

*Fr. Jorge Anzorena, S.J.*

# **SELAVIP**

## **NEWSLETTER**



**APRIL 2021**

### **Journal of Low-Income Housing in Asia and the World**



A tahô vendor is spotted placing some cups of his product on a table of a community pantry at Brgy Panamitan, Kawit, Cavite.  
Photo by Starfish Project facebook

#### **Community Pantries A Multiplication of Loaves and Fishes**

And just as coronavirus sends unemployment to a 15-year high, the African swine fever sent the price of pork, a staple in the Philippine diet, rocketing. Filipinos now go hungry amid a ‘double whammy’ of job losses and rising prices.

Ana Patricia Non, 26 years old, set up a small bamboo cart on a pavement on the street where she lived and stocked it with ₱800 (US\$ US16.50) worth of groceries, including vegetables, packs of rice and noodles, canned food, and bottles of water.

With a handwritten cardboard sign that read

“Give according to your means, take according to your need.”

Little did Ana Patricia Non know that her idea would soon spread like wildfire. Within a day, another community pantry appeared a few kilometers away. Over the week, hundreds of similar food banks sprang up in Manila and throughout the Philippines, all of them sustained by community donations.

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1978-2001: without pictures

2002-mid 2018: with pictures

Fr. Anzorena's Selavip Newsletter is issued twice a year, every year since 1978, without fail.

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THEMES

E. J. Anzorena, S.J.

April 2021

## Is Hope Still Possible?

By Jorge Cela Carvajal

4 March 2021

For work reasons I have spent 11 of the last 20 years traveling throughout Latin America. I have lived stably (for longer than one consecutive year) in four Latin American countries: The Dominican Republic, Brazil, Peru and Cuba. This experience does not give me nearly enough knowledge, much less understanding, of the various political systems to allow me to comprehend the crisis of democracy in the region. But it does give me certain insights that I want to share.

The political systems that I have experienced, be they representative democracies marked by capitalist populism or Caribbean socialism, have deteriorated due to the influence of multiple factors, but I will focus on three: the demonization or deification of the market, the exclusive exercise of power and the steady erosion of the common good. Faced with this situation, is it still possible to hope of living in real and full democracy?

### The Demonization or Deification of the Market

As a result of the long running cold war, the world was divided into capitalist and socialist systems. Thus we can group the United States and Haiti among the former and China and Cuba among the latter. The usefulness of this classification is

increasingly being called into question, as it groups together countries with very dissimilar systems. However, in the Latin American context, the attitude towards the market continues to be a differentiating factor. While some tend more and more to deify it, others demonize it.

Representative democracies exist in capitalist systems where the deification of the market positions it as a macro system that encompasses everything, including the state. The latter becomes an object of the market that falls within the laws of supply and demand. Access to government can be bought, which is the key to managing state power. The privatization of the state has thus come to pass.

A few decades ago, the Dominican Republic fought over whether or not to privatize state assets, such as the companies of the late dictator Trujillo, which had been nationalized. Today what is at stake is the privatization of the state itself.

Political parties increasingly represent fewer ideological perspectives on society and are more similar to companies, which one enters into for economic interests (much like investing or working in a private company). They invest in achieving governmental power, in order to manage the state in such a way that the

investments are recuperated and a profit is produced. From political leaders, who invest their own assets and receive others' for their campaigns, in exchange for commitments on positions or perks; to the simple voter, who sells their vote to cover the bare necessities, or votes for the person who will hand out the most, rather than the person one who will best administer the state's assets, in this way opening the door to populist propositions.

For this reason, programs matter less and less in electoral campaigns; what matters more are promises of individual economic advantages and how they will be distributed.

The so-called neoliberal tendencies deified the market to such an extent that they would propose that the state was becoming increasingly useless, to the point of it being a hindrance, due to the market's capacity for self-regulation. The state had to shrink so that the market could function without obstacles.

But the regulatory capacity of the market fails to guarantee the equitable distribution of goods. On the contrary, the gap between rich and poor has increased. In Latin America, this is evident: it has the distinction of being the most unequal continent in terms of distribution of wealth.

Hence, the socialist proposal, which demonizes the market, is appealing to the popular masses. In practice, socialism creates an absolute monopoly of the market, eliminating competition, which supposedly causes inequality. But eliminating private interest in the market leads to a lackluster attitude towards production. Cuban productivity has been affected to such an extent that Cuba must import 80% of what it eats, and this is not

primarily due to the effect of the North American embargo. The centralized economy and state capitalism have plunged Cuba into a permanent economic crisis in which it has only been able to survive thanks to foreign aid from Russia and Venezuela, money sent back by emigrants in capitalist countries, and tourism, which curiously is managed by large capitalist multinationals allied to the state. The other significant intake has been the sale of services of Cuban professionals by the socialist state, acting as a large brokerage firm for poorly paid 'human capital'.

The crisis has deteriorated and endangered the two great achievements of the Cuban revolution, financed with the help of the Soviet Union: health and education. Low productivity causes a lack of resources to invest in social services.

Both the deification and the demonization of the market have produced a weakening of democracy, that is, of the capacity of the majority to influence state decisions and to benefit from the nation's assets.

In this process of privatization of the state, the role played by the media has been very important. Money is spent on advertising, in the same manner as soft-drink or toothpaste manufacturers. And whoever invests more and better, sells more. Political campaigns are the number one clients of advertising companies in populist capitalist democracies, while the control of the media is an important weapon in socialist societies. For this reason, the new Cuban constitution continues to guarantee state ownership of the media.

The technological revolution is beginning to undermine capitalist or state

media control and to force a restructuring of media management. Two examples give plenty of proof to this fact: President Trump's handling of twitter and the growing importance of fake news in political campaigns.

Curiously, these two opposing stances in relation to the market have similar effects on consumption: it becomes the centre of life. In capitalist countries, consumerism is unleashed with terrible social and ecological impacts, and in socialism, fears around consumption are exacerbated in a context of scarcity. During the so-called Special Period (after the fall of the Soviet bloc) any conversation between Cubans within 10 minutes would already have moved on to food. It was a daily obsession. This phenomenon is beginning to reproduce itself in the current situation.

#### The Exclusionary Exercise of Power

One of the most obvious characteristics of the deterioration of representative democracies is the exercise of power as an exclusionary force. This is in keeping with an economic system based on competition. Access to power is seen as an opportunity to exclude others from participation. In capitalist democracies this is evident when a change of government personnel occurs after a new party wins an election. In Cuban socialism it is the manner in which the single party oversees all life in the nation.

The winner, either of the elections or the war, has the right to dominate by fair means or foul and the loser is excluded until their turn comes. This has been the case in the caudillo or strongman type leaderships in Latin American dictatorships

or weak democracies. In the name of the good of the people, those who think differently are imprisoned or forced into exile. This is the absolute denial of diversity as part of the make-up of society.

Today, when modernity already has deep roots in Latin American societies, a homogenous general population is no longer possible. The diverse nature of civil society is expressed in the variety of movements that reflect multiple identities: regional, gender, labor, generational, religious or racial.

Political regimes have had to accept various forms of negotiation. Sometimes they have tried to incorporate this diversity into the state apparatus by creating a "state civil society", if we are to give a name to this contradiction. Other times, regimes have accepted the presence of these movements while seeking to limit their scope of action, thus giving rise to civil society's continuous struggle to expand the frontiers of what is permitted.

This exclusionary conception of power strengthens the self-perpetuating desires of power holders. Given that you can either have all the power, or you can have none, the urge is to keep it in your own hands. The idea of parliamentary democracies is precisely the opposite. Parliaments are the expression of shared power, in which negotiation is necessary. Latin American democracies are generally presidential, centered on the President. But the existence of parliaments, where there is a plurality of parties, means negotiation is unavoidable. As parties become more like companies, the people are seen as customers. The important thing is to convince them why they should buy, or

why they should vote. Their participation is limited to their moment at the ballot box.

Each time those elected feel less like representatives of the people

At most they consider themselves representatives of the party. In the case of the single party system, the party is the point of reference, the sole overseer of the life of the nation, which supposedly represents the will of the people, but when it does not, it suffers no consequences.

This exclusionary power gives rise to power struggles, competitive in nature and similar to situations where the market is seen as the organizer of life, in which politics adopts a warlike character aimed at defeating the enemy. Social life becomes a struggle for power, where in the long run anything goes, because war is war. Someone said that power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. This exclusionary power is a breeding ground for repressive regimes, corruption and impunity.

We could say that during the 20th century the motto of the French Revolution divided the world between those who sought freedom (the market) even at the cost of equality (democracy) and those who sought equality even at the cost of freedom. Fraternity was the great forgotten term. Perhaps if the latter had been the central principle, then equality could have been combined with freedom. Only by acknowledging others as brothers and sisters, with their rights fully recognized, can a freedom that seeks equality come into being.

The Renunciation of the Common Good

Part of the legacy of modernity is the comprehension of humans as individuals. In this conceptualization, an awareness of the relationships one has with others and with nature is not necessarily part of affirmation of the self. In a context shaped by market competition and the struggle for power, the other is configured as a competitor, as the enemy. The pursuit of wellbeing is conceptualized as a battlefield. Wellbeing comes by way of accumulation, which is the result of success in competition, thereby excluding others. Social relations are defined by conquest and defense, which are carried out by a well-defined in-group.

All that is public, common, and belongs to everyone, is perceived as taking away from what is ours, what is private. We lay claim to the part of the public space that belongs to us as members of the collective. All that is common feels alien to us if we cannot appropriate it. We fight to conquer and preserve our private space, even when it has been expropriated from the public.

The market is not designed to facilitate the survival of all, but to create opportunities for the winners. Politics is not the search for the common good, rather the space to accumulate private assets. Citizens are replaced by masses demanding their own individual rights. In the extreme this means demanding the right to use public space without respect for others, ignoring the rules of coexistence. People demand the right not to wear a mask in their own part of the common space, even if it affects the right to health of others. Public space is no longer shared between everyone; rather each person sees it as their own.

In the socialist world, where theoretically the individual is subordinated



to the collective and where the public good tries to make the private unnecessary, scarcity provokes the pursuit of the private as a survival mechanism. Examples of this are the current queues to buy food or toiletries. Shortages mean people must wait in massive queues to be assured of their own rations. Given the threat of infection from the pandemic in the queues, many people prefer to pay a premium to those who stand in the queue for the relevant products. This provokes a more severe clamp down on coleros<sup>1</sup>, which in turn results in an increase in black market prices, due to the increased risks involved. Those who have resources tend to stockpile, for fear of shortages. Thus scarcity increases and the vicious circle of inequality increases.

