

PHILIPPINES



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Southville Women Strengthen
Care and Solidarity
to Resist Climate Catastrophe

Philippines: Southville women strengthen care and solidarity to resist climate catastrophe

This country brief is based on the Climate Justice Feminist Participatory Action Research (CJ FPAR) journey of the Southville urban poor women from 2019 to 2021. Kadamay, the largest alliance of Filipino urban poor and a CJ FPAR partner, worked together with the women in Southville, one of the government's housing projects in Rizal province. Through CJ FPAR, the Southville women dissected the impacts of climate crises on their lives. They consolidated their demands and take actions in order to realise feminist climate justice for urban poor women, not only in Southville but also in other corners of the country.



Philippines at a glance

The Philippines is a tropical country located in the cyclone belt and the Pacific Ring of Fire, making it extremely vulnerable to climate-related and geological hazards. On average, it experiences 20 tropical cyclones every year and an almost daily occurrence of seismic shocks. Already precarious, this situation is aggravated by the climate crises that further endangers the lives and livelihoods of the Filipinos, especially the marginalised and underrepresented sectors including women and the urban poor.



By government estimates, more than 17 million out of the Philippines' 108 million population are considered poor. Despite this reality, the Philippine government has consistently implemented neoliberal policies of privatisation, deregulation and trade liberalisation. As a result, Filipinos have been mired with persistent poverty, unemployment, lack of social



The national budget has seen a remarkable and consistent decrease in social services, particularly on housing along with disaster risk reduction and management funds. Government spending on housing has gone down from USD 290 million in 2017 to USD 60 million in 2019², while announcing that it intends to privatise future housing projects.



Resources for reducing and managing climate risks were decreased by USD 80 million (from USD 398 million in 2019 to USD 318 million in 2020³) despite scientific evidence that climate change is contributing to stronger tropical cyclones.⁴

Climate crises have contributed to the worsening socio-economic inequalities and access to adequate food, clean water and other resources. In urban poor communities, the impacts of natural disasters are magnified due to poverty and the lack of social protection.

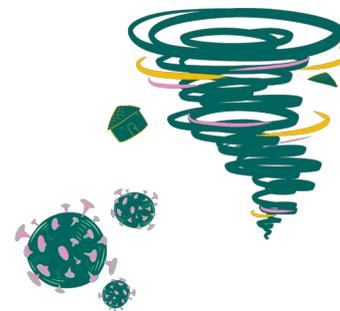
¹IBON Foundation (2017). Budget cuts will worsen the shelter problem—IBON. Retrieved from <https://www.ibon.org/budget-cuts-will-worsen-shelter-problem-ibon/>

²Department of Budget and Management (2019), 2019 People's Budget. Retrieved from <https://www.dbm.gov.ph/images/pdf/files/2019-Peoples-Budget.pdf>

³IBON Foundation (2020). Lower disaster budget shows lack of govt priority. Retrieved from <https://www.ibon.org/lower-disaster-budget-shows-lack-of-govt-priority/>

⁴Holden, William & Marshall, Shawn. (2018). Climate Change and Typhoons in the Philippines: Extreme Weather Events in the Anthropocene. Integrating Disaster Science and Management. Retrieved from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/B9780128120569000245>

In November 2020 for example, many urban poor communities experienced the onslaught of Typhoon Vamco (Ulysses) during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Entire towns and villages were submerged in water and mud claiming the lives of many residents, destroying homes and other properties. Disasters are also followed by a rise in the cost of basic goods, which further affect the already tight and often non-existent budget of families, making recovery and adaptation from disasters extremely difficult.



Overview of the Philippines' Nationally Determined Contribution⁵

MITIGATION



Reduction of Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions by a projected **75% of 72.29%** is conditional for the sectors of agriculture, wastes industry, transport and energy;



Continue exploration of the benefits of market and non-market mechanisms under Article 6 of the Paris Agreement;

MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION

Strengthen the resilience and adaptive capacity of the country through enhanced access to climate finance, technology development and transfer, and capacity building;

ADAPTATION

National Climate Change Action Plan 2011 - 2028 established the seven thematic areas of government action to address climate change, namely



food security, water sufficiency, ecological and environmental stability, human security, climate-smart industries and services, sustainable energy, and knowledge and capacity development;



Undertake adaptation measures across but not limited to, the sectors of agriculture, forestry, coastal and marine ecosystems and biodiversity, health and human security, to preempt, reduce and address residual loss and damage;



pursue forest protection, forest restoration and reforestation, and access to results-based finance in forest conservation.

