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QC urban poor pushes people's plan

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The roadside of the community looks typical of an urban poor enclave — run-down convenience stores, pedicabs parked in unorderly manner, rolling stores selling street food, and an assortment of market items such as meat, fish, and vegetables.



While sticking like a sore thumb amid high-rise central offices of national agencies such as National Electrification Administration, Philippine Statistics Authority and Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency, for the urban poor community on NIA Road in Quezon City this piece of land is their home.

The two-hectare property, which is under the administrative jurisdiction of the National Housing Authority, is home to almost 4,000 families packed in shanties and multi-floor houses. The NHA plans to evict the residents here to put up high-rise condominiums that will cater to the middle-class sectors, many of them employed in various offices nearby.

"This is our home and we worked hard to make this a functional community," says 52-year-old Crisanto Nalla, a Grab driver, as he leads a group of journalists in the labyrinth-like pathways of the community.

Surprisingly, the community is not typical of slums glorified in mass media. Here, members of the community were able to put up a basketball court, a chapel and a daycare center out of their collective efforts.

The passageways are narrow making them hazardous during disasters like fire while spaghettilike cables are hanging everywhere. But, that's it. There are no smelly piles of garbage or clogged canals.

"There are many opportunities available here but you have to work hard. Our jobs are here and the children go to nearby schools," Nalla explains on why they chose to oppose the plan to relocate them to Pandi, Bulacan where NHA normally transfers the informal settlers from Metro Manila.

Urban Triangle Development

Erstwhile President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo issued an Executive Order in 2007 creating the Urban Triangle Development Commission that will oversee the creation of a Master Development Plan for the transformation of East and North Triangles and the Veterans Memorial area of Quezon City into a "well-planned, integrated and environmentally balanced, mixed-use development" business district.

EO 620 series of 2007 rationalizes for a need to "guide and improve the allocation, utilization, management and development of the national government's land resources, as well as to ensure their optimum use, under the principles of economic growth and efficiency, social equity and justice.

WHEREAS, the emerging and projected developments in the area necessitate a comprehensive plan for urban development, business development and marketing that integrates the highest and best use of the properties under a re-planned, mixed-use scheme;

WHEREAS, the composition of the Tri-Dev Commission can be strengthened by expanding its membership and clarifying its scope of responsibilities, to enable it to carry out its mandate more effectively.

The order also tasks the commission to formulate a viable resettlement program for qualified informal settler families in the 250-hectare Quezon City Central Business District project area.

People's plan

In 2022, residents here formed the group United NIA Road Neighborhood Association to strengthen their collective call for on-site development instead of being relocated away from their livelihood.

Amalia Hernandez, the association president, says the residents are willing to pay for a monthly amortization for a housing project that the government will put up but the amount should be within their means.

Initial discussions with NHA, though, show that while residents may avail of the high-rise condominiums that the agency will put up, the monthly amortization is beyond their means.

Hernandez said most of the residents in the community are in the informal sector working as drivers of tricycle, jeepney and pedicab, construction workers, vendors and domestic helpers who are earning an average of P200-P500 a day.

"We cannot afford a high rent," she said, explaining that they can only afford between P800-P1,000 a month. "The government should provide us with housing that is within our means."

The residents, instead, came out with what they call a "people's plan," a project that the residents collectively planned that included housing, livelihood and disaster preparedness.

Since the formation of the association, the group has formed committees that will come up with a design, programs of the group as well as a team that will link the group with the different sectors.

The association also formed committees on land tenure, livelihood, savings, disaster preparedness, education, urban gardening and grievance.

The group has already made a plan for the housing. Hernandez said that the plan will be able to accommodate 3,675 to 4,000 families with each family having their own unit.

The people's plan involves the construction of 12 buildings of 10-story and nine buildings of fivestory structures. Each unit will have a floor area of 22 square meters.