Our societies, disillusioned by our political history, have come to the intuition that the solution lies elsewhere, that it is necessary to look for alternatives to the system. Thus the informal world comes into being, churning just below the surface, which we pretend not to see, but it shocks us by its efficiency and cruelty in causing many to suffer horrific conditions for survival.

And we do not ask the question: if our systems have failed, where do we turn?

### The Glimmering Seed of Hope

In the Caribbean we are in cyclone season. The devastating passing of a hurricane is capable of uprooting century-old trees. Some, lying on the ground after the awesome phenomenon, retain small

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<sup>1</sup> Coleros - Name given to those who queue to buy products to resell at higher prices.

root hairs still buried in the ground. Fifteen days later, upon visiting the sad spectacle of razed earth, we discovered that small green leaves had appeared on these delicate roots. This is the indestructible energy of life sprouting. This is the hope that grows feebly in the desert. In those fragile green leaves lies the future.

Thus, democracy is being born in small communities that have confronted the storms of crisis with creative solidarity. These are groups, families, organizations, churches and movements that have not been led astray by the seductive but deceptive offers disseminated by the propaganda machine, nor by the fear of ruthless repression, nor by the lies repeated ad nauseam. As long as this truly inclusive fraternity infused with solidarity, which is passed down from parent to child, continues to exist and manages to find a way forward, even a tentative one; there is still hope.

Because democracy is built from below

It creates spaces of a fraternity that understands how to integrate freedom and equality. And while it has not yet managed to grow as a system of social coexistence, it opens spaces of hope and uncovers pathways to follow.

A democratic culture must be created that develops the capacities for creative entrepreneurship, participation and solidarity, emanating not only from discourse, but from structures of coexistence and governance in the home, school, civil society, the market and government.

I think that the new communication technologies, which teach us to build

knowledge not from repetition and accumulation, but from creativity and connectivity, will help in this endeavor to construct the future of democracy.

A necessary component is the existence of legislation to promote initiatives of creativity and solidarity in the market, to guarantee authentic participation in complex societies and to develop mechanisms of social inclusion for all. A market oriented towards a democratic society, and a power structure organized through participation guided by solidarity, will help promote the common good as a way to achieve the good life. The challenge is to build social systems that promote this.

Pope Francis, through his charismatic leadership, has promoted an economy of solidarity that starts with understanding the world as our common home. He has

implemented new ways of organizing power in the Church through synodality – which opens participation to the geographic, economic and existential peripheries – and de-clericalization, all of which functions to eliminate the abuse of power.

It is not a one-day task. But, as Pope Francis has said, it cannot be established by force – through taking control of spaces – only by setting processes in motion. This is everyone's job.

[Original article published in Spanish at [Promotio Iustitiae](#)/Translation by Nils Sundermann/Image by [Free-Photos](#) from [Pixabay](#)]

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THEMES

E. J. Anzorena, S.J.

April 2021

## Interrogating the Food and Agriculture Subsidy Regime of the WTO *An Indian Perspective*

Dear friends and allies,

The global trade system established in 1948 by the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the predecessor organization of the WTO, intentionally excluded agriculture from its jurisdiction. The exception, requested by the US, allowed member states to maintain support and protection policies for domestic agriculture.

However, by 1986, at the Uruguay Round negotiations, the GATT decided to change course and establish a market-oriented agricultural trading system, resulting in the 1995 adoption of the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA), which imposes disciplines on domestic agricultural subsidies.

But even under these rules, there is an influential section within the policy and business community who think India's remaining subsidies are too high, and they demand the abolition of state protections

in the agricultural sector, including regulated markets and minimum support prices. Millions of farmers [have taken to the streets](#) in recent months to oppose these reforms.

This paper by Biswajit Dhar explores the AoA's impact on the farming sectors of the US and the EU—the world's largest providers of farm subsidies—as well as India. Whereas the US and EU have successfully maneuvered around the AoA's disciplines in order to subsidize private agribusiness, the agreement constrains India's ability to provide subsidized food grains to its vulnerable population, obviating the need for the current reforms.

In solidarity,

You may download the full article:  
Focus on the Global South  
<https://focus-indiaa.org.in>

CHAD

E. J. Anzorena, S.J.

April 2021

## Sadié's Disability Has Not Stopped Her from Wanting to Pursue Her Education

Sadié is a 13-year-old refugee girl born and raised in Djabal refugee camp, in the region of GozBeida, Eastern Chad. She lives with her mother and three of her siblings, and the family struggles to make ends meet. Her life in the camp has been even more challenging due to a paralysis in her legs that has always prevented her from walking.

Yet, Sadié did not give up on school. Every morning, she would crawl along the dusty roads in the camp to attend class. "I love school," she says. "My favorite subjects are Arabic and Mathematics because I understand them quickly."

Her life changed last November when she received a tricycle to help her move around the camp!

JRS created a special fund with UNHCR to purchase tricycles, trolleys, and crutches for refugee children with reduced mobility, to help them pursue their studies and enhance their social integration.

With her new tricycle, Sadié can now go to class more easily and it is no longer a challenge to simply spend time with her friends.

Many others are in need of special services. Thank you for helping us to ensure that children with disabilities are not left behind.

For further information:  
Jesuit Refugee Service  
<https://jrs.net>



INDIA

E. J. Anzorena, S.J.

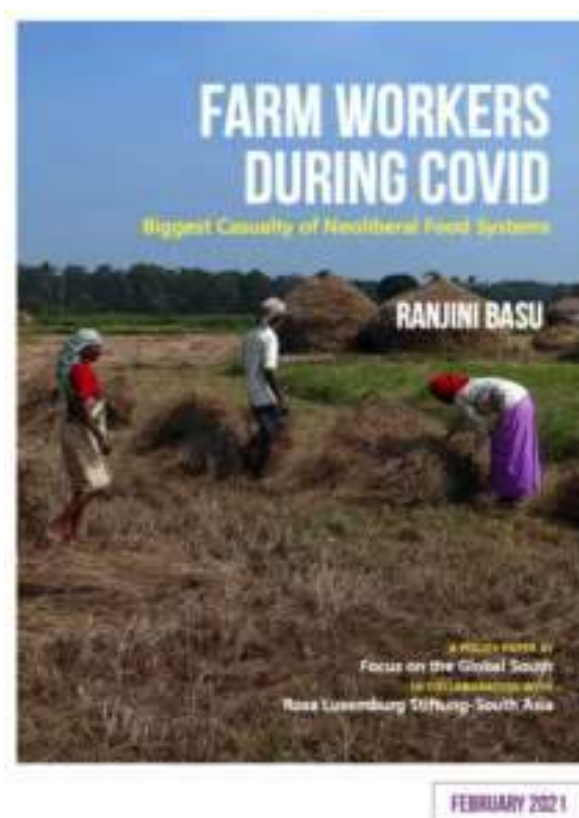
April 2021

## Farm Workers during COVID: Biggest Casualty of Neoliberal Food Systems

At a time when the COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the disastrous effects of the global neoliberal order, highlighting the need for radical redistributive reforms, India has chosen the opposite path. The three new agricultural laws enacted by the government of Narendra Modi threaten to further liberalize the sector at the expense of landowning farmers, exposing them to greater privatization and corporate capture. Less attention has been paid, however, to how India's liberalization of the agricultural sector will affect rural workers.

Around the world, essential food workers have borne the brunt of the combined ravages of COVID-19 lockdown measures and neoliberal policies, thrusting global food systems into chaos. This paper analyses the effects of these policies in the United States and Italy in an effort to imagine the effect they will soon have on farm workers in India.

The prognosis is bleak. The Indian government is on course to replicate the dual health and economic crises afflicting the global North by enabling rampant corporate capture and withdrawing state support for workers. The main difference, however, is that whereas farm workers represent tiny fractions of the populations of the United States and Italy, in India, they



are a sizable percentage of the working class.

### BY WAY OF CONCLUSIONS

The consistent position that successive governments had taken, wherein agricultural policies were focused on promoting food security and rural livelihood has served India well in terms of protecting the vulnerabilities in this sector.

In international trade negotiations, both in the WTO and in the bilateral FTAs,

India has been able to argue convincingly that given the preponderance of small and marginal farm holdings, constituting over 86 per cent of total farm holdings, agricultural policies pursued by the government were primarily oriented towards protecting food security and rural livelihood.

This allowed the government not only to provide effective tariff protection to small producers from facing unfair competition from global agri-business, but it was also able to provide adequate levels of subsidies to make farming a viable occupation.

The focus of the new farm legislations on promoting exports and making India an agricultural export hub can change this scenario completely. Major players in the global agricultural market, like Australia,

the United States, the European Union, who are already questioning the WTO-compatibility of India's exports of agricultural products, could mount further pressure on India to open its agricultural markets arguing that they must enjoy a level-playing field. In other words, if India wishes to operate in the global market as an exporter, these countries should also be allowed to operate in India.

It is of paramount concern whether the agricultural sector, which supports directly or indirectly, almost 60 per cent of the workforce, can withstand major disruptions caused by import competition and the attendant uncertainties of the global market.

To download the report:  
<https://focusweb.org/>

JAPAN

E. J. Anzorena, S.J.

April 2021

## Shibuya's Homeless during the COVID Pandemic

By Shimokawa Masatsugo S.J.

NOJIREN :

Free Association for the Subsistence of the HOMELESS

COVID-19 continues to wreak havoc and affect our daily lives greatly. From foreign lands, we hear reports that COVID-19 is causing tremendous harm among the poorer members of society. Some are saying that epidemics of the past, like the plague reduced social disparity, but COVID-19 is spreading inequality. (I feel this is not just due to the virus characteristics, but because the poor are being abandoned by measures and policies adopted by many governments).

In this article I would like to detail how the problem of social exclusion has worsened and become more visible during this period, by introducing the situation of the homeless community in the area of Shibuya (Tokyo) under COVID-19, as well the activities of the support organizations, mainly NOJIREN and Neru Kargi.

Since the last week of February 2020, when the pandemic began in earnest, most of soup kitchen groups across Tokyo, not just in Shibuya have stopped their activities.

As far as we know, churches as well as well as other religions and citizens organizations were engaged in weekly meal distribution around Shibuya, Shinjuku and Yotsuya – in at least one location somewhere every day.

Most of these activities stopped since the end of February due to concerns about COVID-19 infection. As a result, many homeless people faced hunger.

Unlike the image that many people have of the homeless, quite a few of them are working. The most common work is collecting aluminum cans in the down area and selling them to vendors. There are also people who work as day laborers or temporary workers in the construction industry.

