

## STAYING WHERE THE ACTION IS: RELOCATION WITHIN THE CITY

SEBASTIAN B. SANTIAGO

After Sapang Palay, then Carmona and now Dasmarinas, the only relocation activity that has become familiar to many is that which involves movement to resettlement areas quite distant from the city. Hardly anyone remembers anymore that the earlier urban resettlement projects were within the city. These are Barrio Obrero in Manila, which was established in the 1930s, and Bago-Bantay, a People's Homesite and Housing Corporation (PHHC) project in Quezon City opened in 1954. In a manner of speaking, the Bago-Bantay project set a policy of relocation as close to the city as possible, if not within the city. This policy, however, was indirectly changed when the Office of the President, through the PHHC, effected the purchase of Sapang Palay in Bulacan, Carmona in Cavite, and Dasmarinas also in Cavite specifically for urban resettlement areas in 1961.

The rationale for choosing these three parcels for urban resettlement sites for the Greater Manila Area is not clear from the records. It is quite evident, however, that resettlement was used to justify the purchase. With their development into urban resettlement sites and the intensification of squatter clearance and relocation activities, relocation to distant places has become an unwritten policy created more by circumstances rather than by deliberate choice.

Wherever and whenever people are being relocated, they always ask why they could not stay where they are. Or, if they have to move, why can't they be moved to a place closer to where they make their living. These are very valid questions. And there are many answers. Each answer could be an issue.

### *Why Not Where They Are*

For people occupying land they do not own but under a legal tenure, the government has a policy of keeping them where they are. This policy applies in general to lessees of urban residential estates. Such estates may be purchased or expropriated by the government, subdivided, improved and sold to the tenants. It is important, from the standpoint of public policy, that the beneficiaries are *bona fide* occupants. That is, they must have a legal relationship with the land. The rule, therefore, does not apply to illegal occupants or, as they are commonly known, to squatters.

This principle is one reason why squatters have to be relocated. To allow them to stay where they are is to tolerate — even encourage — an illegal act. Many argue that this principle is designed to protect the institution of private ownership. And private ownerships of land, especially where land is a scarce good, would not serve the public welfare. Those who espouse this argument should also be prepared to accept the alternative, which is either anarchy or state ownership of all lands.

Before getting too involved in a moral debate, the practical reasons for relocating squatters should also be considered. Operationally, the government relocates squatters for the following reasons in the order of priority.

1. They are occupying places which are unsafe and where their structures cause the public a great deal of inconvenience and loss. Such places are esteros and other waterways, river banks, creek banks and railways;

2. They are occupying places which are intended for public use such as road rights of way, parks and school sites, or the area is the

site of a government project. In such cases, relocation is undertaken only when plans have been completed and funds have been made available for the project;

3. The sheriff is enforcing a writ of execution and is about to demolish the entire squatter area and the only alternative is to relocate the squatters;

4. The squatter colony is an eyesore to tourists; and

5. The property belongs to somebody else.

In all these cases, throughout the country, the rule is that relocation may be undertaken only when the relocated families can be accommodated in appropriate resettlement projects.

Which brings us to our next question: Can not these resettlement projects be within the city?

### *The Rationale*

People, even and especially squatters, have to make a living. Though many of them may have had an agricultural background, the fact remains that they have become citified in their way of life and in their ways of making a living. This was demonstrated in the experience of Sapang Palay. Though Sapang Palay was conceived and initially developed as an agro-urban resettlement community more than two-thirds of the families brought there returned to the city to squat again.<sup>1</sup> Those who remained – to this date – have not adopted the life of urban farmers as conceived for them. They still make their living from the city or citified jobs.

The Carmona Resettlement Project would have suffered the same fate had not the railway been extended to it. This was an exercise in making places of employment accessible to resettled families. Yet this was not enough. People who make their living from scavenging, taking in laundry and other odd jobs that can be done only within the city, which only people in their situation would do, returned to the city.

The experiences we have had with Sapang Palay and Carmona all point to the fact that the key to the viability of a relocation scheme is

employment, organized or unorganized. Since those who are affected by relocation activities are most sensitive to the need for jobs, mainly the residual jobs of the city, the ideal relocation site should be, as much as possible, within the city.<sup>2</sup>

### *The Issues*

The immediate consideration of relocation within the city is cost. The cost of land and the cost of development.

