



From Dialogue to Engagement, from Programs to Policies *Grassroots Initiatives on Women, Children, and Development in Poor Communities in the Philippines* The DAMPA* Experience

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Background

The "*Damayan ng Maralitang Pilipinong Api*" (DAMPA) is a grassroots people's organization organized in December 1995 in response to massive demolitions in Smokey Mountain and other areas in Metro Manila in the Philippines, which left hundreds of urban poor families in desperate need of adequate basic services and social protection. Now with a membership of 17,774 families (estimated at 106,644 individuals), the organization aims to contribute viable solutions to basic poverty problems endemic to the urban poor, such as adequate and affordable housing, evictions and relocation which comply with both international and local laws and standards, provision of basic services, and literacy and livelihood development. DAMPA also works to develop specific responses to problems of specific sub-groups within urban poor communities, such as children, women, and the elderly.

DAMPA seeks to achieve this goal thru organizing poor communities around common basic issues, building partnership with government, enhancing community based self help initiatives, and initiating pro-poor legislation both at the local and national government levels. DAMPA now has Fifty nine (59) member organizations in Metro Manila in the National Capital Region, as well as in Regions 3 and 4 in the island of Luzon. DAMPA was registered with the Philippine Securities and Exchange Commission in June 28, 1996.

Vision, Mission, and Programs

DAMPA envisions a society that promotes the development of just, democratic, gender sensitive, environment friendly and spiritually nurturing communities whose economic,

* DAMPA is the Tagalog (a local Philippine dialect used quite extensively throughout the country) word for a poor person's home. An organizational acronym which roughly translates to "Solidarity of Poor Filipinos", it is also a powerful symbol of unity in the urban poor struggle for genuine development.

political and cultural relationship translates into the deepest aspirations of the human spirit. DAMPA works towards the achievement of this vision through:

- Community organizing
- Training of Urban poor leaders
- Capability building
- Research and Documentation
- Policy Advocacy
- Alliance and networking
- Volunteers training
- Cooperative Development
- DAMPA Botika Binhi (community pharmacy)
- Health program
- Gender and Development program

Context of the Work

The Philippine population stands at around 81.1 Million people, with the male population at around 40.8 million and the female population at about 40.3 million. Traditionally, men are considered the bread winners of the family while women take care of the house. As is also common in almost all Asian countries, the Philippines, because of its history of colonialism, is still patriarchal in most respects, although in urban areas women are also forced by economic circumstances to earn money to augment the family income, on top of the traditional role of primary care giver to the family.

The “Third Burden”

On top of this so called “double burden” has been added another “burden”, that of fulfilling the function of primary community development actor. All across the board, the natural tendency of females to act as primary caregivers of the family has been extended to encompass community concerns as well. This, paradoxically, is a logical extension of a long-standing patriarchal tradition. Since mothers are left to care for the house while the fathers leave the community to seek employment, mothers are more exposed to the workings of community life and its corresponding issues and concerns. In DAMPA alone, only 7 of the 26 strong leadership core are males, 19 are females. In the DAMPA Cooperative, only 15 of the 96 members are male, the rest are female. In the community pharmacy projects, only 3 out of the 17 outlets have males manning the operations of the outlet. The rest are run solidly by women.

Why engage in a gender program?

With these figures, it would be easy to assume that development work within DAMPA areas would already be engendered. As we in DAMPA have found out, nothing could be farther from the truth! While these women would readily undertake efforts towards

resolving community issues, gender aspects of the issue resolution process were not necessarily addressed, much less focused on.

This is where the “third burden” comes in. Women leaders whose skills have been honed in negotiations with the highest of government officials still find it difficult, if not impossible, to have their opinions respected by their husbands on such basic concerns as sex and the number of children to have. In some cases, permission to attend meetings is still asked by wives from their husbands. In one case, a woman leader, who was very good at negotiations and urban poor rights, a key net worker and alliance builder, was battered by her husband because he was depressed! To add insult to injury, a large portion of the leadership core would consider this a domestic affair, and not a crime against persons!

