

CHANGED



THE 'JAIL' THAT TAUGHT AGRICULTURE

A teacher transforms an abandoned jailhouse into a school that aims to help Samar achieve food sufficiency





PBSP

Philippine Business for Social Progress

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ABOUT THE COVER



Archimedes Fabellar, a teacher at Catbalogan City Agro-Industrial School (CCAIS), is the cover of this issue of CHANGED Magazine. Through the assistance of Standard Chartered Bank and PBSP, Fabellar was able to transform an abandoned jailhouse into a school that teaches agriculture in Samar.

The magazine "CHANGED" features stories of inspiring people in social development whose lives were changed either through their involvement in projects undertaken by PBSP with its member-companies, partners, and donors, or through interventions in the communities we serve. The A in "CHANGED," is represented by the delta sign (Δ) which is also a mathematical symbol for change.

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MIND THE GAP

**PBSP supports the DOH-NTP
in its goal to find the missing TB cases**



Tuberculosis (TB) is still a major public health problem in the country. In 2018, the Philippines ranked as the fourth country in the world with the highest number of TB cases, next to India, Indonesia, and China. Every year, there are about 26,000 people who die from TB while approximately 35 percent of Filipino families face catastrophic costs due to TB.

Hence, the Philippines aims to diagnose, notify, and treat 2.5 million people with active TB by 2022.

The Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP), through its Advancing Client-centered Care and Expanding Sustainable Services for TB (ACCESS TB) Project, is implementing strategies to support the case-finding initiatives of the Department of Health – National TB Control Program (DOH-NTP). One of these is the mandatory TB case notification program which mandates all health providers, whether public or private, to notify cases of TB. It deploys TB Notification Project Associates to map out and engage private doctors, stand-alone clinics and private hospitals in the Big Three Regions (NCR, Region 3, and Region 4-A) in TB case notification.

In this section, we will share with you stories that show the passion of healthcare providers who contribute to the goals of the mandatory notification program and the sacrifices of a father who struggled to help his family overcome TB.

(Source: Figures are from the DOH-NTP)

COPING WITH DEATH AND SICKNESS

A father of four strives to create a better life for his family who were struck with MDR-TB

Amid the hustle and bustle of Metro Manila, the family of Neil Breoso has managed to keep their peace and quiet in a makeshift house made of galvanized iron and thick wooden planks in the middle of an “apartment.”

The apartment is actually the tombs piled on top of the other, and except for other illegal settlers in the area, the family is surrounded by the dead who are buried in the Bagbag Cemetery in Novaliches, Quezon City.

The cemetery, complete with its haunting scenery and different kinds of insects crawling all over the place, may seem downright frightening or even morbid for some but for this 44-year-old father, his wife and his four girls, this has been their home for almost 10 years now.

Breoso quit school in first grade and learned to work hard at an early age when his parents separated. Since then, he has taken various odd jobs as a porter of vegetables and hardware materials, construction worker and baker, just to support his family.

While life has been difficult for them financially, they were happy and content being together. But he never imagined that they will be saddled with misery after misery when his wife Marife contracted tuberculosis (TB) in 2012.

THRICE THE STRUGGLE

It was just a simple cough but later she started vomiting blood. His wife was able to complete the six-month treatment but failed to visit the health center for a follow-up check-up. So her cough would return and she would undergo another treatment but

then after a month or two, she would suddenly stop the process. This has become their routine back then.

“There was a time that I rushed her to the nearest hospital because she felt unusually down and couldn’t breathe properly. I did not have any idea about TB until my wife was diagnosed with Multiple Drug-Resistant Tuberculosis (MDR-TB),” Breoso said.

Just when he thought that things couldn’t get any worse, two of his four daughters aged 10 and four months old, also got infected with MDR-TB. At that time, he didn’t know what to prioritize – whether to go to work so he could provide their medicines, take care of his wife in the hospital, or bring his children to the health center every day.

“I used to begin my routine at night working in the market of Balintawak. Before the sun rises, I would rush to the hospital to check and monitor my wife’s situation. Then, I would leave her to go home and take care of our children, especially the two who had TB,” Breoso shared.

Fortunately, they learned that the Programmatic Management of Drug Resistant TB (PMDT) Treatment Center at the Lung Center of the Philippines (LCP) in Quezon City offered free medicines to patients.

While this development has solved a big part of his problem, Breoso still had to face his other dilemmas alone.

“During the treatment process, my wife and I experienced the worst situation. That was to sleep outside the hospital because we didn’t have any centavo left in our pockets. I only earn PHP200

per day and I still needed to buy rice and a viand for my family,” he tearfully recalled.

BLESSINGS BEYOND CIRCUMSTANCES

Due to their plight, the LCP and Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP), through its Advancing Client-centered Care and Expanding Sustainable Services for TB (ACCESS TB) Project assisted the Breoso family by giving two portable oxygen tanks and a wheelchair to lessen his wife’s struggle during the treatment. Apart from these, they also received a monthly cash incentive for their daily transportation allowance to the treatment center.

Sadly, five months into the MDR-TB treatment, his wife succumbed to the disease in 2014. Her health deteriorated and she was too weak to survive.

“I didn’t blame anyone when she died. I just wondered how I would be able to support and take care of my children who still need a mother’s love,” Breoso shared while wiping his tears.

The successful 18-month treatment of his children gave him hope to continue striving and fulfill his promise to send them to school, in spite of a small salary. The experience, Breoso said, taught him to become a more responsible father.

Today, all his three daughters are studying. Marienel, 15, is in Grade 9 while 12-year-old Nicalyn is in Grade 6. Mayblyn, 9, is in Grade 3. His youngest, Hannalyn, is now four years old. All of them are healthy and happily starting anew with high hopes for a better future. Thanks to their father who works day and night and dreams of sending them all to college.



DRAWING FROM his family's difficult experience with TB, Neil Breoso now eagerly shares what he knows about the free medical treatment and other services to help neighbors who are suspected of it.

THROUGH THE TRAINING

and assistance provided by the ACCESS TB Project of PBSP, Dr. Richmond Reyes overcomes the challenges of treating and educating TB patients.



SERVING HUMANITY

A Chinese doctor makes it his mission to help TB patients get cured

Born to a Chinese family, Dr. Richmond Reyes chose to serve humanity than follow in the footsteps of his parents who are into business.

“It was my ambition to become a doctor and serve humanity. My passion is to help people, be it poor, rich, and whatever race and social status they belong to. And I’m glad that my parents were very supportive,” he said.

The 51-year-old doctor began his career in the TB program and committed most of his time to TB patients. He was one of the pioneering doctors who served in the first private Directly Observed Treatment Short Course (DOTS) clinic at the University of Santo Tomas (UST) in 1995. Since then, he has been involved in various TB advocacies.

“When I worked in the UST TB DOTS Clinic, I realized that advocating for TB was really in my blood. I was just a fellow before until I joined check-ups in our catchment area in Quiapo, Sta. Cruz, Sta. Mesa, and Blumentritt,” he shared.

A TB ADVOCATE

His tasks have been difficult during his first deployment. Patients were hard to convince because they were not aware of TB DOTS at that time. There were no television commercials, social media, and cellular phones to raise awareness regarding TB. Before, there was a foundation which focused on the TB program, but still the funds were not enough to provide all the medicines they needed.

Dr. Reyes left the UST TB DOTS clinic after it was transferred to the Pulmonary section of the said facility. Yet, he continued to provide healthcare services at the Chinese

General Hospital in Sampaloc, Manila; Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Sta. Mesa, Manila; and Cardinal Santos Hospital in San Juan, Manila.

Later on, he was assigned as the TB DOTS Medical Coordinator at the Chinese General Hospital, one of the 22 private hospitals that were engaged by the Advancing Client-centered Care and Expanding Sustainable Services for TB (ACCESS TB) Project being implemented by the Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP). The project aims to support the case-finding initiatives of the Department of Health – National TB Control Program (DOH-NTP).

“Before, we were not aware that TB is a notifiable case until one time that we attended a series of lectures about TB notification. We started as a referring hospital from 2015 to 2016. In 2017, we began to evaluate and screen presumptive patients. Once they agreed to be enrolled in the TB DOTS program, we provided medicines and helped them in their treatment. Currently, we already have patients who completed the process and were cured,” he said.

