

## **EMPOWERING WOMEN AS LEADERS AMONG RELOCATED INFORMAL SETTLERS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper explores the degree of empowerment among women volunteers in the Hope Day Care Center (HDCC) in the informal relocation site in Southville 8, Cabuyao, Laguna by determining the role of HDCC in promoting women empowerment; identifying women empowerment measured in the Familial, Socio-cultural, Psychological and Political dimensions; and, describing how HDCC teachers become empowered women leaders in the community. The study used the mixed method employing quantitative-qualitative approach. A survey was conducted to determine the impact of the program on the respondents. The findings revealed that HDCC plays a vital role in promoting women empowerment. It provides opportunities for simple women to become more confident among themselves and become trusted community leaders through trainings, on-going formation programs and experiences while teaching. Based on the four dimensions, the results showed that in terms of the familial dimension, women volunteers have become a source of pride among the family members and are treated with more respect and equal dignity. In the socio-cultural dimension, the women feel the value of empowerment and the need to share it because of its positive impact on them and the community. In the psychological dimension women shared their dreams for a better future and acknowledge the values of unity, cooperation, role modelling and wholehearted service as the key to achieve this. In the political dimension, the volunteers believed that they possess the necessary skills to become good leaders. Women volunteers are empowered through the HDCC program. Despite attaining lesser than the required college education, they have been empowered to teach basic education, are more self-confident, have a voice in decision making and are independent-minded.

**Keywords:** women, empowerment, leadership, community, education

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Gender empowerment is one of the more prevailing issues today. Since the Mesopotamian civilization, women had been considered subordinates of the males (Alexander & Welzel, 2005). The Philippines was no exception. However, at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a new breed of women emerged as a response to the changing needs of the times. A number of females became bread winners, were empowered and had found their own voice (Mason & Smith, 2005). Roles have shifted. And yet society does not fully embrace this reality yet especially in depressed areas such as those in garbage dump sites and relocation areas.

Metro Manila, being the seat of the Philippine government, is the most populous of the 12 defined regions of the country, with a population of 12.8 million comprising 13% of the national population (NSO Philippines, 2015). People from the different provinces in the Philippines flock to Manila, congesting the city, and they end up informally settling in any available space. The government tries to resolve the congestion issue by relocating the communities in the outskirts of Manila (NHA, 2005). The people are provided housing and a few other amenities. However, the residents need more sustainable programs especially livelihood projects, proper education and social structures.

Adamson University through its Integrated Community Extension Services (ICES) and Vincentian Center for Social Responsibility (VCSR) is presently working with some 25 of these relocation sites consisting of more than a million people. Volunteer personnel, students, alumni and collaborators are doing a three-phase intervention to alleviate the relocatees' poverty situation. The process includes: values formation, savings mobilization, livelihood program and leadership training. ICES-VCSR use asset-based community development and values-based leadership approaches. They work with and train women, mostly housewives left at home, the single mothers, community volunteers and undereducated women for livelihood and facilitating day-care centers. Perzyna et al (2010) state that, "A prerequisite of the VCSR's work in the community was based upon a commitment to respond to the needs and voices of the people collectively. Thus, it was in a position to make a far greater impact because it did not dictate or reflect its hopes and dreams for the community on the community; it was a semi-autonomous process in which the community made its own path. Handing the power of direction to the people empowered them to make decisions that related to their own destinies and lives."

The Hope Day Care Center (HDCC) was established in 2008 in order to provide the kids of some 13,000 displaced families in the Southville I relocation site access to quality pre-school education. This was a joint project of the World of Hope Foundation, Incorporation, Adamson University and the National Housing Authority. With the extension to the other relocation site in Montalban, the then Vice-President Noli de Castro also became a partner. The collaborators provided the funds for the physical structure and the other program expenses (uniforms for teachers and students, books, school supplies and other incidentals). Volunteer faculty members and personnel of Adamson University did the training of teachers, administration and monitoring of the HDCC project.

This study is anchored on the concept of Empowerment as presented by Lausch (2011). A paradigm based on this concept was used to show the relationship among the women volunteers and the family, community, HDCC and Adamson University. It is projected that with the intervening factors and ongoing trainings, the women shall move from mere volunteers to empowered women possessing the four dimensions suggested by Malhotra, Schuler & Boender (2002).