These incidents, as well as the growing cases of violence against women in poor communities, and coupled with the stark realization that all issues are, in fact, women’s issues, brought to the fore the need for DAMPA to develop a gender program that is built on the role of women as primary actors in local community development. In other words, to transform the “third burden” into DAMPA’s major strength.

Our Goals

Proceeding from the realization that all issues of the poor are also issues of women; DAMPA has set for itself the goal of developing poor communities in which respect for the rights of women, children, and the family are made as basic foundations of community development. In order to achieve this, two fundamental goals that relate to DAMPA’s operational procedures need to be met. Specifically, DAMPA will endeavour, in all of its operational dealings with both partners and government, to;

1. To link basic community issues to gender and development, and
2. To broaden community program initiatives to include specific responses to gender issues and child and family concerns.

Strategies

While the primary strategy remains to be community organizing around basic community issues, a strong networking strategy has also proven integral. Focused primarily on governance and policy development along the terms outlined in numerous national and local legislation which include, among others, the “Women in Development and Nation Building Act” (Republic Act 7192), the “Gender and Development Code” (GAD Code of Quezon City) and the “Philippine Plan for Gender Responsive Development for 1995 – 2025” (PPGD), policy and governance engagements have non the less provided for tremendous opportunities in terms of making these laws and government pronouncements on gender and development contribute in making basic services more accessible and “deliverable” to the poor.

Utilizing a broad based, multi-strategy, multi-stakeholder approach which includes issue-based community organizing, self help initiatives, policy advocacy, networking and alliance building, participation in local governance, maximization of government programs, and capacity building and training, programs designed to respond to basic community issues have proven to be effective vehicles for communicating gender and development concerns, as well as for promoting effective (although not necessarily “peaceful”) ways of working together among both government, NGOs, and People’s Organizations. The “models of engagement” that these efforts showcase, in turn influence new policies on the side of government, especially in how government work with grassroots organizations and, as we shall see later, even on how public funds are spent.

What are we negotiating for?

These strategies are applied in a number of areas of engagements, notably in the areas of budgeting for and development of projects in line with the GAD, including funds for health and micro-lending and livelihood programs and for supplemental feeding programs, and in the area of security of tenure and access and provision of basic services, including water, roads, and drainage.

As stated earlier, an integral component of this effort is the time spent in dialogues with as wide a range of stakeholders as possible, with an end view of promoting collective stakeholderhood of programs and projects. One form of accomplishing this task is through identification of “stakes” based on capacities and expertise. Government, at whatever level, serves as a legitimizing entity, a fund source and a regulative body. Also serving as a source of technical expertise, these are further complemented by other NGOs and private institutions. People’s organizations, for their part, provide a very important element in any undertaking, the provision of “program reality”. Aside from this obvious contribution, grassroots organizations also provide a ready and willing volunteer pool of local people to implement local programs.

Outcomes of the Local to Local Dialogues (and their relevance to the Millennium Development Goals)

Thus far, these efforts have produced community pharmacies, cooperatives and other micro-lending projects, reproductive health projects, and has spurred the establishment of reproductive health networks and the promotion of active participation of local organizations in Barangay (village) development planning and local governance.

Taking the Millennium Development Goals as a framework to measure progress, the following gains have so far been achieved,

Goal 1. Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger

To contribute to the MDG 1, DAMPA through its member organization in Payatas in Quezon City (the site of the infamous “Garbalanche” tragedy of Y2000) is currently engaged in the development and implementation of a Supplemental Feeding Program in partnership with the Department of Social Work and Development (DSWD). Of the 200 children who participated in the initial weighing activities, all had low weights, and about 90 were prime candidates for 2nd to 3rd degree malnutrition. Aiming to provide temporary relief to the problem of hunger and malnutrition among underweight children under 5 years of age, the supplemental feeding program constitutes part of a wider solution to the problem of malnutrition, which includes delivery of basic and primary health care interventions, responses to the prevailing incidence of PTB among residents, (which includes a high prevalence of incidence among children, estimated to be about 4 in 10), delivery of affordable generic medicines through the establishment of community pharmacies, development of livelihood projects, and capacity building.

