

## **FROM AURORA'S BOSOM**

### **STORIES OF THE EXPERIENCES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 5<sup>TH</sup> COUNTRY PROGRAMME FOR CHILDREN IN THE PROVINCE OF AURORA**

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#### **HEALTHY NOTES AT THE POST**

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There is something about Dinadiawan that makes it different from other barangays in the municipalities of Aurora.

On second thought, barangays in Aurora look the same; all of them are at the bosom of a proud forest on mighty mountains defying a vast expanse of the sea. This picturesque natural wonder envelops Dinadiawan like a fact of life.

Quaint Dinadiawan exudes an aura that takes one's breath away. The sensation was duly noted by Aurora's Representative to Congress, Hon. Bella Angara-Castillo.

There's a lot more to do for the people in this area, she remarked; and yes, she agreed, this place radiates a feeling of contentment among its people.

Barangay Dinadiawan has a few families enjoying electric power which ceases at exactly 10 o'clock every night. Nobody complains. In this barangay, a single generator for the whole community running on a limited capacity, is just another fact of life.

#### **HEALTH SERVICES AMIDST RUSTIC SIGHTS**

Apart from the unique arrangement with the power vendor and the sight of nature's formidable presence, Dinadiawan has something more to offer its guests.

Surely, one cannot miss the sight of the miniature houses in each *purok* in the barangay. A rustic visual treat to newcomers, the little houses' fancy look and colorful facades is a joy to see. Flowering plants, vegetables, and herbs stand on guard, surrounding the wee abodes like a bridal entourage.

Wait, the houses have names in them. Come closer. It beckons. It reads, "Health and Nutrition Post."

#### **WHERE EVERYONE IS WELCOME**

The Posts, as they are known, have become a ubiquitous sight in Dinadiawan - one of the four pilot barangays of the Fifth Country Program for Children (CPC V) in Dipaculao. Building and maintaining the Posts in the barangays aim at enhancing health and nutrition environment towards a more Child-Friendly Community.

Inside the Posts are health and nutrition-related informative and instructional posters. A regular inventory includes medicines, family planning devices, and weighing scales. Iodized salt is sold here at P15 a kilo.

Estimated to cost about P5,000 to P10,000 each, the construction of the Posts was labored by the people of Dinadiawan inspired by that good old Filipino reliable, the *bayanihan* spirit.

The structures' daily nourishment is sourced from the kind hearts borne by volunteers in the barangay. Each day, two barangay health workers, known as the BHWs, tend and see to the clients' needs at the Post.

Dinadiawan is proud of its 16 hardworking BHWs.

No wonder the most number of Posts is found in Barangay Dinadiawan. Ideally, each *purok* must have one Post. All of the *purok* in Barangay Dinadiawan, but one, has a Post. There is one *purok*, however, that enjoys two of these health structures.

Building the Post gave the community a creative opportunity. One such Post is surrounded by a playground and fishponds making it look more inviting.

Barangay Dinadiawan looks forward to completing its target of 10 Posts. With two more coming up, it is exciting to find what the plans for the Posts will be like.

#### **THE NEIGHBORS HAVE IT, TOO**

Meanwhile, Posts in Borlongan, another pilot barangay, are doing remarkably well. The barangay government provided P30,000 to finance the construction of more similar structures.

Meanwhile in Dinalungan town, Barangay Poblacion is building more structures to respond to the needs of the community. Like in Barangay Dinadiawan, the Posts here are also equipped with the necessary instruments, posters, and supplies.

Farther down, however is a different story. An extension CPC V pilot municipality has no single Post to its name yet. The lady mayor of Dingalan pointed out that budget allocation for the construction of the Post is now available - but it's the space where to put it up which is not.

The mayor can certainly learn a lesson or two from Barangay Dinadiawan whose community spirit enabled it to lay the foundation for their Posts. Collectively, they nurtured it, watched it grow, and saw the fruits reaped by its people.

To this day, the community continuously nourish it with daily care and attention. For the people in Dinadiawan, running the Posts has now become a daily habit - just like another fact of life.♦♦

## ONE HAPPY CLIENT

One of the many mothers who expressed delight for setting up these Posts is Mrs. Nelia Cortez, a teacher in the barangay. Although medicines are very limited, Mrs. Cortez observes, they are still able to get by with the medicinal herbal plants found in abundance around the Posts.

*"Oregano, calachuchi, makahiya,"* the teacher cites, naming several herbs available at the Post proven to cure a number of common illness.

The Post is more accessible than the health center, the young mother stated bravely.

### HABIT FORMING

A Post regular, Mrs. Thelma Montanez, proclaims that mothers in *Purok I* have developed the habit of regularly dropping by at the Post. Mrs. Montanez, a BHW, spends a day each week at the Post. She says that mothers, who mostly come to the Post to ask for medicines, also bring their children to be weighed.

She happily notes that mothers, having been taught how to use the scale, now do the weighing themselves. The proper use of the weighing scales is one of the several instructional health and nutrition-related lessons mothers learn from the BHWs and from the Post.♦

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## A NEEDLE IN A HAYSTACK

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If anything, the arrival of a middle-aged mother with an infant in her arms, gives no indication of the things to come - or learn.

