

By LEILANI S. JUNIO

The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) said on Thursday that the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) is a tool that does not only uplift the lives of its poor beneficiaries but also helps in transforming them as empowered citizens of the community, in particular, and the country in general.

According to DSWD Secretary Corazon J. Soliman, one proof or example of this pleasant "transformation" is Mrs. Milagros Dizon, a 4Ps beneficiary since 2008 from Barangay Commonwealth, Quezon City.

Secretary Soliman said the woman was recently requested to share with the DSWD personnel how her inclusion in the program improved her life and that of her family and also transformed her from being a simple mother before to a responsible community leader.

"Thanks to the 4Ps, I was able to learn a lot of things and understand better my role as a parent which I am using for many years now to improve our lives, in managing our family and guiding my children by emphasizing to them the value of good health and education," Milagros said in Filipino during a flag-raising ceremony held Monday at the DSWD Central Office in Barangay Batasan Hills, QC.

Fondly called "Aling Mila" by her neighbors, she is married to Matt Dizon. They have five children whose ages range from five to 11 years.

She recalled that before she became a beneficiary of 4Ps, she was a typical housewife who kept on nagging her husband for his low salary, especially when there was no longer food on their table and the children did not have snacks to bring to school.

"I tried my best to budget his salary, but it was really not enough to cover all our family's needs," Aling Mila narrated.

She said that a big change happened when she became a 4Ps beneficiary and was chosen as a parent-leader by her fellow beneficiaries.

"I have learned a lot from the program as I gained some friends. Whereas before I did not even get out of the house, through the program, I began attending trainings and Family Development Sessions (FDS) which added to my knowledge and confidence," she added.

She explained that as she shifted herself into a "responsible" and matured person, she makes sure that the cash grants she receives go directly to the education and health needs of her children.

"The program gives me a feeling of certainty that I have a budget during school days and that my children have enough school supplies such as bags, shoes, and even uniforms," she said.

Another thing that she started doing after being in the program (which she said she did not do before) is ensuring that there are enough vitamins for her children.

She happily shared that her children are now healthier and have developed strong immune system.

"They do not get sick often now, so there is less expenses," she said.

According to her, her best experience from the program was when she was also chosen as a beneficiary of the Self-Employment Assistance-Kaunlaran (SEA-K) of the Sustainable Livelihood Program (SLP) which is also implemented by DSWD for both poor and near poor

beneficiaries to complement the 4Ps and ensure that beneficiaries are capacitated to earn.

"I used the capital provided by SLP to expand my home-based business — selling of native delicacies and dressed chicken to my neighbors," she said.

Aling Mila also joined the SEA-K Association (SKA) composed of 15 women in their barangay.

Again, she was chosen as the leader, and although she kept saying, "hindi ko kaya (I can't do it)," she was able to perform the tasks of a president which included registering their SKA with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to ensure that they are able to pay on time the P94,000 loaned to them as capital.

As a leader, she proved her dedication and enthusiasm that their association paid their loan ahead of the one- year period for repayment.

According to Secretary Soliman, Aling Mila is a living testimony of how the poverty reduction programs being implemented by DSWD affect positively the recipients.

"Her story of empowerment and becoming a contributor to the family income, entrepreneur, productive citizen, and an active community leader is one example of positive changes among beneficiaries of the program," the DSWD chief remarked.

Aling Mila's family is one of the 4,090,667 beneficiaries of 4Ps nationwide as of June 25.

The 4Ps is a flagship poverty alleviation program of the government that provides cash grants to poor household as an investment on the health and education of their children to ensure that they can finish high school and be part of an employable workforce capable of earning higher wages.

In the government's desire to make that vision come true and make the children beneficiaries a tool to break the inter-generational cycle of poverty, the program has been expanded starting this year through an increased budget and extending the age of children covered by the program from the previous 0-14 to 0-18 years old.

Under the program, the head of the poor household receives a monthly cash grant of P500 while three of his/her children who are in elementary and high school receive P300 to P500 a month for their 85 percent school attendance.

The grants are received by the beneficiaries through the Land Bank of the Philippines Automated Teller Machine (ATMs) or through conduits like Globe G-Cash.