The closer the site to the city, the higher the cost of land. It is most expensive if the site is within the city. It does not matter whether the government buys it or expropriates it. The government still has to pay the going price or the declared market value of the property. The government has to pay as it does not own enough land within or close enough to the city. One alternative is to reclaim land from the sea, as planned for the Tondo squatters. Reclamation, however, can be expensive and, in the case of the Tondo project, it is ironic that the government has to expropriate large sections of the Dagat-Dagatan lagoon which have been converted into fishponds and other areas and titled to individuals.<sup>3</sup>

Costly land must be used efficiently. Which means putting more people per hectare of land. The application of this principle would demand high-rise construction, which is very expensive.<sup>4</sup> By way of comparison, it costs the government approximately ₱5,000 to resettle one family in Dasmariñas. This includes schooling up to high school. For ₱8,000 more the resettled family can be provided with a decent two-bedroom bungalow. Total cost: ₱13,000 per family. The initial construction cost for the Tondo urban renewal project was ₱32,439.81 per family, exclusive of land development. For every one family to be relocated within Tondo, 2.5 can be resettled in Dasmariñas.

The concomitant of cost is affordability; that is, affordability on the part of the government which must capitalize the cost of land and development; and affordability on the part of the relocated family who must pay for all or at least part of the cost.

Government resources are not unlimited. And there are many competing claims for these resources. Relocation within the city would require the allocation of a tremendous amount of resources with limited direct benefits. And the beneficiaries are the poorest among the poor from whom the government cannot expect to recover any of its investments.<sup>5</sup> Then again, it may be pointless to speak of recovery of expenditures when we have not considered the magnitude of such expenditures. The Greater Manila Area alone has more than 300,000 squatters. If the Tondo Foreshore experiment were to be used as a standard for relocation within the city, the amount needed to relocate, resettle or improve the living conditions of these families would be about P10 billion for buildings alone.

The cost of relocation within the city would be as expensive to the relocated families as it would be to the government. This would have to be if the government were to cater to the common desire of such families for home ownership. Affordability levels of squatter families, however, are such that individual ownership could only be achieved if these families were subsidized by as much as 80 percent of the cost of home ownership. This is neither reasonable nor practical. Even the alternative to ownership, which is tenancy, would be costly to the government as it must fund and absorb all development expenditures.

The cost of urban renewal and related schemes are decidedly much too prohibitive for developing countries. For this reason, international organizations recommend and fund what they call sites and services projects. Such projects consist mainly of providing blighted areas with basic facilities and amenities, such as potable water, power, streets, garbage collection, and sewerage. There is no relocation. In a sense, if we are to accept that a squatter colony is the lowest form of urban blight, a sites and services project would raise it one level higher — to that of a slum area.

Cost-wise, the sites and services approach is most practical. It is also acceptable to the people concerned as it would not involve relo-

cation, except for some who are affected by improvements. The results of a sites and services project would still be much below the standards of urban renewal. Nevertheless, it has the capability of raising welfare levels of slum and squatter communities to a comparatively higher level than what they have now.

This brief discussion of the sites and services approach, strictly speaking, is more appropriate as a footnote to this paper. The approach presupposes that there will be no slum or squatter clearance activities or no relocation of families. But even in cases where a squatter colony has to be removed, a sites and services project can be relevant. The capability of the government to clear squatter and slum areas is limited by its capability to develop appropriate resettlement areas. It may take time, even years, before many of these blighted areas can be cleared. Pending the renewal of these areas, their improvement and the introduction of essential services can contribute immensely to a better quality of life for the people in these areas.

To get back to the problem of relocation within the city, we still have to raise the issue of acceptability. Acceptability, that is, of a new way of life in a high rise community where the system of tenure may prohibit ownership or require the sharing of the rights and responsibilities of ownership. It was noted earlier that relocation within the city may necessarily involve high-rise construction to maximize the utilization of costly urban land. High-rise living is not a popular way of life in this country, or for that matter, in most countries. Even Singaporeans, proud as they are of their new and imposing high-rise settlements, will opt for a house and lot if given the choice. Neither will that choice be available for those who opt for relocation within the city.

In our experience with the few high-rise apartments run by the government, such dwellings are very acceptable substitutes for a *barong-barong*, relocation to Sapang Palay or Carmona, or even a relatively expensive accessoria in the slums. Much depends on the rent and accessibility to jobs and schools. While the squatter or slum dweller will always opt for a

house and lot, he will accept a high-rise apartment if this is the best he can have to be able to stay in the city.

Another factor to contend with is ownership. Ownership is equated with security (if not profit) and desire to pass on property to the children. Again in our experience, the desire for ownership is strongest where the unit provided is a house and lot package. It is not as strong in multi-dwelling arrangements. Group forms of ownership, such as cooperatives and condominiums, however, could be desirable in lieu of government administration. The government is not, and it is doubtful if it can be, an effective landlord. Since relocation sites within the city have to be vertical developments, cost constraints on ownership and new forms of property and community relations would require a careful consideration of the system of tenure to adopt.