The young mother is the first to arrive at the Quirino Barangay Hall on that hot, sunny morning to join the focused group discussion on health and nutrition. Tagging behind her is a little girl.

She waves cheerfully at the team as she comes nearer. She worries when she learns that the evaluation team had been kept waiting. She worries some more when, after an hour of waiting, all the team has is she.

Meet Aling Linda, jolly and bubbly; so unlike the little girl who keeps hiding her face behind her mother's skirt.

### COLLECTIVE GESTURE OF GENEROSITY

When settled, Aling Linda immediately starts telling the first of what became a series of her true stories.

The opening salvo is the construction of a new Barangay Health Station. "*I-dinonate nga po naming lahat na mga Barangay Health Workers (BHW) yung aming honorarium, para makapagpagawa niyan.* (All of us, barangay health workers, decided to donate our honorarium to be able to build it)," she relates without being boastful.

We receive 750 pesos a month, she replies unhesitatingly to the query on the amount of their honorarium; adding that the barangay council provides for it.

She explains that the old barangay health station is small and can no longer accommodate the needs of the community, thus, all BHWs pooled resources to build a new and bigger one.

#### **LIVING AN EXAMPLE**

Erlinda Falande, mother of 5 and 3-year old girls, lives in Barangay Quirino, one of the barangays of the municipality of Maria Aurora, some 27 kilometers from Baler, Aurora's capital town.

For the urban-initiated, Maria Aurora, like all other Aurora towns, is in the opposing side of a crowded, fast-paced, and perpetually-rambunctious urban character.

It is in this slow-paced rural village, actually a non-CPC V pilot barangay, that Aling Linda found herself a home - a home where anyone who needs help from a BHW found in her a helping hand.

Talking with Aling Linda is like walking into the woods getting deeper by the minute without the usual fear of getting lost. Motherhood, she says without preamble, brings immense satisfaction.

As if on cue, she adds that being a BHW for several years also gives her the same feeling of satisfaction. Both, she says, are life-giving.

#### **VALUES OF LEARNING AND GIVING**

Although a resident of a non-pilot barangay, Aling Linda was able to attend several workshops and training conducted by the local government of Maria Aurora and the UNICEF.

She feels good sharing with the people in her community the things she learned from training and

workshops. She takes it as God's grace to be of help, not only to her fellow mothers, but more than anyone else, to her own family.

With childlike enthusiasm, Aling Linda points out that one need not have a lot of money to be able to eat a healthy diet. A person's resource-fulness and industriousness can deliver a healthy diet, she says with conviction.

And that, Aling Linda exclaims, she learned from the Mothers' Class she attends regularly.

This frail-looking mother of two could have been an excellent teacher despite not having been able to attend higher formal school. She substantiates her stories with practical examples, those proven to have worked, at least, for her.

Infectious and charming, the proud mother relates that whenever her family finds itself at the financial bottom, she would buy a pack of noodle soup and cook it with *malunggay* leaves. The humble *malunggay*, the BHW declares, is a very rich source of vitamin A and iron.

#### CRUSADING FOR FOOD SECURITY

The lady's charm is not confined to a few. Aling Linda's reputation is backed by a witness in the person of Aling Lita, Maria Aurora's municipal midwife, whose presence was incidental being one of the women who came to see the team.

Aling Lita proclaims that Aling Linda is the proud owner of the most successful Food Always in the Home or FAITH garden in the barangay. The seeds, she says, were provided by the Department of Agriculture (DA).

Starting a garden amidst the threat of ducks and stray animals was not really encouraging, Aling Linda admits. She reveals that her neighbors, in fact, used to laugh at her when she started talking about her dream garden.

If Aling Linda lacks anything, it, certainly, is not nerve. The woman has definitely a lot of it and hers is made of steel. Count in, too, a truckload of determination.

Her neighbors were already afraid of their gardens being spirited away by stray animals even before starting to have one, the lady manages to quip.

#### **DREAMING OF FAITH**

With even the potential threats helpless in stopping her, Aling Linda defiantly embarked on her one-person crusade for what she believed was not impossible.

The first order of the day was to place a fence made up of twigs around every single seedling and to water them everyday.

The DA must have given Aling Linda plenty of seeds because even the cement bags and empty tin cans were quickly converted into garden beds.

When she's out attending to her duties, her elder daughter watches out for a foreboding duck attack.

#### **THE LADY OF THE GARDEN RISES**

It didn't take long before Aling Linda, happy and proud, proved to all and sundry that gardening - amidst threats of ducks sowing terror to her plants - was a walk in the park. Only this time - more carefully and preferably with a security escort.

Indeed, since then, her family has food on the table all the time. Right now, she has *camote*, *gabi*, *sitao* and *talong*.

She cheerfully turned the tables on her neighbors by giving them a generous share of the produce courtesy of the gold mine in her backyard.

Aling Linda intimates that her garden made her worry less about food. As an afterthought, she adds that having a healthy family, of course, is blessing enough.

