

CHANGED

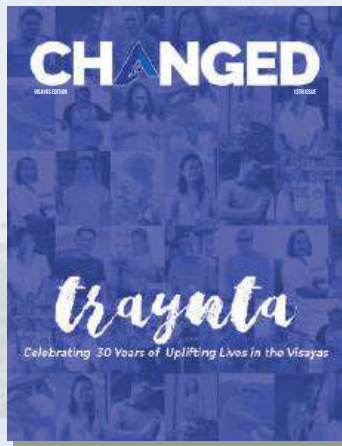
VISAYAS EDITION

13TH ISSUE

Isayanta

Celebrating 30 Years of Uplifting Lives in the Visayas

ABOUT THE COVER



On the cover are the silhouettes of Visayas individuals who all benefited from our programs on Health, Education, Environment, and Livelihood. By sustaining our brand of social development for 30 years in the Visayas, we have helped improve the lives of these people and influenced them to also change their communities for the better.

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.

JEROME DACLISON
EDITOR - IN - CHIEF

RACHEL BARAWID
MANAGING EDITOR

REGGIE MARIE BARRIENTOS
WRITER | PHOTOGRAPHER

MICHEEL MORADA
GRAPHIC ARTIST

JUVY DOMINGO
PRODUCTION COORDINATOR

VISAYAS REGIONAL CENTER
PBSP-GLOBAL FUND TEAM
DIRK ALFARO
VILMA ESOTO
CONTRIBUTORS



CHANGED What's Inside

04 | Message from Manuel V. Pangilinan

05 | Message from Jose Antonio Y. Aboitiz

06 | 30 Years of Uplifting Lives in the Visayas

08 | The 1980s: Every Man's Land

PBSP's 20-year assistance in Negros focused on legal land ownership, food sufficiency, and enterprise development

10 | Turning Crops into Gold

Twenty years after PBSP exited their community, farmer Rudy de Pedro still continues to reap the fruits of its assistance

12 | The 1990s: Helping People Help Themselves

PBSP's assistance in Bohol produced self-sufficient rice farmers and dependable cooperatives

14 | Conduits of Change

From a simple consumer store with 26 members, the Carmen Multi-Purpose Cooperative grows into an 8,000-member organization for farmers

16 | The 2000s: Beyond Reforestation

An overview of the Save the Buhisan Watershed Program

18 | 'Culturevolution'

From "public enemy" to leader of the group, Guillermo Largo now dedicates his life to helping his community grow

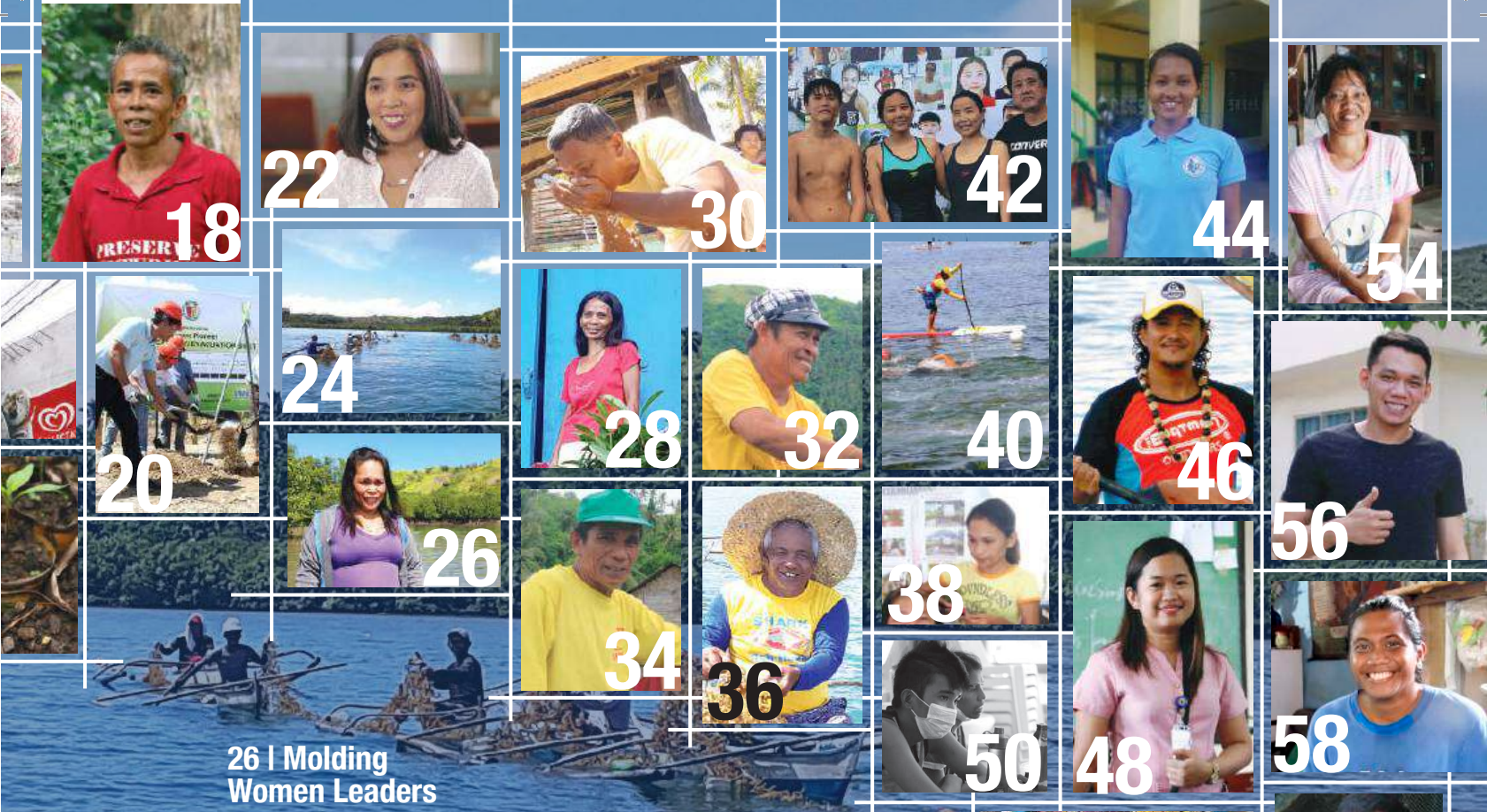
20 | The 2010s: The Height of Corporate Engagement

From corporate philanthropy and social investments, PBSP continues to evolve and develop its unique core competence

22 | Gaining Cash from Trash

Through passion, ingenuity, and strategic partnerships, an accessories company owner grew her business and helped underprivileged youths at the same time

24 | Sustainable Poverty Reduction in Daram, Samar



18

22

30

42

44

54

20

24

26

28

32

40

46

56

34

36

38

50

48

58

52

60

62

26 | Molding Women Leaders

A barangay chief's wife empowers female constituents through livelihood activities

28 | Finding the Much-Needed Relief

A family of 12's basic need is met through the provision of a household toilet

30 | The Gift of Water

An island barangay of small fishermen and farmers get their dream of a potable water system

32 | Protector of the Seas

A local leader in Daram, Samar finds strength and confidence in safeguarding marine treasures

34 | The Big Shift

A former non-believer of associations finds trust in community leadership to a better life

36 | Taking Risks

A fisherman from Daram, Samar opts for a better life with seaweed farming

38 | A Brighter Future Awaits

A mother of three gets to augment family income through hairdressing skills she learned from Project AWESOME

40 | United to build schools

42 | The Family that Swims Together

A family of four goes full force in supporting a swim race that helps build schools on Olango island

44 | When Strangers Help

A downhearted teen finds renewed hope in the scholarship provided by PBSP through the Olango Challenge

46 | Cebu's 'Waterman'

A marshal of the Olango Challenge helps make a difference by pursuing his passion

48 | Work For It And It Will Come

With hardwork, resourcefulness, and help from donors, a cookery teacher is able to give the gift of quality education

50 | Overcoming Obstacles and Challenges of TB

52 | Stronger Together

A family of five overcomes MDR-TB and gets a better life with help from PBSP's TB program

54 | Rebirth of a Social Butterfly

An active housewife from an island in San Carlos City overcomes MDR-TB in spite of the odds

56 | Nothing Can Bring Him Down

For this former patient, MDR-TB didn't cripple him but made him even stronger

58 | Surviving the Second Time Around

The man resolves to be a better person after his two-time ordeal from TB

60 | Providing Treatment with a Heart

A nurse from San Carlos City commits to a life of service by treating patients with MDR-TB and helping them reintegrate in society

62 | The Job of Saving Lives

A banker gives up her lavish lifestyle to fulfil her passion to serve as a PMDT nurse

MESSAGE



It was in 1970 when 50 Philippine business leaders, in the middle of a heightening crisis, sought the need for a better country and decided that their resources can create a bigger impact when they are pooled together. This was how the Philippine Business for Social Progress or PBSP was formed, and as we sought to expand our reach to include the rest of the regions of the country, we opened our operations in the Visayas in 1988.