Goal 2. Achieve Universal Primary Education

DAMPA through its member organization in Navotas, one of the poorest municipalities in Metro Manila, and in partnership with ACA-AQUA, a Japanese Development Agency, facilitates the provision for primary and secondary education of about 65 students, 90% of whom are girls. While primary and secondary education in the Philippines is supposedly free, access to quality education remains elusive for a large majority of poor families. Worse, chances for acquiring higher education after primary and secondary school significantly lowers, since the number of publicly funded colleges and universities are proportionately lower in the tertiary level.

In order to mitigate this, DAMPA is also engaged in the implementation of a college scholarship program in partnership with the Department of Social Welfare and Development’s PGMA Scholarship program. DAMPA was able to secure 15 slots under this scholarship program. Of the 15 scholars, only two are male and the rest are female. They are all enrolled in various courses at the Polytechnic University of the Philippines (a state-run university).

Goal 3. Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women.

To contribute to the achievement of MDG3, DAMPA has engaged in partnership with the Gender and Development Resource Coordinating Office (GAD-RCO) of the local government of Quezon City in the implementation of the newly passed Gender and Development Code (GAD Code), focusing on promotion of the GAD Code through trainings and consultations, active participation in the drafting of the GAD Code Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) and the crafting of service programs for women in a number of Barangays in the city’s 2nd and 3rd District.

Goal 5. Improve maternal Health

Partnership with the GAD-RCO in crafting services and programs for women has resulted in the conduct of “Pap Smear” and “Breast Examination” missions in four Barangays (Villages). This effort in particular involves the Local Government of Quezon City through its GAD-RCO, DAMPA, the Philippine Cancer Society, and the Barangay (Village) Government of Bagong Silangan, Holy Spirit, Pasong Tamo, and Balara. Designed to be conducted weekly in different communities, with follow-up examinations every six months and targeting 17,000 mothers over the next two years, the project has currently provided services for 147 women during the first activity conducted. Institutionalization of partnership commitments have been accomplished, with each partner contributing a specific aspect of the effort.

Goal 6. Combat HIV/Aids, Malaria and Other Diseases

Contributions to the achievement of MDG6 focus on the monitoring and early interventions in combating the prevalence of PTB among both adults and children in Barangay Payatas and Holy Spirit in Quezon City. The twin problem of malnutrition and PTB is affecting a significant number of children, mostly girls, of poor families, especially in Barangay Payatas. In some cases, entire families were found to be afflicted with PTB in varying degrees. While substantive tests still need to be conducted, initial investigations appear to show that at least four of every ten (4:10) of the children had PTB. More thorough laboratory examination of children will be the next stage. DAMPA works closely with the Department of Social Welfare and Development and the local government of Quezon City on this effort.

Goal 7. Ensure Environmental Sustainability

National Land Use Act.

DAMPA is also engage in lobbying efforts for the passage of the National Land Use Act (NLUA). The NLUA intends to protect the environment thru rational land use planning. Generally the essence of the policy is to designate an area for Socialized housing, farming, commercial/industrial and protected area.

Access to improved water source.

Following identification of problems relating to basic services, negotiations with government on the issue of water provision has resulted in the establishment of water connections in Barangay Bagong Silangan. There are now 10,000 families who currently benefiting from safe and affordable water supply as a result of this effort.