Joy is all over her face as she proudly claims that now, her family is able to eat three times a day with open provisions for two *meriendas*. And she doesn't have to buy it. *Guinatan* and boiled bananas, *camote*, or *gabi* picked fresh from her garden are the family's all-time favorite.

"I'm certain that the food coming from my garden is free of pesticides and other chemicals," she beams. "Not like those bought from the market," she adds to which everyone agree.

#### **REALITY CHECK**

Without question, Aling Linda is a walking, breathing success story.

But her "feel-good" story could be a unique and isolated one. For, how many Aling Lindas do we have in our midst - ones with a similar drive, discipline, determination, and thirst for learning?

The group of women agree that most people still depend on government's support. Most of them just wait for whatever comes along and are quick to complain for insufficiency.

The above attitudinal backdrop is aggravated by

rampant gambling in the communities. They confirm that most of the women gamble, too. Bingo, cards, and “ending” are the women’s favorite pastime.

What is sad is, other participants at the meeting lament, they refuse invitations to attend Mothers’ Class and other seminars claiming they are busy. The women almost laugh as they refer to those who spend most of their time gambling and claim having no time.

*“Pero kung may ibibigay ang gobyerno, ang bibilis, (But when the government has something free to give; boy, they’re fast!),”* exclaims the midwife.

Meanwhile, Aling Linda vows to help others as long as she can. That is, she stresses, on top of being a better mother and a wife.

Ever the woman who never loses hope, she fearlessly stated that it is just a matter of time before some people will realize that her example may yet be a better alternative, given today’s social and economic circumstances.

Aling Linda can be anything but ordinary. Her dedication and strong desire to learn is certainly inspiring and admirable. But looking for women like her is like finding a needle in a haystack. ••

## BARANGAY VOLUNTEERS BATTLE MALNUTRITION

Aling Lita, Maria Aurora's municipal midwife, shares promising statistics during the focused group discussion. A high of 70 percent decline was recorded in the number of 2<sup>nd</sup> degree malnourished children in Maria Aurora. Further, last year, about 40 percent decline was noted in the outbreak of diseases, such as sore eyes and measles, in the barangays.

These improvements were attributed to the Barangay Health Workers' persistent educating of parents on proper health care and nutrition practices for their children. Extended programs on immunization, *Operation Timbang*, and *Garantisadong Pambata* programs, appear to be have gained ground, too.

### INCENTIVES FOR MOTHERS

Meanwhile, the Municipal Health Office of Dinalungan offers incentives to encourage mothers to submit to maternal care services. The incentives are part of its effort in educating mothers on maternal and child care.

Incentives come in the form of supplies and/or appliances for mothers who undergo prenatal check-up from first three months to the last three months. It comes with complete TT immunization, regular iron supplements, and dental consultations. •

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## ALONE ALONG A LONELY ROAD

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Harriet stands out among the children who came to see the team of evaluators at the barangay hall. The shy adolescent, aptly dressed in pink, is drowned by the wildly boisterous younger children running around the hall.

The issue at hand is children's welfare. Harriet is no stranger to child labor. She knows what it means and how it feels. She is reminded of her friend, Jennifer.

At the age of 12, Jenny was forced by her parents to work as a maid in Baler. Jenny's case is not an isolated one. Many children in her neighborhood were forced to quit school and work as maids in Manila or Baler. Harriet did not see Jenny since then.

Harriet smiles when it was noted that lately children forced into work by their parents have become fewer. Harriet smiles. The observation, she was sure, will make Mr. Federico Rivera smile, too.

### **A DREAM REVISITED**

This man treats impatience as a virtue and wears it like a personal badge. It was this badge that spurred Mr. Rivera to action. Along with impatience, his love of children and of work earned Mr. Rivera a few victories.

Despite his age, Mr. Rivera is still robust. A resident of Barangay Dina-diawan, Dipaculao town, he travels the gruelling two-hour daily ride to Borlongan Elementary School where he works.

He was one of the participants who attended the CPC V series of training aimed at developing Child-Friendly School System (CFSS) in the barangays.

Mr. Federico Rivera, the school principal, was delighted.

To get oneself committed to advocate the CPC V philosophy was not a difficult decision to make for one who was coordinator of the nonformal education for out-of-school youth.

He found a cause and from the cause he revisited his dream: to build a strong community whose foundations are made stronger by education.

#### **BEGINNING THE CRUSADE**

His duties and functions as school principal gave Mr. Rivera access to data necessary to enable him to design his plans. For one, he continuously monitors female functional literacy (FFL) and parents education functional literacy (PEFL) in the barangay. The data provided a scenario of workable activities to advance his advocacy for the CFSS.

In 2000, the mentor began to organize the *Kilusang Bantay Bata* in Barangay Borlongan. His initial step was to mobilize the support of the barangay council and the teachers.

He found a task for the barangay health workers (BHW) group. Trained in people skills, the BHWs will make an effective secretariat, he decided. Mr. Rivera will soon become the *Kilusan's* adviser when it gains momentum.

When the *Kilusan* was finally organized, the built-in "blessings" that come with his position became handy. He took full advantage of the possession and began looking for the hidden opportunities.