They do not rely on soup kitchens and eat with the money they earn. However due to corona virus, the purchase price of aluminum dropped suddenly from about 110 yen to 40 yen.

The reason, it is said, that China's aluminum imports decreased dramatically. Not only that, the number of aluminum

cans that are thrown into the trash in downtown has dropped sharply.

On top of this, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government suspended its special employment measures program commonly known as “cardboard notebook”. This is an employment program in which the Tokyo Metropolitan Government hires individuals to perform work such as cleaning public parks or cutting grass in the Metropolitan area.

There were about 3,000 homeless people in the Taito ward (Sanya district, Shibuya and Shinjuku wards who were registered and work was offered to them on a rotating basis.

On average, a registered person would be called up about four days a month or about once a week, and they would be paid about 8,000 yen per day,

However this operation was suspended due to the covid pandemic in the new fiscal year, which began in April.

For many, my guess is that for about 30% of the Shibuya area homeless, this cardboard notebook was their only cash income. So, as I wrote above, the suspension of meal services one after another has made “hunger” a very real problem.

We requested to the Tokyo Metropolitan Government a special provision of compensation for the suspension of this program, but this request was denied.

The national government provided compensation for many workers through its COVIP 19 employment adjustment subsidy system and relief benefits but the homeless were abandoned by both the metropolitan and the national governments

For more than 20 years, NOJIREN has hosted cooking and eating together (a soup kitchen) every Saturday. However after the government declared a state of emergency on April 8, we started to hear reports of homeless people who could not eat anything for several days. So, as an emergency measure, we started on April 21 to to also prepare meals on Tuesday and Thursday. In other words, NOJIREN was cooking meals beginning on April 21 three times a week. After 115 meals were served on April 21, the number of the people grew with each serving. After the Golden week in the first week of May the numbers increased further to 159, 172 and 185. About 180 people continued to come even after May 25, when the state of emergency was lifted.

Of course in order to avoid the risk of infection, we tried different things, for example we asked people who received packed rice to take it and eat alone. To reduce crowding, we also extended the service time. We also used masks during meals and disinfected during meal preparation. We asked the supporters to avoid coming by train, and we did not accept new volunteers.

The situation began to change after June 8, when the work of the Cardboard Notebook program resumed. This made it possible for a quite a few of the homeless to eat on their own income without relying on soups kitchens. Furthermore, the soup kitchens of other churches gradually resumed. In response to these changes, NOJIREN ended its emergency weekday serving on Thursday June 11th as volunteers and homeless who were central in the service were becoming exhausted.



A total of 2,851 meals were made during the time that meals were served on weekdays.

I also want to write about the Special Fixed-amount Benefit.

The Prime Minister stated that he will give 100,000 yen to all the people, and the Minister for internal Affairs and Communications said, “to all residents living in Japan”.

News and rumors of this spread spread among the Shibuya homeless too, and some of them felt hopeful that even homeless people might receive this benefit

We also corroborated with the homeless, thinking that the clear words of the Prime Minister and the Interior Minister indicated real possibility. However when we actually applied for benefits, some were paid because they still had a residence certificate, while others were rejected because they did not have a residence certificate anywhere.

This stark differentiation occurred repeatedly. Many homeless people already felt that they have been cut off from society but the fact that they could not receive a benefit that was touted as “for everybody” reconfirmed this. Some even muttered, “I’m not a person”.

I think the shock would have been much less if there had been no such scattered benefit. The problem arose because the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications decided to provide benefits based in the Basic Resident Register, that is, the resident card that some do not want to get one.

From June to August we carried out a signature campaign to provide benefits to homeless people without a resident card, lobbying members of the parliament and

negotiating directly with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications.

In this process my greatest surprise was that neither the officials of the Ministry Affairs and Communications nor the members of the Diet understood that many homeless do not have resident card, and that it is extremely difficult for a homeless person to register as a resident, even if they wanted to register as a resident. Perhaps some readers of this article may be unsure the reason. Too, so I would like to explain here.

Many of the elderly homeless have moved from place to place as construction workers and, in the process, were deleted from resident’s registry.

There are also people who had left their homes to escape domestic violence. They do not want their family and relatives to know where they are.

Some people cannot register as a resident because they are afraid of debt collectors.

People who use parks as sleeping places may want to register a park as their place of residence, but the government offices don’t accept this,

If you are staying at an internet café, even though the notice from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and communications stated that one can register as a resident at an internet café, in reality, there was not even one internet café in Tokyo, where a person could register as a resident.

And surprisingly even if you apply for welfare, you also need to register as a resident. The notice from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications that you can register as a resident a free low-quality accommodation facilities, the so-called “poverty business” facilities is not

practicable. For example in Shibuya ward, there is only one such free low quality accommodation facility that can be used to get a resident card.

The internet cafes and other low priced accommodations are private companies, so the business owners must agree in order for a person to get a resident card.

Of course, it goes without saying, many among the homeless have been discriminated against and despised at government offices, or have been expelled by government offices from their sleeping place in parks and the streets, so the very act of going to a government office has become traumatic.

We negotiated with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications by presenting an alternative scheme using the family registry certificate, which would not rely on the resident card, and could also prevent double benefits. However, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications made no effort to change the payment method based on the resident card.

I was present at this negotiation, and when I asked at the end, “Was it a lie when you said that you intended to provide the

benefit to all residents? “Is it your intention to cut off the homeless?” Their answer was. “We think it is necessary to draw a line somewhere.”

They have cut off the inhabitants without residence cards even if they are facing a life-or-death crisis. They who have lost their jobs and their prepared meals due to the COVID Pandemic.

Unfortunately, I think about 80% of the homeless who came for our meals did not receive the 100,000 yen.

These events merely manifested the disparities, discrimination, and exclusions that already existed in Japanese society even before the COVID crisis. Whether post COVID, or with COVID, I believe we are being called to remake society so that every homeless and excluded person is valued as a person with dignity. We cannot just return to the way things were; or continue in the current state

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## A Nation at the Crossroads

“Shooting a good Samaritan in the head” is a gruesome but accurate description of what happened last month to Wai Yan Htun, a 16-year-old boy from Mandalay. He was on his way from his place to a nearby market to work as a porter when he saw peaceful protesters and rescue workers being bullet-sprayed by the Burmese military. Instead of running away for his own safety, he ran towards the killing zone and carried the wounded on his pushcart for emergency treatment.

In the process of doing so, he was shot in the head by a military sniper who had a real intent to kill him. Surrounded by strangers in the ongoing chaos, he said he

could not hold his life any longer and, with his eyes still open wide, died on the spot.

Tragically, the military’s use of live ammunitions and aiming for the heads of peaceful protesters were very frequent and, in some cases, well documented.

A 19-year-old girl, Angel, from the same city, and another girl of the same age, Myat Twe Twe Khaing, from the country’s capital city, were both shot in the head – proving the military’s intention to kill peaceful protestors and to turn the nation into a slaughter ground.

Within 36 days of their coup d’état, according to a media tally, they have killed at least 55 innocent people and arrested



thousands of people just for refusing to acknowledge the military's coup.

These sad stories are just a few samples of the situations all over the whole country where people have to helplessly bear the brutal oppression of the military regime. In the regions of the country's

ethnic minorities, the military's brutalities have been happening on a regular basis for so long, but now people from the whole nation have to suffer together in similar ways – arbitrary arrests, nightly raids of homes, tortures, and killings. Moreover, the regime has shut down most of the





private media companies and restricted the internet services severely without providing any logical reasons for doing so.

Against such ruthless military regime, the youth are leading street protests and online campaigns. Learning unbearably painful lessons from the miserable lives under six-decades-long oppression by the consecutive military regimes, they are convinced that they should never let this current regime steal their future away.

They are risking their lives to stop the regime from enslaving the nation and to restore human dignity. At the same time, their protests have a crucial aim to help government employees do the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), an indefinite refusal to work for the regime.

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NEPAL

E. J. Anzorena, S.J.

April 2021

## Lumanti Support Group for Shelter

Lumanti is a non-profit making organization established in 1994. It is dedicated to the alleviation of poverty in Nepal through the improvement of shelter condition. Since its establishment, Lumanti has been focusing its work in the informal settlements and marginalized communities in the cities and towns of Nepal. It focuses on slum upgrading, housing projects, saving and credits, water and sanitation interventions, research, advocacy, strengthening community organizations and many more.

Lumanti Support Group for Shelter was registered in 1994 as a non-government organization dedicated to alleviate urban

poverty in Nepal through integrated approach of improving shelter conditions. Lumanti with its approach of providing housing for urban poor is now working for onsite upgrading of settlements with the provision of secure tenure, support in the construction of housing and improved access to sanitation and water supply and credit facilities.

Lumanti is also coordinating community based disaster resilience program to promote grassroots women led disaster mitigation activities. Lumanti promotes all these activities through community led finance mechanisms by strengthening of saving and credit programs and cooperatives.



Following the workshop on 'The Issues of Squatter Settlements' in 1990 led by Dr. Ramesh Manandhar (well respected and accomplished architect and planner), this initiative was started by a small group of individual who were once involved in welfare and awareness raising initiatives in the informal squatter settlements in Kathmandu. The group was once again inspired to come together in 1993 after the sudden demise of Dr. Manandhar in the Thai airbus crash. To take his dreams forward of 'Secured Shelter for the Poor' Lumanti was established which literally means "memory" in the Newari dialect (dialect of local Newari community).

Following this deep belief of late Dr. Manandhar, Lumanti is dedicated to ensure secured shelter for the urban poor, where shelter means not just a house but connotes a much broader holistic understanding of habitat. It includes cultural, historical, social, economic, political, legal, environmental, physical and territorial aspects. The major initiatives of Lumanti are settlement enhancement and housing projects, saving and credit activities, water, health, hygiene and sanitation interventions, education programs, documentation and advocacy, research and surveys on squatter settlements and urban issues including community organization and mobilization activities. Lumanti operates with the core value and belief of:

- Creating spiritual attitude and behavior not in the religious sense but in a broader sense of empathy and good and pure feeling for each other, for whom Lumanti works and with whom Lumanti

works

- Creating a friendly environment where work is not taken as a burden but as a contribution to welfare of human being.

#### Heritage Recovery Plan Handover Program at Kirtipur Municipality

Lumanti Support Group for Shelter organized a program titled "Heritage Recovery Plan Handover Program at Kirtipur Municipality" on 4th January 2021.

