



Charcoal Kids

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Metro Manila is one of the largest and most densely populated cities in the world. It is estimated that 35% of more the 20 million inhabitants of the city are living in slum areas with limited access to sanitation, healthcare and education.

Ulingan community in Malabon is one of the poorest. It is located on the border of a garbage mountain once known as "The Smokey Mountain", a slum officially closed in the early 90'. The exchange residences provided by the Philippine government resettlements program built in remote areas in the province where no facilities are provided. In those artificially created communities, it is even more difficult for the families to find work and sustain their livelihood. Inhabitants who decided to stay in Metro Manila still make their living of garbage scavenging or production of toxic, community-made charcoal widely used in the area as a cheaper substitution for gas and electricity.

"The Ulingans", as they are called, are constantly exposed to harmful emissions such as carbon monoxide, nitrous oxide, and soot, as well as chemicals when burning treated wood. The result is a myriad of respiratory illnesses and heart diseases. Estimates suggest that 60% of the population has tuberculosis while other lung problems and water-borne diseases are commonplace. Researchers have identified more than 35 diseases in garbage-scavenging areas, including cholera, dysentery, malaria, skin disorders, tuberculosis, and typhoid.

A considerable part of those working are children, who spend hours collecting swaps of wood, boiling it for weeks in extreme heat, segregating firewood and searching for precious metal parts that provide supplementary income, all while being held out of school. They earn between 50 cents and 1.5 euro per day and are paid only when the whole work is done and the charcoal is sold to a local vendor.

The small-scale charcoal production is illegal and unregulated but remains the only opportunity for the families who are often withdrawn from any legal protection or financial support of the Philippines government.

This situation is a part of the energy poverty problem, one of the least discussed aspects of current energy challenge, posing a serious threat to a country's economy, national security, environment, and public health throughout the world.



Andrei (20) lives in a dumpsite area of Malabon, one of the poorest and most dangerous slums in Metro Manila. He started working in a community produced coal business at the age of 14. He works 7 days a week and earns around 3 euro per day. It takes 2 weeks to prepare coal ready to be sold; employees are paid only when everything is sold. Malabon, Metro Manila, 2017



According to the UNICEF Report on childhood poverty in the Philippines, the country has the highest fertility rate in East Asia. More than 40% of the population is under 18 years old. On average women have 2-3 kids more than they were initially planning for. In large families, oldest siblings have to stop their education early in order to supply the family income, while

the youngest wait to get their education until their older brothers and sisters start to work and earn money. Especially in informal settlements or urban slums, children are particularly vulnerable due to the living conditions, hygiene and illegal activities often present in those kinds of areas. Malabon, Metro Manila, 2017



Squatter's area in Malabon City is one of the poorest and most congested slums in Metro Manila. Around 137 thousand people live here on a surface of around 2,5 square km. Some make a living by producing toxic community made coal, others work in local businesses, as drivers or construction workers. Malabon, Philippines, 2017



Jane-Rosa (16) stopped school at the age of 14. She is the oldest of 4 kids and works to help her parents sustain their family. She has recently moved into her boyfriend's, Andrew who also works at the charcoal production, family house. Malabon, Philippines, 2017



The wood used to produce charcoal comes from various sources – it is bought, found in the neighborhood or sometimes stolen. Whenever the charcoal business owners hear about a building being renovated, they go to pick up remaining pieces of wood. The wood used is often covered by toxic paints and contains sharp metal parts that are

later used as an extra income. Carton and plastic are also burn and used in the process of production. Malabon, Philippines, 2017



A construction of a so-called “volcano” is the first part of the charcoal production. The small volcanoes are widely spread around the community, situated directly beside the houses of workers employed for its production. The Ulingans are therefore constantly exposed to smoke, ashes and harmful emissions such as carbon monoxide,

nitrous oxide, soot, as well as chemicals spewed out when burning treated wood. Malabon, Philippines, 2017



Charcoal production community is located directly beside a dumpsite garbage mountain, a part of the remains of the famous "Smokey Mountain" slum area, where over two million metric tons of Manila's waste were stocked for more than 40 years. The resettlement residences, provided by the Philippines' Government for more than 30.000 people who used to live there, were built in

remote areas where little facilities are provided. As a result, most still live in the slums around Tondo and Malabon. Metro Manila garbage is currently stocked on an abandoned island not far from the shore and the port area in Payatas. The old dumpsite remains the main working place for the scavangers. Malabon, Philippines, 2017



Miralyn (55) is one of the bosses in the Ulingan community. He just invested 6 thousand pesos in the coal volcano behind him. After 3 weeks he will earn another 6–7 thousand from selling the product. He has 4 employees; he pays 300 pesos per day and provides an afternoon snack. He supports his nephews and nieces financially to help them graduate from college. He also

takes vitamins to protect himself from ashes and smoke, to which he is exposed on a daily basis.
Malabon, Philippines, 2017



After approximately 2 weeks of “cooking”, the coal is ready to be packed and sold. Women and girls from the community pack it first into big bags and then divide it into smaller packages, directly sold in the community or to the big market in the center of Malabon.
Malabon, Philippines, 2017



Nails and metal parts are separated and collected in the final process of charcoal production. Mostly women and girls collect them as an extra income source. One kilogram of nails is being sold for 10 pesos in a junk shop nearby. Malabon, Philippines, 2017