MAKING PATIENTS UNDERSTAND

In spite of their efforts, Reyes still experienced difficulties in the compliance of the patients during the treatment process. There were TB patients who suddenly stopped in the middle of it.

Whenever there is a default case, they contact and visit the patients to encourage them to continue the treatment process. They convince patients who are still working that they can still work and students can still study as long as they undergo the treatment.

“I talk to my patients during the six-month treatment and ask them to hang on every session. We go out of our way and remind them that we are just an instrument to get their healing faster,” he shared.

DOING WHAT HE LOVES

Dr. Reyes describes his journey as a learning process that taught him that every TB patient is different. He always shares with his colleagues that in dealing with every patient, one should treat them fairly and with respect, no matter how they dress up or what status they belong to in society.

Another problem that he continues to deal with is the TB stigma which is still present especially in people from higher socio-economic status.

To address this, he educates patients on the long treatment process, assuring them that it becomes a fulfilling journey when one finally gets cured.

Through his support and dedication, Reyes was able to notify over 500 TB cases from June 2018 to August 2019. This feat earned him the recognition as one of the active partners of the TB Notification program.

“I embraced the responsibilities of being the TB DOTS medical coordinator without any monthly incentive. I travel every day from Mandaluyong just to help TB patients even if I do not have in-patients in the hospital. So when patients are grateful for being cured, I always consider them as part of my achievements that cannot be replaced by any monetary amount. That’s why I really love what I am doing,” he shared.

WHERE SHE TRULY BELONGS

A nurse who used to be a snob and a loner, is now a well-loved member of her community

April Pareja never imagined that she would work with people, much more become a community health volunteer.

The 27-year-old registered nurse dreamt of practicing her profession in big, posh hospitals in the metropolis, and even working abroad to get a higher income. But years later, she found herself happily and passionately serving as a nurse in her community.

MOVING OUT OF HER SHELL

Growing up as an only child, Pareja was used to a certain level of loneliness. But everything she desired was given to her by her parents and grandmother, to whom she is very close to.

"I was always fascinated by the fact that being alone gives me the advantage of having my parents' sole attention and learning things on my own. But my personal development in serving the community was totally different," Pareja shared.

Though Nursing was not her first choice, Pareja eventually embraced her career, especially the opportunity to help improve the basic health services in their barangay in Malabon. This opportunity led to a year of service through the Registered Nurses for Health Enhancement and Local Service (RN HEALS), a program of the Department of Health (DOH) where they were assigned for six months at the Rural Health Units (RHU) and another six months serving at the hospitals.

"When I started working in the community, I felt uncomfortable talking with other people. They would describe me as the grumpy nurse in the health center. But when I started to reach out to them, my mood slowly changed and I suddenly learned how to approach the people," she revealed.

DISCOVERING HER PASSION

Since then, Pareja became very active at the health centers in Navotas and Malabon. For more than four years, Pareja devoted her time handling TB cases. This is where she learned to love the community around her.

In 2018, she started helping TB patients through the Advancing Client-centered Care and Expanding Sustainable Services for TB (ACCESS TB) Project being implemented by the Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP). One of the project's goals is to implement strategies to support the case-finding initiatives of the Department of Health – National TB Control Program (DOH-NTP).

Pareja worked as a TB Notification Program Associate (TB NPA) that facilitates the regular and accurate reporting of TB cases from private medical practitioners and healthcare providers. She ensures that the TB cases in the third district of Metro Manila, which covers the cities of Caloocan, Malabon, Navotas, and Valenzuela, are notified using the tolls and registry developed and provided by the DOH-NTP.

"Being with TB patients has taught me a lot. I spent almost two years with them building a deeper connection. This is because I have been with them throughout their journey during the treatment process. At some point, I consider them as my partners in the community whom we share various experiences in life," Pareja said.


DEALING WITH CHALLENGES

During the first few months, Pareja experienced difficulties in engaging the private physicians especially those who didn't want to participate in the TB notification program.

"There are passive private doctors in clinics and hospitals from the third district. But I managed to convince them to participate in the program to help find the missing TB cases in the four cities of Metro Manila," Pareja said. Fortunately, Pareja and her team's hardwork have paid off. There were a total of 27 engaged private physicians who were able to notify 351 TB cases. A partnership between public and private doctors was formed to intensify case detection by allowing the private physician to use GeneXpert and report the diagnosed cases to the respective TB NPAs assigned in the areas. There was also an increase in the number of patients who visited the health center to get TB treatment.

A BETTER PERSON

Pareja is very proud of her team for working hard to accomplish their goals. According to her, teamwork and

A portrait of April Pareja, a woman with long dark hair, wearing a red polo shirt, smiling against a light-colored textured wall.

words of encouragement are their secret weapons to excel in the field.

“We are creating an environment where we equally look at each other not as a competitor but as a colleague that pushes each other to attain our goal in finding the missing TB cases in Metro Manila,” she said.

As the team leader, Pareja developed into a better individual and team player, not just as a volunteer nurse. Her self-realizations and experiences contributed to her growth.

“Before, I used to have a strong personality that was developed during my childhood years of being alone and as a spoiled child. But somehow, I managed to change my attitude towards other people from a snobbish to a more approachable nurse. From being a loner, I now consider myself a part of the community,” she said.

NURSE AND TB Notification Program Associate April Pareja engages private physicians to improve detection of TB cases among patients.

PEOPLE PERSON

A health volunteer finds fulfillment in educating communities about TB

Caesal Lachica, a community-based health volunteer from Sta. Rosa, Laguna, always puts other people's needs first before herself in whatever endeavor that she gets involved in.

At the age of 18, she has already become the breadwinner of her family. Back then, the Computer Technology freshman worked in the mornings as a cashier in a fast food chain and then spent her entire evenings in school.

After some time, she quit school to focus on earning to sustain the needs of her mother and three siblings. The eldest in the family, Lachica had to assume the responsibility because her father got addicted into drugs and eventually separated from her mother.

"I prioritized my family to help my siblings finish their studies. It's hard to work while studying at the same time. There were days when I couldn't go to school because of my workload. I felt tired balancing everything since we still had problems at home," the 33-year-old volunteer shared.

From the food service industry, Lachica transferred to the electronics industry to work as a machine operator so she can help her youngest brother finish his education.

Later on, she got married and decided to stop working to become a full-time mom to her two daughters. But

things were hard because her husband did not have a stable income from fiberglass-making.

"We lived at my sister-in-law's house while building our own family. It was really difficult at that time, but that was my motivation to be persistent in life," she said.

TURNING INTO A TB ADVOCATE

In 2018, she was hired as a community-based health volunteer for the Advancing Client-centered Care and Expanding Sustainable Services for TB (ACCESS TB) Project being implemented by the Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP).

One of the project's goals is to implement strategies to support the case-finding initiatives of the Department of Health – National TB Control Program (DOH-NTP), in partnership with the City Health Office of Sta. Rosa, Laguna.

"At first, I was very hesitant to apply in this field, thinking that I might also get infected. I didn't have knowledge about TB then and it was my first job related to health," she admitted.

Lachica was one of the 13 community-based volunteers assigned to conduct intensified TB case-finding and refer presumptive TB patients to Delivery of TB Services (DOTS) facilities in Sta. Rosa, Laguna.

As part of her tasks, Lachica organizes TB classes in communities to provide accurate information and debunk myths. She conducts house-to-house visits to determine the people who have the symptoms of TB in the barangay and then encourages them to undergo check-ups to further examine their situation. She also serves as a morale booster to those who do not want to continue the treatment by asking them about their difficulties and encouraging them to push through.

"I am very happy of the outcome of my house-to-house visits with patients. I've seen their eagerness to finish their treatment and be cured from TB. Sometimes, they will bring us food as sign of their gratitude for what we did to them," she enthused.

Not all are receptive though. Lachica still encounters difficulty in spreading the message to others. She said there are snobbish patients who are not willing to listen; TB-positive people who do not want to undergo treatment; and patients who undergo the first month treatment but suddenly stop in the middle of it.

