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**Reflection Paper on Community Resilience:**

Perspectives from the Homeless People's Federation Philippines (HPFP)

***Introduction***

The papers by *Lederach*<sup>1</sup> and *Gross*<sup>2</sup> delve on the main topic of what constitutes *healthy communities*, and the necessity to look into the framework of *resilience* to address the unpredictable impacts of rapid globalization on urban poor communities.

*Lederach* treats the term “healthy community” as not limited to *quantitative measures and indicators like employment or poverty rates, access to education, clean water, housing and healthcare*, but rather looks into *how people and communities locate creative and pro-active capacities for responding to challenges they face*. He then uses 3-cross cutting life experiences of Columbian communities creatively surviving violence and injustices, namely: *displacement, insecurity and, voicelessness*, as the base for looking into qualities of healthy communities. Once recast into their positive forms, these cross-cutting life experiences become indicators of healthy communities as: a) establishing a sense of **place**\_(of self, purpose and meaning); b) obtaining a sense of **security / safety** (of a feeling of belongingness, of a sense of being at home); c) and of searching for a **voice** (of spaces for participation, dialogue, sense of power, connection, response and exchange). *Lederach* then uses the metaphor of resilience and zeroes in on its notion as the ability to adapt, to “*bounce back*”. Seen in the context of communities, resilience is the *capacity of the community to forge solidarity, to sustain hope and purpose, and to adapt and negotiate creatively with the challenges presented*. Consequently, he proposes that **healthy communities**, when seen in the lens of **resilience**, are *local collectives that pro-actively engage in purposeful ways that help them recuperate a sense of **place, at-homeness, and voice***.

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<sup>1</sup> Lederach, John Paul, *Resiliency and Healthy Communities :An Exploration of Image and Metaphor*, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Gross, Jill Simone, *Sustainability versus Resilience: What is the global urban future and can we plan for change?* This is a Discussion paper for the Comparative Urban Studies Project, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and the Fetzer Institute, September 2008.

*Gross* on the other hand, takes a different track by indicating that urban communities that face rapid globalization and its numerous and unpredictable effects, are better off in adapting a **resilience framework**<sup>3</sup> of development rather than clinging on to a **sustainable development (SD)**<sup>4</sup> one that has limitations in terms of adaptability to changing contexts.<sup>5</sup> *Gross* suggests that the lessons of *Hollings (limitation of SD as preoccupied with the balance of the three: environmental protection, economic growth and social equity, lack of flexibility and adaptability to change)*<sup>6</sup> should be taken seriously to explore better methods through which communities in the urban arena are able to adapt. That we must begin to refocus our attention on methods to help communities develop capabilities to respond to unanticipated changes – in values, the economy, in society and in the environment.

This paper looks into these salient points and some other questions posed in the conference and provides some observations and insights in the light of the experience of the Homeless People's Federation Philippines (HPFP), a national movement of savings-based network of communities implementing and espousing community-led approaches to secure tenure, housing, relocations, upgrading, basic services, risk management, urban livability and, civic participation as citizens.

### ***The Homeless Peoples' Federation Philippines (HPFP):***

#### ***Showing resilience in the emerging urban context***

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<sup>3</sup> A resilience model might include the following elements:

1. Capacity to absorb (create openings for the inclusion of new -- populations, ideas, values)
2. Capacity to change (create mechanisms to allow institutional change to occur more easily)
3. Capacity to accommodate the unexpected (planning and policy frameworks that allow room for the unexpected, and that enable regular review in light of these unexpected factors).

<sup>4</sup> The 1987 Brundtland Commission Report, "Our Common Future", defines sustainable development (SD) as *development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own need*. The report likewise identified SD as encompassing three interrelated elements – environmental protection, economic growth and social equity, and that a failure to keep the developmental balance of the 3 elements results in unsustainable programs.