The educator-advocate saw a long, rocky, and

lonely road ahead of him.

#### **SPECIAL CURRICULUM FOR WORKING CHILDREN**

The *Kilusan* basically monitors children's welfare. It also looks into the cases of working children reportedly prevalent in the community. The case of the juvenile perched on the school principal's top agenda for action. The proposal for a special curriculum for working children was born.

Under the proposed curriculum, working children will only go to school for three days a week, on any day where it is most convenient to them. The rest of the week allows them to work or help their parents. Further, the children will be required to bring home assignments they can work on during the days they are unable to attend classes.

He submitted the proposal to the Department of Education, Culture and Sports (DECS) division office in Aurora.

The cold reception shown by several teachers in the school to this project and generally, his advocacy for CPC V and CFSS did not escape the sharp eye of this mentor. He saw to it that not one monthly meeting would wrap-up without him injecting some kind of input on the CPC V philosophy.

Meanwhile, the DECS approved his proposal.

#### **FRUITS FROM SEEDS SOWN BY NOBLE INTENTIONS**

It started last year. That day, Mr. Federico Rivera was a picture of a happy and contented man. In simple rites at the school's regular ceremony, Borlongan Elementary School recognized two pupils who finished under the special curriculum.

Seated at the front facing the stage, the principal was beaming with pride. Dignified and quiet, he prayed silently that this event inspire more parents to send their working children to school.

The example shown by the two pupils sparked a vote of support from groups in the community. In the same year, the council allocated a humble sum of P2,000 for the *Kilusan*. The local Parents, Teachers, and Community Association and a nongovernment organization threw in their felicitations and support.

The same community groups also responded to Mr. Rivera's call to build a makeshift building. The facility helped create a better learning environment for classes with more than 60 pupils. Yes, the school principal still teaches.

At one time, he taught a graduating class of a heterogenous mix of 66 pupils; several of them 20 years old and older. "Some were fast-learners while others were not so fast," he quips.

His "unique classes" was a source of joy and amusement to this extraordinary civil servant with simple means. He never missed to see the challenges, particularly to a teacher like him, these classes bring. Thus, Mr. Rivera continues to update himself with new teaching technologies and strategies to enable him to effectively deal with unique teaching situations.

#### **THE REWARDS CAME MARCHING IN**

It is valuable for Mr. Rivera to reciprocate the support provided by his community by, at least, informing them of the gains realized by his advocacy efforts.

It took some time before his initiatives bore fruit. But it came as a very pleasant surprise and added a few more feathers to his cap.

The Borlongan Elementary School achieved a significant rise in the level of academic advancement. It was the result of the assessment and evaluation regularly made by a team from the education department. Accordingly, the latest review of dropout cases in the municipality decreased by three percent.

The small and big victories can be attributed to Mr. Rivera's effort. But he was quick to point out that those were the benefits brought by the implementation of the Third Elementary Education Program in the barangays.

Mr. Rivera is grateful to the CPC V for opening up floodgates of opportunity where benefits extended even to the mothers themselves.

The mothers found the materials given by the UNICEF very useful. These materials were textbooks, shelves, tables, *karaoke*, blackboards, and electric fans, among others.

For the school's part, Mr. Rivera, ever the teachers' teacher, initiated the development of an after-school 30-minute follow-up lesson for each pupil. It was conceived to help develop good study habits among the school children.

Two birds with one stone, it was. Lessons were not only useful to the pupils alone but also to their parents. Several pupils were heard saying that they read together with their parents.

## **ALONG ALONE A LONELY ROAD**

From Day One, he knew, it was not going to be easy.

Even from the start, Mr. Rivera had no illusion that he alone possessed the wisdom like Solomon's and the strength like Atlas. 'Determination and hard work alone do not get the job done - not in this kind of situation, he carefully qualifies.

The teacher stresses the importance of gaining and keeping momentum and the need for speed in being able to reach one's goals.

The patience of Job is certainly unwelcome in Mr. Rivera's domain.

"A lot of resources are going to waste... there's no sense of speed at all," states the man whose obsession for speed is part of his personal work ethic. He relates discouraging factors he met along the way, such as the need for pushing constantly the *Kilusan* secretariat to its feet to properly perform its functions.

"I cannot bear to see the *Kilusan* in a moment of inactivity. I am certain that if it lies low, the organization is slowly approaching the graveyard," he emphasizes.

He observes that the barangay council is not attending to children's education with the same vigor it accords to health and nutrition projects.

What disturbs Mr. Rivera is his perception of the people's non-chalance and coolness to progressive thinking and reluctance to adopt a cause. They seem to veer away from programs that requires hard work and attention to ensure a successful implementation. In this situation, one should not even think of

rewards, he cautions.

He is unforgiving when it comes to incompetence. What frustrates him most is the attitude of people vested with powers and authority and remain blind and paralyzed to the social and economic realities around them.

Factors like those led Mr. Rivera to doubt the possibility of self-sustainability - given the discouraging attitude of leadership in his locality. The schoolmaster admits feeling discouraged during those moments. But again, his persistence and determination eventually win over his apprehensions. The man is obsessed with change.