"They have limited knowledge about TB. One time, I visited an area where I discovered that his partner separated all his utensils and stayed in a different room because he was afraid to be infected, too," she said.



HER HAPPY PLACE

But these challenges did not deter Lachica from helping her community. She still does her daily routine passionately.

“Through our various efforts, I was able to enlighten the minds of the people. They now understand and believe that TB can be cured. They are no longer afraid, and they know that there are free TB medicines in the barangay,” she added.

Lachica’s hard work has paid off after a few months. She was promoted as the team leader of her group in Barangay Labas, Sta. Rosa, Laguna because of her excellent performance as health volunteer for one year.

“Before, I did not care much about TB patients and the community until such time that I realized that this was my happy place. I feel fulfilled in every hardship that I encounter because I am able to help the people in our community. Everything has paid off,” Lachica said.

CONQUERING HER FEAR of TB, Caesel Lachica is turning her community into a healthier and safer place by helping TB patients get treatment.



BREAKING FREE FROM ABUSE

The Creating Spaces Project seeks to reduce all forms of violence against women and girls



Incidents of violence against women and girls (VAWG) are rampant in the country but most cases are left unreported because the victims stay silent. Speaking up, according to their traditions, would seem that they are fighting their culture.

In the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), the practice of arranged marriage is acceptable because it has some benefits such as gaining wealth and influence through the joining of two families.

But many also regard it as a form of abuse. Some girls are forced to marry as early as the first occurrence of their menstruation. The practice is not only a human rights issue, but also makes the child vulnerable to poverty, school drop-out, domestic violence, loss of innocence, complications or death due to childbirth.

One of the solutions to address this issue is to support initiatives like the Creating Spaces Project which aims to reduce VAWG and Child, Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM) in six municipalities in Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur.

The project is funded by Oxfam through Global Affairs Canada, and is being implemented by local partners like Al-Mujadilah Development Foundation Incorporated (AMDFI), Philippine Legislators Committee for Population and Development (PLCPD), Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP), and the United Youth of the Philippines (UnYPhil-Women).

Creating Spaces has three major pillars. One is to engage key community actors (religious, private sector and political people) to support and promote positive gender norms such as advancing women's leadership and rights and in reducing VAWG. Second is to support women and girls who experienced violence by providing access to support services and economic opportunities. Finally, the project hopes to build the knowledge and capacity of institutions and alliances to influence change. This is by increasing the use of innovative knowledge, including best and emerging practices, and accountability systems to end VAWG.

PBSP is conducting activities for the project that include seminars about VAWG and CEFM, as well as livelihood trainings with start-up capital to provide young mothers with alternative sources of income. These are through cooking *palapa* (a Maranao condiment), dressmaking, making turmeric powder and weaving *inaul* (a Maguindanaon cloth).

SEWING A NEW FUTURE

A young mother empowers herself and others

Asma Lumenda used to live a promising life. She was about to finish college but she got pregnant before graduation.

“My mother got mad because I should have finished my studies before having a boyfriend. It was too late. I had no choice but to take on the responsibility. I had difficulty because it was my first pregnancy. I could not go to the doctor because I had no money. I only availed free pre-natal check-ups at the nearest health center,” recalled Lumenda who is now 21 years old.

Lumenda got married in February 2018. Fortunately, she was able to graduate that same school year while she was pregnant. She took up Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Extension Education from the Mindanao State University in Maguindanao.

“I gave birth in October 2018. It was difficult because I was not ready. I could not buy things for my baby because I had no work. I still needed to take the board exam so I can apply for work later on. But I could not review because I needed to take care of my baby,” she said.

LIVING A DIFFICULT LIFE

The eldest in a brood of five, Lumenda felt guilty for not being able to help her family financially.

“This is the biggest lesson in my life. I should not have married early. Sometimes, I cry because I could not help my mother anymore. I still have three younger siblings who need to

go to school. They stopped so I could graduate. My mother, who is already separated from my father, could not afford to send us all to school. I failed them. Instead of helping my mother, she is the one helping me take care of my own family,” she revealed.

Lumenda would often worry about making ends meet as her husband’s small income as a coconut tapper and rickshaw driver, is not enough. It could only buy diapers and medicines to treat common illnesses for their baby.

FINDING HOPE THROUGH TRAININGS

Fortunately, Lumenda was invited to attend a series of seminars about women’s rights and livelihood opportunities with some 30 young mothers.

The activities were conducted by Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP) through the Creating Spaces Project. The project aims to reduce violence against women and girls and is also advocating against child, early and forced marriage. Aside from women empowerment, the project provides livelihood opportunities to jobless mothers.

“The project came to our community in December 2018. They trained us on dressmaking. They taught us first how to stitch by hand. Then, they introduced to us the sewing machine. Sewing is actually easy. But I have difficulties in making dress patterns because I still need to memorize the measurements of the arm, back, chest and other parts of the body,” explained Lumenda.

In January, the project distributed 14 sewing machines and gave them start-up capital like rolls of cloth and sewing materials.

“By the end of Ramadan in June, we were able to sell clothes like long dresses, *malongs* (tube skirts), and *hijab* (veils). We could still make a lot of school uniforms for kids but we already ran out of cloth. From our sales, we generated a total of Php3,500,” she said.


HELPING UPLIFT LIVES

While she was further honing her craft, Lumenda didn’t realize that she was also developing into a good leader. In fact, she was appointed president of the Young Mothers’ Dressmaking Organization. Their group consisted of 50 members from Barangay Muti in Guindulungan, Maguindanao.

“We decided not to divide yet the Php3,500 income among ourselves because we planned to buy additional colors of cloth so we can make more clothes. We wanted our business to grow so we can provide income to fellow mothers who are jobless,” shared Lumenda.

Aside from managing the organization, Lumenda focuses on making clothes. Sometimes, she brings her baby to the sewing station to play with the children of her fellow mothers.

Lumenda is happy to have come a long way – from that helpless young mother to an effective leader of her dressmaking organization. Indeed, the



training gave so much more than she imagined. Apart from providing the second chance to help herself and her family, she also learned a new skill which she is now using to earn a living.

More importantly, Lumenda was also given the opportunity to help others who are in similar situations.

“Sometimes, I am also teaching others on sewing. There are still a lot of young mothers out there who need help like me. In the same way, I also learn from those who are already good in dressmaking. I sit with them to observe and learn new techniques on making patterns. Because of this, our community has changed. The project provided us an alternative source of income and this enabled us to help our families,” Lumenda said.

ASMA LUMENDA, President of the Young Mothers' Dressmaking Organization in Guindulungan, Maguindanao, learns how to sew hijab, skirts and other Islamic clothing with help from the Creating Spaces Project.



ACCESS TO EDUCATION

**Mobilizing the business sector
to improve teaching and learning**



Not all Filipino children are able to go to school because of a lot of reasons like poverty.

Unfortunately, finishing school is still not an assurance to get a decent job. Unemployment and underemployment are high even among graduates. Sometimes, there is a mismatch between training and actual jobs.

This can be attributed to the poor quality of education that stems from the lack of government budget, low quality of teachers, poor management of schools, poor learning environment, shortage of classrooms, lack of school facilities, inadequate books and equipment, and ineffective method of instruction.

The Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP) has been working with its member-companies and partners to help the government address these gaps in education to improve the quality of teaching and learning, as well as to produce graduates who are skilled, job-ready and equipped to meet the evolving demands of the business industry.

In the following pages, we will share with you three success stories about the provision of a much-needed footbridge to Sapangdaku Elementary School and the community of Barangay Sapangdaku in Cebu City by Fluor Philippines; the transformation of a jailhouse into a school of excellence in farming and fishery in Catbalogan, Samar by Standard Chartered Bank; and Telstra Foundation Philippines, Inc.'s efforts to strengthen linkages between schools and industries to provide students in Sarangani better access to quality education.

BRIDGING THE LEARNING GAPS

A school head helps create a better future for students in her community,
one bridge at a time

Every day for 15 years, Babylin Palban would cross a small portion of the Sapangdaku river in Cebu several times just to monitor her teachers and teach students who are attending classes in two different locations.

Her kindergarteners as well as the first, second and third graders are housed in the barangay hall on one side, while students in Grades 4 to 6 are at the Sapangdaku Elementary School which is located on the other side.

