

The Science and Numbers Behind Empowerment

Message by Vice President Leni Robredo

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First of all, thank you so much for having me today. As I was reading the program, I noticed the rich lineup of topics like transformative governance, evidence-based approach to policy making, and maximizing CBMS data to improve the lives of the poor.

The success stories of local government units who use baseline data to me should be shared in the front pages of our national newspapers and shown on television because these are proofs that when local leaders are inspired and are serious about addressing the greatest need of their constituents, there's real transformation on the ground.

We all know that we live in extraordinary times now. All over the world, it seems that there is a prevailing culture of hate, polarity, and impunity.

Public discourse has been marked with confusion and cynicism. With so many issues that confront us today, it is so easy to be distracted with all the political noise and neglect the fact that there is a bigger war at stake and that is the war on poverty.

The latest SWS survey for the 4th quarter of 2016 shows that 11.2 Million of Filipinos are jobless, which means that our unemployment rate has grown by an astounding 6.7% from the September 2016 numbers.

This is the worse since December 2014. And should be a wake up call for all of us on the urgent need to focus on the real problems at hand--the need to open our eyes to the truth that many Filipinos are still fighting to have enough means to survive day-to-day.

In our search for solutions to suffering and poverty, our experience proves that evidence-based policy setting is critical to our success.

Without baseline numbers, all of us who have devoted our lives to helping the poor are running blind, unable to see the landscape as we press forward.

Right after assuming the Vice Presidency, we decided to really vent our office and make it more advocacy heavy. We started by finding the baselines on which we could anchor our programs on.

My team and I devoted and are still devoting about two in a week to visit the most remote and marginalized communities around the country. Our team looked at poverty, hunger, health, gender, disaster planning, and other development data so we could identify and validate where the need is greatest and find areas of convergence with our partners.

A few weeks ago, we were in Dona Remedios Trinidad, in Bulacan to check on the reasons why malnutrition rate there is one of the highest in the region.

When we went, we met with the parents of the malnourished children and discovered a common denominator among them: poverty brought about by the lack of stable source of income.

This confirmed what we already knew all along, that feeding programs alone cannot solve hunger. We need to go deep into the very core of the problem, which is poverty.

When I was still head of HUDCC, we tried to visit as many existing housing developments for the poor as much as possible. We saw that many housing projects outside Metro Manila, which were made the relocation sites of informal settler families of the city, lack many of the basic necessities and utilities. No electricity, no access to potable water, lack of access to public transportation and far away from sources of livelihood.

Most of these relocation sites were decided based on the price of the land. Siguro alam ninyo po ito, iyong malapit-lapit sa Metro Manila. Parang iyong NHA mayroon siyang requirement, parang maximum lang na presyo ng lupa na pwedeng bilhin para sa relocation sites.

So, siyempre dahil may maximum na presyo, hindi naman na makakahanap sa loob ng Metro Manila. Maghahanap na sa labas ng Metro Manila para magfit dun presyo. So yung mga relocation sites para sa mahihirap na nasa loob ng Metro Manila, nasa labas na ngayon. Karamihan nasa Bulacan, nasa Cavite, o kung saan-saan.

Pero parang may nakakalimutan, na kahit nakakamura sa presyo ng lupa, lalabas mas mahal pa din. Mas mahal pa din dahil dun sa lilipatan walang koneksyon sa kuryente, walang potable water, napakalayo sa public transportation, walang hanap-buhay. Kaya marami po tayong relocation sites sa labas ng Manila na bakante yung mga bahay.

Nag-ubos tayo ng maraming resources pero hindi naman siya inooccupy. Paminsan tatanggapin lang yung bahay pero iiwanan din. And they would choose to go back to Manila where they are informal settlers once again kasi doon ang trabaho.

May isa po akong binisita when I was still in HUDCC, may isa akong binisitang relocation site na napakalaki sa Tacloban. Nasa north of Tacloban siya, doon bumili ng lupa na gagawing relocation site kasi doon nga medyo mura ang lupa.

Pero wala pong access sa tubig. Halos kulang kulang 20km yung pinakamalapit na source ng tubig. Ngayon, nagbudget yung gobyerno ng napakalaking amount para magkaroon lang ng tubig.

Pero kinukwenta po namin ni Sec. Mark Villar kung idagdag iyong gagastusin ng gobyerno na pera para sa tubig, mas mabuti pang bumili nalang lupa na mas malapit-lapit sa sources of income.

So, iyong punto ko lang po dito, ganito kahalaga iyong baseline data sa pagdedesiyon.

Isa pa pong halimbawa, noong bagong-bago pa lang po ako sa HUDCC, may mga housing agencies na nag-present sa akin ng accomplishments. Nakita ko na accomplishments: number of houses built.

Pero kapag binisita mo, marami doon sa houses built unoccupied na dahil wala namang services. So sabi ko baka mahalaga na palitan na natin ang metrics.

Dapat sa housing hindi na accomplishment ang number of houses built, dapat activity lang 'yon. Dapat iyong accomplishment, ilang buhay ba ang nabago for the better dahil sa bagong mga bahay na tinayo ng gobyerno.

