

# **Multi Stake Holder Dialogue: The Case of the R10 Community in Navotas**

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## **1. Introduction**

This case study concerns the engagement of the Community Organizing of the Philippine Enterprise (COPE) in dealing with the urban poor housing issues of eviction and relocation facing informal communities along Road 10 (R10) in the City of Navotas. The widening of Road 10 is a project being undertaken by the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) which has attempted to facilitate the eviction process by “compensating” informal settlers who “volunteer” for demolition. With an estimated 1,500 families targeted by eviction because of this road widening, COPE has helped organize Peoples’ Organizations (POs) among these communities to combat the threat of demolition.

The case study shows these R10 communities confronting the problem of eviction and demolition as they lobby for a decent and dignified city relocation. As these communities confront various issues and emergency situations in their lives, the need to be “united” all the more becomes important. Constructive Engagement thus becomes an important strategy in facing the many challenges and complexities in dealing with various stakeholders.

From the case study emerges two issues: 1) the issue of jurisdiction between national and local governments concerning the urban poor; and 2) the crucial role of education and “rights awareness” among leaders and members of these informal communities.

## **2. Background and Socio Economic Profile of R10 Community**

The R10 Community derives its name from Road 10, the national highway stretching from the ports (also called piers) of Manila to the mouth of the Malabon River. Road 10 cuts through the city of Navotas, which is the smallest among Metro Manila Cities in terms of land area, but its most densely populated. According to a 2007 Census<sup>1</sup>, Navotas registered a total population of 245,344 fit into an area of 10.7 square kilometers (22,929 persons per sq km). Road 10 passes through two of the city’s most populous barangays: Barangay North Bay Boulevard North (NBBN) and Barangay North Bay Boulevard South (NBBS). Since these barangays run parallel the Manila Bay coastline leading to the Navotas Fishport Complex, considered the biggest fish market in Southeast Asia, the area presents a lot of economic opportunities. This explains the large population of NBBS and NBBN and the large number of informal settlers, among whom are members of the R10 community. To facilitate travel and the transportation of fish products as far north as Bataan, the DPWH had recently undertaken a road-widening project in the area. This has affected and threatened (with eviction) an estimated 6000 families of NBBS and NBBN in which the R10 community is located.

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<sup>1</sup> Census conducted by the National Statistic Coordination Board (NSCB) and information furnished at their website (<http://www.nscb.gov.ph/factsheet/pdf08/FS-200805-PP2-01.asp>)

The R10 community is actually deemed the R10 alliance consisting of Peoples Organizations (POs) based in the area sandwiched between Circumferential Road 3 (C3) and Lapu Lapu Avenue, fronting the Navotas Fishport Complex. The PO members of this alliance are as follows: Samahang Pinagbuklod sa Pagkakaisa (SAPIPA), Samahan ng mga Residente sa R10 (SRR) and Buklod Pag-asa ng Pamayanan ng Navotas (BPPN). They represent an estimated 1,500 families being convinced by the DPWH to “volunteer” the demolition of their homes to make way for the R10 road widening project. An estimated total population of 7,500<sup>2</sup> thus comprise the R10 community. The typical R10 average joint family size is between 5-10 members.

The economic activities of R10 families revolve around the Fish Port area, which is under national government jurisdiction. Most income earners from the R10 families have jobs associated with the Fish Port. They work either as informal vendors, fish sellers, pedicab drivers, junk shop, and fish carriers. Out of these sources of living, an estimated income ranging from between P4,000.00 – P12,000.00 per month is earned by R10 family income earners. Majority of the household income earners are women. The average daily wage of respondents is only P55.17/day. If the poverty line is placed at \$1/day (P50/day or P1,500/month), the average monthly income (P1,655.17/month) is barely above that of the poverty line. Still, according to members of the R10 community, despite the absence of income, food has been most readily available in the area, in terms of fish and fish products.

Through the years, with the mushrooming of informal communities near the Navotas Fishport area, there has been an informal subdividing of lots among informal settlers. Being situated near the Fishport Area, which is under National Government jurisdiction, the land on which the R10 community is located is being claimed as national government property by the DPWH. R10 residents have argued, however that the land on which their houses are built is owned by local government, and it is the city government of Navotas which has jurisdiction over them. The situation has led to a dispute among the parties involved. This insecurity of land tenure has also resulted in houses being built shabbily, but with materials ranging from scrap to concrete. Although majority of the houses in the R10 community have only one floor, some have been built with two floors.