Larisa (14) works at the charcoal factory 5 days a week. She stopped school a few years ago. She doesn't have an official birth certificate and therefore cannot officially sign for classes. The local school headmaster agreed to accept her for one more year after which she will stop her education. Her sister, who also works at the charcoal

production site, has hearing difficulties, as the family has no funds to pay for the check up and the treatment.
Malabon, Philippines, 2017



Rosaline (13) was out of school for two years, she was just coming back after summer holidays. She will be in grade 5, 4 years behind what should be a normal course of education for a child her age. She was working several days a week at the community-produced charcoal factory to help her parents and earn for school expenses. This day,

after 5 hours of work she earns 20 pesos, an equivalent of 16 euro-cents.
Malabon, Philippines, 2017



Kids in the community start helping their parents at an early age. Although those that start to be paid for their work are about 7–8 years old, even younger kids help their older siblings and parents. They live in the area and are constantly exposed to the toxic smoke. Malabon, Philippines, 2017



Lung problems, skin and water-borne diseases are common in the community. Researchers have identified more than 35 diseases in garbage-scavenging areas, including cholera, dysentery, malaria, skin disorders, tuberculosis, asthma and typhoid. Malabon, Philippines, 2017



Ricky (30) started his own charcoal business 6 years ago. Before that he was a long-time employee. He also works in a factory nearby. Whenever he hears about a house being renovated in the area, he searches for wood. He has 2 kids, his older son, Andrei (7) already starts to help him to pack cooked charcoal into small bags. Malabon, Philippines, 2017



A pile of wood is slowly cooked for about 10 to 14 days to produce a charcoal. It happens at a very high temperature, the wood is kept under a wooden roof or at least covered with heavy heatproof tarpaulin. Mostly boys participate in this part of the process, taking care of the pile, checking if the temperature

is right and even if no one tries to steal some wood stocked around. Malabon, Philippines, 2017



Christine (31) has 5 kids. She works in the charcoal production for 5 years to help her husband. Before that she stayed at home. This time she helped to pack small pieces of coal into the bags. As she has to kneel the whole time while sharp metal parts cut her hands, it is the most difficult part of work for her. For five days of work, she will earn 300 pesos. Malabon, Philippines, 2017



A boy who visits his uncle in the Ulingan community in Malabon covers his face to protect himself from the smoke floating in the air.
Malabon, Philippines, 2017



Anna-Jane (11) moved to Malabon to live with her aunt in February. Her parents are currently in prison for being involved in drug dealing and prefer to stay there to avoid being killed. Anna-Jane is not going to school after summer holidays, she will work to sustain herself and help her aunt financially. Malabon, Philippines, 2017



Christine buys some food in a local sari-sari shop. She spent the day separating nails and metal parts from the charcoal, which she packed in big bags that were later going to be sold at the market. Malabon, Philippines, 2017



Boy taking rest at the entry of his family house during a day of work. The houses in the community are located directly close to the charcoal production area. Thus, the inhabitants are constantly exposed to the smoke and ashes. Kitchen and the living area are also often located outside of the house and all the appliances are covered in a black ash residue. Malabon, Philippines, 2017



More than 2.7 billion people worldwide cook on wood, charcoal, dung, coal, or agricultural residues on simple traditional stoves or open fire. Around 1.4 billion have no access to electricity at all. The vast majority of the world's energy-poor people live in Asia and the Pacific islands. Home-made stoves fueled by charcoal

are widely used in urban-poor areas. Here a girl is selling corn cooked with coal produced by her family. Malabon, Philippines, 2017



Ricky (30) and Narisa (28) live just beside the open charcoal pits. They have two kids and this year they have applied for 4P's Philippine governmental program aiming to eradicate extreme poverty by investing in health and education. They never got a reply. The corruption in local governments in the Philippines is very common

and some places for the programmes are already reserved for government member's connections even though they are not the most vulnerable. Malabon, Philippines, 2017



Jaja (13) comes from a province. Since she is 9, every summer and during winter holidays she comes to Malabon to work at the charcoal production site. She packs about 3 bags a day and is paid 30 pesos per bag. The work is difficult, she complains about back and knee pain and she already had several infected

injuries after getting her hands cut by metal parts and nails found in the wood. Malabon, Philippines, 2017



Jane-Rosa (16) and Shira (13) help each other wash up after a day of work in the local charcoal production. Girls know each other for a long-time, they live nearby, work and play together. Malabon, Philippines, 2017



Even before they start to work in the community kids already hang out and play in the garbage as they accompany their parents and older siblings during the day. Some are as young as 2 years old. The jewelry that most of the girls wear is found on a garbage dumpsite.
Malabon, Philippines, 2017



Girls taking rest after a long day of work, while boys are packing bags full of charcoal on the tricycles. They will later transport it to the local market where charcoal is sold. Malabon, Philippines, 2017



Small bags of ready-to-use charcoal are being packed on a tricycle to be later transported and sold on a local market nearby. Most employees are only being paid for their work once the charcoal is sold. Malabon, Philippines, 2017



A young boy from the Ulingan community is transporting bags of charcoal to a local market where it is going to be sold. Most of the young employees of the factories are being paid only when the charcoal is sold and when the owner of a local business gets back the money that he or she invested in the wood used for the production. Malabon, Philippines, 2017



Little bags of community-produced charcoal are being sold on most of the stands at the local market in Malabon City. This kind of coal is a very popular, cheaper alternative to gas and electricity. Even though small-scale charcoal production is illegal and unregulated, it is often the only available income source for some families,

who are withdrawn from any legal protection or financial support of the Philippines government. Malabon, Philippines, 2017