#### **PASSION AND OBSESSION**

"I believe that success belongs to those who persevere," he says. Breaking into a smile, he is reminded of the parents whom he describes as having been blessed by God with enormous amount of patience, enough for them to learn to love learning once again.

Data from the FFL and the PEFL in Borlongan sparked in him a renewed passion for learning and teaching. It was then that he started doing it again - teaching nonformal classes. When volunteer teachers and BHWs can no longer handle the lessons, Mr. Rivera is the old standby generator they can always rely on.

He beams when one notes that his advocacy efforts appeared to have bred a change in family relations in the community. Aside from the gains learned from the abc's and the 123's, it looks like improvement in personality and emotionality were gained, too, goes the observation.

He knew of the hindrances, the potential and the real threats, and of the personal difficulties he will certainly go through to enable him to see his dream coming into fruition.

He realizes that he may not even see it come - not in this lifetime.

Impatient as he is, Mr. Rivera, is a certified realist, but obsessed with seeing through to the end what he painstakingly built. Like a mantra, he often reminds himself that "the CPC V is incidental; this is not the time to stop."

Meanwhile, Harriet, herself a special curriculum learner, is now in second year high school and enjoys school immensely.

The hope that someday she will find Jenny and attend school together again, remains as Harriet's ardent dream that she keeps in her heart. ••

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## OUTSIDERS

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### A YOUNG FISHERMAN'S TALE

Jose Sison, 14 years old, lacks the glitter of wonder and innocence in his eyes unlike those of the other boys his age. Instead, his eyes show weariness of the life he has.

Every Saturday before daybreak, Jose joins other fishermen of Baler to battle with the gigantic waves of the Pacific Ocean to catch fish. He goes home with P100, the amount paid for fishermen's helpers.

Jose lives in Barangay Sabang of Baler, Aurora, a coastal barangay famous for its beautiful beaches. It is the main tourist destination in this side of Aurora with its huge waves attracting surfers from all over the world.

But most boys in Sabang are not into surfing; something they consider a leisure enjoyed only by the select rich. They are into a more practical and economic activity: fishing.

Jose stopped school after graduating from elementary. Instead of going to secondary school however, he now helps his father and two older brothers to earn a living to feed their large family. He is the sixth among ten children. His father does odd jobs while two of his brothers, like him, help other fishermen.

Being Aurora's capital town does not automatically assure Baler of economic progress. Classified years ago by the government as a member of Club 20, it remains as one of the most depressed municipalities in Aurora. And just like most its towns, the people's most common source of income comes from the sea.

Given the opportunity, Jose likes to fish everyday to earn more. But there are other kids like him who work for the same fisherman he works for.

#### **SCHOOL BECKONS**

Out of school youths (OSY), like Jose, are encouraged to go back to school by the Municipal Government of Baler through its *Balik-Paaralan* campaign. The program also aims to urge parents to bring their children back to school.

But as always, poverty gets along the way. The reason why parents are forced to take their children away from school is driven by economics. Children going to school means spending while children going to work means earning.

*"Gusto ko po uling mag aral. Sabi nga po ni Tatay, mag e-enroll daw ako ngayong pasukan, (I want to go back to school. Father said I would be enrolled this school opening),"* he says. Jose tries to sound excited but the uncertainty in his voice betrays him.

His older siblings have never been to high school either. And Jose knows too well his brothers' fate may also befall him.

#### **YOUNGER "GWAPING"**

Barangay Dinadiawan in the outskirts of Dipaculao has exactly 65 houses enjoying electric power. The power comes from a generator which turns off at 10 o'clock every night. The rest of the households spend evenings in gas lamps and candlelight.

It appears however, that progress has been friendlier to this barangay if one is to base it on the basic but modest amenities seen in its community.

Dinadiawan is memorable, in a sense that, whenever the name of the barangay is mentioned, the sight of the scrawny-looking kid among a group of his equally scrawny-looking buddies automatically comes into mind.

His friends call him Mac-mac. His complete name, Mac-mac insists, is Mark Anthony Fernandez: a namesake of one of the original 'Gwapings," a movie sensation in the 90's that swept the country's young people off its feet.

#### **I LOVE SCHOOL BUT...**

The scrawny-looking boy is 10 years old and is the third among six siblings. His mother cooks and his sister washes the dishes at the nearby *carinderia*. His father does not work and stays at home baby-sitting Mac-mac's younger siblings.

Mac-mac says, with quiet pride, that he finished kinder-garten. He was enrolled in grade one, but his father spanked him when-ever he learned he went to school. He says that his father didn't want him to go to school, so he quit.

Mac-mac is one of the children whose parents didn't want their children to attend school. This is one of the reasons cited, aside from poverty, why some children drop out of school in Dinadiawan.

Further, a number of teachers, reports said, were giving too many school projects. When students failed to submit the projects, they suffer ridicule in the classroom. Most of them refused to go back to school anymore.

Most of Mac-mac's friends do not go to school, too; and they don't like being with other children who do. "Those kids always tease us," they complain.

