

Hoping, dreaming in Payatas

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Now the open dump has two gray mountains of garbage, a tragic “symbol of poverty” where a decade ago 200 people died and 200 others disappeared in a typhoon-triggered avalanche.

The village came to be when Payatas was turned into an urban-poor relocation site in the 1970s. The first mound of trash emerged sometime in the 1990s after Metro Manila’s previous poverty symbol, the Smokey Mountain dumpsite, was closed down.

Permanent closure is the prospect approaching the Payatas Dumpsite. That could mean immediate loss of subsistence for at least many of the 20,000 people from inside and outside the village who gather recyclable materials and sell them to the numerous junkshops that line the narrow roads.

It is in the part called Phase 2 Payatas B — its 4,000 residents call it “*Lupang Pangako*,” or Promised Land — that Yukiyo, or Yuki, is involved, particularly with the women and children.

With a house-turned-office a short drive away from Payatas B, Yuki serves as the Manila head of Inter-Communication Center for Asia and Nippon (ICAN), a Nagoya-based NGO that has programs in different parts of the Philippines.

In Payatas, ICAN began its aid 10 years ago by giving out boots to people who climbed up and picked through the daily deliveries of fresh trash. Later, in a small, rented house, it set up a medical clinic called Community Care Center.

Having the Center in their area triggered a

leap in consciousness among the residents, says Divina Cardama, the head of *Sikap Pangkabuhayan ng mga Nanay sa Payatas* (SPNP — Mothers Working for Livelihood Improvement in Payatas), which ICAN has since organized with JICA support. “*Doon nag-umpisang mangarap ang mga residente*,” she says: That was when the residents began to dream.

With JICA assistance since 2007, the Center has grown into a three-floor, multi-function building with a bigger clinic and more activities for mothers and children.

The clinic gives residents free regular consultation with doctors and midwives. It also provides special services like Pap’s smear, de-worming, and health education.

Many residents come on clinic day, says Yuki, and many have been cured especially for tuberculosis.

A community pharmacy has opened at the Center, income from which can be used to support the clinic.

There is also a daycare center with 32 pupils, and a feeding center that opens twice weekly. Every Saturday, 70 children come for soups, lessons, and games.

“Maybe they come here because there is little space in Payatas for children,” says Yuki. “Sometimes they even knock and call out to come in.”

The daycare center teacher, Minda Biñas, a mother of four, says former pupils — now teenagers who otherwise might have become drug addicts or criminals — come in to teach and play games with the little ones.

Minda also heads the Payatas Integrated Cooperative Operation (PICO), which JICA helped ICAN to organize as the vehicle for sustaining the Center over the long term.

Minda points out that “pico” is vernacular for a pick, “used to open earth for planting.” At the JICA-assisted Center, PICO is the tool of 150 member-women to acquire livelihood skills that will help them especially when the Payatas Dumpsite closes down.

It teaches them how to make foodstuffs,



Leaders of women’s cooperatives, Minda Biñas and Divina Cardama, with NGO head Yuki Nomura at the daycare center

dolls, candy, and tarpaulin bags, among other such products. Its beneficiaries include some out-of-school youths, but most are mothers, some of whose husbands are jobless. “*Malaking tulong*,” Divina says emphatically: The skills are a big help.

The women, who at the time were plain housewives, also learned basic business and management skills. Divina herself, after training at SPNP, was hired by ICAN to make stuffed toys that were exported to Japan. Today, she is an independent producer who sells to ICAN and other NGOs and participates in market bazaars.

Their organizations and their acquired capabilities, Yuki says, have brought out a something significant in the Payatas mothers. “Through the commitment of mothers,” she says, “we see empowerment.”

Meanwhile, the needs of residents continue to grow. The clinic, even though enlarged, has become too small for them, Divina says. A bigger one is a dream for the future (“*pangarap para sa balang araw*”), she says.

For now, Divina adds, she and the other mothers are living proof of the good intentions (“*kami ang katunayan ng magandang layunin*”) of ICAN and JICA.

The JICA program with ICAN will end in late 2010, and ICAN is preparing to turn the Center over fully to PICO. At first the members were reluctant to accept the responsibility, says Yuki, but they have begun to realize that they can do it.

“*Ito na po ang kasagutan*,” says Divina: All these are the answer to the dream.