The program organized in coordination with local community, local government and other concerned stakeholders. It is part of the UN-Habitat supported project "Parya Sampada" project to prepare heritage recovery plan of three traditional settlements of Kirtipur Municipality; Kirtipur, Panga and Chovar of the 10 heritage settlements of Kathmandu valley where Lumanti is currently working.

Various key stakeholders of the project including the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Ward Chairpersons, government officials, community members, representative of partner organizations and stakeholders attended the program.

The program formally started with the welcome speech from Dr. Anita Manandhar, Chairperson of Lumanti Support Group for Shelter. Ms. Shristina Shrestha, from the technical team, made a detail presentation on Heritage Recovery Plan of Kirtipur. Ms. Lumanti Joshi, Housing Program Manager of Lumanti organization, described the Heritage Recovery Program based on the theme "Sustainable Tourism and Green Growth of Heritage Settlements" (Parya Sampada) and its objectives. The recovery plan has been prepared in other 10 traditional settlements of four municipalities including

Kirtipur. Mr. Anil Sthapit, General Secretary of Lumanti Support Group for Shelter, explained about the importance of heritage and monuments in human civilization.

Dr. Suresh Suras Shrestha, Head of World Heritage Section, Department of Archaeology, drew the attention of participants and experts about the lack of participatory approach in heritage conservation. Ms. Saraswoti Khadka, Deputy Mayor, Kirtipur Municipality expressed her vote of thanks to Lumanti, UN-Habitat and the entire team for the successful completion of Heritage Recovery Program at Kirtipur Municipality. Mr. Ramesh Maharjan, Mayor, Kirtipur Municipality illustrated the context of the destruction of traditional architecture and how we distanced ourselves from our roots. He also informed about the existing gap between Municipality and local community about the understanding of heritage and need for its preservation.

The different government officials expressed their remarks on project activities and process and coordination in local level. Kirtipur Municipality honored Lumanti team and UN-Habitat with the Token of Love at the end of the event.

On conclusion remarks, Mr. Padma Sunder Joshi, Habitat Program Manager, UN-Habitat also a chairperson of the program, formally declared the successful completion of the event. The importance of economic aspects in preservation of heritage was highlighted and tourism as one of the by-product of heritage. He explained that the documentation is an important step for heritage conservation. Lastly, he expressed vote of thanks to all the participants. The program was

conducted by Community Architect Ms. Parikshya Singh from Lumanti organization.

Small support encourages the community to improve their housing condition

Dipu Namuna is the informal settlement of Mushahar community with 56 households. The community is located in ward no. 5 of Sundar Haraicha Municipality. Despite the easy access to the community from the city area, the community people have limited access to the city services. Access to proper sanitation services, safe water and healthy life seems very challenging in the community. All the households in the communities are engaged in informal jobs like unskilled labor in construction works, household works, agricultural labor, transportation labor etc.

Due to the low economic condition of the families, they had not being able to fulfill their desire to improve their housing condition and were compelled to live in the pitiable condition.

Lumanti has coordinated with the Sundar Haraicha Municipality for the selection of the most needy communities for housing improvement and has received written approval from the municipality. The selection of the families to be supported through the project was even more challenging. As most of the families in the communities are poor and the housing condition are very miserable and needed improvement for the betterment of their life, the municipality recommended for covering more and more families as far as possible.

Lumanti has mobilized its community mobilizers in the targeted community and conducted series of discussion with the



communities and formed Users Groups for the selection of the more deserving families to be supported by the project. The team also provided necessary orientation for their active participation throughout the construction process and also ensured for the household funding and labor contributions to complete the house.

For mobilizing the grant support to construct the house, agreement has been done prior to the release of grant support ensuring the completion of the

construction. With the nominal grant support worth NPR 50,000.00 to each family, a total of 50 houses have been constructed in the community.

The small grant fund from Lumanti has in fact worked as the catalyst and the motivational factor leading to the improvement of the housing condition of the low income families in the community.

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PAKISTAN

E. J. Anzorena, S.J.

April 2021

## Created Homelessness

By Arif Hasan

February 9, 2021

Whenever Karachi floods the government announces the widening of its *nalas* that carry the floodwater to the sea. The decision of the extent of widening is taken in an ad hoc manner. As a result of recent decisions, a number of houses along Gujjar Nala, along Mehmoodabad Nala, and along Manzoor Colony Nala are to be demolished. The affected are not being allocated land or funds for rehabilitating themselves and are becoming homeless, having been declared encroachers by the judiciary in Pakistan.

Affected communities argue that their encroachments are just one of the reasons why Karachi floods. Other reasons are that the *nalas* are choked and as such cannot function to capacity, inevitably flooding the areas through which they pass. Communities also claim that they have paid corrupt government officials for the land they sit on and in addition have paid billions of rupees for electricity, gas, and municipal connection and taxes over the last 50 years. Non-government planners are also of the view that another reason for flooding is that three of the major outfalls to the sea at Gizri Creek in Defence Society, Chinna Creek backwaters around Mai Kolachi, and the Kalri Nala at Machhar

Colony are blocked and even if the *nalas* are widened flooding will still take place.

At a meeting of civil society organizations in September 2020, when demolitions were supposed to take place along the Manzoor Colony Nala, it was decided that the community should undertake its own mapping. Arch. Fazal Noor was given the responsibility of arranging this process. Sirajuddin, Head of Technical Training Resource Center, an NGO trained in community mapping by the OPP, was giving the responsibility of surveying and mapping the Manzoor Colony natural drainage system with community involvement. The Urban Resource Center (URC) was appointed as advisor.

The findings of the community mapping show that the Mehmoodabad Nala drains into the Manzoor Colony Nala and that a network of *nalas* passing through 34 settlements (which include Muhammad Ali Society and PECHS Blocks 2 and 6) drains into the Mehmoodabad Nala. The depth of the Manzoor Colony Nala is about seven feet of which three to four feet are filled with sewage sludge and silt reducing its effective depth. At 21 points in this drainage network the *nalas* are blocked

with garbage, debris, and parts of collapsed infrastructure. All this has been mapped with photographs.

The communities are of the opinion that if these obstructions are removed and the *nalas* are cleaned and subsequently maintained, flooding will not take place as the capacity of the *nalas* will be increased by well over 100%. However, government planners point out that for cleaning the *nalas* heavy machinery will be required and for that a minimum clear space of 20ft is required on either side of the *nala*. This can be provided in the case of the Manzoor Colony Nala by the removal of 39 houses which can be accommodated within the existing settlement.

But there is another problem. The Manzoor Colony Nala drains into the Defence Society drain in Phase 7 to which the sewage and floodwaters of Phase 2 and 7 of DHA are added. During heavy rains this drain floods Defense Society and at high tide there is a backwash which makes it difficult for the Manzoor Colony network to drain into the sea. The reason for this flooding is that the Defense Society has encroached upon the one kilometer-wide estuary of the Gizri Creek and reduced its width to a 60ft *nala*. Heavy pumping will be required to deal with this situation or alternatively restoring the estuary which would mean the demolition of a large

number of posh houses that have been built on it. This is seldom pointed out.

The building of a 20ft. road will keep the settlement as it is. However, a 60ft. road, which has been planned, will invite developers and slowly coerce the inhabitants out of the settlement. Thus a low-income settlement will be lost to the city center leading to a densification of other *katchi abadis* or the creation of new ones. It is claimed that such a road will help in the circulation of traffic. However, without a city-level traffic management plan this will be a disaster as we will be creating new congestion nodes just as the construction of signal-free roads have done.

It is suggested that mapping, decision-making, and future management should be done with the involvement of communities and local expertise and on the basis of a vision to promote equity and justice and not on an ad hoc, anti-poor basis. If this is not done it is feared that apart from adding to the ranks of the homeless, the planned upgrading process will result in failure, as it has done so many times in the past.

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PAKISTAN

E. J. Anzorena, S.J.

April 2021

## The Truth behind the Façade

What I have learned in 50 years about urban planning through participation, voyeurism, disillusionment, love, hope and affection?

By Arif Hasan

January 10, 2020

Outline of the talk in Urdu for the Karachi Conference Foundation in Karachi.

What planning did not provide Karachi and its citizens created/acquired for themselves?

Demolitions as ordered by the Supreme Court are not the solution and are creating new problems. What the city has acquired should be integrated into its new plans. However, professionals are not academically trained to do this.

Karachi has a formal land use plan which is not followed. Instead an informal speculation promoting plan exists and is continually being implemented.

Politicians, developers, real estate investors, and the national and international corporate are all part of the speculation game and have no respect for the city's people and its ecology.

Law and the courts promote injustice for they are both anti-poor.

This has, to a considerable extent, determined land use planning in Karachi. It is essential to understand the influence of anti-poor policies on the form of the city. This aspect has not yet been sufficiently studied.

Class and organizational culture determine the nature of projects and their implementation processes.

This culture, through procedural details, makes a mockery of good laws and projects due to which they fail to achieve their objectives.

There can be no appropriate development without micro level understanding.

Such understanding cannot be created through "development tourism". This is what most contemporary research that feeds into Karachi is about.

NGOs create islands of innovation that get absorbed in an ocean of retrogression.

Successful projects become guidelines for local projects and even local level policy. However, when applied at the national or city level the existing bureaucratic and political culture skews them. But why? Important to discuss.

IFI funded projects do not bring development, participation, build capacity or transform cultures.

On the contrary they undermine existing institutions and introduce a culture of affluence. Their adverse effects on existing institutions have been studied in considerable detail.

Neoliberalism has replaced planning with projects.

As a result there is pressure to densify, gentrify, and extract direct foreign investment for unrelated projects, but there is no work or advocacy for minimum space requirements for livability and/or individuals and families.

Economic and social unaffordability is a major contributor to promoting inequity, conflicts, and physical divisions based on class and income, and a growing anti-poor bias in society.

This is a subject that has hardly been studied. It affects the wellbeing of coming generations.

The changing nature of migration, migrants and third generation

*katchi abadis* is producing new social values, class relationships, and new forms of settlements.

Old migrants came from settled cultures and class relationships. They came to their families. Present migrants come from societies where community governance systems no longer exist. They are young and come in groups and live together.

Community participation is all about decentralization and miniaturization of technology.

The smaller the community unit, the more cohesive it will be. To serve the needs of such a unit, engineering and management technologies have to be miniaturized. Work has been done on this but is not given its due importance in professional training.

The academia cannot deliver because of a conflict between academic theory and socio-economic reality and between learning and careerism.

The tyranny of theory – we operate within it, we do not question it. We try to reform a well-defined system. We do not attempt to change it.