## **BONDING WITH THE "LOST COMMAND"**

There is a gang of young boys in Dinadiawan who call themselves the "Lost Command." The boys of the "Lost Command" are 10 to 18 years old, about Mac-mac and his friends' age. All the boys in the band dropped out of school. They banded together like one big family and do odd jobs, such as transporting logs from the mountains to the beaches, to earn a living.

For a while, the Dinadiawan barangay council has been quite successful in disbanding the group. The Council was able to bring them back to school. Eventually, however, they dropped out of school again. It's back to square one for the council. The "Lost Command" boys banded again.

Mac-mac casts a look of envy at the other kids across the hall. Quickly, he turns away and stares at his feet. That is the wrong place, I don't belong there, he could be thinking.

Early on, he admitted that he wanted to go back to school because he loves to learn and get acquainted with other children in the neighborhood.

But the way things are, it appears it will not take long before Mac-mac is found by the boys at the "Lost Command." That is, if he doesn't find them first.

And if he feels he doesn't belong to the group of the school-going children, perhaps with the Lost Command boys, he does.

## **HIS NAME, HIS SMILE**

Has there been a choice for Ronaldo Dukha, will he still use *that* name? But, of course, like all other children, Ronaldo has a right to a name.

Ronaldo's personal circumstances, unfortunately, includes a disease covering most of his body. His scalp, populated by a crop of very short hair, is not spared by scabies.

But hang on, this child has a sweet, shy, innocent smile, albeit pasted in his grimy face. He has a smile that can disarm even the most germ-sensitive snob on earth.

Behind the perpetually smiling Ronaldo is his younger brother, Louie, barefoot, and as grimy-looking as his older brother.

Ronaldo and Louie live in Barangay Poblacion, Dinalungan, another CPC V pilot barangay. Ronaldo is 11 years old and proudly says he is in now in Grade V. Louie, on the other hand, is seven, and has never been to school, he volunteers.

The Dinalungan Central School in the Poblacion is the largest public elementary school in Dinalungan. Ronaldo says that the school nurse regularly checks their height and weight and she also gives him medicine to cure his skin of the diseases. The effects of the medicine, however, failed to show.

Ronaldo's father, who used to work in a sawmill, died of pneumonia. His mother works as a sweeper in Barangay Poblacion. All of them stay with his grandfather.

Ronaldo tells of her 17 year-old sister, who, like most poor girls her age in Dinalungan, works as a domestic helper in Manila. His two younger siblings were given up for adoption.

Like Mac-mac and his friends, Ronaldo and Louie, see no bond connecting them with the clean- looking, well-dressed, and sweet-smelling children

of their age just across the hall. After a considerable effort of convincing the two children, they agree to join the big group, albeit with reluctance.

Restrained giggles from other kids meet them. As Ronaldo comes closer, however, he unleashes his signature smile while Louie shyly moves closer to his brother. Soon, the two siblings are lost in immersion with other children.

He does it again. Ronaldo's smile make good things happen.

#### **OPPOSING SIDES, EQUAL RIGHTS**

In every CPC V pilot barangay visited, the sight of children looking with longing at the kids across the other side, is like one's shadow constantly trailing behind.

The contrast is highly visible. The children standing at a distance look defiant, yet longing for attention. Across the other side, the children act as if besides them, there are no other children on sight.

The Joses, Mac-macs, and Ronaldos in these barangays are children, who, like all other children, equally deserve a claim to a brighter future.

Apparently, they are the ones the program implementors in the barangays missed. ••

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## **SURVIVING IGNORANCE**

They hang around. They do nothing, They cause trouble; if not, they get themselves into trouble. They are everywhere, these delinquents, these OSYs.

Above describe the stereotypical OSYs or the out-of-school youths. They are one sector of society whose members share one common trait - they are all of school going-age. But there is no school for them - sometimes by choice. Others, like Sac, have no other choice at all.

### **SAC, OSY**

Sac is Archie Sacare, 21. His dream of going to college was aborted by a landslide.

An education student in Cabanatuan City, Sac's scholarship was terminated, when after two months he failed to appear in the university. The landslide immobilized all transportation facilities. Poor Sac, he can only bring himself to Cabanatuan City by trekking the mountains and travelling in foot.

With the roads were being repaired, Sac saw his scholarship in peril. The would-be teacher, instead became a fisherman.

### **SAC, THE ADVOCATE**

Besides fishing, however, Sac is also an active *Sangguniang Kabataan (SK)* councilor in Brgy. Paltic, Dingalan, Aurora. As such, Sac believed that his position imposed in him the role of an advocate for the youth. Meanwhile, the CPC V, was launched in Paltic that year.

Initially, the young man believed that a SK councilor's responsibilities are confined only to participating in sport events, in fiestas, in "clean and green" campaigns, in the construction of arcs in the boundaries of the barangay, and in drives against drug abuse.

His limited knowledge of SK's role made him focus his attention to the youth of his age. He did not realize that he can go beyond them - or literally, go a little further below. Sac found out of late, children are within the scope of his responsibility, too.

Sac could have missed knowing and realizing all these. Thanks to the Municipal Social Welfare Development Officer in Dingalan.

