

## **Best practices of Pantawid Pamilya beneficiaries in Mandaluyong: “Kabuhayan sa Gulayan na Dapat Tularan”**

By: Gulay Power Group

In the year 2018, Mandaluyong’s Sanctuary Pantawid Urban Garden won as “Best Gulayan sa Barangay” of Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program in the National Capital Region.

An ocular inspection of the garden gives a visitor an idea of how the trees and herbs benefit the community but the very essence and dynamics of the project is more than meets the eye. The success story of this garden embodies the Filipino’s tug of war against poverty itself.

In 2012, the grueling requirements could have discouraged the farmers in starting the project. Establishing and maintaining an urban garden is considered a challenge for lack of space and water supply. At the onset, they were only provided ½ hectare of land. They also experienced scarce water supply in the following year to the point that some plants withered during summer. The beneficiaries faced this challenge by carrying gallons of water everyday to water their plants.

Their persistence has given the LGU of Mandaluyong enough reason for support. Provision for the installation of their own water supply came in 2016. Moreover, when the center noticed how they maintained cleanliness and order in their premises, they were granted expansion, utilizing idle land size which was more than a hectare. This meant more varieties of plants, herbs and trees and eventually, a thriving livelihood for the community. The seedlings they use to plant in their garden were mostly given by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the Department of Agriculture (DA).

To expand their knowledge on gardening, the Pantawid Pamilya conducted discussions on communal gardening through its Family Development Session (FDS) to promote the importance of food security, nutrition and sustainable development among the beneficiaries.

Other benefits followed from the well-nurtured garden. The fund that the farmers used for their initiatives came from a portion of their income from selling their harvests. During their feeding programs, they cooked the nutritious vegetables they harvest from their garden. They provided free herbal medicines for indigents. They even received a nipa hut from their LGU, where they now gather for their meetings and bible studies. The place now serves as a receiving area for visitors.

Some of the beneficiaries of their feeding program include fire victims from Brgy. Blk 36, Brgy. Panatag, Brgy. Blk 38, Brgy. Botanical, and malnourished kids of half way home. The objective of the program is to promote good health and safety food coming from the garden.

Currently, the Pantawid Pamilya farmers of Mandaluyong's Sanctuary are now serving as resource speakers during the Family Development Sessions (FDS) of other barangays, particularly Zaniga, Buayang-Bato, Malamig and Addition Hills to share their best practices. Other barangays from other localities also visit them to learn about their strategies.

***Insights from the pantawid beneficiaries: "Our garden is a haven from our poverty battleground."***

According to Aling Linda, their sanctuary garden served not only as a project but as a way for them to de-stress themselves from the usual problems in life such as hurdles in paying bills, family issues and relational rifts.

"Kapag hindi ako mahanap, andito lang ako sa garden," said Aling Elsa, who claims that gardening has become a part of her daily grind.

"Nabago talaga ang buhay ko at nakatulong ng malaki ang pagtanim namin dito. Dati kami ang nag-aral at natuto...ngayon, kami na ang nagtuturo...naimbitahan pa kaming maging resource speakers para sa ibang barangay...pinupuntahan pa nga po kami ng ibang lokalidad," explained Jenna Camara, the current president of the Sanctuary Pantawid Urban Garden.

"Hanggang ngayon po, hindi naniniwala yung mga kakilala namin na wala kaming sahod...pero wala po talaga....may savings po kasi kami sa benta namin ng mga

gulay...sabi pa samin, ay hindi kayo magtatagal dyan, kasi walang income, pero masaya po talaga kami...at andito kami, sama-sama hanggang ngayon,” Aling Gina remarked.

“Sana nga po ay mas mapaganda pa namin ang taniman para magmukhang park para pwede rin kaming pasyalan,” said Aling Luzviminda.

According to the beneficiaries, the income from the sale of the harvest goes a long way. A certain portion goes to the beneficiary, another slice goes to the maintenance of the garden and a third part goes to their cooperative bank. They are satisfied with this set-up and they consider themselves fortunate in having the privilege of taking care of their own area in the garden.

“Kami po mismo ay nakikinabang sa sarili naming tanim...kapag wala kaming pangkain, nakakakuha kami ng pang-ulam sa sarili naming gulayan. Nakakatulong ang mga halamang-gamot katulad ng tanglad na bukod sa nakakalinis sa katawan ay nakakababa pa ng presyon. Nakinabang na kami, nag-enjoy pa po kami, kasi nakakapagbonding na rin po kami kapag nasa garden kami, “ mentioned Aling Lina.

The beneficiaries claim to have found much joy in tending their garden areas especially that it keeps them preoccupied instead of focusing on their own personal hardships. It has kept them united, having established friendships and a support group to turn to during their most stressful moments in life.