Urban poor women and the NDC

The Philippines submitted its updated NDC in April 2021 in accordance with its commitments to the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. The NDC is supposed to be aligned with national policies and strategies towards low-carbon development, economic development and industrialisation goals. Among the national laws and policies mentioned in the NDC are the Climate Change Act of 2009, National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM) Law

⁵ Philippines Nationally Determined Contribution (2021). Retrieved from <https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/ndcstaging/PublishedDocuments/Philippines%20First/Philippines%20-%20NDC.pdf>

of 2010, National Framework Strategy on Climate Change (NFSCC) in 2010 and the Philippines' National Climate Change Action Plan (NCCAP). Consequently, a number of these laws and plans/policies mention references to gender and women's human rights, with some even explicitly mentioning in its aims to promote the principles of gender inclusivity and equality, such as in the national DRRM law.

On the ground, the women testify that the impact of the NDC are yet to be felt. CJ FPAR journey allowed the urban poor women of Southville to identify key issues of their community with regard to climate change, such as weak disaster response measures, expensive transportation, lack of job opportunities and other social services such as health services.

Furthermore, although there is much mention of gender equality and women's human rights in the country's laws and policies with regard to climate change mitigation and adaptation, and while there is also some increase in women's participation in Disaster Risk Reduction and Mitigation (DRRM) planning and operations, a systematic assessment on its quality and impact is yet to be seen.

The country also continues to implement laws that run counter to its commitments to the NDC. An example of this is the Philippine Mining Act of 1995 that has allowed the destruction of mountains for mining operations, causing disasters such as flash floods and landslides.



Southville woman doing her daily house chores.

Southville urban poor women's realities amid the climate catastrophe

As a feudal and patriarchal society deeply rooted in colonialism and unbridled neoliberalism, Filipino women, especially in urban poor communities are often relegated to domestic work.

This is true for many women in Southville, which serves as one of the relocation sites of the urban poor from the National Capital Region whose homes were demolished to give way for private development projects.

Coupled with the lack of job opportunities in the country, many Southville women stay at home to care for their children while doing part-time, informal and underpaid care work such as taking on laundry, household cleaning and selling food in their localities to augment the family income.

The story of Rosie

Rosie is the President of the Montalban Relocatee Alliance, a local organisation of urban poor relocatees that seeks to address the problems they face in their relocation sites. Her first experience of a flood was in 2004, a year after her family was forcibly relocated by the Government.

She recalls, "The first time I experienced flood was a year after we experienced the forced relocation. No one from the barangay alerted us. Everything was happening so fast, when my sister woke me the water was just above our ankles. By the time we opened the door to leave with my children, it was above our knees. And when we arrived at the main road it was already at chest level. I don't know how to swim, so we had no choice but to return to our house and climb to the roof."

This was just the first of many floods that she, her family and her neighbours would face. One of her worst experiences was in 2009, during Typhoon Ketsana, known locally as Typhoon Ondoy.



In the morning of September 26, 2009, Rosie and her friend went out to check the Marikina River and noticed that water seemed 'angry'. That's when they realised that the river was overflowing quickly. The only thing she could do was run back to her house while shouting to her neighbours that the flood was coming. There was no time to evacuate. Rosie woke all of her six children and climbed up to the roof again before the water reached the roof. She thought she would lose her eldest child that day, "my daughter was having an asthma attack and it came to a point that it was very difficult for her to move. She was already saying 'it's okay Ma, you can go ahead and crawl to safety, it's okay to leave me here.' I had to order my second child to take care of her siblings and bring them to a safer place."

When the rain finally stopped and the flood went down by nighttime, they had no food and water. She demonstrated how she collected rainwater with her hands to give it to her youngest who was crying out for milk.

Rosie's case is one among so many other unheard stories of Southville women. During natural disasters, it is often the responsibility of mothers to ensure the safety of children and other family members and whatever small possessions they may have. Women are left at home, because the husband and other male members of the household are often away and stay near the workplace in order to save on transportation costs.

Surviving climate induced disasters such as typhoons, storms and floods is not the end of their concerns. As the floodwaters subsided, they looked for ways and means to survive in the face of limited government support.

Evacuation areas during disasters are also a concern for women. Already cramped with many families whose houses have been submerged in flood, there are no dedicated spaces for women, such as breastfeeding stations. Child-friendly spaces to help children cope and process their experiences with floods through psychosocial intervention are also lacking.