Today, we celebrate the PBSP Visayas Regional Center's 30 years of uplifting lives in the region. Since we opened our doors in 1988, we have changed the lives of individuals and communities in the region through our various programs on health, education, environment, and livelihood and enterprise development.

Some programs in the past that serve as highlights in PBSP's existence in the Visayas are the Area Resource Management or ARM program in Bohol and the Samar Development Program. These two programs were considered as models of success in uplifting the lives of people in the agriculture and fisheries sector. The Cebu Hillylands Development Program and Save the Buhisan Watershed initiatives are a showcase of watershed management and livelihood development that contribute to biodiversity conservation and improvement in household income. These served as signature programs that made PBSP a key player in the environment and livelihood sectors in the Visayas. These programs also promoted a more holistic and integrated approach in how we do programs and served as an avenue for companies to participate whether through giving or employee engagement.

The need for business sector involvement became even more relevant as we led more efforts that address the needs of communities following the devastation brought by super typhoon Yolanda. We launched Project New Dawn, raised more than PHP 290 million, and helped rebuild the lives of survivors through the provision of basic needs on health, education, shelter, and livelihood in Northern Cebu, Northern Iloilo, Samar, and Leyte.

On project management, we have also built our grant and social investment portfolio via our partnerships with foreign funding agencies like the US Agency for International Development, Karl Kübel Stiftung für Kind und Familie (Karl Kübel Foundation for Children and Families), The Global Fund, The International Rescue Committee, Lutheran World Relief, and the German and Australian Governments, among others.

As the needs of both business and communities expanded throughout the years, corporate engagement in the Visayas has evolved and companies have likewise adopted initiatives that create shared value. Companies have found value in applying core business competencies in providing solutions to social development problems. PBSP in the Visayas was at the forefront of promoting inclusive business or IB as a strategy through the Strategic Corporate-Community Partnership Engagement or SCOPE project funded by GIZ. This allowed PBSP to pilot IB models even before inclusive business became a buzzword.

As we celebrate 30 years of uplifting lives in the Visayas, we aspire to inspire a higher business sector involvement and establish a refreshed relevance in the region. Building on our years of experience, we have enhanced our strategy by investing our contributions in areas with the most need. We are making a big push to make collective impact work this coming fiscal year. Our programs on health, education, environment and livelihood are undertaken holistically to bring systemic solutions to societal problems in chosen sites and communities. We shall pursue partnerships among multiple stakeholders bound together by a common agenda, shared metrics, and mutually reinforcing interventions.

As a concrete example, we are continuing our investment on the Buhisan Watershed for another five years and will focus on needs-based solutions through our collective impact strategy. More than corporate giving, we wish to reach out to more of our members as mentors of all our project beneficiaries for their own development models. With you as our partners, let us continue to pool all our resources and pursue our agenda on health, education, sustainable livelihood and enterprise, and the environment.

Our ultimate goals for development remain challenging as we continue to contend with issues on poverty, unemployment, and climate change. However, let us be persistent in our stance to help this country through our collective response. We have done this successfully for the past 30 years here in the Visayas, and we intend to sustain this legacy with you, our partners, for the years and decades to come.

Let us continue to solve problems together and always be united to end poverty.


MANUEL V. PANGILINAN

Chairman of the Board of Trustees
Philippine Business for Social Progress

To our Visayas members, development partners, and friends,

This is a thrilling year for us: we just marked 30 years of uplifting lives in the Central Philippines through collective action. Having made it thus far, we pause to reflect on and celebrate what PBSP in the Visayas achieved, and look back at the impact made on the communities we helped through these three decades.

I am grateful to be a part of this occasion. Allowed to serve as your Visayas Regional Committee Chairman for a number of years, I personally witness how PBSP molds companies, communities, and stakeholders into a collective “agent” that stimulates development. It is with nostalgia and gratitude that we recall and realize how our contributions have given so much for the development of communities. It is with hope that we look forward to doing more of the same.

When we started our operations, the Cebu Hillylands, so vitally important to Metro Cebu, were in socio-economic stagnation and on the brink of ecological collapse. By planting millions of trees and pouring in livelihood support to our farmers, we now see a much healthier Cebu Hillylands with sustainably managed programs. Thousands of city residents are aware of its importance through the volunteerism we enabled.

Thirty years on, together, our efforts continue to provide more for communities through our Platforms for Collective Engagements on Health, Education, Environment and Livelihood. With our combined support, we stand our ground and fight against tuberculosis. We build basic local infrastructure such as community halls in far-flung places where important local decisions are made and organized so communities can make better decisions. Our Safe Motherhood Caravans have saved mothers and children from the horrors of post-natal mortality. Our classrooms and educational assistance enable students to reach higher education and get employment. Our needs-based approach to livelihood improves the lives of farmers and fisherfolk in Bohol, Samar, and Leyte.

The mainstreaming of Corporate Social Responsibility is probably PBSP’s most enduring legacy. PBSP in the Visayas certainly helped to bring this about. Many companies learned how to do it through our engagements. Many other foundations learned from our systems. Many social development professionals cut their teeth with us, and brought to others a wealth of experience. The importance of these intangible legacies are beyond measure.

I pray for your continued trust in our promise that every peso spent for the community has lasting and relevant impact. Our collective stance permitted us to provide large-scale relief, early recovery, and rehabilitation efforts during the Guinsaugon mudslide, Guihulngan and Bohol earthquakes, and Super Typhoon Yolanda. Our professional, trustworthy systems qualify us to implement outside aid. We continue our journey to find more innovative ways to fight the desperate poverty that overwhelms so many. By introducing the concept of inclusive business, we provide a new mode of expressing corporate citizenship that creates shared value—enabling business to fulfill its profit goals while affecting positive change in the lives of the poor.



With 30 years of experience in the Visayas and as PBSP approaches its 50th anniversary, we can claim that our brand of social development is effective and sustainable. As we embark on this huge challenge of transforming ourselves for the greater good, I have faith that you continue to partner with us to make life better for Filipinos.

Truly yours,

JOSE ANTONIO Y. ABAITIZ

Trustee and Visayas Regional Committee Chairman
Philippine Business for Social Progress



30 YEARS OF UPLIFTING LIVES IN THE VISAYAS

The Visayas region boasts of rich coastlines and watersheds, allowing it to be more self-sufficient than its neighbors. However, poverty still remains high in the region, which mostly affects landless farmers, fisherfolk, and urban workers.

Through its sustainable solutions, PBSP in the Visayas has taught many businesses to be more responsible corporate citizens by improving the lives of the poor. Together with its member-companies, PBSP has provided health care for mothers and persons with tuberculosis, improved the quality of basic education in public schools, restored both upland and coastal environments, and increased the livelihood opportunities of farmers and fisherfolk.

In this special Visayas issue of CHANGED, we will share with you significant innovations and initiatives that not only changed the landscape of social development in the Visayas but also made an impact in the communities we served through the decades.



PBSP'S NEGROS OCCIDENTAL
Development Assistance Program
focused on welfare assistance
through rice subsidy, backyard
vegetable gardening, and community
organizing so communities affected
from the sugar crisis could reach
a level of subsistence, and food
sufficiency.

THE 1980s

EVERY MAN'S LAND

PBSP's 20-year assistance in Negros focused on legal land ownership, food sufficiency, and enterprise development

In the 1980s, Negros Occidental produced 68 percent of the country's sugar needs, making it the "Sugar Bowl of the Philippines." But it was the province's dependence on sugar that also made it susceptible to social polarization.

Landowners would require a large volume of labor force, mostly landless workers, to run the sugar plantations year-round. When sugar prices plummeted in the world market and rocked the province's sugar production in 1985, more than 200,000 sugar workers were left unemployed and famished. Another problem was the continuing plight of landless rural workers who were affected by the national agenda on agrarian reform.

These issues prompted PBSP to lay out a provincial strategy that focused on transforming landless sugar workers and marginal farmers into productive, organized, and independent land owners.

From the strategy, PBSP created the Negros Occidental Development Assistance Program which focused on welfare assistance through rice subsidy, backyard vegetable gardening, and community organizing. The purpose was to enable communities affected from the sugar crisis to reach a level of subsistence and food sufficiency.

In later years, the program evolved from backyard farming for food sufficiency to entrepreneurship development for income augmentation. Its focus shifted to providing technical and legal assistance for land ownership, disseminating appropriate farm technologies, and financing for agricultural processing and marketing. It united community-based organizations and trained them on handling marketing and post-production activities.

For the program, PBSP also focused on creating institutional alliances that would support agrarian reform. It developed the capabilities of various organizations to tackle land transfer and agrarian community development activities.



LANDLESS FARMERS received technical and legal assistance for land ownership, appropriate farm technologies, and agricultural financing from the program.

