

## BUILDING TRADES TRAINING IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED AREAS IN MINDANAO

April 2006 - April 2007

ALTERPLAN recently completed this project on behalf of the Education and Employment Alliance (EEA) of the Philippine's based Consuelo Foundation. Over nine months, participating youth aged 17-24 years learned everything from the basic civil trades to innovative building system techniques developed to improve housing affordability. Having completed the training, these youth now form a pool of skilled workers with all of the required expertise to build a simple but adequate house. Even more importantly, in addition to learning technical skills, participants learned life skills to aid them in rebuilding the social networks and support systems of communities destroyed by armed-conflict.

Alternative Planning Initiatives (ALTERPLAN), in association with Habitat for Humanity Philippines, recently completed a building trades training project in conflict-affected areas of Mindanao, the southern island region of the Philippines. The project targeted out-of-school youth in the 17-24 age range living in Peace and Development Communities (PDC). These heterogeneous communities regroup members of internally displaced communities, former combatants and their family. Muslims, Christians, and indigenous people reside in the PDCs.



As a common trait, the conflict and displacements have robbed them of the opportunity to learn, use their skills or engage in economically productive activities. After initial support from The Consuelo Foundation – through a program of the Education and Employment Alliance funded by USAID – the project attracted other sponsors who saw interest in this empowerment project. The International Labor Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Multi-Donor Programme (UNMDP) provided funds for further development and implementation of the training project.

Although Mindanao is a largely peaceful region, for a few decades now, a low-intensity conflict sets in opposition the Government of the Philippines and two major rebel groups – the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). Apart from the many combatants and their families whose lives are constantly tainted by violence, the conflict also affects local civilian populations who suffer from instability, violence and displacement.

### **A focus on Mindanao youth**

According to regional statistics, the conflict has had particularly bad consequences for the youth between 15-24 years old who could not benefit from the safe and stable environment necessary to study and integrate in society as active members. It is the only age bracket that shows significantly higher percentages of high school undergraduates and unemployed, a quarter of which did not even have the chance to finish elementary school level. Since the youth is affected so strongly, Alterplan and its partners decided to concentrate its efforts on the 17-24 years old bracket with the hope of healing wounds and providing an alternative to violence that has taken root in the region.

### **Social and physical rebuilding of communities**

Habitat for Humanity has been building 1000 houses in the south-central region of Mindanao around years 2006-2008 under their Build for Peace program funded by the European Union. Since their usual modus operandi involves strong community engagement with beneficiaries building their own communities and houses under guidance and training from a core of skilled workers and professionals, it emerged as a natural partner for the training project. This partnership is beneficial for both the participants to the training and Habitat. While the breakdown of community support systems in the region made it especially hard to find useful labor or skilled workers for Habitat's construction sites, unemployed and unskilled youth needed an opportunity to integrate into the regular social fabric of communities and be economically and socially active.

Given this situation, housing and livelihood seemed to be two strategic entry points towards a solution to the problem. The overall goal being the empowerment of displaced groups, former combatants and their families, this project provides them the opportunity to rebuild, literally, their own homes and communities.

### **Project implementation**

Alterplan and its partners started developing educational materials, building partnerships and establishing the project framework in April 2006, while the first training began in July. Three different sites were selected for the project: Midsayap, in the province of North Cotabato; Tacurong, in Sultan Kudarat; and General Santos City. All of them are located in the south of Mindanao, are home to Peace and Development Communities, and host a Habitat for Humanity Build for Peace construction site. In each site, 80 unemployed youth, separated in two groups of 40 trainees, were selected to participate in the Building Trades Training project. While

selection criterias specified that the participants needed to possess basic reading and writing skills, no prior knowledge of construction was expected.

### **The building trades training**

The technical objective of the training is to create a pool of workers who, among themselves, will have all the required skills to build a simple, adequate house. Using Habitat for Humanity's Build for Peace construction site as a practice opportunity for the trainees, it is assured that the participants complete the training program not only with theoretical knowledge but also with significant on-the-ground experience. The participants are integrated as workers into Habitat construction teams. Upon graduation, they are already considered skilled workers.

The staff of trainers is a composite of certified trainers and specialized construction workers, usually Habitat leadmen, who have undergone a special pedagogic formation. With a constant intertwining of theory and practice, the trainers teach the participants basic house construction techniques as well as the innovative Habitat system, entrepreneurship notions, and culture of peace. The program also includes life skills and psycho-social workshops to help participants deal with the traumas inflicted by violence and displacement.



### **Post-training opportunities for the youth**

To provide a standard level of competencies among the participants and facilitate their employability, they are required to pass the national Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) test. After training in the two first sites, success levels to the test reached an encouraging high of 95%.

Importance is also given to post-graduation placement. While potential employment was assured on Habitat Build for Peace construction sites for the next two years – a total of a thousand houses are being built – participants may also find employment on other Habitat projects or in private-sector construction, locally or abroad. Both high success levels to the TESDA test and distribution of starter toolkits to all the participants augment significantly their employability and potential entrepreneur opportunities. Even if ideally all the participants should be able to work close to their own communities, it is known that there is a recurrent demand for construction workers in both the Middle East and Malaysia.

This project showing interesting results, Alterplan and Habitat for Humanity are currently looking at the opportunity to develop new training sites in other regions of Mindanao and successfully built a partnership with the ILO to develop a training program on the Visayas island of Guimaras which recently suffered from a large scale oil spill, affecting the main livelihood of fishing in a number of municipalities.

Our partners in this project.



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