Sa feeding program, halos lahat ng barangay mayroon namang feeding programs. Pero parang marami pa rin iyong hindi nagsimula sa baseline, hindi din sinusukat kung gaano ka-effective ang feeding programs.

Baka marami tayong ginagastos pero hindi naman napupunta sa mabuti. Kaya napakahalaga ng CBMS dahil iyong baselines magagamit natin pagsukat kung gaano kaepektibo yung mga ginagastos natin.

Iyong activity, lagi po nating iisipin na hindi yan yung accomplishment. Iyong activity is only the means of achieving the targets.

So when I was still in HUDCC, we decided to overhaul the entire policy and system and craft a national housing program that is truly responsive to the needs of the poor. To be able to do that, it was critical for us to have accurate baseline numbers. When I left HUDCC, we were in the process of completing our arsenal of baseline data.

Poverty is a multi-dimensional problem that requires a holistic and comprehensive approach. This means that our strategy should treat the major dimensions of poverty exactly as they are: complex and closely interwoven. This is how we can provide concrete and sustainable solutions, not just quick fixes and simplistic yet ineffective results.

So last October, we launched the flagship program of the Office of the Vice President – Angat Buhay. “Angat” meaning lifting people from deep poverty and “Buhay” signifying the value of life of every living Filipino, as opposed to the growing culture of death and violence today.

Angat Buhay aims to contribute to the fulfillment of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, focusing on six key advocacy areas: maternal and child healthcare, food security and nutrition, quality secondary education and, rural development, women empowerment, and housing.

Currently, we are piloting Angat Buhay in 50 partner local government units (LGUs) across the country. We are now linking these LGUs with much-needed aid and resources from our various partners from the development sector, non-profit groups and small and huge private corporations.

What we have come to discover is that collective action, effective partnerships, and community engagement are the best ways to fight poverty and inequality. But it is never easy.

The next six years can be a good opportunity for our local governments to shine. As local officials, you have the technical and operational capacities to bring forth concrete reforms in your communities.

You have tools like the CBMS, technical support from the De La Salle University's Angelo King Institute for Economic and Business Studies, and the DILG to provide data so your policies can be truly responsive. But collaboration is always the key.

As experts and leaders in the development sector, we all need to develop a common results framework, with shared metrics so we can measure the impact of our collaboration. Ganito po yung ginagawa namin ngayon sa Angat Buhay.

Magkaroon ng common scorecards for every key advocacy area we would be taking care of. Ang parati naming sinasabi 'pag hindi natin masusukat, 'wag nalang natin gawin. At para masukat ang isang bagay, kailangan na kailangan natin na mayroong baselines.

I was sharing with Dr. Celia a while ago that when I was a very new member of the House of Representatives, walo pong LGU iyong nasa distrito ko.

Sa walo, dalawa palang doon yung kabahagi ng CBMS. Hirap na hirap kaming mag-umpisa ng mga proyekto kasi wala kaming baseline data na kailangan. 2013 na ako nagsimula pero sa ibang LGU ang

hawak pa naming data ay 2009. But Dr. Celia was telling me a while ago na ngayon I think more than half of the country's LGUs have already started with their CBMS data. Napakalaking bagay para sa paggawa ng mga programa.

Gaya po ng sabi ko kanina, we must stop measuring and reporting activities. Kasi activities lang 'yun. Let's start measuring quality of life. This is not about us ticking off a development list and saying "I did it".

This is about us empowering those we help and encouraging them to say "We did it together". Because when we do, the transformation on the ground runs deep, and it will continue even when we are no longer around.

Naalala ko po noong buhay pa ang asawa ko, when he was still Mayor in Naga, parati niyang pinapaulit-ulit sa kaniyang mga kasamahan, na lahat dapat nasusukat. Kapag nasukat at maganda ang resulta, we institutionalize already.

Dahil tayong mga local officials, dumadaan lang tayo. Pero iyong mga taong pinagsisilbihan natin, parating nandiyan. Mas mabuti na kapag maganda iyong programa, kahit wala na tayo, nandiyan pa rin.

And those words appear to be very prophetic. Hindi pa naman namin noon alam na mawawala siya agad. Pero dahil na-institutionalize iyong mga programa niya, not only in Naga when he was Mayor, but also when he was already with the DILG, when he started the Seal of Good Governance, Seal of Good Housekeeping before which was converted into the Seal of Good Governance, when he started the Performance Challenge Fund, when he started Bottom-Up Budgeting, parang naging prophetic iyong kaniyang words na i-institutionalize iyong mabubuti para kahit wala na ako nandiyan pa rin yung mabubuting programa.

Empowerment at the grassroots and good governance improves the lives of many Filipinos.

But we need to do it right, however difficult.

Now more than ever, we must act with passion and purpose, and move forward without fear.

So today and in the days to come, may we continue to work hard together to serve our people, especially the last, the least, and the lost.

Maraming salamat po.

Good luck sa tatlong araw na in-allot niyo dito.

Magandang araw sa inyong lahat.