

TAO-Pilipinas' annual training and immersion program for students and new graduates focuses on the creation of disaster-resilient and sustainable communities

BY GERALDINE MATABANG

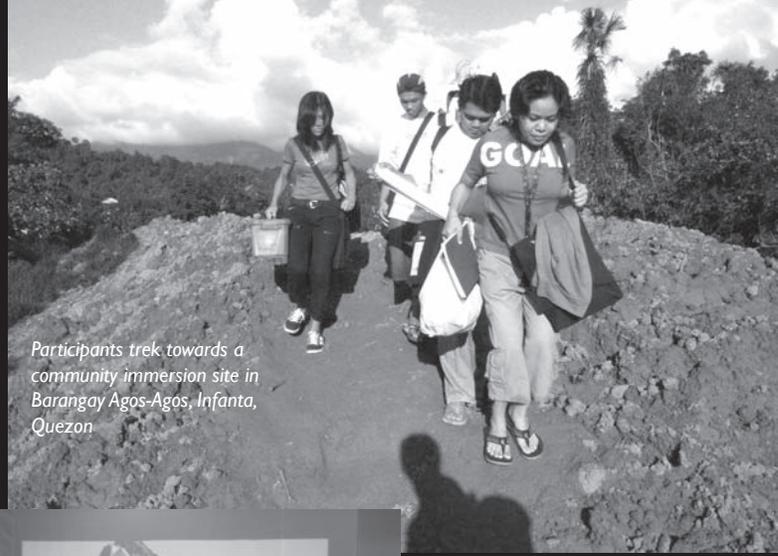
“It’s very good to see young people get into disaster risk management.” This was the shared reaction of disaster risk management specialists Blenn Huelgas of UN-Habitat and Mayfourth Luneta of the Center for Disaster Preparedness on the first day of the 2006 Young Professionals (YP) Orientation Workshop on Social Housing held by TAO-Pilipinas on October 17 to 21 in Antipolo City.

The theme of the workshop for this year was “Young Professionals Working towards Sustainable Communities: Integrating Community-Based Disaster Risk Management in Social Housing.” The objective of the five-day workshop was to orient both design professionals and representatives of people’s organizations (POs) in actions and approaches that can contribute to enhancing the capabilities of communities, especially in social housing sites, to reduce and cope with the negative impacts of disasters. Disaster resilience is seen as one of the key characteristics of sustainable communities.

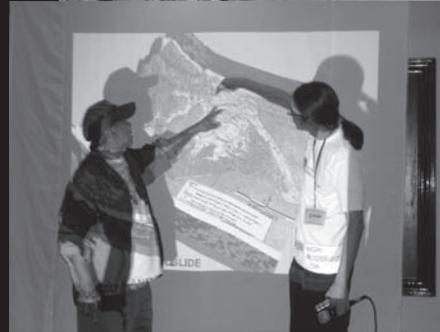
About 31 participants from Metro Manila-based architecture and engineering schools and representatives of people’s organizations (POs) from Infanta, Quezon Province and Metro Manila attended the workshop.

The YP workshops have always been carried out in two levels: *theoretical*, through lectures and presentations; and *practicum*, through field visits and community immersion. After the training sessions held in Villa Cristina in Antipolo during the workshop’s first two days, participants visited Buklod Tao communities in San Mateo, Rizal where community-based disaster risk management (CBDRM) programs are already well-placed. The participants then proceeded to communities in Barangays Agos-agos and Dinahican in Infanta, Quezon for a community immersion.

The participants were grouped into teams to simultaneously conduct community consultations in following sites: Pope John Paul II Village, a resettlement site located in the uplands of Bgy. Agos-agos and where beneficiary families are flashflood victims from Infanta, Real and Gen. Nakar; Dinahican Visayan Village Fishermen’s Association (DVVFA), a people’s organization in a small fishing village along the coast of Bgy. Dinahican and whose member-families are informal settlers; and Munting Sabang Tagumpay Association, another people’s organization of informal settler-families in Bgy. Dinahican who are in the process of relocating to an identified resettlement site along the southern coastal area of Infanta.



Participants trek towards a community immersion site in Barangay Agos-Agos, Infanta, Quezon



COPE representative Kuya Romy and Geologist John Ong discuss a map of Infanta on the first day of the workshop.



YP participants simulate a volcanic eruption in a team building exercise.

YP Workshop 2006 Tackles Disaster Risk Management





YP participants Carl and Joel explain architectural details of disaster-resilient structures during the community workshop.



Norai (far right), assists residents of Bgy. Dinahican in explaining community issues through a problem tree.

TAO-Pilipinas coordinated with organizations working in these areas such as the Community Organizers of the Philippines Enterprise (COPE) and the Prelature of Infanta's Social Action Center (SAC) so the YPs could conduct a disaster risk management workshop with the host communities. This workshop included participatory hazards assessment, mapping activities, focus group discussions and action planning. For two nights, the workshop participants also slept in the homes of host families in the sites.