PBSP collaborated with the provincial government, the Department of Agrarian Reform, community organizations, and the Philippine National Bank. Through this combined assistance, PBSP was able to increase the productivity and net income of farmers, distribute 15,000 hectares of land to qualified beneficiaries, and develop functional organizations with sustained socioeconomic activities.

There is a certain routine that 70-year-old Rudy de Pedro religiously follows on a daily basis.

Mornings will find him rising with the sun and eating breakfast with his family. Once breakfast is done, the real grind starts. His hours are mostly spent tending his vegetable plots where he primarily gets his food and drinking coconut water from trees he planted years ago.

While his son takes care of the goats and chickens, he would visit his *buyo* (betel leaf) gardens for harvestable leaves he sells every day. By the time his wife would call them for lunch, he and his son already filled up a basket of *buyo* and vegetables they will sell to the community market in the afternoon.

On certain seasons, there are other tasks he has to add to his routine. He would need additional help harvesting fruits from his orchards. And when he has free time, he would visit his two-hectare forest for firewood or visit the creek where his cut flowers are in bloom. He would harvest some of them on occasions they are in demand.

His options of earning income have become very wide that he no longer worries about the future, especially that he had already led all his children to better lives. De Pedro credits his current quality of life to the support PBSP provided him 20 years ago.

RUDY DE PEDRO shows off his produce from the farm he improved with the help of technologies he learned from PBSP.

TURNING CROPS INTO GOLD

Twenty years after PBSP exited their community, farmer Rudy de Pedro still continues to reap the fruits of its assistance

"I owe my life to PBSP because it was the only NGO who helped me and taught me all that I know now. If I have a better life now, this is all because PBSP did not give up on me," the resident from Barangay Ilihan of Bago City shared.

AGROFORESTRY IS KEY

De Pedro was a beneficiary of the land reform program that may have blessed him with the ultimate abundance—20 hectares of land—but he had no idea how it could provide him with the key to his prosperity.

For him, the only way he could earn more was to clear more land for more crops to grow. He was a little skeptical when PBSP offered a new technology that would let him earn 10 times more than what he usually had with a smaller land. He became more hesitant when PBSP told him that a portion of his land would be dedicated purely as a forest, which meant he was hindered to cut trees from the land he just acquired.

Still, he continued to join PBSP's causes to see if the promises indeed

came true. What also made him think differently was the fact that PBSP told them they will be staying with them for years. So he gave PBSP a chance, something he never regretted and was very thankful for.

From the intervention, he and a few members were formed into an association where they learned how to be collaborative and dependable leaders. Aside from receiving training on agroforestry, they were given seed capital to plant forest trees, fruit trees, and high-value crops. Since de Pedro's land included a creek, he was taught to grow torch flowers along the banks so he could also earn from them.

"As a farmer, my first priority is always my family. The environment will be second. But PBSP taught me how important our forest is too, especially that it is a watershed. I also learned to earn in better ways by protecting the environment," De Pedro said.

When he had his very first harvest and earned PhP1,000, the biggest he

earned in his life so far, de Pedro was so enthusiastic.

BOOSTING PRODUCTIVITY

Now, after 20 years, de Pedro still reaps the wonders of the technology he learned from PBSP. Aside from his jackfruit orchard, he also has papaya, pineapple, rambutan, durian, mangosteen, and lanzones.

He continues to tend to his forests, which is now a source of seedlings for forest trees. From time to time, organizations still go to him to ask for supplies of seedlings. From his continued development of the land, he now has two *buyo* plantations. He is the main supplier of *buyo* in their market.

Because of his steady supply of produce, he could earn more than PhP1,000 weekly from his *buyo*. On certain months, he would earn as much as PhP6,000 just from the harvests of his fruits and cut flowers. Some of the income will come out as savings since he no longer needs to spend much for his food due to the vegetable farm he also grows.

With his earnings, he was able to send his daughter abroad to work. His two other daughters, on the other hand, were able to finish school from the income from his farm's produce.

These days, he is focused on passing on the technology he learned from the project to his son so his family will be continually blessed with food and income even when he is gone. Such is the power PBSP gave him.

"Before, my concern was how to earn money for my family. Today, my concern is how to take care of my farm now that I am getting old. I do not even have enough time to take care of all of them, even with my son helping me. But I continue to find the time to tend to all of it because I know how much PBSP invested (on me). I want this investment to last and to still be enjoyed by my heirs," De Pedro said.



RUDY DE PEDRO is now the main supplier of *buyo* in their local market.

THE 1990s

HELPING PEOPLE HELP THEMSELVES

*PBSP's assistance in Bohol produced self-sufficient
rice farmers and dependable cooperatives*

The 90s witnessed how PBSP's assistance shifted to providing solutions to poverty through an area-based approach. In the Visayas, Bohol was chosen as one of the areas for its robust economy driven by tourism and agriculture.

Bohol's rural areas are made up mostly of mere farmers whose only source of income is through rice production. At that time, insufficient irrigation systems led farmers to depend on rain-fed mechanisms when planting rice, making productivity suffer. Inadequate threshing and drying facilities, low milling recovery rates, and poor market strategies led to the high cost of capital inputs.

This made the farmers largely dependent on credit facilities. The lack of good credit facilities hindered them from achieving yield targets. The low buying price of rice upon harvest also further decreased the rice farmers' incomes. Because of this, most of them chose to sell their lands which were converted into residences and other establishments. This further put the province's food sufficiency at risk.

In 1993, PBSP and its partners implemented the Bohol Area Resource Management program that focused on improving the productivity of rice farmers. The program invested on pre- and post-harvest facilities to address productivity losses during production. Small water impounding facilities were constructed to improve low production among rain-fed farms. These forms of assistance helped increase the rice cropping cycles of farmers from two to three every year, increasing their productivity.

The provision of trainings was also a central aspect of the program. It trained barefoot technicians, who in turn, established model farms that served as show windows for other farmers to emulate. Additional farming technologies such as the integrated farming system and organic farming were also introduced. Capacity

building interventions were also provided to its local proponents, the cooperatives, so they can sustainably manage additional services offered to their farmer-members. These included the provision of revolving and marketing funds as well as the construction of rice mills and warehouses.

Recognizing the strength of the tourism sector, the program developed linkages between farmers and tourism establishments such as restaurants, resorts, and other destinations mapped out in the province's tourism value chain in order to help establish farmers as possible direct suppliers to these industries.

Through the program, more than 1,000 small farmers sustainably improved their income through integrated farming production. The installation of additional facilities helped reduce rice production losses, while the improved access to credit loans, additional farming technologies, and capacity building trainings helped develop cooperatives and farmers into leaders and entrepreneurs.



THE PROGRAM trained partner-cooperatives to enable them to sustainably manage PBSP's interventions.

A photograph showing two farmers working in a rice field. In the foreground, a man wearing a straw hat and a plaid shirt is bent over, planting rice seedlings in the water. Behind him, another person wearing a white cap and a blue shirt is also working. The field is filled with young rice plants and muddy water.

THE BOHOL AREA RESOURCE MANAGEMENT Program helped improve the productivity of rice farmers by providing pre- and post-harvest facilities, constructing small water irrigation facilities, training local partners and cooperatives, and introducing integrated farming technologies.



CIRICIO BONTOG is among the beneficiaries of the Bohol Area Resource Management Program which helped grow his cooperative from a consumer store into an association that offers bank-like services and loans.

CONDUITS OF CHANGE

From a simple consumer store with 26 members, the Carmen Multi-Purpose Cooperative grows into an 8,000-member organization for farmers

It started out as a simple and rented consumer store in Carmen, Bohol that offered retail and micro-lending services. Years later, the association now called as the Carmen Multi-Purpose Cooperative (CMPC) has evolved into an association that already offers bank-like services, including car loans with the lowest collaterals in the province.

This is how the cooperative has become financially secure. Riding on its success is manager, Ciricio Bontog, who feels both glad and challenged on his task of sustaining the cooperative's legacy.

As one who has grown with the cooperative since its humble beginnings, Bontog could only credit CMPC's achievements to PBSP. He was still one of the group's lending collectors when PBSP visited their store and offered to make it one of its project partners for its 10-year program.

After undergoing a rigorous institutional building process facilitated by PBSP, CMPC received its first project assistance funded by PBSP—its own building so it no longer needed to rent a space to operate. From then on, Bontog knew PBSP really meant business when dealing with them.

"We wouldn't be anything if PBSP did not come here and took a chance on us as one of its partners. Slowly and steadily, we were given project after project and before we knew it, our membership grew and so did our services," he shared.

BOHOL ARM

CMPC was organized in 1989 to help address the financial needs of its members who are poor rice farmers and small entrepreneurs, and uplift their standard of living by offering micro-lending services at low rates.

This was the reason PBSP chose CMPC to be its local partner when it launched its Bohol Area Resource Management (ARM) program in 1993. ARM aims to help transform farmers into farmer-entrepreneurs.