Crossing the river meant walking through knee-deep waters or balancing one's feet on top of rocks that serve as pathway.

"I would rather submerge my feet in the water, than balance myself on top of the rocks. I'm afraid to slip and fall," said the 47-year-old Palban.

But walking in the river becomes more difficult during storms when the water is high. It has been an arduous and dangerous journey not only for her and her students, but for everyone in the community. She had also contracted a water-borne skin disease at that time due to her daily struggle.

PASSION FOR TEACHING

A resident of Sapangdaku herself, Palban was influenced by her parents who were both teachers to also pursue the same profession. After teaching for 10 years, she was assigned as head of the school located in the same community where she was raised. Her passion for teaching and the opportunity to give back, have served as motivation for Palban to push through amid the

difficulties and challenges in their school.

When she first arrived at Sapangdaku Elementary School, she was surprised to see 600 students attending classes in the cramped barangay hall. At that time, the elementary school was closed because typhoon floods destroyed the classrooms. The incident forced the previous principal to close down the school and made the barangay hall as alternative classrooms.

Since all the students could not be accommodated in the barangay hall, Palban requested the mayor to allow at least half of the young populace to transfer back to the school. While this set-up has somehow eased the situation of the students, there was the river that the school community had to cross over every time they went from one side to another.

ANSWERED PRAYER

In 2016, her prayers were finally answered. While executives from Fluor Daniel Inc., Philippines (FDIP), a subsidiary of global engineering and construction leader Fluor Corporation, were distributing the trolley bags they donated to the students, they also asked for the school's other needs. She immediately told them about a footbridge.

In the same year, (FDIP) approved the request to fund the construction of the Sapangdaku footbridge for the students of Sapangdaku Elementary School. Engineers from the company even worked on the structural design of the bridge to ensure its safety and durability.

Last year, the footbridge was turned over to the school and community who were happy to finally have safe access to the main road, barangay hall and school. Since they do not need to cross the river by foot, the residents will no longer have to worry about contracting skin diseases and allergies that can be obtained from the water in the river.

Through this intervention, the students became more eager to go to school. The new school year generated a higher enrollment rate of 632 from 603 last year, with new students coming from neighboring barangays. So far, there had been no dropouts this school year compared to three percent last year. The tardiness of the students has also decreased.

"This intervention made us feel that we are not abandoned. Even if the situation of our school and community is like this, we know that people still care about Sapangdaku," Palban said.

She considers the footbridge a big accomplishment that can be attributed to the partnership of PBSP, Fluor Philippines and the local government of Sapangdaku.

"The footbridge addressed the problems of safety and security of the children and the residents," she added.

Palban hopes that the footbridge will pave the way for bigger developments for Sapangdaku and its learners. She is confident that her dream to build a better and more conducive place for learning for the students of Sapangdaku will soon be realized.



WITH THE NEWLY-BUILT bridge in Sapangdaku, Cebu, Babylin Palban and her students no longer cross the river on foot to reach their school.

COVER STORY

THE 'JAIL' THAT TAUGHT AGRICULTURE

A teacher transforms an abandoned jailhouse into a school that aims to help Samar achieve food sufficiency

On the town of San Vicente, Catbalogan City, there is an abandoned jailhouse with nine hectares of mostly forested land.

Archimedes Fabellar did not know why he signed up for the monumental task of transforming it into a senior high school for agriculture but from the way things have turned out, he is glad he took on the challenge.

The jailhouse in Catbalogan City was built in June 2001 by the provincial and city governments. What the LGU did not account for, however, was the many NPA attacks that hounded the area at that time. Fearing for the safety of the inmates and jail wardens, the government decided to abandon the building.

In 2017, the city government offered the facility to the Department of Education for its productive use. The DepEd Schools Division of Catbalogan City proposed to transform the jailhouse into a farm school to help address food sufficiency and security of the city. Catbalogan is the number one importer of basic commodities in Eastern Visayas. It also aims to encourage the younger generation to become professional farmers by honing their skills, knowledge and attitude.

Fabellar, a science teacher specializing in research at the Catbalogan Comprehensive National High School, was assigned to lead the planning and implementation of its school-based management (SBM) thrust. His work helped the school reach level 3 of SBM practice, the highest standard in the SBM criteria. This led the school division superintendent to see him as a potential principal for the new school for agriculture. He was also asked to research for possible agricultural technologies that could help solve the food security problem of the province. It was an offer he could not refuse.

"My future job was levels higher than what I imagined. But DepEd believed in me, and I am always up for a challenge so I accepted," he disclosed.

STARTING FROM THE BOTTOM

The establishment of the Catbalogan City Agro-Industrial School (CCAIS) was in an unusual manner: it did not have a formal identity and concrete funding.

As a school that just started out, it already had 44 Grade 7 and 60 Grade 11 enrollees. This was a result of the city recruiting two scholars from every barangay. While the funds for



THE SCHOOL'S vision is to become a center of excellence in farming in Eastern Visayas.



HOPING TO help his community become more self-sufficient, Archimedes Fabellar goes the extra mile in improving their school's sustainability.

Maintenance and Other Operating Expenses (MOOE) of CCAIS were still being processed, Fabellar had to rely on city government funds with supposed counterparts from 57 barangays. Based on the plan, each barangay would donate PhP5,000 per student every year, but even that was not realized.

Fabellar used to teach classes with three more teachers he borrowed from other schools. As part of their Brigada Eskwela, he would request volunteers from the army, barangay, and parents to help clear the forested lands so they could use them for their lessons. When not teaching, he would continue working on the documentary requirements of their school and funds.

"The first six months were really tough. With LGU funds, bidding for supplies took longer so we made do with

whatever available desks we could get. We constantly needed funds because the school has a dormitory where our students stayed, so their daily needs like food had to be met. I had to be at the city hall every day to ensure the timely release of the monthly allowances for food," Fabellar revealed.

GETTING TO THE TOP

Thankfully, most of the school challenges were solved through a two-year project by Standard Chartered Bank (SCB) and Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP). The oldest international bank in the Philippines initially funded a program for another school in Catbalogan City, and it was during the turnover that the DepEd superintendent requested for assistance for CCAIS. When SCB and PBSP toured the school, they knew instantly that they needed to help.

It was a dream come true for Fabellar. Through the project, they received a computer laboratory, audio-visual materials for education and recreation, farm tools and equipment, and skills training for teachers and students. The project also included the development of a five-year operations manual for CCAIS and the creation of a school governing council. It also funded the exposure trips of students to various industries in Samar for knowledge enrichment.

Because of the project's assistance, the school is now closely reaching its vision of becoming a center of excellence in farming in Eastern Visayas. The operations plan, in particular, helped Fabellar plan ahead for the coming years in developing the school's curriculum.



"We have so many plans and so many dreams but we still need technical assistance. The project taught us how to look at the school from a different perspective, such as sustainability schemes, and I am really thankful for that," he said.

FULFILLING DREAMS

CCAIS is now making its operations sustainable so it does not rely so much on government funds. It has a demonstration farm with a vermicomposting area and chicken coop, where students can apply the skills they learned in the classroom. The school is also starting to build a livestock farm, focusing on hogs, cows, and carabaos.

To date, CCAIS started delivering close to 15 trays of brown eggs every day.

They used the income to purchase feeds for their animals and are also planning to mass produce blue ternate (or butterfly pea flower) for a high-end farm in Leyte.

Graduating students will also be offered an opportunity to build their own farms in their homes and sell their produce in their respective barangays as part of the city's food sufficiency plan.

This year, SCB is also turning over four agribusinesses to 41 (from the first batch of SHS graduates in April) students to help them become young agripreneurs. These young farmers will be organized and registered as an association. Aside from these agri-enterprises, the company is also providing an agribusiness and enterprise management seminar as

well as training and exposure trips on different agribusiness technologies.

As for Fabellar, his stint at CCAIS taught him to appreciate agriculture. In fact, he is even starting to build his own small farm. By mixing this new love with his passion for research, he has also ventured into pet projects with his teachers. One of which is to cross-breed chickens so it could produce different kinds of eggs.