<sup>5</sup> C.S. Hollings in his paper "*Resilience and Stability of Ecological Systems*" published in 1973, saw in the language of sustainability a hidden bias towards system "equilibrium" – 'the maintenance of a predictable world...with as little fluctuation as possible.' In the process he points out, that this could result in a systematic loss of flexibility. Static systems he suggested may under conditions of sudden or dramatic change, lose their structural integrity – they might collapse! Hollings suggests that a more laudable goal should be resilience rather than sustainability.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

### *A Profile of the HPFP*<sup>7</sup>

The Homeless Peoples Federation Philippines (HPFP) is a self-help, community-based federation that promotes savings mobilization in low-income communities as a way of building their financial capacity to invest in their own development. It works towards securing land tenure, upgrading settlements and uplifting the economic status of its members. The HPFP uses savings mainly as a strategy, not only to finance community investments but also to bring people together to work towards their common ends. It is thus not only a financial tool but also a social mechanism, which builds networks of communities out of which emerge continuous learning and innovation, partnerships and support systems. This network of communities opens up new possibilities for negotiations with the state and, among other things, the realization of new forms of partnership.

The Homeless People's Federation Philippines (HPFP) is a national network of 161 urban poor community associations and savings groups spanning all over the three major regions in the Philippines namely the Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao. As of December 2007, the HPFP has approximately 70,000 individual members representing in 18 cities and 15 municipalities. The Federation's work focus on low-income communities in the high-risk areas, voluntary resettlement and post relocation activities, disaster management and reconstruction processes through community-led initiatives

The HPFP essentially takes a **three-pronged strategy** to reach low-income communities. It **organizes and mobilizes communities, encourages savings-based financial strategies**, and **engages with the public sector**. Underpinning this three-pronged strategy is the adherence by the HPFP to a **community-led / driven approach** to securing tenure, upgrading, basic services delivery, risk management, civic participation as partners in city development.

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<sup>7</sup> Profile is based on Yu, Sandra and Karaos, Ana Marie, *Establishing the role of communities in governance: the experience of the Homeless People's Federation Philippines*, Environment and Urbanization, Vol 16, 107, Sage Publication, 2004, and the HPFP Brochure 2008.

***On Healthy communities and Resilience:***

I find Lederach's discussion on healthy communities of the urban present and future as *local collectives that pro-actively engage in purposeful ways that help them recuperate a sense of **place, at-homeness, and voice***, as a fair description for the HPFP and its communities. HPFP communities constitute urban poor dwellers who reside either in the margins, danger zones (shorelines, riverbanks, railway tracks, garbage dumpsites, geohazard areas); public places like bridges, thoroughfares; sites for mega-infrastructure development; and private lands, all under constant threat of displacement. Given their low incomes, the high value of urban land, and the lack of housing finance, these communities are compelled to settle on marginal lands. As informal settlers, they are not included in government census and planning, leading to further exclusion. The situation is like that suffered by the Columbian communities in Lederach's paper where the HPFP urban poor have that sense of being displaced (place), of not being secure in their occupancy (at home-ness or security), and without a venue (voice) with which to air their needs and aspirations.

As a test of being “**healthy**” and resilient communities, HPFP communities have decided to do something about their situation by looking at their own areas, identifying their development needs, plan, build their capacities, save, and implement plans. They have initiated numerous secure tenure initiatives through the purchase of land, construction and management of site development, negotiated with government for pro-poor relocation procedures in massive infrastructure development, and post disaster reconstruction. Facilitated by the three pronged strategy of the HPFP of community mobilization, financial modelling, and engagements with public and private sectors towards securing tenure, they become part of city, regional, national and even international network of learning communities that regularly meet, share, plan and implement secure tenure initiatives. Hence the communities are able to **establish a sense of place** ( organized groups network), of **security and at-homeness** (land and housing acquisition and the communities and networks built), and **establish a voice** (inter-community exchanges, dialogue , engagement with and participation in governance to advocate and negotiate for programs and policies for secure tenure).

In these complex and uncertain periods of rapid urbanization, migration, of mega-infrastructure and commercial development-induced displacements, and disasters made more frequent by climate change, the HPFP and its communities have, in way, adopted the **resilience framework** of having the flexibility and adaptive capacity to “bounce back”. with the 3 elements of: 1) capacity to absorb (create openings for the inclusion of new -- populations, ideas, values); 2) capacity to change (create mechanisms to allow institutional change to occur more easily); 3) capacity to accommodate the unexpected (planning and policy frameworks that allow room for the unexpected, and that enable regular review in light of these unexpected factors). Through regular regional, national and international core group meetings, and inputs from technical partners, the HPFP is able to scan its environment for emerging trends like climate change, disasters, influx of investment / development funds, and migration, and come up with measures and adjustments to address these. Moreover, the community-led approach coupled with a decentralized and flexible governing structure and National Code of Policies that respect and promote regional contexts, make for an adaptable mechanism to address unforeseen shocks or events.