Relocation, as an urban problem, is a product of rural migration to urban centers. Relocation has become necessary because of congestion in the cities. Congestion not only in terms of population density but more so in the sense that urban housing and its supporting facilities and amenities are no longer capable of coping with the population. While deprivation is most acute in the blighted areas, it is actually the entire city and all its people that must bear with the resulting shortages in essential services such as frequent brownouts; low water pressure, if any; uncollected garbage; crowded thoroughfares; and inadequate police protection.

Benevolent policies towards squatting could only worsen this situation. They would induce more people to move to the city. To be blunt about it, the more we make life easier for squatters, the more squatters we attract; hence, a policy and a program of relocation within the city to keep these people where the action is, such as effective rural and regional development programs.

### *Summary*

Relocation within the city, or relocation without dislocation, is an alternative to the ex-

isting program of relocation to places quite distant from the city. It appears to be a reaction to the dislocation suffered by relocated families, particularly in their means of livelihood. The humanists have always been critical of government relocation and resettlement activities in the belief that such activities are conducted without humanitarian considerations. This was quite true in 1963 when the city administration of Manila relocated its Intramuros squatters without coordinating with the national government agencies concerned. These families were literally dumped with their belongings in Sapang Palay which was not ready to receive them.

Sapang Palay was a traumatic and tragic experience. Its impressions have remained with us. But because of its lessons we have been able to improve in Carmona and are doing even better in Dasmariñas. One basic problem, however, remains: that of providing employment for the resettled families, particularly those dependent on residual jobs. It may be added that the oil crisis has added a new dimension to this problem: transportation costs.

It is basically because of employment that relocation within the city is offered as an alternative. But this alternative also suffers from its own constraints. It is much too expensive for both the government and the intended beneficiaries. And it could have unintended side-effects which could aggravate the problem of urban congestion.

Relocation to distant places and relocation within the city are therefore two extremes of an approach to the same problem. There must be a happy medium between these two points of the pendulum. In other words, there must be other alternatives.

### *Notes*

At the time he read this paper, Sebastian Santiago was General Manager of the People's Homesite and Housing Corporation.

1. The original settlers in Sapang Palay were allocated lots ranging from 800 to 1200 sq.m. on the expectation that they would support themselves from backyard gardening.

2. Under the operational policies of the Presi-

dential Assistant for Housing and Resettlement (PAHRA) and the Department of Social Welfare, only destitute squatter families (as against the affluent and professional) are entitled to relocation.

3. Reclaiming 315 hectares from the Dagat-Dagat-an lagoon is estimated to cost ₱108 million, or ₱32.50 per sq.m. before development.

4. Especially in the case of the Tondo Foreshore Area. Being a reclaimed area, high-rise construction will require extensive pilings for building foundations.

This can sum up building costs by as much as 20 percent.

5. This would raise a question of equity. Should tax money be used for high-cost, low-benefit projects, especially where the benefits accrue to individuals rather than the general public. Even now, based on their observation of existing resettlement schemes, many are asking if they have to squat for the government to heed their own need for low-cost housing.

**PHILIPPINE  
SOCIOLOGICAL  
REVIEW**

**Available Back Issue**

**POPULATION ISSUE**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <i>Peter C. Smith</i>                                    | The New Nuptiality: Recent Evidence of Delayed Marriage and a Projection to 2000   |
| <i>Melinda Bacol-Montilla and<br/>William F. Stinner</i> | Farm Origins, Education and Occupational Mobility in Metropolitan Manila: A Footnote on the Overurbanization Thesis                                    |
| <i>Zelda C. Zablan</i>                                   | The Prediction of Adoption and Continued Practice of Contraception Among Enrollees in Family Planning Clinics: 1972                                    |
| <i>Mary B. Deming</i>                                    | The Influence of Marriage and Childbearing on Occupational Mobility in the Philippines: A Reformulation of the "Social-Mobility Hypothesis"            |
| <i>Francis C. Madigan, et al.</i>                        | Twenty-two Months of Vital Rate Coverage by a Dual System in Northern Mindanao   |
| <i>John E. Laing and<br/>James F. Phillips</i>           | Survey Findings on Family Planning Program Effects in the Philippines, 1968-73   |
| <i>Gerry E. Hendershot</i>                               | Differences in Contraceptive Knowledge, Attitudes and Practice by Rural-Urban Residence History: Currently Married Women Aged 15-44, Philippines, 1973 |
| <i>Peter C. Smith</i>                                    | Educational Attainment and Choice of Spouse: An Introductory Note on Assortative Mating  |
| <i>Dionisia R. de la Cruz</i>                            | An Application of the Coombs Preference Scales for Family Size and Sex Composition   |
| <i>Nilda M. Castro</i>                                   | A Developing City in a Dual Economy  |
| <i>Enresto M. Pernia</i>                                 | Philippine Migration: The Settlement of the Digos-Padada Valley, Davao Province  |

Volume 23 Numbers 1 to 4  
January to October 1975