Urban poor women taking action

Through their FPAR journey, the Southville women conducted a "Konsultahang Bayan" or community consultation which enabled them to know the current issues and concerns of their community. The women initiated these consultations and were able to collectively come to an understanding of the root causes of their problems, and this contributed to a high level of consolidation in the community.

When disasters strike, urban poor women leaders initiate community kitchens. Volunteers from the whole community offered support in preparing and distributing food. And because they are themselves survivors of these calamities, they are able to respond quickly, helping themselves and other survivors from their community with various support they could collectively afford including hot meals and other food essentials.

The women coordinate with private individuals and organisations to mobilise and distribute relief packages. They also decided to open the local daycare as a temporary evacuation centre for affected families, especially for the community members who could not go back to their homes due to the damages.

“

As long as there is quarrying in the mountains, our river will be brown and will continue to be shallow, and it will cause flooding in our community.

”

- Southville woman

Beyond these emergency responses, the urban poor women organised sign-ons petitioning the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) for immediate relief and cash aid for the victims, such as in the case of Super Typhoon Vamco.

Urban poor women rose above their personal problems and went beyond their immediate households. They knew that collective action is the key for their grievances to be heard and addressed, especially when being poor meant government neglect. Their organisation not only empowered them as women but also as part of the urban poor sector.



Urban poor woman during one of the rallies demanding justice in government program for disaster relief



Urban poor women asserting their rights and demanding government assistance during Covid19 pandemic

What do we want?

The FPAR documented experiences of the Southville women during disasters. It showed there are persistent problems of vulnerability and unpreparedness despite there being laws on disaster response and other related protective measures. Five years after the Philippines drafted and passed its first NDC, changes are yet to be felt by the urban poor women.

The FPAR journey in Southville concluded with the following recommendations:

At the local level, the Philippine government must:

-  Provide a systematic plan for the evacuation, rescue and distribution of relief in urban poor communities;
-  Include urban poor women in disaster risk reduction (DRR) planning for inclusive, gender-responsive and pro-poor policies with regard to disaster response and mitigation;
-  Establish evacuation centres along with gender-responsive facilities, including child-friendly and women-spaces such as breastfeeding stations in every community to ensure that evacuated families have a decent and habitable temporary shelter;
-  Support local and grassroots organisations' initiatives such as community kitchens, daycares and relief operations to support victims and survivors of the increasing climate induced natural disasters;

At the national level, the Philippine government must:

-  Increase the disaster preparedness and adaptive capacity of the urban poor in the face of the increasing climate induced disasters;
-  Provide sufficient and sustainable post-disaster support in order to help affected communities to repair, rebuild and rehabilitate. More than instant noodles and a few kilos of rice that will only be sufficient for a few days, relief should include fair compensation for the loss and damage to properties;
-  Improve the lives and livelihoods of the urban poor through decent work, living wage and access to social protection;
-  Review and repeal anti-environment and anti-peoples policies as part of meeting Philippine commitments to the Paris Climate Agreement. This includes the Philippine Mining Act of 1995, which has allowed the

destruction of mountains and forests, thereby causing flash floods and landslides not just in Southville but also in different parts of the country.

At the international level,

- ◉ There must be mechanisms to hold the Global North accountable for their historical and ongoing accountability regarding greenhouse gas emissions, ensuring that the rich countries won't just skirt away from their responsibility and promote false solutions. The international community must deliberate and enact a binding treaty to fill the gaps in extraterritorial obligations (ETO);
- ◉ Solidarity among the peoples of the Global South must be strengthened against plunder and exploitation of the developing countries by wealthy countries and big multinational companies. Data and observations should be exchanged in order to produce stronger positions with regard to climate and environmental related policies;
- ◉ The New Urban Agenda in Asia and the Pacific must be reviewed. It should recognise the role of the urban poor women by promoting their meaningful participation and leadership in planning, decision-making and implementation of the Agenda. The development of urban spaces should not be used as a cover for displacing urban poor communities, but rather uphold their human rights and improve their quality of life.



About APWLD

The Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) is the region's leading network of feminist and women's rights organisations and individual activists. For 35 years, we have been carrying out advocacy, activism and movement-building to advance women's human rights and Development Justice. APWLD worked with and supported seven partner organisations from seven countries to conduct a Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) between 2019 and 2021. This FPAR is part of APWLD's Climate Justice Programme.

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