Access to tenure secure thru CMP, and direct purchase

DAMPA has continuously been engaging government in improving access to secure land and housing tenure for urban poor families by proposing, and sometimes actually

implementing, different strategies ranging from provision of soft loans and government subsidy through the government's Community Mortgage Program (CMP), to outright direct purchase. The CMP is a government program which provides funds for community loans for housing, with 25-year mortgages. Interests in the CMP program amounts to 6% per annum.

To illustrate, the Samahang Pagkakaisa sa Sitio Kumunoy (SPSK), a member organization of DAMPA, was able to negotiate a CMP with the Quezon City Local government. The total lot cost of the 9,816 sq. meter lot amounts to Php 7,852,800 (\$142,778.18). This project has benefited 95 families.

The "Direct Purchase" is a concept introduced by Kapatiran sa Lupang Pangako (KLP) in Barangay Payatas (a DAMPA member organization) as an affordable and sustainable form of land acquisition relative to existing government programs. There are three (3) reasons that makes the concept affordable; 1) The cash payment for the lot gives the organization the chance to negotiate with land owners to have the land price pegged at the government zonal value (which is significantly lower) rather than at the market value, and 2). The waiving of interest payment becomes an area for possible negotiation with land owners, especially if payment periods can be significantly shortened, and 3). It gives a chance for the organization to raise awareness on the situation of urban poor people with land owners.

Goal 8. Develop a Global Partnership for Development.

Access to resources in the Income Restoration Program for affected families of the JBIC-funded Flood Control Project in the Philippines

DAMPA's nature as a grassroots people's organization, as well as its track record in cooperative development and sustainable programs provides a major attraction for government as well as international bilateral agencies such as the Japan Bank Cooperation Fund (JBIC) to engage in partnership efforts for development of specific communities. Recently, DAMPA has joined with the Income Restoration Sub Committee of the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), the CAMANAVA Flood Control Project, and the National Housing Authority in addressing the issue of income and livelihood development of families relocated because of the government's flood control projects. Borne out of continuous lobbying and pressure from DAMPA and other organizations, the project aims to assist 3,500 relocated families increase real incomes within a two-year period.

DAMPA represents the people's organizations in the committee by presenting feedback and recommendation of the people's organization in the committee meetings. DAMPA also facilitates local meetings related to program development. In these engagements, DAMPA tries to assert policies favourable to the people.

In addition, DAMPA also handles part of the Php 2 Million project funds (Php 600,000 or \$10,909) for use in micro-lending projects for the beneficiaries.

Access to affordable essential drugs on a sustainable basis.

The DAMPA Community Pharmacy (CP) was conceptualized as a response to community issues raised by members of DAMPA relating to the high cost of medicines, defined in terms of affordability, accessibility and sustainability of essential drugs. The concept of the program involves local resource mobilization to raise local capital, purchase of affordable and safe generic medicines, training on rational drug use, project development and project and financial management, and networking with local organizations and governmental agencies such as the Department of Health's (DOH) Community Health Program, the Bureau of Food and Drugs (BFAD) also under the DOH, as well as with local government units both at the city and Barangay levels.

Capital for the project is provided primarily by the members themselves, with government providing matching funds where applicable, as well as training, training resources provision, and facilitation of licensing and securing of permits.

Presently, DAMPA partner organizations are operating 17 community pharmacy outlets servicing an estimated 50,000 families. This track record in implementing the program has prompted the Department of Health (DOH) to seek DAMPA's assistance in implementing their own "Botika ng Barangay" (Barangay Pharmacy) Program, which was conceptualized to provide access to essential drugs for all Barangays nationwide. This partnership provides DAMPA with access to otherwise elusive lobby points to promote pro-poor policies related to the government's health programs. Intended government capital infusion for DAMPA's own outlets alone amount to Php 425,000 (\$7,727) for the initial 17 outlets.

