

## Status of Informal Settlers in Dagupan City

Rizalyn M. De Guzman  
Kia Joy O. Franco  
Maribeth P. Servanda  
Morena L. Yangao

This study was conducted to assess the living conditions of informal settlers and to understand their expectations regarding the Local Shelter Plan of Dagupan City. The research aimed to describe their socio-economic situation, access to basic services, and overall housing conditions, as well as to determine what they expect from the government's shelter initiatives in terms of safety, affordability, and livelihood opportunities. The findings of this study are intended to serve as a valuable reference for policymakers, local authorities, and planners in improving housing and relocation programs that address the needs of informal settlers more effectively.

The researchers employed a descriptive survey research design, which is appropriate for studies that aim to describe and analyze the characteristics, conditions, or opinions of a given population. This method allowed the researchers to collect data on the existing situation of informal settlers and to interpret their experiences and expectations in a systematic way. According to McCombes (2019), descriptive research focuses on answering the "what" questions rather than "why" questions—it helps to establish facts and provide a clear picture of a population's condition.

The respondents of the study were informal settlers residing within the boundaries of Bonuan Gueset, Dagupan City, one of the city's coastal barangays where numerous informal settlements have developed over time. The estimated population size of informal settlers in the area was around 2,000 individuals. To determine the appropriate sample size, the researchers applied a 95% confidence level with a 10% margin of error, resulting in a total sample size of 200 respondents. This sample size was deemed sufficient to represent the larger population and to ensure reliable results.

The study utilized purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique where respondents are deliberately selected based on specific characteristics relevant to the study. In this case, only individuals or families classified as informal settlers were included. Purposive sampling was used because the researchers needed participants who could provide firsthand information about the realities of informal settlement life and their views on the local shelter plan. This approach ensured that the data collected were directly aligned with the objectives of the study.

The primary instrument for data collection was a survey questionnaire, which served as the main research tool. According to McLeod (2018), a questionnaire is a structured research instrument composed of written questions that aim to collect factual information and opinions from respondents. The questionnaire was carefully designed to gather data on two major areas: (1) the current condition or status of informal settlers in terms of accessibility to services, habitability, affordability, and safety; and (2) their expectations and preferences regarding relocation and housing under the local shelter plan.

Before data collection, the questionnaire underwent validation by experts to ensure accuracy, clarity, and reliability. It was reviewed by one Municipal Social Welfare and Development Office (MSWDO) social worker assistant and one faculty member specializing in social work, social studies, and public administration. Their feedback was used to revise and refine the questions to improve the quality and relevance of the instrument. The final version of the questionnaire incorporated their recommendations, ensuring that it was comprehensive and suitable for the target respondents. After validation, the survey was administered to the 200 selected respondents. The researchers used frequency, percentage, and mean to analyze and interpret the gathered data.

The results of the study revealed that the majority of the respondents were aged 30 to 39 years old, representing the working-age population. Most of them were female and married, indicating that family units are predominant in the informal settlements of Bonuan Gueset. Educational attainment was generally low, with most respondents being high school graduates, which limits their employment

opportunities. Consequently, the majority of respondents were unemployed, relying mainly on irregular or informal sources of income such as vending, fishing, and other daily-wage activities.

The findings also showed that most families had been living in their current residences for over 10 years, suggesting that informal settlement in the area is not temporary but has become a long-term living arrangement for many. On average, each family had five to eight members, reflecting a relatively large household size. In terms of economic condition, most families reported an average monthly income of less than ₱9,520, while their average monthly household expenditures were below ₱10,000, showing that their income barely meets their basic needs. This financial instability highlights the precarious living conditions of informal settlers and their vulnerability to economic shocks.

The study further analyzed the status of informal settlers based on four key indicators—accessibility of services and facilities, habitability, affordability, and safety. In terms of services and facilities, the results indicated that most respondents had reasonable access to basic services such as water, electricity, and education due to the proximity of their settlements to urban areas. Despite their informal status, many were able to benefit from nearby public facilities and community services. This accessibility, however, is often informal or inconsistent, as connections to utilities may be temporary or unauthorized.

When it comes to habitability, the study revealed that the houses occupied by informal settlers are generally small, overcrowded, and poorly constructed. Although most families expressed satisfaction with their proximity to schools and workplaces, they also emphasized the need for more space and better employment opportunities to improve their living standards. Their homes often lack proper ventilation, sanitation, and drainage systems, which contribute to health and hygiene issues.

Regarding affordability, the majority of respondents reported that they could access basic health care services through government programs such as PhilHealth, which provides free or subsidized health services. Community health centers also play a vital role in offering medical assistance to informal settlers. This finding suggests that while financial capacity remains limited, government interventions have helped alleviate some of their health-related burdens.

In terms of safety, the respondents generally felt relatively safe in their community, though they identified several risks that still require attention. The main environmental concerns included frequent flooding, poor drainage systems, and water contamination, which threaten their health and property. Moreover, the lack of a structured security system exposes them to potential safety issues, particularly during calamities and high tides. These conditions highlight the urgent need for proper urban planning and disaster risk reduction measures.

One of the key objectives of this study was to identify the expectations of informal settlers regarding the local shelter plan of Dagupan City. The results showed that most respondents prioritized relocation areas with nearby job opportunities. Employment accessibility was considered the most important factor in achieving sustainable housing, as many families depend on informal labor and need to be close to urban centers for livelihood. Another top priority among respondents was to be relocated to areas free from flooding. Safety and environmental stability were essential considerations, as most informal settlers currently live in flood-prone or coastal zones that are vulnerable to storms and tidal surges. They expressed hope that the local shelter plan would identify safer and higher ground for relocation.

Lastly, respondents emphasized the importance of affordable health care services in their new communities. They expected the local government to integrate access to health centers, schools, and livelihood programs within relocation sites to ensure a holistic approach to resettlement and social development.

In conclusion, the study found that the informal settlers in Bonuan Gueset, Dagupan City face significant socio-economic challenges related to poverty, housing inadequacy, and environmental risks. Despite these hardships, they remain resilient and hopeful that the local shelter plan will provide them with safe, affordable, and sustainable housing. Their main expectations revolve around proximity to employment opportunities, flood-free areas, and access to affordable health care—factors that they believe are essential for improving their quality of life.

The study highlights the importance of community participation in housing policy planning. By considering the lived experiences and expectations of informal settlers, the local government can develop a more inclusive and responsive shelter plan that addresses not only housing needs but also the broader social and economic dimensions of urban poverty.