This research intended to determine how women day-care teachers become empowered leaders in a community of relocated informal settlers. Specifically, it answered the following

objectives: 1) Describe the value/ role of HDCC in promoting women empowerment, 2) Identify measures of women empowerment in the following dimensions (familial, socio-cultural/ community, psychological, and political), and describe how HDCC teachers become empowered women leaders in a community of relocated informal settlers based on the four dimensions identified.

This study focused on the experiences of eight women volunteer HDCC teachers from Southville 8, Cabuyao, Laguna. Their responses to the survey questions and guided interview were analyzed, evaluated and compared in relation to Malhotra's four dimensions of empowerment.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

Much has been written about women empowerment and their role in the society (Alexander and Welzel, 2005), (Bell and Reich, 1988), (Malhotra, Schuler & Boender, 2002), (Ransom, 2006) and (Ramirez, 2009). Prevailing themes, especially for those from developing countries, give focus to situations in rural and urban settings, the case of migration, women and micro-finance and entrepreneurial housewives. These themes weave in and out of the gender empowerment scheme.

Alunan (2002), Boserup (2007) and Guerrero (2001) explain that in rural settings even when farming and agricultural industry are considered a man's job, women play a vital role in both the primitive and the more developed communities especially in African and Asian countries, like the Philippines. These studies showed that while women's roles may not be fully recognized yet, it could not be denied that they make vital contributions to the well-being of the family.

In the urban setting, Alunan (2002) describes the Filipina woman's transition from rural housewife to how she responds to the new challenges that came about with urbanization. With the changing landscape, women have to cope with the scarcity of agricultural resources, increasing population, absence of livelihood, health and money problems, and even with vicious and violent husbands. They resort to working in factories or find employment as domestic help, sacrificing personal comfort, in order to earn a living not only for themselves but especially for their families who are depending on them most of the time. (Alunan 2002; Guerrero 2001; Mc Dermott 2011; and Sayne1991).

Another survival alternative for the Filipino family is to send the women to work abroad. However, studies show the dual benefits and costs for the overseas employment: larger contribution to the family and the nation's economy at the expense of rocking the foundation of society, the family. Then, too, are issues of human trafficking and exploitation of women by their employers, either physically or psychologically (Alunan 2002; Guerrero 2001; and Mc Dermott 2011).

Mayoux (2000) identifies another survival alternative through micro-finance and its three paradigms: financial self-sustainability, poverty-alleviation and feminist empowerment. These are the reasons why micro-finance institutions such as Grameen Bank and ACCION are conceived. McDermott (2011) and Aslanbegui et al (2010) cited the downside of microcredit which demonstrates the seeming unfair predicament of women who avail of the opportunity for economic freedom and empowerment offered them.

Then there are ordinary women who juggle their time among fulltime motherhood, being a wife and earning a living; they are "*mompreneurs*." They rise above gender subordination and become fully empowered to take on the roles of becoming bread winners taking on different fields and crafts and make them full-blown businesses. These women serve as inspiration to other Filipinos, women and men alike (Ramirez, 2009).

In communities of relocated informal settlers in the Philippines, women also play a vital role. Being urban in nature, these sites have to deal with scarcity of resources, lack of livelihood, health, education and money problems. After a series of values formation and skills training provided oftentimes by NGOs like Adamson University, women are provided with microfinance alternatives, some livelihood programs and opportunities to serve in day-care centers as teachers (Tavanti, 2010). Despite their seeming lack of opportunities themselves, women make significant contributions to alleviate poverty conditions by serving those who are more vulnerable than them such as the children. By conveying good dispositions and moral character, teachers hope to influence pre-schoolers to catch positive traits and prepare them for formal elementary education (Osguthorpe, 2008).

In all these situations women empowerment is the other side of the coin. Lausch (2011) describes it in two ways: a) Empowerment is associated to the norms, values and beliefs of a society; therefore, empowerment can be revealed differently in different societies. b) Empowerment can look different at the individual level versus the community level. Empowerment is also relational, for it occurs in relation to whom a person interacts with. Such descriptions may be used to validate the degree of conscious empowerment that women may feel in the course of doing their work in different situations.

### **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

The study used the mixed method employing quantitative-qualitative approach. A survey was conducted to determine the impact of the program on the respondents. Moreover, to further explore the viewpoints of mothers/ guardians, interviews were conducted.

## **4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. The Value/ Role Of Hdcc In Promoting Women Empowerment**

Tables 1 and 2 present the self- assessment on the role of women empowerment as well as the value of the HDCC in promoting empowerment, respectively.