After PBSP provided the trainings and the building, CMPC also received other kinds of assistance such as shredders, threshers and blowers; a warehouse for rice milling; and agricultural production loans. In turn, the cooperative allowed small farmers to rent out the facilities at low rates.

With CMPC, the program started disseminating new technologies to farmers so they could further increase their productivity. These technologies included vermi-composting, integrated farming, and the use of small water impounding systems for irrigation. Later on, the cooperative received grants from the project which were used as marketing and revolving funds to enable farmers to access loans at very affordable rates.

"One of our town's problems has always been about where our farmers can get capital and where to sell their products at higher prices so they can continue their farming activities. This was where PBSP wanted us to come in," Bontog said.

These components, coupled with PBSP's constant mentoring sessions, all helped ensure the cooperative's capability in managing projects, so farmers could depend on them for farm productivity needs. Through the grants and additional services, CMPC became the consolidator of all the farmers' harvests and served as direct outlets so farmers no longer had to worry about where to sell their products. To help them sell the products, PBSP linked CMPC with other establishments so the latter can have many market options.

HELPING THOSE IN NEED

Long after the program ended, CMPC continues to expand their services to its over 1,000 farmer-members. They now help train other farmer associations on PBSP technologies to help improve their yields. The cooperative also started streamlining its financial processes to ensure that all member contributions are well accounted for. As a result, they helped grow their farmers' own funds by being members of the cooperative.

CMPC also learned how to manage and grow their funds and started investing on other services. The organization expanded their consumer stores to five more branches in Bohol. Now their products, including those from the farmers, will have more outlets. Aside from consumer goods and farm products, they also sell organic fertilizer, mobile phones, and prepaid load.

Its good standing also attracted more funding from the Visayas Cooperative Development Center, the National Confederation of Cooperatives, Department of Labor and Employment, Cooperative Development Authority, and the Department of Agriculture. These engagements further allowed CMPC to expand their lending portfolio, open money transfer franchises, and engage in bank-like services.

To date, CMPC has more than PhP64 million worth of assets from only PhP28,000 some 29 years ago. It has expanded PBSP's building to a two-story facility and now caters to more than 8,000 members. Its employees also grew from six to 34.

The most important lesson PBSP taught CMPC was on how to help others in need. Bontog takes this mandate to heart. Now that CMPC is in the position of helping those in need, the cooperative began sponsoring events led by local government units which cater to small farmers. They also provide free trainings on licensing and accreditation to those who wanted to form associations. When a strong earthquake hit Bohol in 2013, CMPC was among those who provided free grocery goods to the victims.

"After everything that PBSP gave us for free, I felt that we should also give back now that CMPC has grown. I remember that PBSP's slogan was 'Helping people help themselves,' and as one that used to be their local partner, we wanted to emulate that, too," he said.

SINCE 2008, PBSP invested in the Buhisan Watershed to help sustain the water supply in Cebu through massive reforestation. The program also seeks to improve the lives of poor upland farmers through alternative livelihood opportunities, and transform the watershed into an eco-tourism destination.

THE 2000s

BEYOND REFORESTATION

An overview of the Save the Buhisan Watershed Program

Cebu is a bustling metropolis which contributes more than a fourth to the Philippines' economy with its export processing zones, ICT centers, tourist destinations, and other foreign and local investments. It is blessed with rich coastlines and watersheds, allowing it to be more self-sufficient than its neighbors.

One of its ecological treasures is the Buhisan Watershed and Forest Reserve located within the 28,300-hectare Central Cebu Protected Landscape (CCPL), Metro Cebu's source of water. While the smallest of the five protected areas within CCPL covering only 631 hectares, the Buhisan Watershed performs an important function for Metro Cebu's socio-economic stability.

It supplies water to the 106-year-old Buhisan Dam, the first water system that was built in Cebu to provide clean water for the people and effectively eradicate the spread of cholera, a water-borne disease that became the primary cause of death during the early 1900s. It is the only surface water source in Cebu operated by the Metropolitan Cebu Water District.

With more than 100 species of plants thriving in the watershed's hills and woodlands, the watershed is also a natural sanctuary for various species of butterflies. These ecological and historical attributes make the Buhisan watershed a favored spot for conservation and a viable site for sustainable eco-tourism projects.

However, the watershed is continuously haunted by threats of water shortage for the past 25 years. A study revealed that by 2030, Metro Cebu will eventually run out of water if efforts are not carried out immediately. Poverty remains high in its four communities or barangays, namely: Buhisan, Pamutan, Sapangdaku and Toong. The volume of silt deposits in the dam decreased its water capacity by as much as 60 percent.



IN THE SAVE THE BUHISAN WATERSHED Program, community-based organizations are tapped to grow, plant, and maintain hectares worth of native forest trees.

In 1989, the Cebu City government called for the direct involvement of the business sector on the rehabilitation of the CCPL. Years later, PBSP started with its annual reforestation caravan as the business sector's response to environmental protection. In 2008, the Save the Buhisan Watershed Project was launched to help sustain the water supply for Metro Cebu, improve lives of poor households through alternative and eco-friendly livelihood opportunities, and transform the watershed into a sustainably managed eco-tourism destination. Through the project, PBSP created strong links among stakeholders for the provision of livelihood options and enterprises, capacity building of community-based organizations, governance, and environmental rehabilitation.

Now, the project has become a driving force for companies to become more conscious of the environmental impact of their business operations and a push towards sustainability.

'CULTUREVOLUTION'

From "public enemy" to leader of the group, Guillermo Largo now dedicates his life to helping his community grow

The members of the Dulhogan People's Association (DPA) never thought that Guillermo "Guillie" Largo would become their leader, not even in a million years.

Largo hates the idea of change, which is not one of the qualities of a leader. In fact, he used to figure in the most outrageous encounters with DPA when it was just starting out. When he first chanced upon a cluster of forest tree seedlings diligently gathered by his wife, he stepped on the mass of greens in anger and left them to die.

But now he sits as the president of the association that is involved in livelihood activities such as selling seedlings, organic fertilizer, and ornamental plants as well as raising goats and providing catering services, among others. Aside from this, DPA continues to serve as a steward of PBSP's environmental projects by establishing, reforesting, and maintaining areas within the watershed.

"As a leader, I felt like making up for all the trouble I did by ensuring we continue to succeed as a group. It is a task I feel I would continue to do in a lifetime, even if I am no longer leading them," Largo said.

ACCEPTING CHANGE

Largo belongs to a family of farmers and charcoal makers in a remote upland community that, for so long, knew no other means of earning income. Like the rest of the dwellers of Sitio Dulhogan, an area in the Buhisan Watershed and Forest Reserve, he lived most of his years waking up at dawn so he could cut and scour wood for charcoal. This only changed when he got a temporary job as a welder in the city in 2006, and has since depended on this for his family's survival.

When PBSP first visited their community in 2008 and offered to organize an association that would help them find more sustainable means of income, he was the first person who refused the membership. He even tried to stop his wife from joining.

"I was really annoyed by it at first. I never saw the point of the group's meetings and their activities. I believed they were just wasting their time collecting seedlings which I think no one would buy. At that time, I

was thinking: 'Why would I trade my job, even if it was irregular, for something like this, which never has the assurance of succeeding in the first place?'" Largo revealed.

Still, upon the insistence of his wife, he helped her association gather and haul the seedlings on a delivery truck so they could be transported to PBSP's central nursery for reforestation. He personally saw the seedlings delivered to another watershed after a few months but he remained skeptical until money started pouring in. This finally convinced him to join the association.

As a member, he learned how to raise seedlings and produce organic fertilizer from vermicomposting, which PBSP buys for its reforestation activities in the area. The seedlings they raised are sold at PhP5 each, which PBSP buys every two weeks, while each sack of their vermicompost, which would usually take three months to produce, would cost PhP250.

While waiting for the seedlings to grow, they also plant and monitor other reforested areas in the watershed. For this, they are paid at least PhP5,000 per hectare. They learned how to do organic farming so they would know how to grow and sell high-value food crops and ornamental plants.

"From the association's first delivery of 10,000 seedlings, my wife got a share of PhP2,000. And when I started actively participating, we would earn PhP10,000 a month. I still had doubts, but when this continued for months, I finally believed in PBSP's sincerity to help us," he admitted.

ASSUMING THE LEADERSHIP ROLE

Life had been good to Largo and his family since DPA started implementing the projects. Their additional income allowed them to send their children to school and pay for his daughter's hospitalization bills when she gave birth. This would have been impossible if he only had his welding job to depend on.

But it was until he began leading their association in 2011 that Largo truly felt he had changed. When the previous leader

died and nobody was willing to take his place, he immediately accepted the position when it was offered to him. He thought it would be easy. But it was not.

Largo, who was used to fending for his own family, learned how to think and work as a group. He had to facilitate meetings and moderate minor disputes that come with them. He had to monitor projects and support his members. He had to speak out for his group in various activities and workshops. And Largo, who admits that he is quick to anger and does not take no for an answer, learned the best thing of all—patience and humility.