#### **THE CHILD HAS RIGHTS, TOO**

It never occurred to Sac that what he sees everyday in his neighborhood are corruption and grave violation against children, had he not been able to attend the seminar on the Convention on the Rights of Children held in Baler. If not for the invitation of the municipal officer, Sac never knew that children have rights, too.

He grew up believing that what is happening around him are perfectly acceptable and but a part of our culture.

He remembers situations where children unwittingly become innocent victims resulting from uninformed decisions made by fighting parents and jealous relatives.

It never dawned on him that a violation of children's rights constitutes a crime.

### **SAC'S LONG WAIT**

The seminar he attended filled him with hopes and aspirations. Sac went home armed with a cause. He expected that what he learned would filter down to the members of the community through the *Sangguniang Bayan* members. He was confident that the members will then seek the assistance of *SK* in its advocacy activities. Sac waited, and when no word came, he gave up.

It was a bad time for Sac and his group. The *SK* was declared inutile as it stood mute to scores of juvenile crimes, particularly the series of vandalism, which were getting rampant in the locality. The youths were proclaimed "lost." As a consequence, a curfew ordinance for minors was passed.

The accusation hurt Sac but his hands are tied. Alone, there is nothing he can do. There were only two of them working actively for the *SK*. The other one is Monette.

### **SAC ON THE TRAIL**

In his heart, Sac knew he could not afford to stop. Stopping is like surrendering to the devil was his analogy of his cause. He started to pursue his advocacy by his own humble means. Just give Sac an opportunity and there goes him, unstoppable, like a minister preaching.

One can see and listen to Sac at every gathering, in small conversations, at the shop or in front of *sari-sari* stores. He especially relish informing every person, at any given opportunity, the provisions on Children in Need of Special Protection (CNSP).

Sac chose to be partial in discussing CNSP because he said it is closest to home. He sees it happening everyday around him. Children abused

physically and verbally is a common sight in the community.

Sac admits it is not easy at all especially approaching parents during the act of beating their children. Whenever he sees a child being beaten badly, he approaches the parent and informs him/her that what he/she is doing is, in fact, a violation of the child's rights.

He adds that, what he sees is actually a crime in progress. Of course, he has to be very diplomatic the best possible way.

#### **SAC ON TRIAL**

Sometimes parents listen. Some of them, he had seen mellowed down. But unlike in fairy tales, things does not always end up happily ever after. A parent shouting to his face telling him to mind his own business happened not only once or twice. That one, he admitted, wasn't so inspiring.

He came to know what indifference and ridicule are in more ways than once. It sent Sac into thinking. Could you blame this people, who, all throughout their lives, lived through it, and saw no wrong in beating children. We do it as a form of discipline, they would say.

There are times that even Sac finds himself ridiculous trying to advocate "child's rights" to people older than him and whom he thought should know better.

Most people treat Sac and Monette as just another kid; and therefore, neither are credible nor have the right to tell them what to do with their own children.

Their advocacy must have touched a few raw nerves in the area. It went ugly; Sac and Monette were called names.

But there was cause to rejoice: their advocacy was making inroads straight inside the homes.

Mothers in the barangay claimed, that except for slight verbal and physical gestures such as pinching, they see no case of child abuse in the barangay. Sac began to think, it looks like people equate child abuse only to rape and murder.

Ignorance is the main obstacle, Sac conceded. But he still firmly believes that a credible person who has the respect of the people can make a difference in this advocacy efforts.

## RECYCLING ABUSE

Carla, 24, is a mother of three. She lives with her 30-year old live-in partner, Anton. They started living together when she was 17.

The whole neighborhood is aware of Carla's plight; she, being a victim of domestic violence. Like most of the physically-abused women, however, she does not report any of the beatings. When asked why, she just shrugged her shoulders.

The officials of Dibet, Casiguran, where Carla lives, maintain that there are no reported violence against women in their barangay.

In Carla's home, the phases of violence initiated by the father does not stop at the mother. Five-year old Mylah tells that her mother, frequently spans her and her two younger brothers, Dennis and Martin.

She also tells that she often sees her parents fight. But unlike the picture Carla paints of Anton, their daughter Mylah says her father is *mabait* (kind-hearted).

Why is this so? Anton beats Carla. Carla beats Mylah, Dennis, and Martin.

Meanwhile, no one does anything about it because no one reports it - despite everyone being aware of it. •

### SAC SAW ALL THESE

Since he learned about child's rights, Sac began to be very sensitive of his encounters with violence. He related a few cases he has personal knowledge of.

- His neighbor hang his son inside a sack because the child was so naughty.
- One of the children in his purok came running and crying and pleading to him to please help them. Back home, his father is beating his mother severely.
- There was a man who forced his son to sell ice candy and ice cream in the streets. When the child refuses to do it, the father beats him. One afternoon after selling the goods in the street, the poor kid came home crying - a dog bit him on his bottom.
- A mother - Sac cannot tell if serious or joking - said that she mixes her baby's milk in her coffee. The milk was donated especially for the infant. Since she is breast-feeding, she reasons out that the baby will still get the nutrients through her breasts.