**Table 1:** *Teacher Self-Assessment on Women Empowerment*

<b>Particulars</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
1. As an individual, do you believe women’s empowerment is important to community- development in the Southville/ Towerville/ Montalban community?	3.5714	Strongly Agree
2. Women are assets to a community.	3.6250	Strongly Agree
3. The Hope Day Care Center (HDCC) project is a means to gender empowerment, equality, and participation exercises.	3.8750	Strongly Agree
4. The HDCC provides an opportunity for women to serve the community.	3.6250	Strongly Agree
5. There were barriers to empowerment, equality, and participation in the Southville/ Towerville/ Montalban community for women before becoming a HDCC teacher.	2.7500	Agree
6. The HDCC project is a means to respond to the nation’s thrust in making education accessible.	3.6000	Strongly Agree
Composite Mean	3.6000	Strongly Agree

*Legend: Strongly agree= 3.50-4.00; Agree= 2.50-3.49; Moderately Agree= 1.50- 2.49; Strongly Disagree= 1.00-1.49*

Results show that HDCC teachers strongly agree that they are valuable women individuals and are assets of the community. They are also unanimous in the belief that the HDCC and its programs are good opportunities for women to serve the community and as a means to respond to the nation’s thrust in promoting education. They further agree that there is a hindrance to women empowerment and equality in the community while they are aware of their worth as individuals and what they can contribute to the community.

**Table 2:** *Teacher Self-Assessment on the Role of HDCC in Promoting Empowerment*

<b>Particulars</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
1. Do the values formation and the processes that you are doing as HDCC teachers have a positive impact increasing the pre-schoolers' self-confidence?	3.5000	Strongly Agree
2. Do you believe that you are setting a good example to the students in order for them to become better kids?	3.7500	Strongly Agree
Composite Mean	3.6250	Strongly Agree

The HDCC teachers strongly agree that their teaching process are helping the students to gain self- confidence and they are setting good examples worthy of being emulated. They are confident in their teaching style and being role models to the students.

## **2. Dimensions Of Women Empowerment**

### **2.1. Familial Dimension**

The Familial Dimension is divided into four aspects: participation and role of the women in the family, changes in the power structure at home, encouraging other women as volunteer HDCC teachers and status of the family before and while being an HDCC teacher.

The varying responses show that generally women are free to play their roles as mothers and wives in the family as well as express themselves. They are respected by their husbands who are supportive of them as HDCC volunteer teachers. They communicate, thus misunderstanding on gender issues is avoided. However, some are still victims of abuse in the family. This may be due to the fact that women are just starting to be more self-confident and speak their minds and feelings, something that may be new to their partners.

Women have gained respect and trust of the family members because of their HDCC experience. With that, they are able to become more confident in expressing themselves and asserting their equality with the husbands who used to keep them at home as simple housewives.

The teachers want the other women to experience being HDCC teachers because they are helpful in developing their personality and self-confidence. They are also able to see their worth in being able to help the community through the HDCC.

**Table 3:** *Status of the Family before and while being an HDCC Teacher*

<b>THEMES</b>	<b>RECURRENCE</b>	<b>INTERPRETATION</b>
<b>Status of the Family before HDCC</b>		
Plain housewife	4	Performed the duties and responsibilities as a housewife such as serving the husband, taking care of kids and doing chores.
Misdirected life	2	Engaged in immoral acts or chaotic way of life
<b>Status of the Family while with the HDCC</b>		
Respect as HDCC teacher	3	Gained respect from family and children; students and community
Involvement in community work as HDCC teacher	2	Serves or performs bigger responsibility in the community as HDCC teacher
Mingled with the people	2	Socialized with people in the community as HDCC teacher
Self-image as HDCC teacher	4	Sees herself as someone who can confidently teach and serve the community; had redirected vision in life from immoral or chaotic one to a focused community and family-oriented activities.

The responses showed that from mere housewives relegated to house duties, the women had found their voice and are able to make decisions for themselves due to the respect accorded them. They were able to become more confident in themselves and had the freedom to choose serving the society beyond their own family circle.

## **2.2. Socio-Cultural /Community Dimension**

The socio-cultural/ community dimension is subdivided into five topics: gender discrimination awareness, manner of treating women in the house, manner of treating women in the community, changing people’s perception on women and aspects in the community freely addressed by women.

Among the recurring themes in this dimension are: equal treatment, participating in the work of the family, work for the development of the community, empowered women, encouraging others, inspired to serve the community and taking initiative.

