

Sound Practice No.7 Marikina City Squatter-Free Program¹

Overview

Squatting is a cause of poverty, and the Philippines has a high incidence of squatting, especially in highly urbanized areas. Metro Manila has the most populous squatter colonies in the country, and it has been a continuing major national problem. Till today, it has not been completely addressed. Over the years, squatter communities have, in fact, become politicized, and residents have learned to use their political power to ensure their residency. At other times, some became what we call “professional squatters.” These are people who wander from one squatter area to another, especially in areas developed as government housing, to gain a share from the program but sell the property eventually. In many cases, they are also residents of squatter areas who rent out their abodes or part of it. In short, these people make use of government housing projects for economic benefit.

Marikina, as a city in Metro Manila, is not exempted from this problem. About one third of its population is composed of these informal settlers (this was a name given to squatters sometime in the mid-1990s because the original term has already earned a negative meaning).

It was in 1992 when then Mayor Bayani Fernando launched a settlements program. Armed with the law RA 7279, he mobilized the local government to stage the processes necessary for identifying the squatter colonies and the families residing in the areas, conduct a citywide registration and continuing census, make an inventory of all possible land in the city for resettlement.

By 1993, the citywide registration was held where some 23,000 squatter-families were identified and listed. It was then made clear that the local government’s

¹ This practice has been prepared and written by Julie Borje and her team in Marikina

policy was to make those residing in the city for some 20 years to be automatic beneficiaries of the program.



Significant Background Information

In the program of government of Mayor Fernando, the following were listed as program guidelines for resolving the problem of squatting:

- The slum dwellers shall be given preference to stay in their present residences.
- If any transfer shall be done, the new place should be better than their present community. It has to be: permanent, in Marikina, with roads and drainage, with water, and with light/power.
- The residents are willing to pay for the land.
- Payment should be made in installment and preferably on long-term basis.
- Decisions should be made to effect immediate improvement of these areas or to stop further improvement on areas that have to be vacated eventually so that the affected residents will not waste any more money.
- To stop buck passing and to pinpoint responsibilities, the LGU shall take full charge of the total human settlement function for Marikina.

As the local government began its spade work, it was made part of the policy that: (1) priority for relocation shall be given first to those areas in danger zones and to those that will be affected by government programs; and (2) only 24-square meter lot shall be given to every squatter-family. The foregoing item no. (2) has been decided on the premise that: 'The problem of housing for the poor is not the house but the land.' Likewise, in RA 7279 (or UDHA of 1992), for the term "humane," as it appeared in said law, the city has defined it as 'in-city resettlement' and '24-sq.meter lot' for every family-beneficiary of the program.

By 1993, the Marikina Settlements Office (MSO) was organized with the following as the main components of the setup:

- Administrative Services
- Operations, which is in-charge of census survey, demolition and relocation
- Basic Services ensure the provision of electricity, water and sanitation, and facilitation of students' transfer to schools
- Land Management, negotiates and prepares the documentation pertinent to CMP, conversion of emergency relocation centers (ERC to permanent settlement sites (PSS), and those that may cover direct purchase or donations



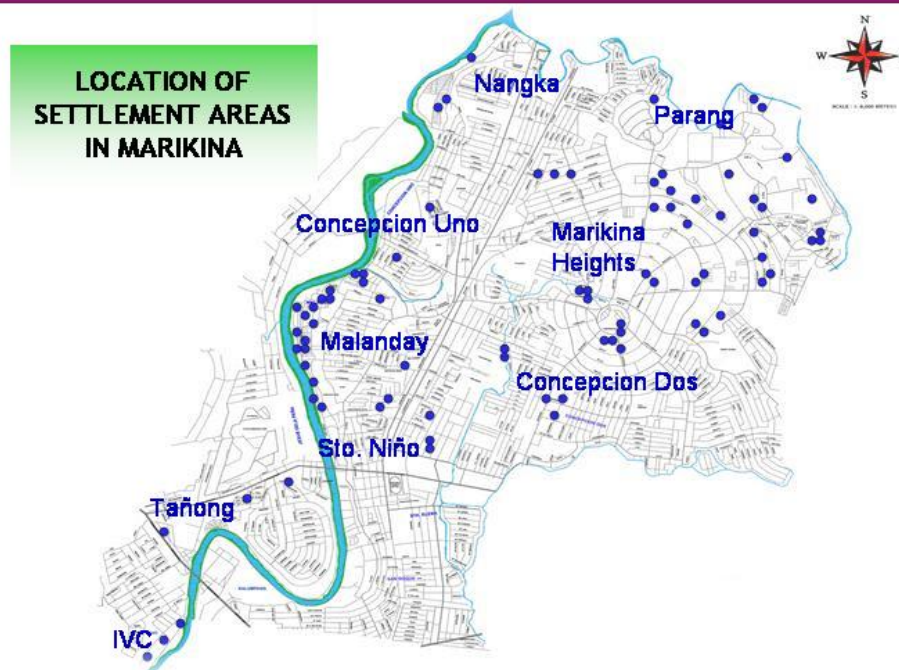
Marikina's demolition team in action

To ensure that the program can immediately be carried out, particularly pertinent to land management, the city's legislative body was coopted to work on the declaration of settlement sites and areas for priority development (including government lands) through ordinances. Likewise, it was made official that the

local government will serve as originator for Community Mortgage Program (CMP).

The program has resulted into the following situation:

- No. of families relocated: 9,935
- No. of settlement sites: 7
- No. of organized community associations: 251
- No. of families with land security tenure: 14,310
- No. of families for relocation: 1,448
- No. of families with individualized electricity metering: 26,964
- No. of families with individualized water metering: 24,245
- No. of remaining squatter-families (in private lands): 1,271
- Total land area of settlement sites: 15.6 has.
- ERCs: 2.3 has.
- CMP payments: P250-P400 per month
- Population of highly-dense communities (today): 26,964 families



Some Details and Relevance to Megacities

The program is a technical and management project, especially in the area of community management. The actions made on this problem of squatting resolved not only the proliferation of squatting in Marikina or in the entire Metro Manila, but have given way to resolving other relevant problems---

1. The removal of squatters along waterways demonstrated the enforcement of the 3- meter easement along creeks;
2. It also gave way to the enactment of a local ordinance defining the river easement, which is 93-meter from the center of the river;
3. With the enforcement of the foregoing items (1) and (2), it made the areas close to waterways safer for both structures (particularly residential houses built near them) and certainly, people;
4. With obstructions removed along creek and river easements, it made the area navigable for engineering equipment to conduct regularly creek and river clean-up, thus, mitigating flooding problem;
5. The program beneficiaries gained more sense of security, which inspired them to give due attention to matters that would protect their status of stability, like peace and order and safety, including disaster risk management;
6. The program helped in changing people's attitude---the beneficiaries have become more disciplined, they are now able to value meaningful activities, and have developed stronger belief in government.

Today, the present administration is completing the CMP process of the remaining communities and is working on a plan to upgrade the state of the communities.

Knowledge Base Coding Reference:

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