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## NEWSLIFT

# Laws, programs for poor not enough: leaders

MANY of the supposed pro-poor laws and government programs are not enough to uplift the condition of the impoverished Filipinos.

This was the conclusion of more than 30 select leaders of grassroots organizations from different parts of the country attending the four-day consultation on four thematic papers on legal empowerment of the poor: access to justice and the rule of law, property rights, labor rights and legal mechanisms to empower informal business.

While admitting that some laws have good intentions and pro-poor provisions, leaders claim that legal instruments have not been effective in reducing poverty incidence nationwide.

"Government laws and programs are either fundamentally flawed and do not capture realities on the ground or are not properly implemented by assigned agencies," informal sector leader Mercedes Nicolas said.

Government offices even lack the needed resources to undertake pro-poor programs and projects, she added.

Another problem that has continuously frustrated the effective execution of many laws, fisherfolk leader Honorio Baculao said, is that many stakeholders and target beneficiaries do not understand these laws.

"For instance, many fishers in far-flung communities are not even aware that there is the Fishery Code or Republic Act 8550 that supposedly uphold their welfare," he lamented.

"While some leaders are properly oriented on their basic rights and sectoral concerns, their capacity to conduct massive information dissemination is very limited. Our government should address this issue otherwise their programs are doomed to fail," he said.

As for micro-finance programs that intend to assist small informal businesses, leaders of vendors associations argued that requirements of governments' microfinance and other credit lending programs are insensitive to the needs of small informal businesses.

"The process and requirements to apply for loan programs are very tedious and cumbersome. As vendors and informal workers, we cannot access these programs because we cannot produce the necessary documents since we are not even legally recognized," said Maria Pino-Buanghung of the Cebu City United Vendors' Association.

Aside from airing their sentiments and stories on existing laws and programs that impact on the poor, the participants also came up with concrete plans to address their sectoral issues and concerns.

One is to conduct regional paralegal trainings that can help more people become aware of their rights as well as of the laws that impact on their situation.

The four-day event was organized by the non-government organization Economic, Social Cultural Rights Asia (ESCR-Asia) in cooperation with Public Interest Advocacy and Litigation Office (PIALO) and Free Legal Assistance Group (FLAG) Cebu Chapter and supported by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Philippines-Fostering Democratic Governance Portfolio.

## QUOTEWORTHY

*Mora na gyud ni og martial law, that's why we will do our best to finish the canvass as soon as we can para mahuman na ning tanan*

— **BOGO CANVASSERS CHAIRMAN VERONICO PETALCORIN** on the transfer of the Bogo ballot boxes from the Provincial Capitol premises to the Comelec regional office