Given the 12 points mentioned above we will never be able to plan appropriately for the COVID or post-COVID period.

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## World Bank And Karachi

Arif Hasan

March 23, 2021

According to media reports and the World Bank website, the Bank has approved a US\$ 652 million loan for six projects in Karachi. These include US\$ 40 million for making KWSB more efficient; US\$ 230 million to make Karachi a more livable city; US\$ 382 million for improving “mobility” in Karachi by financing the Yellow Line BRT; US\$ 200 million for a resilience/solid waste efficiency project; US\$ 86 million for neighborhoods’ improvement project, and US\$ 100 million for development of infrastructure to reduce urban flooding and public health risks.

In all these projects there are bound to be major evictions of local populations. However, the World Bank Environmental and Social Framework (ESF), which went into effect in 2018, is committed to protect people from “potential adverse impact that could rise from Bank-financed projects”. Adverse effects can be “physical displacement, loss of residential land or shelter, assets or access to assets leading to loss of income sources or other means of livelihood or both”. The ESF goes on to say that borrowers have to “avoid or minimize involuntary resettlement by exploring project design alternatives” and “mitigate unavoidable adverse impacts from land

acquisition on land use through timely compensation for loss of assets at replacement cost and assisting displaced persons in their efforts to improve or at least restore livelihoods and living standards in real terms to pre-development levels prevailing prior to the beginning of project implementation”. Furthermore, the ESF states that resettlement activities should be “planned and implemented with appropriate disclosure of information, meaningful conversation, and informed participation”.

What the ESF provides is exactly what the citizens of Karachi have been asking the State and the Bank for the last 30 years and in the process being dubbed as anti-development and sometimes even as traitors by certain bureaucrats, politicians, and sections of the city elite. It is hoped that the ESF will be enforced in the coming projects and the necessary procedures and institutions for its implementation will be created. It is important that the lead for this should be taken by individuals and organizations who have lobbied unsuccessfully (except for a few projects) for years.

However, it must be stated here that Sadder was a part of the World Bank’s

Neighborhood Improvement Project. In spite of that over 2000 shops were demolished and more than 40,000 hawkers displaced, without any dialogue, compensation, or relocation, as a result of the Supreme Court-backed government's anti-encroachment drive. There was no reaction from the World Bank against this major attack on Karachi's street economy and we do not know if Bank money was involved in the eviction process.

As a sequel to the flooding in Karachi in 2020 the government is in the process of demolishing about 14,000 houses and 3000 commercial units along three *nalas* of Karachi. Demolitions along other *nalas* are planned. Those who are being evicted from their homes have not been consulted, nor are they being provided sufficient funds or land for relocation, most of them are living under the open sky on the rubble of their homes in a period of COVID, inflation, and recession. The rumour in the settlements is that this demolition and clearing of the *nalas* is being carried out with World Bank funding.

Whether these allegations are true or not is irrelevant. The fact is that in the areas where World Bank projects are located major housing rights violations have been and are being committed in violation of the Bank's ESF policies. Also given the scale of World Bank involvement in development, it is in a position to influence the decisions taken by the government. The fact that it remains silent

on the issue means, for many observers and for the effected communities, that it is complicit in the demolition and eviction process.

So far the only visible World Bank input in the development of Karachi is the People's Square. A detailed study of the project design, implementation, and repercussions by Mansur Raza informs us that key stakeholders who used this space for recreation, sports, and cultural purposes were never consulted and in the process lost their cultural assets. In addition, an architecture of questionable quality in design and environmental terms has been created and which segregates four important Karachi institutions that were once spatially linked to each other.

Given what has been said above it is necessary that all Bank projects should be exhibited in a public space (such as the Expo Center) for comments and necessary modifications carried out on that basis. Also on the architecture and planning projects, an architect should be chosen on the basis of a design competition. But for the time being it is more important that the Bank should state its position on evictions in Karachi, failing which it will lose whatever little credibility it has left.

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## Community Pantries

### A Multiplication of the Loaves and Fishes

The Spike  
April 5, 2021

An alarming spike in coronavirus infections continued to surge and started to overwhelm many hospitals in the capital and outlying regions.

President Rodrigo Duterte placed Metropolitan Manila and four outlying provinces, a region of more than 25 million people, under lockdown last week as daily infections breached 10,000.

The Philippines has reported more than 795,000 COVID-19 cases with 13,425 deaths, the highest totals in Southeast Asia after Indonesia.

All the hospitals have been more than full the past two weeks. Some could expand bed capacity but lacked enough medical workers partly because many had been infected.

And just as coronavirus sends unemployment to a 15-year high, the African swine fever sent the price of pork, a staple in the Philippine diet, rocketing.

Filipinos now go hungry amid a 'double whammy' of job losses and rising prices

The Response of Patricia Non  
and the Maginhawa Community Pantry  
April 14, 2021

Ana Patricia Non set up a small bamboo cart on a pavement in a Quezon City village, stocking it with 800 pesos (US\$16.50) worth of groceries, including

vegetables, packs of rice and noodles, canned food, and bottles of water.

The 26-year-old resident attached a handwritten cardboard sign that read "Maginhawa Community Pantry", after the name of the street, and came with a guideline written in Tagalog: "Give according to your means, take according to your need."

On Facebook, she shared pictures of the cart and people helping themselves to the community pantry's contents, and encouraged others to set up their own food banks. "You can do it, just don't expect anything in return," Non, a visual communications graduate from the University of the Philippines (UP), said in an interview with local media.

The Response of the Police

Then trouble started brewing. Soon after Non set up her pantry, three policemen showed up armed with assault rifles. They demanded her personal details and asked which organizations she belonged to.

A post appeared on the Quezon City police department's Facebook page alleging that the food banks were being used to recruit soldiers for the communist New People's Army.

The National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF ELCAC)



claimed the pantries were being supported by the Communist Party of the Philippines.

The task force, established and led by President Rodrigo Duterte as part of his vow to end the communist insurgency, has a reputation for “[red-tagging](#)” – the act of accusing people and organizations of being communist rebels.

Although communism is not illegal in the Philippines, a new anti-terrorism law allows authorities to brand communists as terrorists. The task force does not use any legal procedures to identify alleged rebels and has accused Duterte’s critics and opponents of being terrorists.

Many red-tagged people have wound up murdered or been shot dead by soldiers and the police.

At the same time that Non was red-tagged, a local government undersecretary, a Duterte appointee, said community pantries would need permits because of the dangers posed by crowding and the non-observance of social distancing.

Trolls started attacking the food banks as “recruitment hubs”, one sneering that it was a “stupid piece of opportunistic

rhetoric”. An NTF official declared that there were “no hungry people in the Philippines”

### The Response of the People

Little did Ana Patricia Non know that her idea would soon spread like wildfire. Within a day, another community pantry appeared a few kilometers away. Over the week, hundreds of similar food banks sprang up in Manila and throughout the [Philippines](#), all of them sustained by community donations.

The shutdown set off a wave of public outrage that prompted politicians and many officials to come out in support of Non.

Quezon City’s mayor Joy Belmonte announced that community pantries did not need permits and offered to send workers to enforce social distancing..

Philippine national police chief General Debold Sinas lauded the food banks as “an expression of Bayanihan spirit”, a Filipino term that refers to community goodwill and support.

Defense chief Delfin Lorenzana said no



[The shutdown set off a wave of public outrage that prompted politicians and many officials to come out in support of Non.]

matter what Non’s political beliefs were, “if she is helping with her heart, we will

support it (because) kindness is everyone’s color”.



People queue for free food from a community pantry in Quezon City on April 23, 2021. Photo: Reuters



People arrange grocery items to be given away at the Maginhawa Community Pantry in Quezon City, started by Ana Patricia Non. Photo: Xinhua

## VISION CAUGHT

It’s the power of a good deed begetting other good deeds.

Restaurant owner Toots Vergara set up a table in front of his establishment in P. Noval Street in Sampaloc, Manila with vegetables, canned goods, rice, and instant noodles.

While few availed on the first day, Vergara's online call-out resulted in other people dropping by with goods or sending donations.



Crops from local farmers are given away at the Matiyaga community pantry in QC, which drew inspiration from the Maginhawa stall. *Photo courtesy of Elijah San Fernando*

Residents from Lexington Village in Pasig made the initiative, making the supplies of face masks, face shields, vegetables, and water jugs available to those who were in need.

Vergara said 2 contacts reached out to him about putting up pantries in Tondo and Bambang, also in Manila.

He echoed Maginhawa “pan-tree” pioneer Ana Patricia Non’s sentiment that while their efforts may not solve the root cause of poverty, at least it would help the truly needy to survive.

In Narra Street, Project 3, Elmer Cordero of PISTON were among those who led the community pantry, saying it was time to give back to the people who are in need.

Cordero was one of the jeepney drivers who were jailed after staging a protest in 2020.

A community pan-tree also sprouted in Bayombong, Nueva Vizcaya, established by graduating college students. The students said they were inspired by the original in Maginhawa, citing how it helped a lot of people who are hard-hit by the pandemic.

“We are college students who are losing hope with what is happening in our country. Many of us wanted to go outside the country after we graduate but these movements around the country is inspiring us to serve the Filipino people.”

“We are happy with what is happening but we also pity the country's situation. There are still a lot of people out there who will say there is still hope. We want to spread this statement of hope through the initiative.”

In Makati, a man walked down a line giving each person a 100-peso note (US\$2).  
In another city, an ice cream vendor began offering free ice cream.  
Soldiers appeared in Maginhawa to give 20 sacks of vegetables.  
The German ambassador also visited Maginhawa to bring donations.

Non's Maginhawa "pan-tree" has blossomed to truly include its community.  
From a cache of canned goods and fresh fruits refilled a handful of times during its first day, the pantry saw more people come and go with contributions.  
On Friday, the pantry overflowed with rice and other goods that the tricycle drivers parked nearby helped repack these into smaller bags for more to receive.  
The line of people waiting to get a pack stretched onto the next street, with those same tricycle drivers volunteering to ensure order and physical distancing.

Even in Timor Leste, the Philippine embassy helped set up stalls distributing food to locals.

Lt General Antonio Parlade, spokesperson of anti-communist task force compared Non to the devil.  
"Satan gave an apple to Eve, it all started from there."

Ms Alice Gentolia Murphy, spokesperson of the urban poor says that Ms Patricia Non reminds her of Jesus Christ feeding the multitude.  
"At a time when people are fed up with incompetent and callous leaders... We are taking back power, one community pantry at a time."