"Two years ago, I would have never thought that I'll be where I am right now. I feel truly blessed. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and I'm glad I took it. I got to meet people who helped build this school and I am trying my best to do my part so all their help and investments will not go to waste," he concluded.

THE CATBALOGAN City Agro-Industrial School is hoping to produce students who can be agripreneurs.





Deep in a peaceful night on the 11th day of December, 1986, a little girl was born, given the name of Cleofe Marie Navaja Librando and "Tet" to family and friends, and now Mrs. Cleofe Marie L. Quintana, just as lovely as she is.

Who would have thought that this young girl would become a professional teacher and a school principal ever

She came from a family of educators. From her mother, she learned the importance of education. She was appointed as a teacher at Glan Padidu Elementary School in 1989. She worked there for several years before being transferred to Malbang Elementary School in 2006 to continue her noble profession.

She was appointed as a teacher at Glan Padidu Elementary School on July 11, 1989. She worked there for several years before being transferred to Malbang Elementary School in 2006 to continue her noble profession.

The good character she brought into a huge bearing in the school and became the newly installed principal of Mangelen Integrated School in 2015. A new door of opportunity opened to her. She continued to work on building a culture of learning. Being naturally a person who always takes action, she always takes initiative and responsibility to change and grow the school for the benefit of the students. She always moves towards noble deeds. She finds happiness in what she does and takes advantage of every opportunity it offers to be good in the world as well. The experience of the years strengthens her resolve and gives meaning to her endeavor. A

She acts as a catalyst for change, a leader who helps pushing the boundaries of what can be done better as a school. She's not just the person in authority, but she do however have a strong vision. She is able to communicate clearly with others, tap into the strengths of the people she work with and help them see that there are many ways to work toward a common purpose.

She can build solid relationship with the people that she serves. A person who has a character and credibility is just seen as a good leader. She is knowledgeable & leads by example. Her purpose to lead never ends. She was transferred to Mangelen Integrated School and serve her best up to July 2015.

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School principal Cleofe Quintana was re-assigned to Mangelen Integrated School in Maasim, Sarangani in 2015 because she had a huge problem to solve.

The issue of angry parents protesting about school contributions was going out of hand. They aired their grievances on social media and in the local radio station. They needed to do something, fast.

"The Parents-Teachers Association (PTA) felt irritated everytime we would implement a project like Brigada Eskwela. They were complaining why they needed to clean the school for a week which also required them to buy brooms, hollow blocks, paints and other materials. The activity was already discussed in a PTA meeting but most parents were shy to voice out their sentiments at that time. Instead, they relayed negative information to their neighbors. Later, they bashed the school on social media and even reported a complaint in the radio station against the previous school administration," explained the 58-year-old Quintana.

PRINCIPAL CLEOFE Quintana continues to improve her school by encouraging the parents, teachers, and community to work together.

COLLABORATION IS THE KEY

A veteran school principal employs various strategies to get the support of parents and donors

MOBILIZING THE COMMUNITY

To address the problem, she re-strategized and prioritized projects that showed a tangible output to the parents. She also encouraged her teachers to serve as role models.

“In our last Brigada Eskwela, I required my teachers to take the first initiative to clean the school so parents can see them and encourage others to do the same. I also instructed them to explain to parents why we needed to raise funds when we implement a project. When a project is left unfinished, one reason may be because the collected contribution did not reach the required amount as only a few parents were able to give. We communicate this to the parents and to the PTA,” she added.

Quintana realized that the parents have the heart to help but most of them do not have money to pay or donate for projects. Due to this, the resourceful principal tapped various donors to help meet the school needs.

“Fortunately, many of them were eager to help. Sarangani Energy Corporation donated paints, pipes and construction materials for their laboratories. South Cotabato II Electric Cooperative fixed the electrical wirings of our classrooms. They also provided a transformer so we can have our own pole. Doctors from Soccsksargen General Hospital also conducted a medical mission for the school community while the Police Regional Office 12 and Maasim Municipal Hall complemented it with

free circumcision and dental care. Kamaga Barangay Hall also donated cash. As our counterpart, the school took care of the food and venue with the help of parents,” said Quintana.

Quintana continued to look for ways to further improve their school. One of this is the Senior High School (SHS)-Industry Linkage project funded by Telstra Foundation Philippines, Inc. and implemented by Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP), in partnership with Department of Education (DepEd).

STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS

Through the help of Telstra Foundation Philippines, Inc. and PBSP, Quintana also signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Sarangani Energy Corporation for their Entrepreneur Center.

“We needed to construct an Entrepreneur or Pasalubong Center in front of our school where we can display and sell the products of our SHS students. These products are flower stands, armchairs, other metal furniture and fixtures as well as food items such as cakes, cookies and other pastries. We are hoping that the customers can also help improve the output of our students through feedbacking. We want to create a venue where both customers and students can exchange suggestions,” she said.

Through these combined efforts, the school has improved a lot. Quintana also gained the trust and support of the parents who became more involved in the development of the school.

“We were able to construct a feeding room, handwashing area, kitchen and laboratories coming from our own budget. The PTA also helped in concreting our school perimeter. After finishing the gate, the PTA offered to construct three makeshift classrooms. Two donors also provided an air conditioner in the computer laboratory and a gas range in the culinary area. But we try to maximize first our own resources before seeking the help of others,” she added.

Apart from improving the school's relations with the parents, Quintana also looked after the welfare of her teachers.

“When I became a leader, I realized that not all my expectations would happen. I should not compare myself to others, especially my experiences as a teacher, because it is different. Before, I had a lot of free time so I would go home at night to my house which was just walking distance from the school. But teachers now cannot work overtime because they still have babies, kids to attend to. They need to go home right after class. I learned from them that it is necessary to adjust and look after the welfare of others,” revealed Quintana.



YOUTH

CONVERSATIONS

PBSP's initiative engages the youth on matters that affect them



YOUTH CONVERSATIONS ON WHAT MATTERS

January 10-11, 2019
VIP Hotel, Cagayan de Oro City

The Muslim youth in the Philippines are not spared from violent extremism. They are the favorite recruits of armed groups because they can be brainwashed to do things.

During the Marawi Siege, some youth joined the ranks of the Maute Group who pledged allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Some Maranao children and teenagers became spies and combatants against the government. But the terrorists did not succeed because the military fought back and the citizens still believed in the capacity of the government to maintain peace and order.

The siege already ended but the threat still exists. Military tactics cannot solve the problem alone. It should be coupled with interventions like civic youth engagements.

Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP) supports initiatives on this through the conduct of youth conversations. The activity aims to provide a safe space for young people to articulate their dreams and aspirations as well as their worries and fears; to express their personal views on matters relevant to them; and to participate in formulating their development agenda on critical aspects that matter to them.

The first PBSP youth conversation was conducted in January 2019 during the plebiscite of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL). About 50 young Maranaos joined the activity which provided some valuable insights on what the Maranao youth truly desire.

One is economic security where they can gain access to stable jobs that are free from discrimination as well as sustainable livelihood that promote Maranao products. Second is reproductive health where everyone, including their parents understand the possible negative effects of early and forced marriage as well as the health risks associated with teenage pregnancies.

The Maranao youth also seek good governance which includes proper knowledge on government plans, policies and processes as well as easy access to government services. They also wish to engage in various civic activities like involvement in the Local Youth Development Council. The young people in Mindanao also want to remain intact with their culture so they strive to promote and practice it wherever they go. They also express the need to learn Maranao culture in schools where teachers could also provide emphasis on how to properly express *maratabat* or pride.

Finally, the PBSP Youth Conversations activity underscored the need to strengthen Islamic education among the youth in Mindanao.

PROUDLY FROM BUTIG

A Maranao girl displaced by war comes back
to rebuild her dreams and her hometown

In 2016, Grade 9 student Juhaira Gunda evacuated her home in Butig, Lanao del Sur.

“My family fled because my parents feared for our lives. A local terrorist group captured the Butig Municipal Hall and set up camp at the Butig National High School. The military managed to neutralize them but some structures were already destroyed. Because of this, we moved to Marawi City where I continued my studies until Grade 10,” recalled Gunda, now aged 19.

Her family thought they were already safe in Marawi City but the same terrorist group staged a bigger battle in the city for five months, killing thousands and destroying homes and properties.