New opportunities, communication strategies and Channels

It is noteworthy that, while these two examples of government investments in local development projects are small in comparison to other government projects, these amounts represents a shift in government capital spending, away from traditional, government-led efforts (traditionally viewed as a major source of governmental corruption and funds misuse) towards spending for promotion of partnerships with direct, grassroots organizations that can utilize the funds more efficiently and with less bureaucracy, and deliver services more effectively, directly to the people who need them most. The implication of this shift in the battle against corruption, as well as to directly providing services for the bottom 20% of the population in any given territory, is immense.

Added to these are the seemingly insignificant (from a financial point of view) contributions provided by other government agencies and bodies, from National Government Line Agencies to the different governmental levels, to DAMPA's different development efforts. While their contributions greatly facilitate the implementation of programs by an organization composed mainly of volunteers such as DAMPA, and any

other grassroots organization for that matter, these contributions are also strong statements of goodwill forged by effective governance engagements and partnerships between local governments and peoples organizations in all levels of governance.

Enabling Condition

Various factors have contributed to the attainment of these results. Among these include;

- The existing legislation related to women and children. Proceeding from CEDAW, women and development legislation and others (such as RA 7195 and the PPGD of 1995 to 2025) have provided the enabling framework to facilitate engagement in GAD programs. The existence of the Philippine Local Government Code of 1991, which outlines the basic structure for grassroots participation in governance, has not only complemented other legislation on GAD, but has also provided the basis for active multi-stakeholder engagements with government.
- The existence of successful programs on GAD that one can learn from. In this aspect, the contributions of the “Lihok Filipina Foundation” (and Ms Tessie Banaynal-Fenandez) in Cebu and the CO Multiversity in Manila (through Ms Fides Bagasao) has provided DAMPA with more than just glimpses into the processes involved in developing a GAD program. Their experiences serve as guides to our own foray into GAD.
- The nature of the smallest level of government (the Barangay) as both a government executive channel and an avenue for direct participation of people, having a “quasi-grassroots” nature, makes it an ideal venue to engender government – public engagements. Local Barangay Chief Executives (the “Barangay Captains”) are effective allies in development.
- DAMPA’s nature as a direct membership grassroots organization. Both implementers of programs and program beneficiaries are members of DAMPA organizations. This gives local organizations a big stake in the success of projects and programs, and promotes a high degree of volunteerism. This in turn translates to a higher degree of credibility for the organization in terms of delivering concrete program results, making DAMPA an attractive partner for government.
- The “shift” in government partnership practice towards grassroots organizations, as mentioned in the previous section.

How has on-going dialogue and participation been ensured?

In the experience of DAMPA, dialogue and participation can be ensured in three stages:

Stage 1 relates to conditions prior to engagement. It is important, in our experience, to maintain a vast number of constituents, and to maintain a healthy appreciation of government. At least in our experience in the Philippines, while professional technocrats in general do the work in government, it is “politicians” who call the shots. Because of this, politicians generally engage with grassroots organization with an eye to “votes”. They therefore engage with groups who are organized and with big number of membership.

As an organization of organizations, it is also necessary for DAMPA to facilitate internal agreements on issues and solutions prior to dialogue with government. The goal is to make engagement a dialogue focused on organizational, and not individual, interests. The environment which allows government to sit in dialogue is also an opportunity to educate, presenting grassroots organizations with a chance to lobby for the Urban Poor agenda.

The **2nd stage** of participation is to build recognition of both parties as stakeholders. At this point it is necessary to define the basis of partnerships by sharing of perspectives on common problems and the identification of workable solutions. It is important to have the role of everyone discussed openly and collectively agreed upon. In DAMPA’s experience (as stated earlier) our appreciation of our organizational strengths and weaknesses play a major role in the forging of any agreement. In any program and projects developed during the dialogue, the organization must be able to actively engage and play a vital role. This can at times mean fiscalizing and asking simple but substantial questions relating to operations. At times, the organization must also assist in making things simple. Lastly, it is also necessary to seal the participation by a Memorandum of Agreement.