Following the popularity of her posts about the pantry, Non welcomed people's interest in donating but said she hoped they would set up versions in their neighborhoods.  
She is now part of a group chat with people from areas such as Bulacan, Fairview, and Laguna who approached her for advice on putting up pantries.

"In a world that is often seen as cold, uncaring and even downright evil, the simple gesture of compassion reverberated across the country," she said. "There's nostalgia for goodness."  
Lisa Ito, an instructor at the UP College of Fine Arts where Non graduated, called the pantry "a vaccine or booster shot we really need at this time, which inspired a lot of us by putting trust back into the hands of the people. At the community pantries, although people could in theory take all the food they wanted, those who went and waited in line for hours picked out only enough for themselves and their families. "

"I believe community pantries will expand and branch off into various expressions of caring for the less fortunate and showing up this impotent government."

"The Filipino spirit is alive and well.  
Goodness will continue to flourish among our people."

## TAO-PILIPINAS, Inc.

March –April 2021

Building Sustainable and  
Disaster-resilient Communities  
(Misereor project,  
3 years, starting 2019)  
By  
Geraldine Matabang

In the second year of project implementation, activities varied among the three Homeowners Association.

Masagana HOA in Angat Bulacan focused on incremental site development and building community infrastructures in the resettlement site. The HOA also continues to operate and maintain solar-powered streetlights and rainwater purification system that provides clean and affordable drinking water in their area.

In Lupang Arenda, APOLA led efforts toward acquiring secure tenure through land proclamation. TAO has provided capability-building and technical support in structures mapping and data processing in preparation for carrying out people's planning workshops to reblock the area. The community has begun monitoring compliance to building regulations in their area, noting structures that are more than two storeys high and setback encroachments.

TAO and PPVHOA, of Binondo, Manila, on the other hand, worked on completing the contract documents for the construction of a 5-storey 1,320-sqm

building for housing 200 families. The documents will be submitted to SHFC for CMP loan financing and to the LGU for building permit approval. PPVHOA is now in negotiation with a building contractor.

Modified methods for  
project assessment

To abide by community quarantine restrictions due to the on-going Covid-19 pandemic, TAO developed a three-part online assessment module which consisted of the deployment of a survey form, validation of survey results, and focus group discussions to monitor achievement of target indicators.

Online activities were arranged using the KoBo Toolbox, an open-source application, and the the online Zoom video-conferencing platform for community members to safely participate in the assessment.

Despite the new normal set-up, participant turnout was good. TAO received a significant number of survey responses and Zoom sessions were mostly well-attended. Community members participated using a mobile phone, tablet, laptop or computer desktop.

To keep the virtual activities engaging and interactive, TAO used online facilitation tools such as Mentimeter, Google docs and Jamboard.

**APOLA Continues  
to Fight for Security of Tenure  
By Angelus Maria Sales**

THE Alliance of People's Organizations in Lupang Arenda (APOLA) in Taytay, Rizal is a confederation composed of 27 homeowner associations (HOA) that work together for the development of Lupang Arenda.

Despite the pandemic and lockdown, APOLA has not wavered in its fight to secure tenurial rights in the 91-hectare land that they occupy under Proclamation 704, along with the 5-hectare DENR-owned property occupied by Samahang Masigasig ng Tapayan Association Inc. (SAMATHOA), one of its member HOAs.

Last year, they continued to follow-up government agencies involved in the processing of their application for land title under the Free Patent Law or RA10023 which they have submitted in 2018.

APOLA participated in a multi-agency meeting with officials of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), Laguna Lake Development Authority (LLDA), and Presidential Commission for the Urban Poor (PCUP) on March 11, 2021.

The meeting ended with LLDA officials agreeing to honor the certification that they issued in 2007 that certified that the 20,100 square meters of land was above the 12.5 meters mean lake level. This clearance is the only thing needed by the DENR Provincial Office to process and issue the land titles for SAMATHOA.

Representatives from the DENR Provincial Office agreed to process the land titles within 60 days after receiving data from

LLDA. LLDA has promised to do so within one week after the meeting.

Determination in the face of obstacles

Despite the small victory, APOLA's fight for security of tenure is still filled with numerous obstacles

There are land claimants suddenly coming out of nowhere after all the decades of land occupation in the area. But through it all, the resolve of APOLA is unwavering.

It has continuously supported the capacity building of its members to increase their knowledge on disaster risk reduction and management. They have worked hand in hand with the municipal government to gradually improve the infrastructures in the area. APOLA leaders have also reached out to their network to gain access to basic social services for their members, such as livelihood opportunities and scholarship programs.

From having occupied the land in the late 90s when it was just a mere rice field, to gradually developing the area by their own means, APOLA members have invested so much in Lupang Arenda. Giving up the fight is never an option for them. This is something the national government must realize when considering APOLA's clamor for security of tenure.



*Participants in the stakeholders forum discuss APOLA plans with IAO representatives*

Turnover of Projects to the Masagana  
Community  
By Min-Roselle Malunhao

Despite limitations and challenges to project implementation brought about by the covid-19 pandemic in 2020, TAO-Pilipinas and the Masagana of Angat Homeowners Association Inc. were able to complete all the components of the Direct Aid Program 2019 (DAP) funded by the Australian Embassy in the Philippines.

On February 28, 2021, a simple turnover ceremony was held to mark the end of the project entitled “Sustainable Community Development of the Masagana of Angat Homeowners Association Inc.” It began in 2019 and was comprised of capacity-building activities and construction of community infrastructures.

The ceremony was held simultaneously on site and through an online platform. Among the on site attendees were some members and leaders of Masagana HOA, officials of the local government, including the Angat mayor Leonardo De Leon.

Those that participated virtually in the occasion via Zoom were a few community members, along with staff members of TAO-Pilipinas and Mr. Pablo Lucero Ms. Doris Avila of the Australian Embassy.

The ceremony was a festive event, even though guests were attending from different places. It turned emotional at times as project stakeholders were commemorating the stories of hardship, triumphs, and lessons from the project.

The project faced the most unfavourable circumstances, but the patience and perseverance of Masagana community and TAO spurred by their shared trust and commitment, carried the project to fruition ... towards community sustainability.



**Masagana  
community greenhouse**



**Masagana  
concreted road segments**





**TAO-PILIPINAS, INC.**

**eNEWSLETTER**

March - April 2021

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### TAD and community partners gather online for project assessment

*By Jocelyn Sabido*

**THE YOUNGEST AREA TEAMS MET WITH THEIR respective target groups virtually, working together to conduct the yearly assessment of the Tuguegarao Watershed Project, Building Sustainable and Disaster-resilient Communities, that was started in 2010. These community partners participated in the assessment – Masagana (ICA in Tuguegarao), APFA (a federation in Tuguegarao, Tuguegarao), and PPWCA in Bumbaya, Misamis. Unlike in early 2020 when the first assessment was conducted on-site and in their in-person gatherings, the assessment after the second year of project implementation was done entirely online.**

**Community activities for the second year**

In the second year of project implementation, activities started in the three communities. Masagana project activities focused on incremental site development and building community infrastructure on the residential site. The ICA also continues to operate and maintain water-powered windlights and solarized production system that provide clean and affordable drinking water to their sites.

**Community activities for project assessment**

In this year's assessment, TAD enabled the modules and tools for project monitoring and assessment in order to abide by Community governance structures due to the on-going Covid-19 pandemic. TAD developed a three-part online assessment module which consisted of the deployment of survey forms, validation of survey

**credits, and focus group discussions** to measure achievement of target indicators. Online activities were arranged using the Kahla Toolfish, an open source application, and the

**FEATURE ARTICLES**

Online project assessment with 12 community partners

Support of IEP project to the government community partners' efforts in the community partners

TAD in Palawan (10th conference)

TAD training activities (10)

TAD training activities (10)



Assessment of project assessment (Meeting 1)



Assessment of project assessment (Meeting 2)



Assessment of project assessment (Meeting 3)

### Hybrid event held to turnover DAP project to Masagana community

*By Sheela Sabido*

**UNCONTESTED LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES** in project implementation were brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. Despite these, TAO Pilipinas and the Masagana of Tuguegarao (Masagana Association Inc.) were able to complete all the components of the Urban And Program (UAP) DMP funded by the Australian Embassy in the Philippines.

**On February 26, 2021, a simple business ceremony was held to mark the end of the project and to celebrate another milestone for Masagana**

**UAP.** The project, entitled Sustainable Community Development of the Masagana of Tuguegarao Association Inc., began in 2010 and was completed of capacity building activities and construction of community infrastructure. ([Read Full Story/Article](#))

**Following on-site and online**

To comply with local guidelines on limited physical gatherings, the project turnover ceremony



Assessment of project assessment (Meeting 3)

For further information:  
<https://tao-pilipinas.org/contact-us/>



## The Effects of the Pandemic's on TAO Partner Communities

By Marianne Turiano  
TAO-PILIPINAS, INC.

THE COVID-19 pandemic has severely affected the country since the past year. While it has proved to be challenging for everyone, it is undoubtedly all the more difficult for people in poor communities. Their already fragile conditions are further threatened by the health crisis.

As part of its yearly project assessment with community partners, TAO-Pilipinas conducted an online survey to gather data from the members and leaders about the situation in their respective communities, using the KoBo Toolbox application from January 27 to February 12.

One part of the survey inquired about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and other new developments in the communities of Masagana of Angat, Bulacan; Lupang Arenda of Taytay, Rizal; and PPVHOA of Binondo, Manila.

### Community needs during the pandemic

Since many participants noted that they lost their jobs because of the pandemic, survey results show that food and employment are the primary needs of each partner community. Secondary to these needs are financial assistance and hygiene kits to comply with Covid-19 health and safety protocols.

These pandemic-related needs were primarily addressed through financial

assistance and relief provided by the government and private organizations. Many respondents from all three partner communities also mentioned that they met their needs on their own by finding alternative sources of income and strictly managing their finances. In Masagana, some members harvested their self-planted crops as means of food security.

In Lupang Arenda, the pandemic deferred land proclamation proceedings so the respondents felt actions are needed to pursue efforts toward tenure security. Community leaders in Lupang Arenda are consistently following-up and coordinating with assisting organizations and national government agencies to move the proceedings for security of tenure.

PPVHOA survey respondents also cited delays in the implementation of their housing project due to the pandemic. This diminished confidence in the project and negatively impacted the participation of some community members.

Aside from the pandemic impacts on their livelihood and well-being, participants from Masagana also recalled the devastating effects of typhoon Ulysses (Vamco) last November amidst the pandemic. They likewise acknowledged that despite the difficulties of community quarantine measures, it allowed them to attend to and focus on on-site project

implementation. They managed to complete the DAP project activities during this period.