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## **COMPAS AND OTHER POINTS IN COMMUNICATING CPC V**

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It could have been a sensational hit in the barangay: A test broadcast anchored by its very own local talents.

### **THE MEDIUM? ComPAS!**

To an information-poor area like Aurora, the ComPAS or the Community Public Address System, is manna from heaven. Introducing ComPAS, therefore, will help raise the community's level of awareness and knowledge of the CPC V program; not to mention excitement.

This system involves the participation of stakeholders from planning, operation and maintenance. It can well be an apt symbol representing the communication component of CPC V.

### **FLASHBACK**

The June 2000's edition of *Children Now* newsletter, produced by the Philippine Information Agency (PIA) for the CPC V, proudly bannered that the lucky barangay chosen as site for ComPAS operation was Poblacion in Dinalungan town.

Initial activities which were coordinated by the PIA were swiftly carried out. Individuals long dreaming to become broadcasters were trained by the DZJO resource persons. Then came the arrival of the UNICEF bearing the ComPAS equipment.

It is after the equipment setup that the live test broadcast should happen. But after a year, there was still no test broadcast.

## **TECHNOLOGY OF PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION**

The ComPAS is a novel instrument where people in the barangay can share and exchange instrumental knowledge. It is also an ideal medium for transfer of livelihood technologies between and among the people in the community.

Under the ComPAS plan of action, the PIA will assist in providing technical support and community mobilization. The UNICEF will provide for the cost of the radio equipment and training.

Aurora's only radio station, the DZJO-FM, will be tapped in training selected individuals in the community on broadcasting, operation, and maintenance.

The local government, will provide for the required materials for its construction, maintenance, and repair as its counterpart. Further, the barangay will also look into the security of the facility. The municipal engineer, on the other hand, will look into the construction of the tower and the radio room.

### **WHAT WENT WRONG?**

The delay in the ComPAS operation was traced to the nondelivery of the local government's counterpart for the project. The municipality of Dinulungan failed to provide the budget needed to construct the ComPAS' tower and radio room.

The Dinalungan municipal government explained that the ComPAS initiative came at a time when the year's budget was already passed.

In accordance with government procedures, the budget allocation, therefore, for the ComPAS project can only be made available the following year - that is, year 2001.

Breaking news from the field indicates the strong probability of an approaching broadcast event in Brgy. Poblacion in Dinalungan. The work on the ComPAS' radio room and tower will start soon with the budget having been released lately.

The local talents should give themselves a once-over to prepare for the long delayed premiere performance.

#### **THE COMPAS OPPORTUNITY**

Considering the realities in the communication environment in Aurora, the ComPAS, however limited its signal, could well fill a communication gap in the barangay.

The delay in the ComPAS operation can be compensated by an excellent management and effective operation. It is not remote that a well-managed and efficiently-ran ComPAS may serve as a perfect justification for a proposal to establish another ComPAS in another barangay in the pilot province.

#### **COMMUNICATING CPC V**

Earlier in the program implementation, print materials on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Child-Friendly Movement, among others, were distributed to the beneficiaries.

Training and broadcast programs, themselves advocacy channels; and the strategic placement of streamers and billboards aimed for higher public visibility.

The cited information activities on CPC V, however, failed to create a dent on the knowledge level of a significant slice of the population.

Evaluators are often confronted with puzzled faces of the beneficiaries in meetings and group discussions.

The CPC V has built-in projects that offer opportunities to communicate the Child-Friendly Movement. The setting-up of the Knowledge Center for Women and Children, conduct of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys, and of course, the CompAS, all promote and advocate for a Child-Friendly Movement.

#### **THE ENGINE LOSES STEAM**

Relegating communication component at the bottom part of program plans has almost become traditional. It is ironic that the so-called “engine” of a program requiring massive advocacy and social mobilization appears only at the bottom of program plans.

Promoting the principles of the Child-Friendly Movement requires an aggressive information campaign to mobilize participation and involvement of the stakeholders.

After all, before an individual decides to get involved in a cause, a substantial amount of knowledge must be first digested. After all, commitment comes only after a thorough understanding of the issue.

The “engine” that brings forth awareness, knowledge, and understanding, needless to say, deserves a generous consideration.

#### **PROSPECTS**

Looking beyond and within the communication environment, recent developments unveil a regional

communication landscape requiring massive information and communication technology (ICT) retooling.

The potential and the necessity of being “wired” at an era known as the knowledge society, need not be overemphasized.

With the regional ICT infrastructure backbone growing in leaps and bounds, the ICT as a tool will be seen - at its best, a necessity.

Neither the ICT as a tool nor the Province of Aurora should be considered in isolation. The prospects of a multi-functioning ICT is not only for carrying specific messages but also for entire program implementation; at present and in the future.

Meanwhile, the region continues to promote the use of the ICT as a device to respond to emerging issues and demands.

The prospects, therefore, for an ICT-based Child Friendly Movement program - that defines function, speed, accuracy, and access - should not be ignored. •

## Credits

These stories were culled from the results of the focused group discussions, field interviews, provincial and municipal consultative meetings conducted during the CPC V Mid-Term Program Review and Evaluation in April and May 2001 in the province of Aurora.

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