that the strategic factors of empowerment are prerequisites for community development. This includes activities and strategies conducted during the CO process leadership trainings, consultations and trainings, their experiences during the community organizing process, challenges and coping strategies, and the stakeholders’ participation. In the case of TCVHOAI, these become the distinguishing qualities of the association. Getting involved the people from the start of the process capacitates them the necessary skills, knowledge, and experience to form a relatively better association. In the study of Bago, Buctuan, and Ursua, (2005) about the living conditions of a Gawad Kalinga (GK) settlement Iligan City, they argued that applying a more holistic

approach in organizing people such as needs assessment in partnership with the government sector to fully identify the issues confronting informal settlers are necessary. In addition, effective leadership essentialize the capacity of the organization. It was instrumental for TCVHOAI in forging partnership with different agencies. These factors serve as the strong foundation of the organizations especially on meeting the consensus of the different parties from the community organizers, government officials and the community members in implementing the policies of the association.

Networking and Building Alliances

The strong and remarkable participation of the stakeholders during the organizing process of TCVHOAI is also noteworthy. The networking and the building of alliances enable the TCVHOAI to access external funding for site development. The government and non-government organizations and the community members have meaningfully established their partnership in the process of transforming better conditions of TCVHOAI community and its members.

Most of my interlocutors stated that sharing of resources, expertise and responsibilities made TCVHOAI successful especially in winning the resettlement program. They recounted how important it was to have partnerships with other institutions because the community's problem cannot be solved by the members alone. One community member shares, "it can never happen without the participation of other partners. It is very impossible to solve the problem in a community without partners." This means that the insufficiency of one agency can be complimented by another agency especially in terms of resources. Another community member recalls that, "it [network] is truly relevant because the other agency can complement to the insufficiency of other agencies. Not all agencies have complete resources. It is impossible for an agency to say that everything is doable". Sugi Ruhayu and colleagues accounts the meaningful involvement of different stakeholders from government non-government agencies, academe, and communities in developing a community-based tourism in Indonesia (Ruhayu et. Al, 2015). It also shows how important are the partnership of organizations to create meaningful outcomes for the community. As argued by Honculada (1984), the established partnerships are significant contributions to effective programs and projects in the communities.

In view the abovementioned accounts, a community organizing expert Saul Alinsky (1971), argues that people's organizations facilitates process whereby people coming together around a shared interest or concern, could

collectively identify targets, garner resources, mobilize an action campaign, and consequently help realign power within the community.

The Significance of TCVHOAI Experiences, Challenges, and Coping Strategies

In the empowering process, community organizing as a tool towards community development is vital. Taking the accounts from my interviews with TCVHOAI members, government and no-government personnel, community organizing in TCVHOAI has contributed significantly to the success of the community. My research participants mentioned that community organizing mobilizes people and is a way to empower them. In building development programs, community-driven processes and activities is the key to success. Furthermore, community organizing capacitates the people, for example, through the conduct of several meetings of the association and the practice of collecting monthly dues to support for capability building activities. To put an emphasis, organizing people is a prerequisite to a community-driven project.

One of the significant contributions of the community organizing process is to provide capacity and information to people about their roles in the organization, especially in sustaining their community and building their homes. One member of TCVHOAI narrates, “with our own efforts, we were able to build our house here. The moment that we acquire the land, you have the freedom to build your house, and improve it. This is our situation now”. This narrative reflects to the transformation of their living conditions before as informal settlers. The threat of eviction and disaster risks are no longer a cause of uncertainty for the members. Although, they still need to pay at least a small amount as their counterparts. Based from their narratives, I found out that they develop the sense of ownership and they no longer be labeled as ‘squatters’ or informal settlers. One member states that, ‘though we are still in the process of improving our house, we know that this ours already. We will no longer be evicted. We are also paying small amount and we can no longer be tagged as squatters’. In this sense, the TCVHOAI members are taking of the advantage the organization, the processes and outcomes afforded to them. This indicates the significance of their participation in the organizing process. In addition, the work of Chester Arcilla is important in this context, in making socialized housing programs sustainable and affordable, urban poor families must be given space to raise their concerns and participate in decision-making processes (Arcilla, 2019).

With that, the elements that underlie empowerment is visible in TCVHOAI community. As Deepa Narayan (2002) puts it, the elements of

empowerment such as access to information in which government, non-government organizations, and citizens exercise the two-way information, allow the people to take advantage of their opportunities and access to basic social services. In my observation from the community, the whole organizing process encourages people to actively participate in the activities, express their concerns, and to put in place the plans of the associations.

However, their entire participation to the whole organizing process also constitute difficulties. In fact, the TCVHOAI's previous organizing experiences with HFC and UN Habitat are the leading causes of their apprehensions and doubts. When the LIHUK organization took over the process of relocation, the members find ambiguity of the outcome. A community organizer shares, "they [members of TCVHOAI] are having second thoughts in believing in us because most of the members who joined are hesitant. Because it might still be the same from the past that the entire plans did not succeed. That is why when the LIHUK entered there were suspicions". In the organizing process, it is inevitable to encounter challenges. Empowering communities means also confronting the members' opposing ideas and winning their trust. To put these challenges into perspective, community organizers needed to be patient. Together with the community leaders and government officials, based from their experience, they were persistent in motivating members to actively participate in the process. They made sure to properly inform the issues and set the common goal. The TCVHOAI members witnessed this claim. According to one of the informants, "the officers and NGOs are so determined to take action, they strengthened our organizations, convinced us to participate and take the process."

In TCVHOAI, these strategies are useful in building people's trust, to take action in transforming their lives and community for the better. Primarily for this case is to live in a formal settlement and build their homes without the risks of disasters and issues of illegal occupancy. Thus, motivating people is the key to empower the communities.

Conclusion

In this article, I examined the TCVHOAI as a community-based people's organization to make visible and substantive improvements in the lives of its members as informal settlers living in a vulnerable location to becoming homeowners in a better location. This paper validates the use of community organizing as a tool to empower communities. By using empowerment perspectives, this paper supports Deepa Narayan's argument that empowerment is the expansion of the freedom of choice and the means to

shape people's lives (Narayan, 2002). This further argues that the organizing processes exemplified in TCVHOAI such as access to information, inclusion and participation, leadership, network building, multi-stakeholders' partnership are essential factors to produce an empowered community. These factors provide space for the people to become co-producers and co-actors in decision making, planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluation to bring community transformation. I argue that when people work together and share responsibilities, they can develop sense of accountability which is essential in empowered communities.

This paper also supports the argument of Saul Alinsky (1971), that people's organizations facilitates process whereby people coming together around a shared interest or concern, could collectively identify targets, garner resources, mobilize an action campaign, and consequently help realign power within the community. Thus, I emphasize that organizing people is a prerequisite to a community-driven project and to establish grounded motivations, like in the case of TCVHOAI, people will no longer be labeled as 'squatters' or informal settlers. They attained sense of dignity as homeowners without the threat of eviction. On the other hand, I also argue that TCVHOAI is a work in progress, which means, building their own homes indicates empowerment but other dimensions of social transformation remain to be taken into consideration as the society progresses.

Lastly, TCVHOAI is a manifestation of an empowered community engaged in community development. In the present socio-political context characterized with neoliberal policies, community organizing is essential to empower communities to address developmental needs of the marginalized sectors. I argue that community organizing is an important tool to bring the shared interests of people such as looking after the well-being of their entire community.

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