"A leader needs to be patient and understanding to his members. Even if some members have offended me, I have to learn how to step down and admit my own mistakes. Now, I learned how to listen to my members and consult the staff of PBSP whenever I have difficulties in running our projects," he said.

From 30 members, DPA has now expanded to more than 54 members and maintained more than 15 hectares in the Buhisan Watershed.

From PhP3,000 a month from charcoal making, they now earn an average of PhP5,000 to PhP8,000 monthly from growing seedlings. To help their families further, some of their male members were provided TESDA-accredited trainings on carpentry, masonry, plumbing, and tile-setting. They now own 12 goats for their livestock.

As for Largo, he continues to earn more than twice his usual weekly salary from just raising seedlings and selling organic fertilizer. And by raising and nursing seedlings, he has found avenues of nurturing not only himself, but his entire community, as well.

"I feel honored by the trust my members gave me. Now, it's my turn to make sure all our future plans to improve our group will succeed," Largo said.

**PRESERVE
FUTURE !!
SAVE OUR NATURE**

ARMED WITH TRAININGS and work experience he received from PBSP's projects, Guillermo Largo is more than ready to commit his life to serving the Buhisan Watershed which he calls home.



DUPONT PIONEER and **PBSP** officials lead groundbreaking rights for the construction of a farming academy in Abuyog, Leyte. The building now serves as a training and evacuation center in times of disasters.

THE 2010s

THE HEIGHT OF CORPORATE ENGAGEMENT

From corporate philanthropy and social investments, PBSP continues to evolve business sector involvement in social development

PBSP celebrates and honors its steadfast commitment to sustainable development through corporate social responsibility. Since it opened its operations in the Visayas in 1988, PBSP continues to strengthen its investments to those who matter most—the communities in most need of help.

When the United Nations (UN) ratified the declaration of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), PBSP was given the privilege to be the national secretariat of the UN's MDGs and the Business Sector for its proven track record and large-scale impact.

PBSP's role focuses on encouraging companies to support the achievement of the MDGs and consolidate the country's business sector response to the MDG challenge. In partnership with the National Economic Development Authority, PBSP developed four clusters to help attain the MDGs: Business and Poverty, Business and Education, Business and Health, and Business and Environment.



PBSP AND INTELICARE officials pose before the barangay health station they helped improve in Ajuy, Iloilo. The health station was damaged by Super Typhoon Yolanda in 2013.

In the Visayas, PBSP's collective efforts allowed it to achieve large-scale accomplishments that each player or stakeholder could not have achieved individually. Various companies still continue to partner with PBSP to help plant mangroves and indigenous trees, build potable water systems and schools, educate mothers on life-saving lessons, and share its expertise in dealing with local and global markets. These were all for the mission of helping the underprivileged rise from various forms of poverty.

Additionally, PBSP's pooled efforts helped complete all the rehabilitation interventions it committed to deliver after Super Typhoon Yolanda wrecked thousands of communities in 2013.

Aside from participating in various levels of engagement, companies also helped build better lives by encouraging involvement of employee-volunteers for better corporate engagement.

Through the years, PBSP saw that corporate giving through philanthropy and social investments were not enough. It needed to recalibrate its development programs to enable it to become sustainable. Rather than immediately going to the communities to introduce livelihood projects, PBSP first focuses on addressing company's needs for products and services, which can be addressed by committed partner communities belonging from the base of the pyramid.

This broadened and strategic approach was developed by PBSP and the German Agency for International Cooperation through the Strategic Corporate-Community Partnership for Local Development (SCOPE) program. SCOPE helps contribute to the sustained growth of the company while tapping its inherent potential to help eliminate poverty by engaging more communities into their core businesses. It has become a concrete example of inclusive business and inclusive growth which PBSP strongly advocates, making sure that the poorest of the poor are not left behind in its quest for economic and social development.

GAINING CASH FROM TRASH

Through passion, ingenuity, and strategic partnerships, an accessories company owner grew her business while helping underprivileged youth

Grace Querickiol-Niggel was still working as a Values Education teacher when she decided to follow her passion for hand-crafted designing and Cebuano culture, and opened her own accessories shop, Gracie Q Creative Designs, in 2007.

She knew that the local accessories scene was tough, so she chose the iconic *pusô* (hanging rice wrapped in woven coconut strips) to be her signature design in all her accessories. With her friends and connections, she also targeted to export her accessories so she can earn more income from them.

But while her business plan and designs may give her a competitive edge, she was searching for something more out of her

business—she wanted to change the lives of some communities. These were the out-of-school youth (OSY) of the Don Bosco Technological College (DBTC) where she was teaching.

The opportunity came when PBSP and the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) introduced the Strategic Corporate-Community Partnership for Local Development (SCOPE) program. Through this, she was also able to collaborate with DEDON, a famous Cebu-based furniture company, and DBTC.

"When they (GIZ and PBSP) started with that kind of partnership, the first thing I wanted to do was to train out-of-school youth. And with this partnership, we were able to see the potential of what we were doing because we had the same vision of solving poverty in our community in some way," Niggel disclosed.

THE DEDON CONNECTION

It was DEDON that donated the scrap materials which were then sewn by 15 students of DBTC. An advocate of sustainability, the company known for its hand-woven furniture was actively looking for ways to recycle their off-cuts and scrap materials and produce zero waste when PBSP and GIZ came in.

"We love sustainability, and we enjoy ensuring that every product we make is a story of eco-friendliness. We're looking at all the raw materials we consume to create our furniture, and we've been looking around the community here in Cebu who are developing some fantastic crafts," DEDON President Hervé Lampert said.

Lampert, who has always been impressed by the talent and creativity of Filipinos, also wanted to promote the art of weaving in Cebu. Hence, he found the partnership with DBTC and Gracie Q as the perfect fit to his personal passion and the company's eco-sustainability program.

"It's amazing when you look at those products, how they are able to turn some

simple scrap materials of fiber and fabric into beautiful accessories. So we offered the scrap materials that came out of manufacturing our furniture so the Gracie Q team can give a certain life to them," he added.

For Niggel, it was another unique design that was included into her business, as it also supports her passion of creating beautiful crafts out of nothing, like scraps.

"With this kind of program, I think I can do something to contribute to the community because of my experience," she said.

THE BIG BREAK

To prepare them for the job, the students first underwent DBTC's extensive one-year training on weaving. It was during this time that Niggel met 18-year-old Angelita "Ging Ging" Crimsal, a high school graduate who opted to look for other means of earning income for her family.

The training helped Crimsal weave the first *pusô* creations of Gracie Q Creative Designs, a feat that Crimsal takes pride in. More importantly, it allowed her to earn for her family and learn life skills to be more employable.

When the project ended after a year, Crimsal decided to try something else, bringing with her the skills and confidence she got out of her training and experience. But fate must have other plans for Niggel and Crimsal whose paths crossed again at the school where Niggel's child was studying. Crimsal was an administrative assistant at the school. At that time, Niggel was looking for someone to take over the operations of her company. When Niggel met Crimsal, she immediately offered the job to her. For the latter, the task was both a blessing and the most challenging one that she had to fulfill.

"I did not expect that she would give me this much responsibility. But one thing they taught me in the training is that we should always be willing to learn so I did



FROM ONE of the weavers, Angelita Crimsal is now in charge of the local operations in Gracie Q Creative Designs.



GRACE QUERICKIOL-NIGGEL'S sheer will to change the lives of the out-of-school youth led her to open a business that taps them as weavers of prime *puso* accessories.

not pass up the opportunity. I said yes," Crimsal recalled.

Apart from overseeing all company operations from logistics, deliveries, business permits, and negotiations, she also helps out in designing new products during exhibits. While these are bigger duties, Crimsal enjoys every one of it, especially when she negotiates with new suppliers and buyers. Equally important for her is maintaining the trust and confidence of Niggel.

"Miss Grace could choose anyone, but the moment she saw me, she chose me. It felt really good when she told me she trusted me because she saw how I worked during the training and knew I could deliver. That is a one-of-a-kind trust, and that is something that you should value in a lifetime," Crimsal said.

For Niggel, this gesture was about giving one the opportunity to excel and give back. "If you give them the right avenue, if you give them the right place where they can unleash their potential, they can do something. They can change their society. And that was what I want to do with Crimsal," she added.

GROWING WITH THE BUSINESS

When Gracie Q was just starting out, Niggel would also receive local orders that found her designs interesting. This prompted her to also expand her business locally and reach out to more communities in need of additional livelihood options.

Aside from her exports, Niggel also puts up stalls in boutique malls and resorts that showcase her products. There are instances too when she would showcase her now diverse product line in Manila, which includes accessories, bags, and purses made

of abaca, straw, and scrap fabric from DEDON.