“We had no choice. We went back to Butig to seek refuge. But at that time, our hometown had not yet recovered. I continued Grade 11 at the Butig National High School even though the school buildings were not yet repaired. We were forced to fit in a small classroom. We had no comfort rooms so we had to use the bathroom at a house of my classmate who lived near our school. We already got used to that situation where we had no facilities like armchairs, computers and other learning materials,” said Gunda.

FIGHTING DISCRIMINATION

Butig residents like Gunda continue to face discrimination because some people associate the municipality as the birthplace of the local terrorist group.

“We always experience discrimination every time people would discover

that we came from Butig. A staff of a university in Marawi City doubted me and my classmates when we submitted our requirements for a college entrance exam. The staff accused us of forging the signature in our school records. He was also underestimating us. We heard whispers that we could not pass the exam because we do not have quality education in Butig,” she revealed.

Gunda was hurt of these assumptions. She never thought that a fellow Maranao would discriminate them for being residents of Butig.

“We are also victims but some people see us as terrorists. They should not treat us like criminals. Contrary to their belief, there are a lot of good people in Butig who also want peace and development,” she pointed out.

SPEAKING UP

Despite being discriminated, Gunda never developed a grudge against others. She continues to share positive things to compensate the reputation of Butig.

“When I attended a youth conversation in Cagayan de Oro City last January, I initially worried that other participants would discriminate me if they discover that I came from Butig. Later, I realized that not all people are judgmental. In fact, I never felt out-of-place during the two-day activity. They accepted me and even listened to my opinions,” she shared.

Organized by Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP), the youth conversation titled “#YouthMatters” aims to provide a safe space/platform for the youth to express their opinions on matters relevant to them.

Apart from this, PBSP and other donors brought in a lot of projects that helped improve the lives of the people of Butig.

“Butig National High School had no buildings before. But when donors came like PBSP, they constructed classrooms and a computer laboratory. Some school buildings are complete with amenities like armchairs, comfort rooms, electric fans and lights. Because of this, I am now proud to say that Butig is beautiful,” said Gunda.

Through these interventions, she realized that it is not bad to accept help. In fact, there are a lot of donors who are willing to provide assistance without any hidden agenda.

MAKING A PLEDGE

Seeing the kindness in their donors, Gunda felt inspired to help Butig recover herself.

“I want to become a teacher or a social worker someday. I want to help educate my community. I have a passion for teaching because my mother was a former teacher and my elder brother is currently teaching English in Saudi Arabia. Development work is difficult but the fulfillment of being able to help is priceless,” she said.

Someday, Gunda hopes to see a brighter and more progressive Butig where people are no longer discriminated and tourists or investors could come and go freely in the town. She is determined to help the military, local government and other stakeholders in promoting lasting peace and development in her hometown.



THROUGH PBSP's Youth Conversations, Juhaira Gunda is speaking up for herself and her fellow youth.



PLANTING THE SEEDS OF TOMORROW



When Typhoon Ondoy hit the country in September 2009, the unprecedented flooding submerged homes and caused damage to infrastructure and agriculture. More than 400 lives were lost and around four million people were affected by the typhoon.

The deforestation of the Marikina Watershed largely contributed to the record-breaking floods in Metro Manila and neighboring cities. The lack of trees in the watershed left the ground unable to absorb rainwater, which flowed to the lowlands instead.

Seeing the need to rehabilitate the Marikina Watershed, PBSP launched the Marikina Watershed Initiative Program (MWIP) in 2010 and engaged its member-companies to be part of the reforestation efforts. One of the companies that committed to the cause is the Aboitiz Group.

In 2015, the Aboitiz Group partnered with PBSP for the implementation of the Adopt-a-Watershed Project. The goal is to plant 500,000 trees in four years in approximately 313 hectares of the Marikina Watershed. The project seeks to ensure the survival of the seedlings by engaging local people's organizations in the management and protection of the reforested areas. It also aims to enhance the economic activity among households in the watershed areas through the provision of alternative livelihood.

To date, the project has planted 220,000 seedlings and provided livelihood to seven farmer organizations – Tulungan sa Kabuhayan ng Calawis (TSKC), Nagkakaisang Samahang Magsasaka sa Brgy. Calawis (NASAMASABACA), Ayaas Kay-Rufa Farmers Association (AKFA), Inigan Upland Farmers Association (IUFA), Kolo-Ka-Koloy, Apia United Farmers Association, Inc. and the Malayang Samahan ng mga Magsasaka sa Calawis.

This year, the Aboitiz Group reaffirmed its commitment to rehabilitate the watershed by committing to plant an additional 130,000 seedlings and provided over PhP6 million for the maintenance and protection of the seedlings.

In this issue, we will share with you how the project helped a farmer-organization contribute to the sustainability of the watershed.

FRUIT-BEARING INITIATIVE

A farmer-leader partners with Aboitiz and PBSP
to provide alternative livelihood in their community

Slash and burn agriculture, or more commonly known as *kaingin* system is still a practice among poor communities in rural areas as a source of livelihood of people. This used to be the dilemma of Sitio Apia, Barangay Calawis in Antipolo, Rizal for years, where people cut down and burn trees for firewood or charcoal and sell it to support their daily needs.

“Some of us are farmers. We grow vegetables, fruits, and root crops, too. But almost 70 percent of our population makes a living through the cutting of trees for firewood and charcoal-making. It’s been like that, since. Even if we know the harmful effects of *kaingin* and logging, we cannot just ask people to stop. Because by doing so, we are actually asking them not to eat or live,” shared Antonio Marcelino, 49.

Marcelino is the president of the Apia United Farmers, Association, Inc., one of the seven farmer organizations engaged by the Aboitiz Group and Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP) to manage and protect reforested areas of the former’s Adopt-a-Watershed Project.

LEADING A GOOD CAUSE

In 2009, he was one of the few farmers in Calawis who suffered the devastation of Typhoon Ondoy.

“We were brutally hit by Ondoy. It had destroyed our farmlands. There was no way we could transport our harvest out

of Calawis because almost every road was blocked due to landslides. We suffered a lot back then. And the same situation hurt us every time it rained hard,” he lamented.

Because of this, the people needed to find alternative livelihood to support the needs of their families. Marcelino was one of the officers when the Apia United Farmers, Association, Inc. was formed in 2012. Upon seeing his leadership and communication skills, the members of the association elected him as president in 2014.

Under his leadership, the association has worked with different Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) who helped provide alternative sources of income for the people in their community.

“I used to earn an average of PhP8,000 a month through farming and carpentry. When the projects from different NGOs came in like seedlings preparation and reforestation activities, we got to earn extra,” Marcelino shared.

During his first years as president, he has led the association to work with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) for various reforestation initiatives.

In 2018, the Aboitiz Group, in partnership with PBSP, engaged Marcelino’s farmers’ group to provide seedlings for reforestation and tree planting activities in the Marikina Watershed. This initiative is part of the


A-Park Program which is committed to sustainability and environmental stewardship, particularly focused on carbon emissions reduction while providing livelihood opportunities to its host communities.

“We get paid both for the preparation of seedlings and the actual planting and monitoring of it. Since last year, we have planted almost 28,000 fruit-bearing and native forest trees in an 18-hectare forest land. We are 104 members in the association, so to ensure proper remuneration and sharing of income, we do scheduling and tasking to properly distribute the workload among members,” said Marcelino.

TURNING INTO ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDS

The steady income they receive through the project has enabled them to better support their family and their association.