The HDCC teachers want to share with other women their good and helpful experiences as volunteer HDCC teachers through their life witnessing and encouraging others to participate. Their willingness to share to the bigger community by serving and inspiring others is another manifestation of a positive degree of empowerment present in the socio-cultural dimension.

**Table 4:** *Aspects in the Community Freely Addressed by Women*

<b>THEMES</b>	<b>RECURRENCE</b>	<b>INTERPRETATION</b>
Work	4	To have work/ extra work, business
Leadership	3	Leadership in the community, spiritual and livelihood activities, and stand up for the elderly.

Among the issues being addressed by the women in the community are work and leadership. Women don't shy away from work or endeavor extra businesses to help the family. They also take the lead in many of the activities, whether for livelihood or for the betterment of the community, such as standing up for the elderly and in spiritual exercises. This shows that indeed they have become more confident and empowered.

### **2.3. Psychological Dimension**

The Psychological Dimension is subdivided into five parts: women's awareness of opportunities and their roles in achieving them, dreams and aspirations for the future, things to be done to achieve the dreams, things that HDCC can do to broaden opportunities for women in the community and things that the teacher can do to broaden opportunities for women in the community.

The HDCC teachers dreams of a better life and that they are aware that within them is the capacity to do it. They only became more aware of their opportunities for growth after they became HDCC teachers. The women dream of having their children finish schooling. They also want to have a better future which they equate with economic prosperity. This shows how they value education in order to uplift their lives. For them graduation = good job = economic prosperity = better future. Aside from that, they also dream of personal and community development. By being volunteer teachers in the HDCC, they are able to develop themselves personally and this is a source of familial pride. Furthermore, they also dream of the entire community to progress and develop.

Having articulated their dreams, they are also aware that they need some steps to achieve them. Foremost is working hard as a team (of volunteers or as a family). Persevering together is a must. They also need to serve the others wholeheartedly if they want to make community development a reality as well as be consistent in walking the talk in order to be credible. Lastly, they believed that in order to achieve their dreams, aside from human effort they need to trust in God so He can bless their dreams.



**Table 5:** *Things that the Teacher can do to Broaden Opportunities for Women in the Community*

<b>THEMES</b>	<b>RECURRENCE</b>	<b>INTERPRETATION</b>
Cooperation and trust	3	Being part of the whole, cooperating as a team and trusting each other.
Sharing the experience	3	Sharing the good experiences and happiness as volunteer teacher, wife and mother to inspire others.
Encouraging others	4	Encouraging others to participate and be part of the work for the community.

The women volunteers feel the need to be a team player in order to foster cooperation and trust. By word and example, they can share the good experiences they have as volunteer teachers and their positive impact among them as persons, family members (e.g. wife, mother, daughter) and as leaders to inspire others. Another way is for them to deliberately encourage and invite others to participate in the good work for the community.

#### **2.4. Political Dimension**

The Political Dimension is subdivided into seven topics: women’s increase in self-confidence and communication skills, women leadership and role modelling for the community, women role models in the community, traits or characteristics appreciated in a woman, traits or characteristics looked for in a leader, believed in possessing characteristics of a leader and ways to encourage other women to take on leadership roles.

Results show that the women have gained better communication skills through their HDCC training and experiences. They have also become more confident in using the social network to broaden communication and they have positive outlook as leaders in both their homes and the community. The HDCC teachers value equality and believe that they can be good models of values for others.

When asked to name some of the women role models in the community, they mentioned fellow HDCC teachers, themselves, family members (mother) and community leaders. Acknowledging themselves and fellow HDCC teachers as women role models is an indication of their self-worth and confidence. Their mothers and community leaders are also appreciated for the valuable roles they play in their families and community respectively.

Four traits/ characteristics being appreciated in women have been identified. Being strong and sacrificing for the good of the majority, may it be for the family, association or the community, is top of the list. They value endurance and perseverance. This is followed by respect and love

for oneself and others which signifies the great value they place on oneself and on other people. They also find faith in God and freedom to express oneself important. To do this, one must be a person of courage and has fear of the Lord.

Integrity, ability to lead others, compassion and humility, God-fearing and being nationalistic are the characteristics they are looking for among their leaders. They need someone who is trustworthy and does not play favorites. This saying they want a person who has the ability to lead others and yet is compassionate, humble and, who does not discriminate against the members. They also want someone who is God-fearing and dedicated to the country.