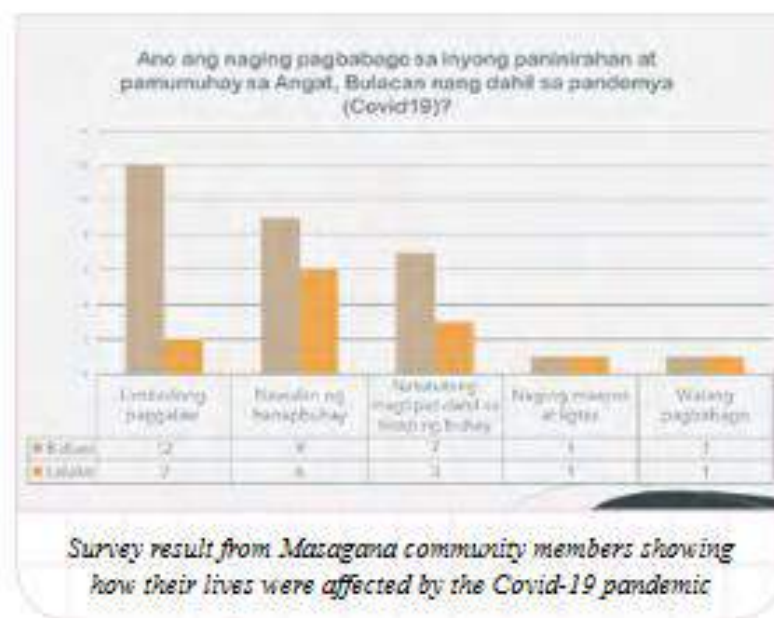
Survey respondents from Lupang Arenda also shared that the community became quiet and orderly since people are discouraged to go outside. They also noted of other improvements in the area such as concreted roads and newly-installed streetlights which increased the security in the neighborhood.

### Community solidarity amidst the pandemic

The pandemic has brought about financial, physical, mental, and social changes in the lives of the people from TAO's partner communities. Although each people's organization has its own distinct situation and needs, the impact of the pandemic did not vary that much among the three communities. Most of the survey

respondents agree that they need economic stability to weather the crisis. In these unprecedented times, families need their immediate and basic needs met before they can focus on other issues outside their homes. Incredibly, these people are getting by each day while fighting for their community causes and advocacies.

While TAO-PILIPINAS alongside other partner organizations provide assistance to the partner communities in ways they can, there is much that other sectors and the government can do to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic. The current situation needs to be improved not only for them, but also for other communities facing similar issues. The Covid-19 pandemic necessitates stronger and more efficient crisis response that works for everyone, especially for communities in need.



For further information:  
<https://tao-pilipinas.org/contact-us/>

## Time is Revolution By Raymund L. Fernandez

“Those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable.” This quote is attributed to US president John Fitzgerald Kennedy in 1962. The logic of it is quite clear and demonstrated time and time again in history. Change is inevitable. It is merely the consequence of changing awareness. The discussion of change and what changes the people desire and intend to achieve over time is a tide that is impossible to stem. The people who rule can enact laws and apply all the coercive powers of the state to stop it. But they will not succeed. The dictator Marcos had his Anti-Subversion Law, jailed most of his well-known critics, and caused several of them to disappear. But look what happened to him.

In a situation of repression and oppression, change is always the factor of time. Time is revolution. And because of that, we should note down the names of those people of authority - Congressmen - who put us down, who made peaceful change impossible, who voted for this Anti-Terrorism Bill. History will remember them. But next time around we should resolve not to make the same mistakes as in times past. Those who commit acts against our people now must be held to account for their acts in the future.



And that future will come, whether we or they like it or not. And the fact of the Anti-Terrorism Bill itself tells us it may come sooner than later. Through jaundiced eyes our rulers can see it coming. The smell is in the air - the run-away covid pandemic, the inevitable economic recession, the social disparities leading to poverty and injustice everywhere.

Conversation is in the nature of humans. We need to express what we perceive to others just simply because we know personal perception always needs to

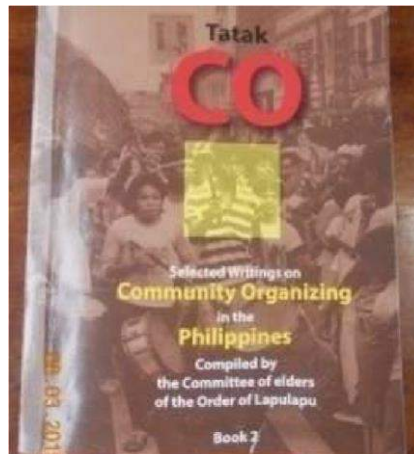
be tested with others before we can accept its truthfulness. And conversation is the only way we can do this. The Katipuneros of 19th century Philippines felt the urge to talk to each other before coming to the collective decision to revolt. What they could not win with words, they inevitably learned to win with arms. The socio-political discussions of that time would have been far from the accelerated state it is in now with social media and the internet.

And we had been feeling the fact of repression and oppression for years now. This anti-terrorism law simply concretizes into the language of law what is in the heart and nature of all corrupt and repressive regimes. The war against drugs became simply a war against the poor. Extra-Judicial Killings became a tool of the state to get rid of its perceived enemies. To the same extent, this anti-terrorism bill is just another tool of the state. The problem with tools is that it can be applied anywhere and towards any goal the wielder of the tool wills: Notwithstanding their idle swearing it will not be abused. Notwithstanding it is against the Constitution, specifically, the Bill of Rights, yours and mine.

And whether Marcos' Anti-Subversion Law or this latest one, the end goal is always the ease with which they can label citizens "terrorists" or "criminals"; And with this, the legal ability to jail people without the need for proper charges and the assurance they will get their day in a court of law. The midterm result: disappearances and murder. The immediate effect by design: To put a chill over the discussion we need to determine our true state and the state of the country. But this latter goal has never been achieved in history, not in the US, not in China, not in the Middle East, not in the Philippines under Marcos' Martial Law, and not now, under the current government. The discussion is just too widespread and everywhere. They can arrest a few they perceive as leaders of the discussion, but they will not be able to jail everyone. And in a very short period, young people everywhere will think: If we cannot discuss all these openly and peacefully then perhaps it is time to change our language to more forceful terms. It is an historical inevitability. And all this transpires over time. Time is revolution.

For further information:  
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## Coming Soon:



### 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition

This book was written to capture stories of triumphs of community organizing (CO) which has remained largely in oral tradition recounted in the campfires of tribal communities, the hovels of urban poor communities and in the tactic sessions of community organizer- trainees.

It is the hope of the editors of this book that this serves as an inspiration to future generation of COs and to others to uphold the time honored gospel values of helping the destitute and defending the weak and the downtrodden in this post truth world.

The publication of this book was also driven by the desire to honor the memories of departed COs who dedicated their lives to upholding the CO ideals and to the development of the theory and practice of CO as found in the pages of this book.

This work is a compilation of published and unpublished articles on

community organizing that grew out of the Tondo foreshore area and later expanded to other parts of the country.

This book was put together to serve as a supplement to CO training which traditionally consisted of on the job training bereft of any classroom setting. The CO trainee learned to organize under the supervision of an experienced CO. The trainee learned how to mobilize, strategize and tacticize based on the conditions that unfolded on the ground with very little theoretical inputs. He learned organizing by organizing and not sitting in the classroom and listening to lectures.

The training mode is akin to learning how to swim where one learns swimming by actually swimming and not listening to lectures on swimming over time, the demand for theoretical inputs from college educated trainees came to the fore.

This book was put together to meet that need. It is meant to provide COs with the

theoretical frameworks to make sense out broader and deeper understanding of their experiences as well as provide a community organizing work.

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by Bimbo Fernandez

For further information:  
[pagtamba@yahoo.com](mailto:pagtamba@yahoo.com)

SOUTH AFRICA  
E. J. Anzorena, S.J.  
April 2021

## News from the Recyclers of Cape Town

By Gershwin Koehler

I am in semi-retirement the last 2 years, and work mainly from home.

Covid 19 has affected our operations severely the last 7 months. Prior to the lock down the business were doing 400 plus tons waste per month, so we were financially viable.

Currently we are now on a quota supply system, doing only 220 tons recyclable waste per month. The operation has lost 50% of its normal monthly revenue.

As Blue Sky Recycling, we initiated and have now delinked a women`s start-up Vuku Zenzele doing multi recycling. This is our new initiative. We are excited about, as it functions as a women`s cooperative.

This is a snap shot of what`s happening this side in Cape Town.

For further information:

Cape Town CORC SDI

<https://www.sasdialliance.org.za/category/news/corc>



SYRIA

E. J. Anzorena, S.J.

April 2021

## Rania Wants to Go Back to Syria But She Can Not

*My precious country, I have been away from you for a long time.*

*Ten years have passed, and we are apart.*

*I long for the family house, for the gathering in Ramadan, and for the coffee that my mother makes every morning.*

*I miss my father's promises of prayers and his well wishes for us.*

*I miss the voices of my siblings all over the house.*

*I yearn for each street, sidewalk and shop in Aleppo.*

*I feel nostalgic for the smell of Jasmine tree at my grandfather's house, and for my grandmother's stories.*

*I miss all the details of my daily life that I used not to give attention to.*

*I wish to go back to Syria, but my country is suffering, bleeding, and it is ruined.*

*I ask God to protect and look over my country and its people.*

Rania, a participant at JRS Social Centre  
in Beirut, Lebanon

On this somber date which marks the 10 years since the start of the conflict in Syria, the Jesuit Refugee Service and Entreculturas ask the world to recognize the urgent and multiple crises unfolding in Syria and its neighboring countries, particularly Lebanon and Jordan. We request renewed support for the Syrian people and their collective suffering.

With the end of wide scale bombing in many parts of Syria, the country has slipped off the radar of many international media

outlets, yet around 12 million Syrians remain displaced inside Syria and in the region. Regional and international governments question the prolonged displacement of Syrian refugees and whether it is safe for people to return to Syria. Through our work with displaced Syrians in the region, which includes the provision of education, mental health care, livelihoods and protection programs, we see first-hand the current reality.

The situation in Syria has reached a point of extreme crisis as the Syrian currency has devalued to a level unseen in history and prices of food and other essential items have increased by more than 200%. People are starving: an estimated 60% of the population do not have regular access to safe and nutritious food. More than half a million children under five are stunted from chronic malnutrition.

