

Off to a Good Start

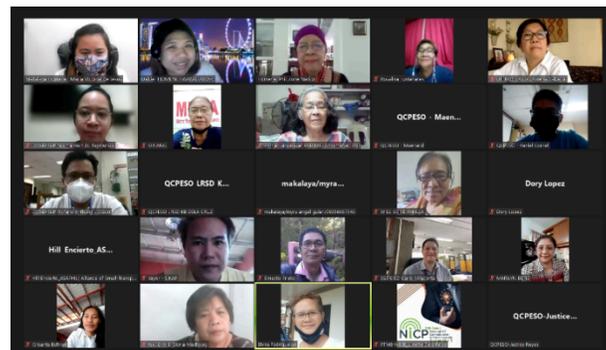
Homenet Philippines Launches Policy Dialogue with Government Agencies

By Zone C. Narito

Some 27 leaders from 18 Homenet affiliate organizations, together with representatives from the Metro Manila Vendors Alliance (MMVA) and the National Anti-Poverty Commission Workers in the Informal Sector Council (NAPC-WISC), discussed their concerns and demands in a virtual policy dialogue with representatives of concerned government agencies 23 November via Zoom.

Representatives of the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Social Security System (SSS), Cooperatives Development Authority (CDA), the National Anti Poverty Commission (NAPC), and the local government unit of Quezon City Public Employment Service Office (QC PESO) were on hand to respond to the workers' demands and present their programs and services that could address the complex needs of various subsectors of the informal economy.

HomeNet Phil President Primar Jardeleza in her welcome remarks appealed to the government representatives to listen to the voices of women and men in the informal economy. She said these are the voices "which have been muted for so long and faces that are invisible"



As envisioned, the Policy Dialogue created a space where leaders of small vendors, fisherfolks, farmers, home-based workers, transport workers and service workers freely expressed their plight as well as their aspirations and commitments. Representatives of five subsectors composed of Flor Assidao-Santos from MMVA (an alliance of market vendors), Hill Ancierto from ASAPHIL (an association which includes small transport operators), Myra Gulan from MAKALAYA (a

women's group focusing on services), Ka Trining Domingo from KABAPA (an association of rural women) and Josie Lipio from PATAMABA (a national network of informal workers comprising mainly of homebased workers) discussed a wide range of demands, principally ensuring the right to earn a living and receive sufficient income for the family's survival needs, as well as protection from human rights violations and harassment which persist even during pandemic.

Representatives of the rural women's group highlighted gender issues, and the need to encourage and support women's political as well as socio-economic empowerment. They also pushed for meaningful agrarian reform, debt moratorium, nationalist industrialization, and equitable distribution of wealth.

Social protection served as a recurrent theme during the dialogue, eliciting a positive response from the SSS representative who assured the group that a social security package for informal workers will be made available.

Guaranteeing social protection for informal workers is also a major provision and salient feature of the Magna Carta of Workers in the Informal Economy (MACWIE) bill presented during the dialogue, which generated substantive discussion.

The dialogue also touched on the challenge presented by the impending implementation of the Mandanas Act which aims to improve social service delivery through decentralization of a substantial portion of the national budget and localization of programs being offered by national line agencies. This makes representation of informal worker leaders in local decision-making bodies an urgent necessity in mounting an effective advocacy agenda revolving around social protection for all.

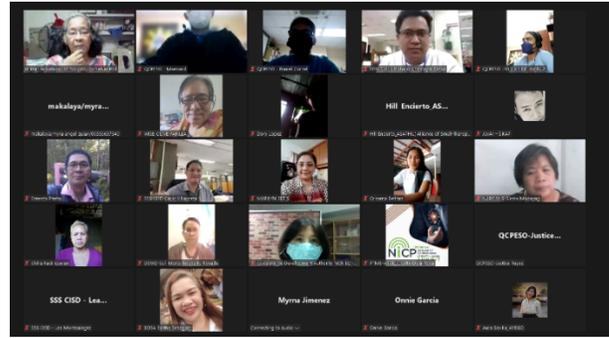
Given that the main concern of informal workers is economic survival especially during COVID times, the main response of government line agencies as explained by their representatives comes in the form of programs and services focusing on sustainable livelihood and entrepreneurship such as access to markets, technology and innovation,

capacity building of management and labor, access to finance, and assessment of the business climate.

Key leaders of Homenet Philippines saw the policy dialogue as a leverage for both executive and legislative advocacy which successfully created a platform for forging partnership and convergence for widening the access of informal workers to social protection programs and services.

According to them, “The initiative of a dialogue is indeed an effective approach to transforming the relationship of the marginalized sector with the government - from dole-out/clientelism to empowerment and partnership. In the end, the commitment to advance the livelihood and living

conditions of informal workers was strengthened among and between the Homenet affiliates and partner government agencies.”



There are plans to hold more policy dialogues in the first quarter of 2022.