Illustrative cases of HPFP resilience can be seen in the instances of sudden adversity brought about by disasters and massive displacement. The 2000 Payatas Trash slide in Quezon city tested the cohesiveness of the just federated HPFP, the community-led framework, the savings scheme, and the ability of the HPFP to create models for securing tenure. While initially difficult, the HPFP has managed to turn the disaster into a learning exercise that involved: a) raising awareness of wastepickers on the hazards of their continued stay on the dumpsite; b) mobilized the communities to voluntarily dismantle their hazard-located structures and relocate in 3 alternative sites; promoted continuous savings; c) established the conduct of community surveys in danger zones not only as a post disaster component but as a disaster mitigation and organizing measure.

The Guinsaungon landslide of 2006 in Southern Leyte and the Typhoon Frank damage of the entire Iloilo in 2008 paved the way for the HPFP to developing community capacities for post disaster reconstruction for implementing transit housing in coordination with the Municipality or City authorities.

The Typhoon Reming and Mount Mayon flood and mudslide in 2006 has provided the HPFP and its communities a learning venue to test the versatility of the community-led approach of community surveys, savings and organizing not only as a post disaster reconstruction measure but more importantly as a disaster mitigation and preparedness measure to raise awareness and galvanize communities to save and acquire safe/ hazard free land.

The heavy investment mega-infrastructure development of the North and South Railway in greater Metro Manila to improve the transport system and de-congest Metro Manila involving the relocation of close to 50,000 families has given the HPFP the venue to organize project wide (across several local government units) affected families, engage in multi-government negotiations with communities for in city or municipality relocations, and evolve more pro-poor relocation models.

Lastly, the entry of the Community-led Infrastructure Finance Facility (CLIFF) and other community-led upgrading initiatives (Asian Coalition for Housing Rights and International Labor Organization) in HPFP Iloilo city has paved the way to building capacities for more scaled up community-led slum upgrading that is implemented through a strong, city wide urban poor network, supported by the city, assisted by a network of local professional and academe resources, and at the same time promotes community savings.

### ***How to promote urban inclusion?***

Experience of the HPFP shows that to promote urban inclusion the three pronged approach of community organizing and mobilizing of communities, the establishment of financial models, and continuous and meaningful engagement with the city and other stakeholders is key. Organizing through organizational development training, registration with the SEC to gain legal personalities and accreditation, good socio-eco survey data and linkages with the city are included in this approach. Of import too is having a credible track record of implementation and the establishment of a city wide urban poor network that is supported by technical professionals and academe to serve as a unified platform for dealing with government to have the

sector's advocacies heard and adopted as core city business. Lastly, the community-led approach should always serve as the bedrock for organizing and engagement.

### ***Role of the individual?***

While communities are the moving and driving forces in this urban arena, the role of good individual leaders is important. In a community-led framework, leaders are crucial in ensuring that the democratic and participatory processes are adhered to. The individual leaders should act as the living examples of how a community-led approach should run. They should be confident enough to be servant leaders, facilitators and occasional resource persons and not commanders of the communities. They should lead by example, be subservient to the community processes.

### ***Conclusion***

In closing, I am reminded by the proposition of *Gross* in her paper, that urban resilience is key to addressing the challenges of a globalized and climate-changed urban arena. And that good urban resilience is achievable through: 1) the development of strong communities operating as both AGENDA setters and IMPLEMENTATION partners; and 2) with support of government and other stakeholders. Hence, in successfully navigating the uncertain waters of today, resilience for the HPFP involves the indispensable role of continuously organizing, mobilizing and building the capacities of communities and linking them into strong multi-level networks that espouse self-help, community-led secure tenure, upgrading, risk reduction approaches. Combine this with a strong financial modelling scheme that constantly looks for ways to improve the provision of finance to support tenure, upgrading, basic service delivery of the urban poor. Lastly, there is the element of continuously yet innovatively engaging government, the academe, professionals, and the private sector to obtain institutional buy-in or support for community-driven initiatives.