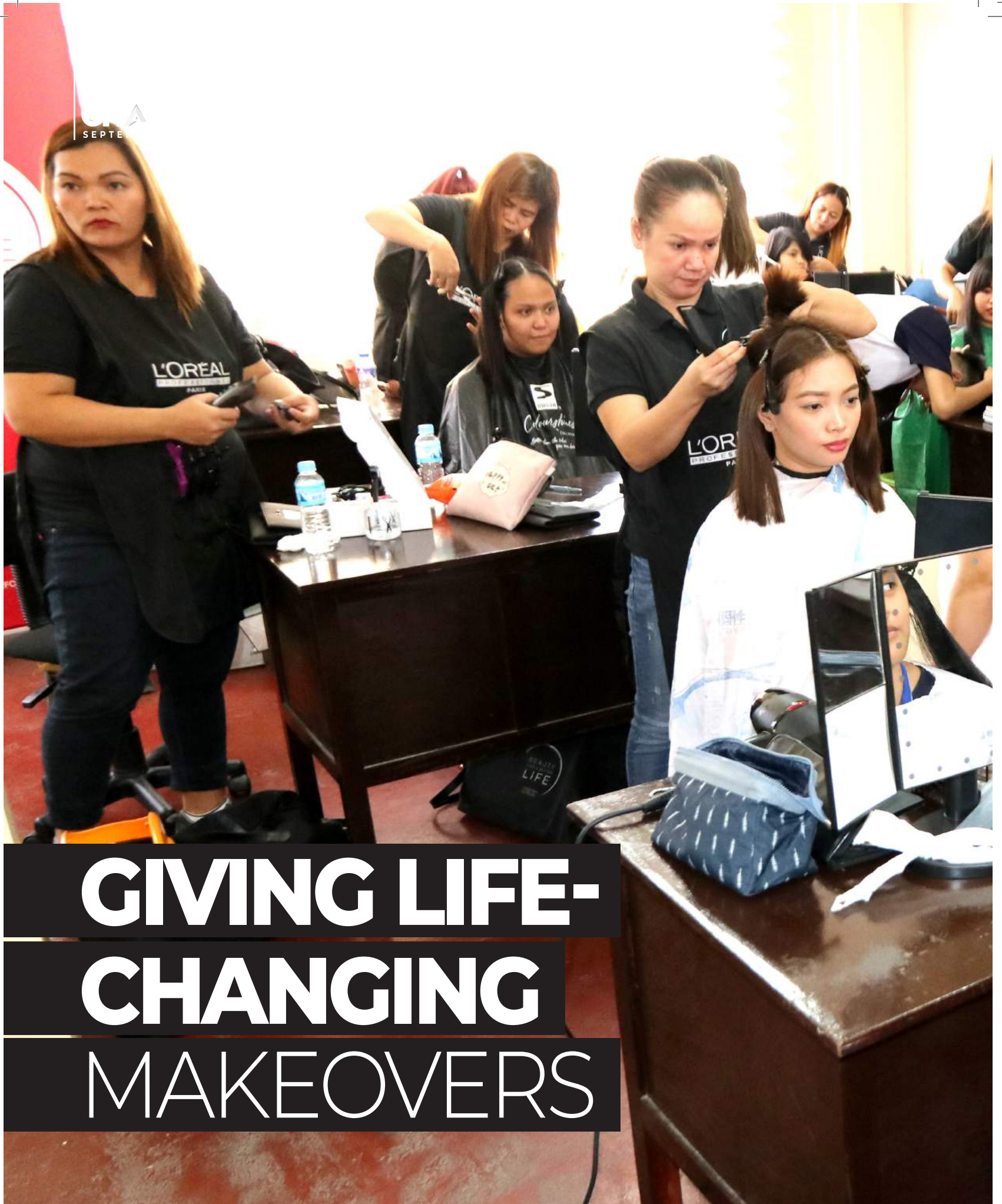
“This project is continuously helping us until today. This is the kind of project that we need, more stable and long-term. Through our earnings, we are able to support the needs of our kids in school and pay for daily expenses at home. Whenever a member needs financial assistance, especially during emergencies, the association is always ready to lend money from its savings. But of course, we need to manage the funds judiciously so when another member needs financial help, we will be ready to assist him, too,” he added.

A man with short dark hair, wearing an orange and navy blue polo shirt with a small logo on the chest, blue jeans, and a watch on his left wrist. He is standing in a lush green forest with sunlight filtering through the trees. The background is slightly blurred, focusing on the man.

But more than the alternative livelihood that it brings to them and the residents of Sitio Apia, the project has also motivated their community to find better ways of caring for the environment.

“This project is beneficial and addresses both our economic and environment concerns. It is really hard to encourage people to stop kaingin and charcoal-making but when you came, you made us see things in a different perspective. You provided alternatives for people to earn a living while caring for the environment. We hope that this project continues and reaches more communities, so we could stop illegal activities that are damaging our environment. We also hope that even in our small way, we can help communicate the goal of PBSP to other people’s organizations and residents in nearby barangays,” said Marcelino.

ANTONIO MARCELINO and members of Apia United Farmers Association, Inc. help rehabilitate the Marikina Watershed by providing seedlings for the tree-planting initiatives of Aboitiz and PBSP.



GIVING LIFE- CHANGING MAKEOVERS



With more than 15 million Filipinos living in poverty, providing for the basic needs of every poor family has become an everyday challenge.

There are parents who could not afford to send their children to school because they could not find better jobs. There are students who are forced to stop studying to earn a living. There are many other people who could not reach their dreams due to lack of opportunities and financial difficulties.

These situations push PBSP and its member-companies to work together to improve access to jobs through skills upgrading and employment facilitation while expanding economic opportunities with the engagement of the private sector and partner organizations.

L'Oréal Philippines, Inc. partnered with PBSP to provide livelihood opportunities to underprivileged men and women through Beauty for a Better Life (BFBL). The project trains community members on beauty and hairdressing techniques, as well as personality development and financial literacy. The three-month training also includes hands-on exercises and internship at L'Oréal partner-salons. Some of the trainees were absorbed by these salons after the training.

Launched in April 2017, BFBL has already trained 185 community members in Brgy. Sto. Niño and Brgy. Jesus dela Peña in Marikina City; Brgy. Sto. Rosario Kanluran in Pateros; Brgy. Western Bicutan in Taguig; and Brgy. Bagong Nayon in Antipolo, Rizal.

Through seven batches of training, BFBL has helped around 70 percent of the trainees to be employed in salons or to put up their own small businesses.

In this section, we will share with you inspiring stories of our BFBL beneficiaries who were able to turn their life around through the skills they learned from the intervention.



Mark David Galang has been to a lot of job interviews and was able to pass all of it but every time, he would always end up not getting the job.

“Whenever I would reveal the problem with my club foot (a foot that is rotated internally at the ankle), their (interviewers’) tone would get different, and I end up going home, still jobless. It was really depressing. It has been that way for two months of job hunting in Makati, Ortigas, and other places,” lamented the 24-year-old Galang from Marikina.

Galang goes to job interviews in padded rubber shoes because wearing shoes, more so the customary black leather shoes hurt his feet. This was one of the points raised during his interviews so he is forced to reveal his birth defect.

SURVIVING DISCRIMINATION

His club foot was also the reason why he had been bullied a lot in grade school. Galang wore only slippers to school every day.

“I had to transfer schools. I was so down and could no longer concentrate on my studies. I lost all my confidence. In high school, I became active in a church and they motivated me to consider therapy again. It was not successful though, but at least, I finished high school because of them,” he revealed.

Galang continued to pursue Business Management but he later quit to give way to his twin brother and his sister who was graduating from college at that time. He had to look for a job instead to help support his family. But this was where his job interview ordeals began.

“Discrimination is real. I spent time and money to go to these interviews and I always got a resounding ‘no.’ I almost won the “yes” four times but because I have a club foot, a PWD who can’t wear a pair of black shoes to work, I had no chance of getting the job,” he said.

He felt that even if his skills could match the best and the brightest people who wear black shoes he could never get the job because he could only stand, walk and run in rubber shoes.

MARK GALANG calls himself a ‘mobile salon’ because he travels using his scooter to do home service for his clients.

KICKING OFF HIS 'BLACK SHOES'

A struggling job-seeker gets to start his own business through a livelihood training from L'Oréal and PBSP

PASSION FOR LEARNING

After numerous tries, Galang finally got a call center job but he only lasted for a month. He got sick because he couldn't survive a graveyard shift.

"I thought of going back to college but I decided to look for another job. Since learning is my passion and I needed to earn, I enrolled in TESDA. I studied bartending, housekeeping and table setting because I wanted to work abroad too as a waiter. I got interested in massage, so I studied massage. You can earn a living without a boss. In massage, you can do that," he said.