To augment her workforce and meet the growing demand of her products, Niggel started engaging female weavers in one of DEDON's adopted communities. These women are now serving as Gracie Q's quality control personnel.

"That is one of my main goals, to help grow a community as my business also grows. I wanted to focus on those who are in need because it builds their self-confidence and gives them a sense of ownership. They are able to unleash their creativity. Before, they thought that they don't have anything to give or to contribute because they just come from a poor family. Yet, here they are now with me," Niggel said.

SUSTAINABLE POVERTY REDUCTION IN DARAM, SAMAR WITH KKS AND PBSP

In Daram, poverty remains high that families cannot provide the basic needs of their children such as food, clothing, shelter, medicine and education. The people have long depended on the bounty of the sea for income and subsistence.

However, fish catch is declining due to the degraded coastal environment and limited interventions toward its protection.

Daram was also not spared from the wrath of Super Typhoon Yolanda in 2013. Damaged fishing boats, destroyed coral reefs, and declining fish catch further crippled the livelihood of fishermen. The local government and the private sector provided capacity-building efforts on disaster risk reduction, particularly

on preparedness and immediate response, to help the affected communities.

This also prompted the German Government, the Karl Kübel Foundation for Children and Families (KKS), W.P. Smith, and the Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP) to implement a three-year project called **Sustainable Poverty Reduction of Fisherfolks in the Daram Municipality through Coastal Resource Management, Income Generation, and Community Mobilization**.

The project was designed to reduce poverty and create environmental and hygiene awareness among 600 marginal fishing families in 12 barangays. The project is also in cooperation with Daram Federation, people's organizations, and the local government of Daram.

IMPACT IN NUMBERS



350 families
with increased monthly
income



**7 seaweed
nurseries**
established



**13 people's
organizations**
capacitated to sustain
project activities



8.1 hectares
of mangrove areas
reforested



16.74 hectares
of marine sanctuaries established

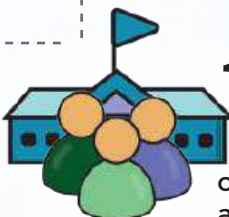


**210 seaweed
farmers**
with own farms

**6 people's
organizations**
engaged on
milkfish
production



PHP 300,000
provided to Daram
Federation for its
marketing initiatives

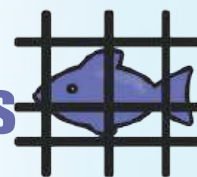


1,200 pupils
in **14 schools**
oriented on environmental
awareness and personal
hygiene

**210 individual
seaweed
drying
stations** established



**8 marine
fish cages**
established



505 families



trained and provided with
farm inputs for bio-intensive
gardening

**6 potable
water
systems** installed



**99 household
toilets** installed





ROSALINDA BOLOK leads the women of her barangay to be active members of the community.

MOLDING WOMEN LEADERS

A barangay chief's wife empowers female constituents through livelihood activities

As the first lady of Barangay Marupangdan in Daram, Samar, Rosalinda Bolok made it her task to empower her female constituents. While it is not really expected of her, it has become her personal advocacy as a women's advocate to champion the rights of her fellow wives and mothers in her area.

This stemmed from her observation that they have become too comfortable in their roles and reliant on others—particularly their husbands—to decide for them. This is something Bolok finds a little difficult to accept. An outspoken go-getter, she could easily initiate tasks and make decisions with the full support of her husband. Hence, she believes that to help improve their barangay, she needed to help them.

"Most of them are wives of fishermen and farmers who do not see their potential in their ability to give more help to their families. I wanted to change that because if there are more empowered women, we can have more active and participative residents who want a better life and a better community," Bolok said.

This was her reason for creating the Women's Group Organization of Marupangdan in 2007. Through the organization, she shares with her members the lessons she learned from her trainings and finds ways to engage them in activities that test their capabilities.

They started with more family-related tasks such as feeding programs for malnourished children and mini-fundraising events for their organization. Their biggest project came when KKS and PBSP brought their sustainable poverty reduction program to their barangay.

"When we first heard about the project, my husband had hesitations accepting because he did not know who will handle the task since it requires a people's group. I immediately offered our group because I know that the project will help improve the lives of our constituents," she added.

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDS

As co-implementers of the project, their first task was to establish and manage mangrove areas in their community. For Bolok, it was the perfect opportunity to showcase the skills and capabilities of their group.

It was their first biggest project, but they did not let that discourage them. To ensure its success, Bolok first saw to it that their members understand how the project can benefit them and their community so she could get their full cooperation. With PBSP's guidance, the members learned how to properly plant and take care of mangroves. Each of them also had assigned shifts in watching over the mangrove areas every day.

"When you manage mangrove areas, you need to nurture the mangroves so they can grow. And that's our innate skill as women, we make things grow well. We also have the patience to go out and watch after those plants as if they were our own children," Bolok shared.

From the initiative, the members learned how mangroves can protect their coastal areas from strong winds and typhoons and serve as areas for fish to breed and grow. This was proven by the different kinds of fish they would see on the mangrove areas whenever they visit to replant or remove trash from it.

AN ASSET TO THE COMMUNITY

Of all the 12 barangays that were assisted by the project, they are the only women's group that was tapped as community beneficiaries. This all the more made them effective co-implementers.

Because of their success, they were also tapped for other PBSP project components, such as establishing milkfish production areas. They were also given bio-intensive gardening packages for food security.

These projects enabled them to earn their own income to help support their families. They were also able to work and grow together, building each other's confidence and skills in carrying out the tasks.

"We wanted to make our barangay projects successful to prove that having an all-woman group is not a limitation. And because of our hardwork and cooperation, we really did it. We are so thankful to KKS and PBSP for this chance because this enabled us to speak up and make wiser decisions for our community," Bolok said.

13th Issue

CHANGED
KKS PROGRAM

FINDING THE MUCH-NEEDED RELIEF

*A family of 12's basic need is met through
the provision of a household toilet*

CLARITA DINONO feels blessed to
be part of the selected few to own
a free household toilet.

If living in a 32-square-meter hut made of bamboo and nipa with a big family is difficult enough, having no sanitation facility is something else.

This was the plight of housewife and mother Clarita Dinono, 48, her eight children and four grandchildren for decades. In Barangay Valles-Bello, 187 of its 203-household population do not own sanitation facilities, including all residents of Dinono's coastal village. With their meager earnings and with more pressing needs to prioritize, both the government and residents do not have enough funds left to build sanitation facilities.

As they have no sanitation facilities to use, Dinono and the rest would go up the mountains or in the open sea to find relief and bathe with their clothes on. If their need to "let go" is more urgent, they would hide in rocks by the seashore since they no longer have time to travel uphill.

"It is very uncomfortable when we would go out at night and find rocks to hide from. Sometimes we would stumble upon other neighbors doing the same, but we learned to thicken our skin because there is no other place to hide," Dinono said.

If they had a choice, Dinono would want to have toilets of their own. Aside from the sanitation and hygiene they offer, household toilets would provide them their much-needed privacy. But all these discomforts are in the past now with the provision of household toilets to their community by KKS and PBSP.

A CLEANER LIFE

The provision of toilets, as part of KKS and PBSP's three-year program, aims to help improve the health of children and sanitation in households and teach family members not to use the seas as communal comfort rooms. The project built 99 household toilets in four barangays and conducted information drives on good sanitation for children and families on proper hygiene and good sanitation especially on human waste disposal.

When PBSP offered to build household toilets in their area, their automatic response was to not accept it, thinking that

they could not afford to repay PBSP for its services. For them, getting a toilet without a price was just not possible, so it came as a surprise when the organization explained that the assistance to the community was completely free.

"We were used to organizations saying they will help us but we will still pay in return. Of course we wanted to pay, but we really couldn't afford it. So, we would rather not own something we should have. Besides, we already have a lot of other needs to think about. But when PBSP told us that it was free, we were both shocked and elated. We just couldn't believe we are given such blessing so we took it," she enthused.

Before having their own household sanitation facility, Dinono's family would simply go to the sea to wash their hands and utensils before and after cooking and eating. Because of this, they would frequently suffer from fever, colds, and flu. So it was just a huge relief when the new toilet came.

"We can properly wash our hands with soap now, and we can actually take our time cleaning ourselves because we have our own private place. It has a proper drainage system so I feel more comfortable and secure knowing that our wastes are not washed ashore, unlike before. In this way, our family can help clean our seas," she said.

MAINTAINING AN INVESTMENT

Dinono feels blessed to have her family among one of the selected few to receive the household toilets. Hence, her family would judiciously do her task of maintaining their toilet and allow other families to use it so they won't be using the seas instead.

In return for the free facility, she and each of her children would take turns cleaning the toilet. She also signed an agreement with KKS and PBSP that forbade her to destroy, sell, or loan the facility within ten years. Dinono knows this is her family's responsibility since the facility was already given to them for free.

"This toilet is a dream come true for us. We should always take care of it since it also took care of us," she said.