The **3rd stage** is to forge long term participation. It means committing to more complex sectoral and cross sectoral issues. This means lobbying for local and national legislation, and local community-based and national projects.

What are the Skill, Knowledge and Capacities gained?

In DAMPA’s experience, engaging in dialogue with government at different levels, as well as with other stakeholders, also afford leaders and ordinary members of grassroots organizations the opportunity to acquire added skills and knowledge and to hone their expertise. For DAMPA in particular, gains in skills, knowledge, and capacities include, and are not limited to, the following;

Skills

- Skills related to the local budgeting processes, specially those related to GAD and Local Development Planning are acquired, including resource and service mapping, and others.
- Leaders and members acquire experiences in facilitating different kinds of meetings, from small focused group discussions to community assemblies, to formal dialogues to multi-stakeholder planning sessions.
- Skills in developing and “off-grounding” community issues are taken to a different level. Analytical skills are further developed as a result of the need to establish the linkages between basic services issues to gender and development, secure tenure, and livelihood.
- Communication skills are developed as well. Leaders and members learn how to speak clearly and with confidence during dialogues with the government, and acquire the skill of proper packaging of their thoughts and ideas in a manner that are precise and “constructive”.
- Training skills of leaders and ordinary members are developed as well. DAMPA has developed its own training pool composed of local volunteers, drastically reducing training costs and reliance on external trainers and at the same time boosting the morale and credibility of leaders and members. In some cases, our volunteer trainers have been asked to become resource persons in the training programs of partners.

Knowledge

- Leaders and members are also exposed to the rudiments of organizational development and management. However, rather than the traditional learning track of clarifying “theories” first and engaging in “practice” later, the experiential nature of these engagements give a backdrop to the already immense wealth of experiences that these leaders have in managing projects. Theories therefore become results of the dialectic between existing practice and experiences, both positive and negative.
- The same is true with financial management as well. We in DAMPA find that the best financial managers are those who have very little to manage, such as poor people. Proceeding from the members’ experiences of poverty, the systems and mechanisms used for survival become the basis for learning effective management of finances.
- The biggest area of learning has definitely been on Gender and Development, including establishing the fundamental connections between the daily lives of

people with such concepts as the gender divide, understanding of the phenomenon of domestic violence and violence against women, women's rights, laws and issuances on women, and the GAD framework and "engendered development".

- Understanding of community organizing has also developed to a higher degree. Traditionally focused on basic services issues, where the concept of "community" is amorphous, and where "process" is as much an objective as material gain, understanding of the CO process has been made more wholistic. This is brought about by a deeper appreciation of the processes involved in CO and of the understanding that "the community" is not the "face-less masses", and that responses to the specific problems of specific sub-groups can be as varied and different from each other as one can imagine. Understanding of the role that "process" play in CO has also been deepened, the most stark realization being that "process" is not a substitute for but rather an instrument in the attainment of concrete improvements in the lives of the poor.

Capacities

Over-all, development in terms of capacities for DAMPA have been tremendous, including;

- DAMPA's capacity to train its own leaders and members, and others, through its own training pool
- The sharpening of DAMPA's capacity to organize using different approaches, including community, issue-based, gender-based, and others yet to be named.
- The capacity to more effectively convey the organization's agenda in dialogues and network meetings, in a manner that engenders participation and involvement of stakeholders.
- The ability to attune programs, like cooperatives and micro-lending, to the cultural and social conditions of the community. As a grassroots organization, this is DAMPA's primary strength, and its major contribution to multi-stakeholder development efforts.
- The capacity to maximize local community resources, as well as resources available from government.

What has each partner learned in this process?

For DAMPA

The biggest learning for DAMPA is the understanding of where its own strengths and weaknesses lie. As an organization of poor people, our understanding and appreciation of poverty conditions, and its many nuances, turned out to be our major strength and contribution! Conversely, our major weakness, which we are just beginning to rectify, have been an inability to convey this strength in an effective manner, one that fires the imagination and excitement of partners to engage with grassroots organizations.