Perhaps because of the eviction threat which has loomed over the R10 community for several years now, habitat conditions in the locality have worsened through the years. The community has a high degree of congestion, with houses being built in close proximity to each other. There is also no sewerage system in the area with respondents jokingly referring to their system as “flying saucer”<sup>3</sup>. Solid waste management has also been neglected since the DPWH has purposely left drainage systems unfixed. What used to be a concrete basketball court has been referred to as the community swimming pool, because of the stagnant water which has accumulated over it<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> As furnished by the local Barangays of NBBN and NBBS; each household represents about a family of five (5) individuals

<sup>3</sup> This is in reference to people’s excrement being wrapped in newspaper and plastic, and being thrown like “flying saucers” towards the R10 main road.

<sup>4</sup> Dirty water (from laundry and hygiene) drains towards the basketball court and the situation is made worse by rain and uncollected garbage.

### **3. Challenges, Problems and Aspirations of the R10 Navotas Community before COPE**

Overpopulation, poverty and insecurity of land tenure were the main challenges and problems facing the R10 families before COPE intervened in their community. About an estimated 1,500 families of the R10 were about to be displaced because their houses were literally in the way of a road widening project conducted by the DPWH on Road 10. When the communities approached their local barangays for help, they were given vague answers. This was because local government deemed the land the families were living in as under the national jurisdiction of government. When residents argued that they were paying barangay taxes and were registered voters in the area, local government officials continued to remain non-committal to their cause. As such, the R10 communities thought they had no choice and were resigned to be demolished. The constant threat of demolition and a lack of awareness of their rights, led to some families “volunteering” to demolish their homes (after DPWH gave them financial compensation, amounting to about P15,000.00).

Aside from being a poor community, the R10 community is also notorious for having a high incidence of crime in the area, the most serious of which is the proliferation of drugs. Because of this, the R10 community has had a notorious reputation of being a haven of criminals, and taxi drivers are hesitant to bring passengers to the area, especially at night. The R10 community also experiences crowding and overpopulation. This overpopulation has resulted in compounding the problem concerning access to basic services such as sanitation, water and electricity.

The R10 community drew the attention of COPE back in 2001 when after the government enforced an eviction notice on the urban poor communities affected by the DPWH R10 road widening project. Government personnel from the DPWH forcibly and violently evicted 913 families amidst negotiations for adequate relocation. Only 100 families were given relocation, the rest were offered amounts ranging from P 5,000 to 15,000.

The communities at that time were not aware of their rights and were not aware of what was stated in the law embodied in the Urban Development Housing Act (UDHA). COPE immediately focused on its anti eviction work by making the POs in the R10 alliance (SAPIPA, SRR and BPPN) aware of the law. COPE started working with leaders on the community and training them to be more assertive of their rights. Most of these leaders turned out to be women. To respond to the immediate eviction threat, COPE even deployed all its Manila community organizers for three months in the R10 communities. COPE accompanied communities in meeting local and national government officials. COPE was able to intervene and act as mediator between key players involved in the eviction issue. As a result, demolitions were indefinitely stopped; and both local and national government started to hear side of the urban poor.

COPE’s anti eviction also consisted in making the people be aware of their housing rights. This led to the communities gaining a voice in the process. COPE helped establish the R10 alliance so as to continually pressure and force the DPWH to negotiate with them. This led

to indefinite suspension of demolitions on the part of the DPWH. Thus, as of July 2009, no forced evictions have occurred even if DPWH continues to negotiate with individual families in accepting its financial offer which was recently raised to P21,000. As a result, more than 200 families opted to accept the money offered in lieu of their relocation rights.

#### **4. Achievements and Constraints**

A commendable achievement by COPE has been that to stop demolitions indefinitely by the DPWH. When COPE began to educate the R10 community of its rights, within the context of the UDHA, an awareness of the law now made residents stand their ground before the DPWH. They refused now to be “volunteers” willing to have their homes demolished. Because of this new found awareness of the law, although communities are aware that the land they are based on is not theirs, they have agreed to leave the land only with the availability of a decent and dignified relocation site. The R10 community has thus made a stand that it would not agree to a demolition until an adequate and acceptable relocation has been offered its residents.