THE COASTAL VILLAGE in Barangay Valles-Bello, where Clarita Dinono's family lives, does not have any household toilet.

THE GIFT OF WATER

An island barangay of small fishermen and farmers get their dream of a potable water system

When 40-year-old Santiago Bardaje visited Catbalogan City in Samar for the first time, the first thing he noticed was how city dwellers could easily get water through faucets installed inside their homes.

He wished the same situation back home but in an island barangay with very limited funds, their only access to water was through a deep well that was built last 1967. While their water comes from the spring, the pipes that distributed it from the source to the well are already 51 years old and worn out. To prevent from getting sick of water-borne diseases, they would just pay Php20 for every container of clean, drinking water.

Fortunately, Bardaje's dream came true when PBSP offered to set up a level 2 potable water system in their barangay in Cabugao. This project was a component of a three-year sustainable poverty reduction program funded by KKS. It tapped the Cabugao Small Fisherfolks and Farmers Association headed by Bardaje as co-implementers and beneficiaries.

As soon as he heard the good news, Bardaje immediately gave offerings to the spirits of the spring as permission to upgrade their deep well so it can serve water for more people in their barangay.

"It was also our way of thanking them for bringing KKS and PBSP to us. We have been dreaming for a new water system since I was a child and it finally came true," he said.

WATER FOR A WATERLESS CABUGAO

To help provide clean and safe drinking water to their homes, PBSP transformed the deep well into a water pump so it could push more water to a tank for storage. Tap stands were then installed on two strategic areas to bring water closer to the residents.



THE LEVEL 2 potable water system provided by PBSP now serves 80 percent of Barangay Cabugao.

The level 2 water system is now serving 80 percent of the entire barangay by supplying more than 100 containers of water every day to over 130 families. The residents no longer have to carry heavy containers and walk more than two kilometers just to get water for their use. They also do not need to pay for their drinking water since the one provided by the tap stands have been tested and cleared for drinking.

"We are really blessed to be chosen as a beneficiary for this project because most of us here are already old and no longer have enough strength to pump water and carry the containers to our homes. Now, we have this water system that is just a few steps away from our homes. We can also drink from it, which is even better," Bardaje said.

WATER FOR THE FUTURE

To help maintain their water system, the association would charge Php1 per container so residents can share in paying

for repairs and monthly electrical fees. From their collection, the association would set aside Php600 a month as their maintenance.

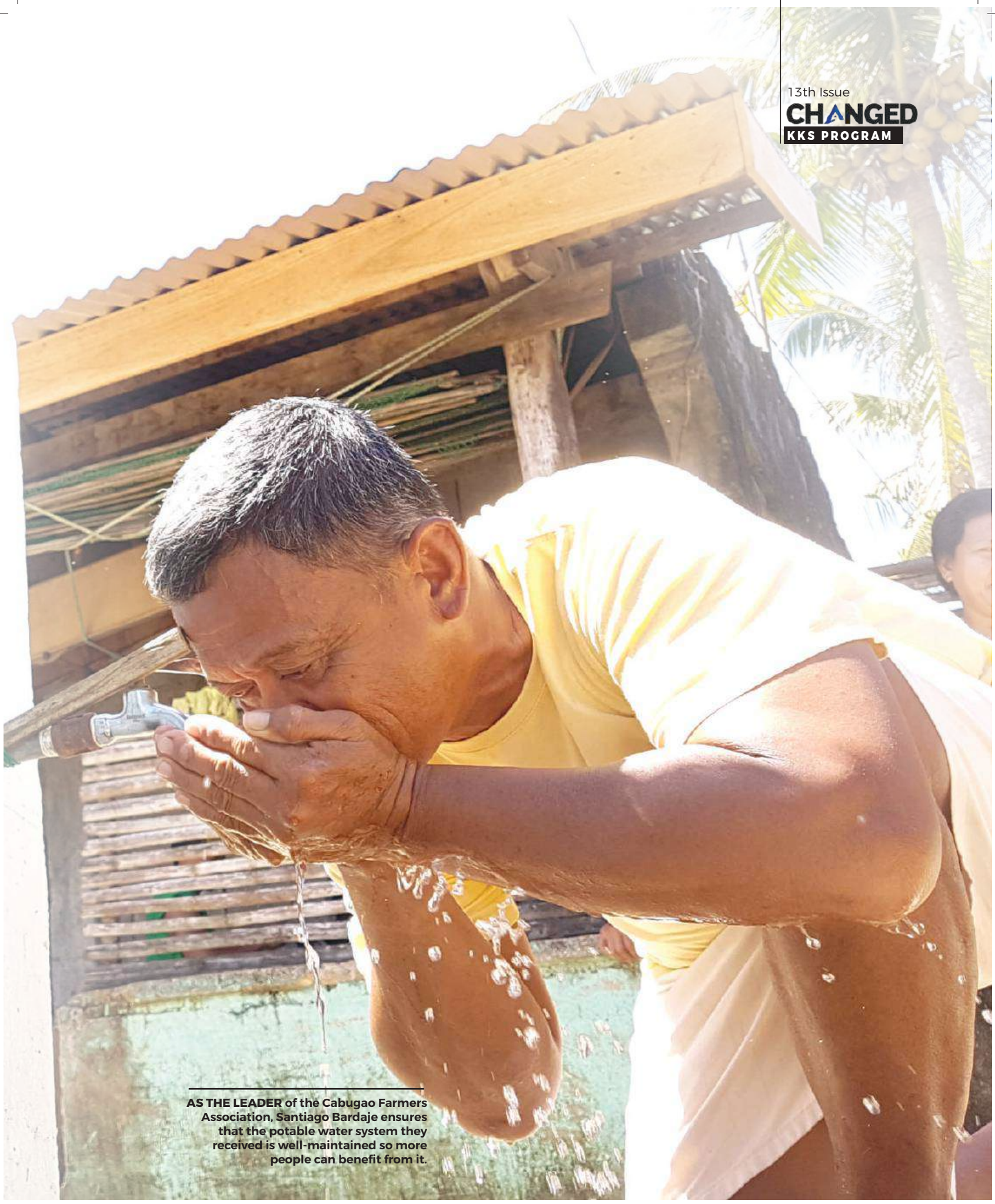
"We do not want to burden ourselves too much so we only asked for Php1 per container. In this way, we can still save since we no longer need to hire someone to get water for us and pay additional Php20 per container for water to drink. And even if we cannot spend all the funds in a month, we will not touch it because we want this fund to grow just

in case an emergency happens," Bardaje explained.

When their new water system became operational, the members of the association would observe how some curious children would tinker with the tap stands and abuse their newfound access to water by not properly turning the faucets off.

To regulate this, the association only allowed residents to collect water in the morning and afternoon. By setting up this schedule and locking up the water system after, they were able to reduce costs and maintain the engine of the water pump.

"We have a plan to upgrade this into a level 3 water system with the help of our barangay so we need to save and grow our funds. KKS and PBSP turned this water system to us so we have to take good care of it since we can never build another one like this," Bardaje said.

A photograph of a man in a yellow shirt drinking water from a public tap. He is cupping his hands under the running water. The background shows a wooden structure and palm trees. The image is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

AS THE LEADER of the Cabugao Farmers Association, Santiago Bardaje ensures that the potable water system they received is well-maintained so more people can benefit from it.

PROTECTOR OF THE SEAS

*A local leader in Daram, Samar finds strength
and confidence in safeguarding marine treasures*

Whenever Fernando “Tito” Nazareno would go out and fish, he could not help but feel like crying. The task of providing for his family has become even more difficult with only a maximum daily catch of five kilos after almost 12 hours on the open sea, and that was on his best days. How times have changed, he would lament.

The island town of Daram used to be Leyte’s crown jewel when it comes to a balanced, well-maintained marine ecosystem. Nazareno remembers his childhood days when he would join his father to fish and see their clear waters teeming with different kinds of marine life. Their area in Barangay San Miguel, is a cove, so other crustaceans like crabs and shrimps can also be found. Since the town also faces the Pacific Ocean, they could just sail beyond their regular fishing areas if they wanted to catch bigger fish.

But through the years, massive illegal fishing from neighboring towns and cities destroyed their seas. The once clear waters are now filled with silt due to careless activities from the local fishermen, which also aided in the deterioration of their coastal waters.

He knows, however, that not all hope is lost when he learned that German foundation KKS and PBSP would improve their lives by rehabilitating their coastal waters.

“I know they are the answer to our needs so I already made a commitment to give my full support to their plans,” said Nazareno, who also chairs the town’s federation (Daram Federation) of community-based organizations.

NO FISHING ZONE

In 1991, the local government of Daram established a marine protected area (MPA) in San Miguel to help conserve its waters and regulate illegal fishing. For a time, these abuses decreased, but with the town’s meager funds, they could not effectively enforce the law. This made their campaign unsustainable.

