

PBSP, JFPR-ADB step-up efforts to improve lives of urban poor

FOR 32 years, the Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP) has made a huge difference in the lives of the underprivileged. The corporate foundation embarked on yet another endeavor in its bid to help alleviate poverty in the country through the [Strategic Private Sector Partnerships for Urban Poverty Reduction in Metro Manila \(STEP-UP\)](#).

Last month, PBSP, Asian Development Bank (ADB), Housing Urban Development Council (HUDCC), and Department of Finance (DoF) signed a memorandum of agreement that will benefit 5,823 urban poor families in 23 communities from nine cities in Metro Manila namely Malabon, Caloocan, Mandaluyong, Manila, Marikina, Quezon City, Pasig, Taguig, and Muntinlupa.

The Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction (JFPR), through the ADB will provide \$ 3.6 million grant while PBSP will raise its counterpart of \$3.33 million in financial and in-kind assistance for the implementation of STEP-UP in the next three years.

The program, as a post-land acquisition strategy, will help improve the living conditions of poor families in Metro Manila that have steadily grown at 4.4 percent a year, considering that 35 percent of urban population live in slum dwellings or squat on private or public land. These families live in substandard conditions: inadequate access to potable water, overcrowded makeshift homes, and poor sanitation.

Seen during the signing of the letter of agreement, Juan B. Santos, PBS Board of Trustee and Chairman and CEO of Nestle Philippines said, “In the initial stages, PBSP conducted a thorough assessment of the communities it has selected. While we will also have to prioritize the communities and municipalities in the first year, and build the program over time, we are also looking for visible, high-profile results.”

The STEP-UP program is the private sector’s response to widespread problem to urban poverty and the government’s call for support.

The fund will finance the development of community structures such as housing; and revolving funds are aimed at providing loans to qualified micro-entrepreneurs for livelihood assistance. One-time grant assistance is also lined up to the communities for the construction of water facilities, drainage, roads, re-blocking, and other infrastructure needed in a community.

The program will also encourage more businesses to provide financial assistance, employee volunteers and skills sharing to adopted communities. Partnerships with local government units, non-government organizations, homeowners’ associations, as well as business establishments and the academe will oversee the coordination and implementation of housing and interrelated community programs.

The benefits don’t end there. STEP-UP program includes the Risk Reduction and Management component for urban poor communities. It is not enough that they have a

proper shelter; families need also to protect their homes and community from floods, fire and typhoons. This program will help develop people's capabilities in preventing and responding to disasters, and to provide basic equipment.

STEP-UP was created when ADB initiated pilot-testing new approaches for on-site urban upgrading and off-site relocation of informal settlers under the JFPR. PBSP, a non-stock, non-profit corporate-led social development foundation that has been implementing anti-poverty programs since it was established in December 1970, is prominently involved in various projects for urban upgrading and poverty alleviation. Because of this, PBSP is a perfect partner to promote corporate involvement with a more focused impact on the lives of the urban poor.

“A key aim is to increase the level and impact of corporate outreach, and to ensure sustainable long-term impacts that improve the lives of the poor in a measurable way,” said Matthew Westfall, ADB Principal Urban Development Specialist.

STEP-UP not only benefits urban poor population, it is also a way to unite the private sector, local government units, and the national government to work as one in easing the conditions of poverty-stricken communities.

In his speech, appreciating the efforts of JFPR, ADB and PBSP in reducing poverty, HUDCC Chair Michael Defensor said, “We cannot solve this problem single-handedly, the involvement of the private sector is very much needed.”