The community immersions were primarily aimed at letting the YPs experience first-hand participatory planning approaches by conducting community consultations. These were also opportunities for them to apply and validate their understanding of the CBDRM lectures from the first part of the workshop.

Community Issues

At the fourth day of workshop, each of the teams presented their practicum outputs before a plenary. Several issues were brought up during the plenary discussions, such as the engagement of the local government unit in CBDRM programs, organizational strengthening of POs, mangroves area protection, the perennial problem of lack of basic services in resettlement sites that residents consider as everyday hazards in their lives, and previously urban area concerns that now also affect rural communities (e.g. garbage disposal, groundwater depletion and contamination). The hazards which were prioritized by people were the lack of potable water supply, flooding, typhoons, and solid waste. These practicum outputs were a validation that the scope of disaster risk management should encompass both natural and human-induced hazards.

The workshop participants also shared their personal reflections. For most of the students, it was their first time to directly interact with poor communities as technical service clients. They acknowledged that the workshop activities were an eye-opener that gave them a wider perspective on their roles as professionals and a deeper appreciation of basic shelter needs. Panelist Avic Ilagan, a TAO Board Member and filmmaker, commented, "It was clear from the presentations that YPs faced a tough task where you were not only architects and engineers but also researchers, organizers, and teachers."

But the activities facilitated by the workshop participants in the immersion sites are just the initial phases in the whole CBDRM process. Indeed, much of the information drawn out from the people need to be analyzed and further coordination (among various stakeholders) and community work are expected to be done so that effective disaster risk management at the grassroots level can be fully realized. With YPs willing to focus their talents and energies on such work, TAO-Pilipinas hopes to contribute more in helping create disaster-resilient and sustainable communities.

REFLECTIONS

The YP workshop participants were asked to draw something to symbolize their reflections and lessons learned during the event. Here are some of their thoughts:

"Natutunan ko pagpunta sa Infanta na importante talaga ang tubig. Sa bahay sinasayang-sayang ko lang ito, ligo ako ng ligo. Doon bumaba kami ng bundok para mag-igib. Mahihiya ka maligo kasi ang layo talaga ng pinagkukuhanan at saka mga matatanda pa ang nag-iiigib. Yung iba mas bata pa sa amin, mas malaki pa yung bitbit sa aming balde. Tapos itong hipon kasi talagang memorable siya—first time kong kumain ng hipon so natutunan kong i-appreciate kung ano yung nakahanda sa harap ko."



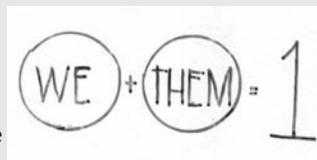
— Michelle Galarion, Civil Engineering Student, University of Santo Tomas



"Eye-opener itong event na ito para sa akin kasi mas naappreciate ko kung ano yung meroon ako. Basta andaming nabago...mind, body, and soul. Basta makaka-affect talaga ito sa way of thinking ko...lahat...hinde ko nga ma-explain lahat kasi sobrang dami niya."

— Frances Cortez, Architecture Student, University of the Philippines

"We' pertains to us tapos ang 'them' yun yung mga taong nakainteract natin. Equal to one kasi nagmerge tayo as a group...tinuruan natin sila, at nagfacilitate tayo. Sila naman nakinig at naki-cooperate sa atin. Nagmeet yung mga utak natin



na masolve yung mga sinasabing problema nila. Sobrang suwerte natin dahil marami sa atin galing sa middle class. Nakisama tayo sa mga tao na mas matindi ang pangangailangan kaysa sa atin. Tapos siguro ulitin ko na lang, lagi ko kasi naririnig to: hindi lahat ng bagay matututunan natin sa pag-aaral. Mas maraming bagay tayong matututunan kung makikipag-interact tayo sa tao kasi doon natin matututunan kung ano ang essential sa buhay."

— Rex Atienza, Geodetic Engineering Student, University of the Philippines



"Para sa akin ang candle symbolizes light and hope. Kasi po sa bawat disaster sa ating buhay pagkatapos noon naghihintay tayo ng liwanag o may inaaasahan tayong liwanag na darating sa ating buhay. Yung ginawa po ninyong community immersion sa lugar namin ay nakapagdagdag ng liwanag sa mga taga-Infanta, Quezon. Kaya red yung ginawa kong light dahil nandiyan yung pagmamalasakit niyo at yung pagmamahal sa bawat tao."

— Roxanne Astroveza, PO Representative, Pope John Paul Village II, Bgy. Agos-Agos, Infanta



"Tayo lahat ang susi sa paglipad ng tagumpay tungo sa magandang kalikasan. Nasa atin ang lahat kasi we have 7,107 islands. Meron tayong magandang kalikasan, yamang tubig at yamang lupa. Ang mga tao diyan ay kaming mga kabataan at yung mga taong natulungan namin. Kung lahat magtutulungan sabay-sabay tayong aangat at sabay-sabay rin tayong uunlad."

— Kate Teves, Architecture Student, Far Eastern University