Aside from wanting to have his own business someday, Mark is into grooming so he took up cosmetology. He met his girlfriend in TESDA, and they later worked in a salon and spa in Marikina for PhP1,000 a month allowance and a 60/40 per head daily commission pay. He also learned nail art and paraffin waxing in the salon.

"I told myself, if people don't want to hire me, then I'll just put up my own business. I had to learn all of it because massage, nail art, makeup and foot spa are package promos in the salon," Galang added.

THE OPPORTUNITY OF A LIFETIME

His skills were further developed when he got accepted in L'Oréal Philippines' Beauty for a Better Life (BFBL) Program.

"A friend who was part of the first batch of graduates of the program encouraged us to study cosmetology again and I got interested because it is L'Oréal and they give out allowances for trainees. So, I pursued the training," he said.

Galang was one of the 22 trainees of BFBL's Batch 3 in Brgy. Sto. Niño, Marikina who received daily allowances during the three-month training. For him, the training didn't only teach about hairstyling and the international standards of hair care. They learned how to do pricing and rates for their services, including matching the product mixes against the prices.

"I got hospitalized a couple times during the training because I had to do some side jobs at night. Among these was cleaning air conditioners which was really tiring for me. There was even a time when I went straight to the training right after I got out of the hospital. I really wanted to finish the course so I pushed myself to learn everything. I saw my future in this, my last chance so I strived to do it," Galang pointed out.

After the training, Galang was offered a regular job at his on-the-job-training (OJT) salon but he refused and chose to be a freelance hairstylist instead.

"Since I already established a network of customers and I have a big L'Oréal credential in my portfolio, I knew I could do this on my own. And since I have my girlfriend with me, we can work together to get customers," he said.

THE FRUITS OF HARDWORK

Galang and her girlfriend set up an online homeservice page on social media. They were able to serve an average of two to three customers a day who live as far as Fairview to Antipolo, Rizal.

"I never experienced having no customers. We offered promos and freebies to our clients to stay competitive. Even if I get lower than usual sales, as long as I get some, it's okay. At first, we also had to endure the daily commute while carrying all the equipment, mixtures and products. Later, through our savings, we were able to buy a scooter that made it easier for us to do our work," he shared.

From September 2018 to January this year, Galang was able to earn more than PhP100,000 from his rebonding and other hair care services.

"I bought my scooter and my phone. I have savings, and I can give bigger share for the bills at home. All the rejections that I got from companies served as my motivation to strive more, to study and learn a lot. I don't need to wear black shoes anymore. In fact, I am now wearing a comfortable white slip-on rubber shoes," he exclaimed.

While he is already reaping the fruits of his hardwork, Galang is still bent on further honing his craft. He plans to take further studies in massage, cosmetology, hair and makeup.

"I am an NC2-holder now for hairdressing, thanks to L'Oréal and PBSP. I am really grateful to them because I carry their name and I am way ahead of other hairstylists because I am a graduate of Beauty for a Better Life. Thanks also to PBSP for giving me the opportunity. They even supported us to get OJT and they will not stop until they see us get hired," Galang said.

A BEAUTIFUL JOURNEY

A mother of two finds purpose in sharing beauty with others

For 30-year-old mother Xavrina Traya, providing for her two children used to be her only priority in life.

She never thought that joining a livelihood training would eventually lead her to rediscover a new sense of purpose, and this is by doing what she loved to do when she was a teenager: making people beautiful through hair and makeup.

A ROUGH CHILDHOOD

Traya was only seven when her parents separated. She and her two siblings were left in the custody of their mother. But she was treated differently and often abused physically.

“My mother would beat me up, tie me to the stairs and drip candle wax on my feet. I thought back then that maybe, she was angry at my father and she vented it out on me,” she recounted.

When her father came to visit and saw the bruises on her body, he took her away to Cavite. They didn’t even bring any of her clothes. Her father just wanted to give Traya a fresh start.

But starting a new life in Cavite was not as easy as she thought. Used to being with her siblings, she felt lonely in her new home.

“My father was a driver and mechanic in a company. He would take me with him to work. That was the reason why even at such a young age, I was already aware of the responsibilities of having to earn a living,” Traya said.

True enough, she ended up as a working student in high school even though her father supported her. She

didn’t want to rely on him too much so she took part-time jobs to pay for her expenses. In her free time, she would sell makeup and beauty products.

A TASTE OF INDEPENDENCE

Traya quit her studies in second year high school to work full-time as a sales lady in a store selling beauty products. Later, she moved from one job to another.

“I was a contractual worker for several shops and even experienced working at a gasoline station. Then I found a job at a salon and spa. By day, I was an assistant and at night, I worked as a therapist. I also learned the basics of hairdressing,” she said.

Traya eventually left her father to live with her boyfriend in Marikina. That was where they started a family.

GOING BACK TO SCHOOL

In 2017, while waiting for her son at school, Traya was approached by a staff at their barangay hall who invited her to join the Beauty for a Better Life (BFBL) Program of L’Oreal Philippines, Inc., implemented in partnership with PBSP.

“I thought it was a good opportunity, so I decided to apply. But I didn’t know if I would be accepted because I felt I wasn’t good enough. I even had difficulty filling out the application forms in English,” she admitted.

Fortunately, Traya was accepted as part of the first batch of trainees of BFBL in Sto. Niño, Marikina. During the training, she learned beauty and hairdressing techniques, as well as personality development and financial literacy.

“My biggest challenge was balancing my job and the training. I would attend the training in the afternoon and do massage therapy jobs in the evening. I couldn’t give up my job because I needed to earn to support my family,” Traya said.

Even with her salon experience, the training felt like she was learning everything for the first time.

“The training was really different and in a whole new level, compared to what I learned at the salon. Apart from the skills and techniques, I also learned how the different hair treatments and chemicals affected different hair types. Before, I just based the hair treatments on estimations but through BFBL, I learned the proper way of doing hair treatments like rebonding and coloring,” she explained.

Apart from the lectures and hands-on exercises, Traya experienced an on-the-job training at a L’Oreal partner-salon which further developed her craft.

GROWING HER BUSINESS

After graduating from BFBL program, Traya immediately started her home service salon. Her husband, who is very supportive of her work, helped set up a Facebook account where she could post her services and interact with clients. A client also recommended her to others which helped Traya grow her business even more.

“During peak seasons, I would earn as much as PhP11,000 in a week. I would do hair and makeup services for weddings or hair treatments for clients all over Manila. Sometimes, I would even get three home service bookings in a day,” she revealed.

When Traya started getting clients from neighboring provinces, she decided to turn the balcony of her house into a mini salon.

Apart from grooming her clients, she would also teach them how to care for their hair. Then, she would sell haircare products to complement the hair treatments that she offers.

"It's saddening when you see the damaged hair of your clients. I even had a customer who was almost balding because she did not know that constant bleaching would damage her hair. I had to give her hair treatment several times to help her hair grow back," said Traya.

LEARNING NEVER STOPS

Managing her mini salon and home service business is hard work though.

"There are times when I have to work until two in the morning, to be able to attend to three home service customers who are having their hair treated, rebonded and colored. It's hard when you're doing it all on your own," Traya revealed.

Going home at the wee hours of the morning was also dangerous. One time, she almost got mugged on her way home, after finishing a home service job at 3 a.m.

Nevertheless, Traya is determined to excel in her work. And even if she is already a National Certificate-holder from the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), she believes that learning never stops.

"For hairstylists like me, the only way for you to improve is to learn from your mistakes. My work isn't always perfect but I don't let that discourage me. I try and try until I perfect my craft," said Traya who also shares tips and experiences with other hairstylists.

Her ultimate goal is to open her own salon someday. Traya plans to further develop her career while still keeping her massage therapy job as an additional source of income. She also plans to buy a vehicle to make her home service job easier.

If she also gets the opportunity to work abroad to earn more for her family, she would definitely go for it.

"I wouldn't have gotten this far if it wasn't for the training. Almost all the things that I have now were obtained from my income from the mini salon and home service business. I'm really thankful that I was part of BFBL. It was the first time that I really felt like I had a mother taking care of me," Traya said.

APART FROM her home service business, Xavrina Traya also earns income from her balcony-turned-mini salon.



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