**Table 6:** Ways to Encourage Other Women to Take Leadership Roles

<b>THEMES</b>	<b>RECURRENCE</b>	<b>INTERPRETATION</b>
Live by example	2	Showing how being a volunteer HDCC teacher has helped them become better.
Talk and explain	4	Approach prospective women, share and explain the positive side of leadership
Inspire	3	Motivate and encourage by explaining and witnessing to what is being preached.
Be involved	2	Be part of the activities for community development.

In order to encourage women to take on leadership roles, the HDCC teachers agree that they talk and explain to prospective women, inspire them, live by example, and get them involved in various community activities. The HDCC teachers want more women to have the positive experiences and learnings that they have experienced themselves. Aside from talking and explaining the main thing would be to walk the talk so others can truly be motivated.

Survey results answered by women teachers showed a mean score of more than 3.0 in 39 out of 47 questions; the maximum being 4.0. Its standard deviation also showed three items that were more than 1.0. These items fell under the family and psychological indicators. Upon closer analysis, it can be noted that the first two questions referred to domestic violence and the third one on the belief that women have little opportunity (for growth). Thus, it can be surmised that if they rated these items lower, they are inversely related; that is, women were not victims of domestic violence (anymore) and that they believed that women have big growth opportunities.

The women volunteers are also respected by the students, their own family members and the bigger community as well. They have the zest to teach, are enthusiastic to share about their experiences and are equally passionate about encouraging other women to volunteer and serve

the community. The women, given the confidence and on-going skills trainings, have been given leadership roles in the community.

The women volunteers in the HDCC are empowered. The eight women, despite attaining lesser than the required college education, have been empowered to teach basic education among the pre-school students. They have become more self-confident, have a voice in decision making, are independent-minded and know how to voice out their opinions.

### **3.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Gender empowerment is still one of the more prevailing issues today especially in depressed areas. Yet, with proper training, an opportunity to serve, and sustainable support, women can become a strong social capital. The volunteer teachers of the Hope Day Care Center in the relocation site have risen from being voiceless people to women of courage, serving the young and the community.

Given this experience, the different sectors are encouraged to provide better support for this vulnerable group of women as well as strengthen programs that address educational concerns of pre-school children of locally displaced communities.

The said project has also given its participants a concrete platform for long-term development, making them vital parts of their community’s sustainability especially in nurturing the youth – forming their values and being role models – all while building their own confidence and disposition as well as changing the society’s perspective towards them.

With this, the researcher recommends the continuous implementation of this program and to further involve participation of more women as well as other members of a household in the initiative to extend the project’s developmental results in the community.

**Table 7: Summary of Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations**

<b>SUMMARY</b>	<b>CONCLUSIONS</b>	<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>
Value / Role of HDCC in promoting women empowerment	HDCC plays a vital role in promoting women empowerment. It provides opportunities for simple women to become more confident among themselves and become trusted community leaders.	Strengthen and institutionalize the trainings and formation provided by Adamson University to the volunteer teachers of the HDCC. Replicate the HDCC in other displaced communities
How do values formation and role modeling of teachers help in developing the	Values formation and role modeling of teachers develop better students. The will have people to emulate so they can	On-going formation of teachers is a must so they may be updated with the trends in education without losing sight of the values which

students to become better?	become better children to their families and citizens in the community.	they may inculcate among the young.
Women empowerment in the Familial dimension	Women volunteers have become a source of pride among the family members. They have also been treated with more respect and equal dignity.	Involve the family members especially the husbands and children in some of the trainings for the HDCC teachers.
Women empowerment in the Socio-cultural dimension	Even when a few instances of discrimination may be felt, women still feel the value of empowerment and the need to share it with other women because of the more positive impact it has created on them and the community.	Encourage and involve more women in the activities. Aside from the HDCC, provide opportunities for women to develop their potentials and share their talents in the community. Make them feel that they have a big role to play in community development.
Women empowerment in the psychological dimension	Women have dreams for a better future for their children, family and the community. They also acknowledge the value of unity, cooperation, role modelling and wholehearted service as the key to achieve this.	Provide self-awareness seminars, workshops and retreats in order to strengthen their confidence in themselves and among each other.
Women empowerment in the political dimension	The volunteers believe that they possess the necessary skills to become good leaders. They also look up to model leaders whom they can emulate.	Hone their skills and potentials. Make teambuilding exercises an essential part in their regular formation. This not only lets them discover their leadership skills, it may even patch up differences among the members.

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