Sanctions imposed by the international community have worsened the economic situation and hurt the most vulnerable. In addition to ongoing security concerns and widespread damage to infrastructure from years of conflict, the economic situation makes it impossible for many to survive

For further information:  
Jesuit Refugee Service  
<https://jrs.net>



THAILAND

E. J. Anzorena, S.J.

April 2021

## Networks of Homeless People in Three Cities Plan, Develop and Manage Their Own Secure Shelter Strategies

The homeless network in Thailand links city-based networks of homeless people in three cities, so far. For many years, the network has been supported by the Bangkok-based NGO Human Settlements Foundation (HSF) and the Four Regions Slum Network. Since 2003, HSF and the homeless network have been making surveys of homeless people. In their most recent survey, they counted 1,093 homeless people in Bangkok, 136 in Chiang Mai and 166 in Khon Kaen. Without a secure place to live, bathe or cook, and without ID cards, these most vulnerable of all Thailand's poor find themselves shut out of most government welfare and health-care programs and face many dangers: being raped, robbed, beaten-up, chased by the police and forced to sleep in the rain.

In 2007, the Bangkok homeless network designed and built its own homeless shelter in Bangkok's Taling Chan District, with support from the Baan Mankong Program, in collaboration with CODI, the State Railways Authority, the Bangkok Municipal Government, Human Settlements Foundation, the Four Regions Slum Network and the local community network. The two-story shelter made history in several ways, and represented a sharp departure from government-

managed homeless shelters. This was the first shelter that was designed and run completely by homeless people themselves, with their own rules and their own set of support programs, including a savings group, a kitchen garden and income generation projects that made use of recycled materials many of the residents collected. The shelter also represented a new co-production strategy for addressing problems of homelessness, in which the government provides the land and finances the construction, and the homeless people design and run the shelter, making their own rules and regulations, according to the real needs of the residents, with support from CODI and their partner NGOs and other community networks.

Now, inspired by the success of the Taling Chan shelter and two others that followed in other parts of Bangkok, as well as the homeless network's campaigns and joint community movement, the Thai government has allocated a budget of 118.6 million baht (US\$ 3.1 million) to support similarly collaborative, self-managed homeless shelters in Thailand's three largest cities – Bangkok, Chiang Mai and Khon Kaen. Land for the new shelters has been acquired in Khon Kaen and Chiang Mai and the new homeless shelter in

Chiang Mai was inaugurated by the Minister of Social Development and Human Security on June 28, 2018. Meanwhile, the first batch of twelve pioneering families from the Bangkok homeless shelter in Taling Chan has taken the big step of moving into the country's first-ever permanent housing project that is being designed and built by (formerly) homeless people themselves, on land leased

inexpensively from the State Railways Authority, with soft housing loans from CODI.

For further information:

CODI,  
Human Settlements Foundation (HSF)  
and the Four Regions Slum Network  
<https://en.codi.or.th> › [baan-mankong-housing](#) › [homeless](#).

Timor-Leste  
E. J. Anzorena, S.J.  
April 2021

## Jesuits in Timor-Leste Respond to Easter Sunday Flood Crisis

14 Apr 2021

Jesuits in Timor-Leste are responding to the widespread destruction of Tropical Cyclone Seroja, an Easter Sunday nightmare that brought flash flooding and left 42 people dead, including a Timorese teacher at the Jesuit Mission supported Loyola College.

With an estimated 14,000 people temporarily displaced as of 9 April, Jesuit Mission will assist Jesuit Social Service, who have been supporting communities in six informal evacuation centers in Hare and Dili, areas badly affected by the flood.

Supported by Jesuit Mission, these long-term solutions include purchasing and providing mattresses, bed sheets, kitchen and cooking utensils for 100 households, approximately 1000 people.

Currently food is being provided to displaced families as all their cooking equipment has been destroyed by the floods.

The mass displacement and infrastructural damage caused by flooding waters and landslides additionally poses the threat of spreading COVID-19, with Dili municipality seeing a resurgence of new cases in recent months.

Jesuit Mission stands in solidarity with the devastated families in Timor-Leste and urges our supporters to keep them in your thoughts and prayers.

For further information:

SJES ROME

[sjes-hl@sjcuria.org](mailto:sjes-hl@sjcuria.org)



“Evacuation centers include convents, parish halls a university and religious houses. Now that the rain has stopped, we can begin to clean up and plan long-term solutions for these families.”

Júlio Sousa SJ, Director of Jesuit  
Social Service Timor-Leste

“If we have sufficient resources we will certainly extend our help to more households. At the moment we have distributed food items and clothes to over 500 people.”

-  
Júlio Sousa, SJ

“Any donation towards the vital efforts of our Jesuit partners will help transform the situation of the most vulnerable families. Let’s work together to help our sisters and brothers in Timor-Leste get back on their feet.”

-  
Helen Forde, CEO of Jesuit Mission.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

E. J. Anzorena, S.J.

April 2021

## The Roots of the Chaos in the USA

By Cristianisme i Justícia

4 February 2021

### David Brooks:

In the last few months the world has watched the United States with a growing horror and disillusionment. The nation that had always been the example and model of democracy, the shining light, has descended into anarchic chaos, ending with the insurrectionist assault on the Capitol on January 6, which seemed more like something that would be found in a place where there are frequent coups d'état. It came very close to that. The goal expressed by the Trump supporters was to isolate the members of Congress, hang the leaders and change the results of the presidential election. It was the President himself who incited them. Perhaps it would be useful to reflect on how we got to this point. The roots go deep.

I do not suppose to sum up the whole history of the contemporary US. It is sufficient to say that the fundamental problem, which also exists in the majority of countries in the world, is economic inequality. **The US always has boasted that it was the beacon of liberty and equality, where everyone could rise up and create a good life if they worked to earn it.** The truth is that this promise never became reality. At the beginning, those who suffered most were the immigrants and people of color; beginning with the

technological revolution of the last century, those at the bottom have been those with less education who saw their jobs flee to foreign countries. Of course, they blamed the immigrants and people of color who had adapted to the changed circumstances. It was precisely this disaffected group which Donald Trump attracted, a majority of whom were white with little education. They applauded Trump when he promised to raise them up, throwing out all those who were not true Americans, when he lied to them by saying he would return their jobs which had disappeared, and when he made fun of politicians. What happened was that they and Trump himself believed in the deceptions and the lies became reality. Other members of his party thought that the only way that they would be able to stay in power was to follow the Trump road. Those who did not do what he demanded of them were fired, usually on Twitter. There was created in the White House and Congress an atmosphere of fear.

For almost three years everything seemed to be going well. The economy was good and Trump seemed to be invincible. There were some scandals but even his critics accepted the fact that it would not be possible to remove him from power until the next election. And then COVID arrived and the whole scenario changed

completely. From the beginning it was obvious that for Donald Trump to admit the existence of the virus and to take the necessary steps to protect citizens was something personal, a failure that he was unwilling to accept. His egotism was such that to admit the truth about the sickness was a reflection on himself that he would then seem to be weak. So he continued to lie. He never wore a mask and he demanded the same thing from his followers. The economy was more important than the health of the people and so he fought against the restrictions and he insisted that public places remain open. And why? A good economy was the key to keep himself in power. Nevertheless, it was going in the opposite direction, from bad to worse. Millions of workers became unemployed. In June, additionally the protests and marches against racism and violence on the part of the police against people of color. Again, the president denied its existence, blamed the “anarchists”, and used the National Guard to control the violence. When he was supposed to cure the racial divisions, he fomented them. Instead of unifying, he divided. He never denounced the racists and white supremacists that formed the backbone of his “movement”.

Coming to the election, the chasm that had been created between the two halves of the country was worse than ever, impossible to overcome. It was then that Trump gave birth to what is now called “the big lie”. He announced that the only way that he was going to lose the election was if it was stolen from him by the anarcho-socialists of the Democratic Party. The United States experienced the largest vote in its history – some 160 million votes. Trump lost by more

than 7 million. He immediately started to accuse the Democrats of fraud, of counting the votes of dead people or of people who had not registered to vote. He attacked especially the states where many people of color had voted. He took more than 60 cases to court in various states and lost them all. Up until today Trump has not conceded the victory to Joe Biden nor have his most fanatic followers. They have invented a series of plots and conspiracies to explain the loss.

And so we come to January 6. That day Congress had come together to fulfill one of the most arcane requirements of our Constitution. Each state has a certain number of electoral votes according to the number of seats it has in the Congress; its votes are given to the candidate who wins the majority of the popular vote in the state. The only function of Congress is to count the electoral votes and declare the winner. Donald Trump was convinced that it was an opportunity to change the results of the election and he called together his followers to assault the Capitol and take over the Congress. It was really an attempted coup d'état. Declaring that they had done it at the direction of the President, the mob overwhelmed the police, broke down windows and doors, destroyed furniture, invaded the chambers and forced the members of Congress, including the Vice-President, to go into hiding. In the end the police were able to control the situation and threw them out. Five people died in the attack. The only other time that the Capitol was sacked was in 1814 when it was burned by an English army.

I have written this article in part to explain to a non-American audience the events of the last few months so that they



can better understand the madness that has grabbed us. But on the other hand **I wanted to call attention to the danger of ignoring the inequality in our societies and the importance of the consequences of doing so.** During the pandemic, inequality has grown. Those who could telework continued to earn money, the Stock Market reached highs never before seen, and those on top bettered their state of luxury, while those on the bottom found themselves without work, forced to leave their housing, and could not even send their children to school. The “essential workers” had to continue doing their jobs and fell victims to the pandemic, along with blacks, Latinos and indigenous people. Governments did not know how to react quickly and the steps that were finally taken alleviated some needs but left a lot of others without resolution.

It should not surprise us, then, that the disadvantaged protested or felt that they had no voice. The surprising thing is that a person like Donald Trump, who, of course, is not one of them, could propose himself as their savior. He discovered the way to

express in public the rudest, most vile feelings of the crowd which they themselves only expressed in private. He gave them a voice. The bad thing is that he turned their loyalty to his own advantage in order to maintain himself in power. He never learned how to empathize or sympathize with those who were suffering, he blamed people of color for all the bad things and he looked down on women in particular. And in the end, like all those who hope to be dictators, he did not want to leave the presidency.

Be careful! The example that the United States is giving is that **democracy is fragile, very fragile.** If we are bit careful, if we don't take seriously the desires and needs of the disadvantaged, the marginalized, the minorities, we put ourselves in peril of losing our democracy to the politics of extremism, left or right, which might find a leader, a chieftain, a caudillo

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