**COPE has thus forced key players involved in the issue of eviction and relocation to dialogue and seek a solution. This resulted to the forming of the Local Inter Agency Coordinating Council (LIACC) headed by the Mayor of Navotas which was to coordinate the various stakeholders in the eviction and relocation issues and activities, facing the R10 community. Thus, in negotiations with the LIACC, the R10 community has been lobbying for an in city relocation site within Navotas.**

An awareness campaign for basic human rights is thus crucial and foundational. When the urban poor are made aware of their rights as provided for in the Urban Development Housing Act (UDHA) then they are able to be more assertive before the Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA), which had a tendency of simply demolishing shanties without any due process. For COPE and the R10 community, MMDA had not only not acted responsibly, it had violated the law it should have upheld in the first place. The R10 families are the first to admit that they realize the problem and are part of the problem. They realize that they do not have a right to stay in the area and are most willing to be evicted because of a government project such as road widening. However, what the R10 families have been requesting (in which COPE has played a crucial part) is a realization that eviction alone would not solve the problem. Looking at the big picture, R10 families want both national and local government to see their point of view. And according to their perspective, people are not struggling against eviction *per se*, but an eviction without a decent and acceptable relocation.

In city relocation, however poses a challenge. The local government (as represented by the planning office) admits to having such a site but that it is reserving this site for constituents who are living in danger areas in Navotas. The city planning office identified these hazard areas as those situated near the river and esteros. The Navotas city government has been reluctant to deal with the R10 families because the city government sees the R10 community as staying on national government property. In city relocation for the R10 community thus presents a dilemma for the Navotas city government. The city is willing for an in city relocation for the R10 families affected by the road widening project of DPWH, but is reluctant to bear the cost of relocation fully. In a way, the Navotas city government wants the DPWH to share in the cost of relocation.

However, since there has been a lack of coordination between the key players, negotiations have stalled and the R10 families have been caught in between. Thus, the R10 communities have become seemingly pawns in a chess game by key national and local government players.

Thus the dilemma, it seems is how to treat the R10 community. Are R10 residents constituents of the city government? This is supported by claims of the R10 community residence because they pay barangay taxes and are registered with their local barangays. On the other hand, local government is reluctant to delve into national government jurisdiction as claimed by the DPWH and the Fish Port Authority.

In consultation with urban poor communities affected by immediate eviction, COPE has lobbied for an in city relocation rather than out of the city relocation. As articulated by the R10 families themselves, out of the city relocation creates many problems such as higher transportation costs and the loss of livelihood. More often than not, families who have been demolished and moved to out of city relocation sites, find themselves going back to the city and living in the same informal communities they were based in, before. For the R10 families, whose members find their source of livelihood in the area, an in city relocation thus provides the best alternative. Since their sources of income can be found around the R10 area, either as factory workers or informal vendors, the families want to remain in the city. They also feel very much secure in the area since, for them, food is easily accessible. On the other hand, if indeed an in-city relocation is not possible, then for the urban poor families of R10, an ideal relocation site should take transportation costs and livelihood opportunities in consideration.

In the end, awareness of urban poor rights play a crucial part among urban poor communities facing demolition. According to COPE, there are urban poor communities who are literally at a loss during demolition. Such communities do not know the formal processes and proper ways of proceeding concerning demolition. Such communities are not aware of their housing rights as dictated by the UDHA. As such, when COPE makes these communities aware of their rights. The R10 community was thus very much surprised to learn that it had the law on its side. If a community is not organized, then government or other implementing agencies are able to evict communities even at short notice.

COPE's work has thus become daunting because if it has not only been advocating anti eviction work leading to relocation, but it has also to think long term about decent relocation programmes for urban poor communities about to be evicted. Viable in city relocation sites is quite difficult to attain as long as horizontal urban development housing. Sadly, although it is the responsibility of the government to address such an issue, it has been left to NGO's such as COPE to find solutions to this. COPE is very much aware of the capacity/capability problem faced (or not faced) by government. This problem involves addressing housing resources to address housing needs.

In a spirit of dialogue, urban poor communities are able to question government policies which do not take their community perspectives into consideration. In the same manner, government is also able to convince communities of their policies, and the need to implement them. What has been a breakthrough in dialogue is the realization that the urban poor, when presented with several housing options, are able to see government perspectives and procedures

better. This seems not the case when urban poor communities are only presented with a singular option of eviction.

Such a challenge involves imparting this awareness to urban poor communities. Anti eviction work and community organizing thus also involve helping communities become aware of these realities and problems. In becoming aware of the repercussions of such problems, community leaders hopefully are empowered to dialogue with local government. This assumes that communities and local government are able to sit down and open communication channels in order to share each other's perspectives. In sharing various points of view regarding community problems, both government and affected parties are able to come up with viable solutions to difficult problems and challenges.