Aside from the obvious necessity of effectively organizing the poor, it is equally necessary to develop articulate leaders that can explain legislation, ordinances and women's agenda during dialogue and negotiations with the government and other stakeholders.

Another significant lesson is the need to turn around government's idea that grassroots organizations are too process-oriented as to be inefficient. This, however, cannot be done by merely denouncing government practices nor by simply proposing alternatives. In DAMPA's experience, this is best done by actually showing efficiency and effectiveness. It is therefore of prime necessity that grassroots organizations invest more time and energy in establishing efficient systems, mechanisms, and procedures if they wish to maximize engagements with government.

Lastly, the understanding that development cannot be driven by just one group (be it all men only, or all women), or one sector (be it government only, or by grassroots organizations primarily), has also taken root. This "bit of wisdom" has always been given lip service. We in DAMPA are trying to make this concrete.

For Local Government Partners

These experiences have also provided other stakeholders, notably the government, of the intrinsic value of positive engagements with local, grassroots organizations. Traditionally, government service delivery channels have been limited to the flow between governmental levels, and through other government departments and instrumentalities. The entry of local grassroots organizations into the service-delivery arena has provided government with a more direct and efficient medium for the flow of governmental services and projects. This translates to less work for government, and more opportunities for devoting governmental efforts to other tasks.

But this flow is in no instance a one-way process for, as pointed out earlier, this is also an opportunity for grassroots organizations to influence how projects are implemented.

Another area of learning has been the turn-around of both government and grassroots organizations that both are threats to each other. More synergistic arrangements have actually translated to more efficient implementation of programs, which translates to more achievements for local governments.

The obvious implication of “acceptability” of government projects once participation of local grassroots organizations is institutionalized cannot be overstated. Leaders and members of local organizations provide government with a ready and willing pool of volunteers to work in the implementation of programs, thereby cutting costs. Even the involvement of local organizations in the procurement of supplies, contribute to mitigating instances of corruption and wastage. Even joint-auditing of project funds that are openly shared can be done, with all partners providing the essential check-and-balance mechanism with each other in terms of how funds are spent.

Recommendations

There is no point in re-inventing the wheel. But there will be premiums made in developing a better one. It is therefore necessary, and sound, to study the experiences of others who have already ventured into the field, and adapt lessons into your own reality and the conditions existing within your own communities. The goal is not to simply “replicate”, but to generate a new experience that will produce new lessons and insights.

Continuously engage government. This is the best way to maximize existing local resources, and heighten the government’s awareness on the real situation of the poor in general, and of poor women in particular.

Use multiple approaches. Oftentimes, DAMPA’s experience shows that it is not the methodology that is the problem, but rather it is how the use of these methodologies are calibrated to fit the context. To this end, the use of conflict and confrontation as an approach (so integral in the classic community organizing methodology) has to be re-calibrated in the context of multi-stakeholder work so as to focus on the situation and not on the partners.

Try to forge common goals, as well as the processes and indicators on how these will be achieved. For this, the Millennium Development Goals provide a ready and effective framework to anchor all our efforts on. It is also equally important for all partners to be able to work as teams and not competitors.

For us grassroots organizations, try to make it easy for government, and other stakeholders for that matter, to work with us. To this end we should continuously strive to develop better systems, and to always improve our capacities. Government will only see that we can do what we say we can do if we actually have something to show.

And lastly, for governments, trust in the people's desire to improve their lives. From here, it is a short step to trusting in the people's capacity to do so. Grassroots people have something that they can share that will be of great importance to the success of any program or project. Something that others do not have and others cannot show. This is the experience of poverty. The people are the best source of inputs on what is commonly called "program reality." The poor, in the worst of circumstances, have always survived. Knowing these survival techniques will add premiums to any program.

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