“The abusers eventually returned. Every day, we would hear blasts because of dynamite fishing. I would try to go to them with my small boat and plead for them to stop. But I would stop whenever they would bring out their guns. I did not want to die, it really was a helpless situation,” he recalled.

To address these concerns, PBSP worked closely with the local government unit, national agencies, and other community-based organizations to empower and make them more capable

of implementing a sustainable Coastal Resource Management (CRM) Program. The project taught all stakeholders involved in planning, implementing, and sustaining a marine protected area management plan. This also includes tips on creatively organizing fundraising activities and communication campaigns to educate more communities on the importance of having a healthy marine environment.

To help rehabilitate San Miguel’s marine protected area, the project installed markers for no-fishing zones and put up a floating guard house for the barangay’s monitoring activities. Through all these efforts, Nazareno and his officers became a central figure in the barangay’s CRM implementation. They participated in basic Fisheries Law Enforcement Team trainings, helped draft the town’s overall CRM and MPA management plans, and received patrol boats from the project so they can guard the seas more efficiently.

“Because of this project, we became more empowered in apprehending these abusers because we know that we are not alone. We now have the full support of other stakeholders. The project also stressed how we, as the fishermen, are the most important actors of this program so we should take this role seriously,” he said.

FIGHTING FOR THE FUTURE GENERATION

For Nazareno, being a part of this initiative has a more personal purpose: he wants his future generation to experience the same marine abundance he had as a child. Hence, he works extra hard to help teach more communities on protecting and nurturing their seas.

He joins PBSP in conducting information drives in schools. During meetings, he includes CRM in the agenda to constantly remind stakeholders of their role in protecting the seas.

“I realized that by teaching other people, I also learn additional things every day, which I can use or apply in the future. Someone has to do this and make the first step. How will our future children live if this bad situation continues?”

These days, Nazareno’s daily routine involves waking up before sunrise, getting on his boat, and watching over a portion of the seas and protecting it from unscrupulous men abusing the waters. After his watch, he would then go out to sea and fish for a day’s worth of wages. In the afternoons, his watch continues, or he would conduct meetings to once again share his passion to help the seas. There’s no letting up for a man who has sworn to protect the seas and his only source of livelihood.



FERNANDO 'TITO' NAZARENO
makes it his personal mission to
conserve their marine resources
for future generations.



ROLANDO ARRIEGA is committed to be the model farmer and fisherman to his members to help replicate the new technologies.

THE BIG SHIFT

A former non-believer of associations finds trust in community leadership to a better life

For as long as he can remember, Rolando Arriega, 57, would always scoff at any organization, government-initiated or not, that involves officers and members. He used to think of it as a waste of time and another scheme for corrupt people to continue leeching off resources intended for the community.

So imagine his surprise when he was chosen by neighbors to lead their association.

"It was during a meeting for PBSP's projects when they all requested that I lead them. Since I was the only one they nominated, I couldn't refuse. At the same time, I also felt fear: I did not want to become the leader I was skeptical about," the fisherman from barangay Valles-Bello said.

PBSP brought different kinds of assistance to their barangay as part of their commitment to help improve the lives of communities in the island town of Daram, Samar. To make the three-year project sustainable, PBSP partnered with people's associations and strengthened their capacities in managing projects.

MODEL FARMER

Through the project, PBSP gave their community two alternative income-generating opportunities: milkfish production and bio-intensive gardening (BIG). Arriega and his members received trainings, farm inputs and tools, and other materials. While interventions were already given, the hardest part was to convince his members to apply the new technologies.

"While the trainings taught us how these new technologies can earn, the members still had some doubts. They feared that it would be risky. What if we fail and then we have nothing to earn? Most of us would rather spend our time on something we already know, like fishing. We are all farmers and fishermen who only want to provide for our families so I understand where their hesitations were coming from," Arriega revealed.

He knew he had to set an example by setting up his own farm. The free BIG package provided by PBSP contained vegetable seeds and farming tools, which Arriega used to plant white squash, ampalaya (bitter melon), and eggplant. From planting white squash and bitter melon, he was able to harvest at least four sacks in every cropping season and earn more than Php3,000. From his 50 eggplant shrubs, he could harvest at least 12 kilograms a week, which he sold for Php12 per kilogram.



MEMBERS OF THE *Nagkakaurusa an Gudtui ugay puro Pangisda ngan Parag-uma han Valles-Bello* take turns maintaining the milkfish cages as part of their sustainability plan.

With his personal success, he was able to convince other members to replicate the technology, with him offering technical assistance.

"To be honest, it is very tiring to be a leader because I have to look after my members all the time. But that is what a leader should do because your members trusted you. On my part, I made my members feel they owned these projects too because this is for them. We need to take care of it or the project would fail," Arriega said.

For milkfish production, he mobilized his members to help in setting up the cages, cleaning and replacing the nets, and feeding the milkfish fingerlings. Through this project, the organization was able to earn Php50,000 from their first cropping cycle alone. They are now on their fourth cropping cycle. Using their earnings, the association was able to expand their fish cage so they can produce and harvest more milkfish.

CHAMPION FOR LIVELIHOOD

As the chairman of the *Nagkakaurusa an Gudtui ugay puro Pangisda ngan Parag-uma han Valles-Bello*, Arriega automatically earned a membership spot in Daram Federation, a group of community-based organizations within the town. Following his group's success

and honorable reputation, he was also elected as the federation's champion for its livelihood project on milkfish production—another role he did not ask for.

His mandate was simple: to make Daram earn more from milkfish by reducing some of their overhead costs. One of his self-assigned tasks was to find local milkfish fingerling suppliers from Tacloban City. Other fishermen would say that there is no other nearer source, but he did not give up.

"One of the problems here is our culture, our *bahala na* attitude. But I know we will not prosper with that attitude, and that is one of the things I would like to change," he pointed out.

Arriega would even sail to other neighboring island towns to look for sources until he finally found one. Now, he is making the necessary coordination work for all barangays.

"I am glad they insisted that I take this task because it also helped me become more open-minded. It all boils down to who you are as a person. I value their trust, so I have to keep earning that," said Arriega who is proud of the man he has become—a confident, capable, and honorable leader to his community.



AMADO REAL takes the lead in growing and nurturing seaweed farms to help ensure a better life for his community.



TAKING RISKS

A fisherman from Daram, Samar opts for a better life with seaweed farming

When Amado Real, 65, and his neighbors were hired to tend privately owned seaweed farms, he immediately saw the potential to earn a lot of income even if it was something new to him.

After seeing how his employer earned from it, it had become his dream to have a farm of his own so he can be a better provider for his family. But he later learned that it was not simple at all. To set up a seaweed farm, he needs at least Php20,000 to procure the farming materials and seaweed cultivars. As a fisherman living in Barangay Cabac in the island municipality of Daram, Samar, his monthly income is not even enough to support his family of nine. Hence, earning this amount for the seaweed farm is a close-to-impossible task.

When PBSP came to their area and offered to help their community through seaweed farming, Real did not hesitate to accept the assistance at all.

“Like other kinds of work, I saw its risks. You have to pray there is no typhoon or it will destroy all that you worked hard for and earn nothing. But it was not as demanding as fishing. I do not have to sail so far out to get fish and earn something. With seaweeds, you still go out to sea every day to take care of the seaweeds, but the area is close to your homes,” said Real, also the chairman of the Cabac Fisherfolks’ Association.

GREENER PASTURES

The project assistance was a component of a three-year sustainable livelihood initiative funded by KKS and PBSP. Each member of the association received their own materials and cultivars to set up a 400-meter seaweed farm.

On the first months, however, only five of the members actively accepted the assistance and established their seaweed farms—a challenge that Real faced in implementing the project.

“When you are more than 60 years old and have been fishing all your life, it is harder to separate yourself from the livelihood that kept your family alive for the longest time. It became my mission to let them see that seaweed production is effective,” he said.

He did this by setting an example. By dawn, he would sail out to sea and set up his fishing gear. He would then return

by morning and tend to his seaweed farm. In the afternoon, he would go back and harvest what his fishing gear had caught for the day.

Indeed, the hard work paid off. On the first month, each of the members who tried seaweed farming harvested 200 kilos of fresh seaweed each month just from their two seaweed lines. By selling the seaweeds at Php10 per kilo, each farmer earned an additional Php2,000.

After experiencing their success, the pioneering members started expanding their seaweed farms while the other members started establishing their own.

“I wanted them to realize that instead of waiting for the entire day to catch something in the middle of the sea, you can maximize that idle time through seaweed farming. It is even easier because we have paddle boats we can use to tend to our farms. This way, you can earn both from fishing and seaweed farming, until your farm is big enough to answer all your financial needs,” he said.

A BETTER LIFE

With more members joining and expanding their seaweed farms, the association was also able to produce dry seaweeds, which sell at Php30 to Php45 per kilo. Through their combined supply of fresh and dry seaweeds, their community collectively earned more than Php34,000 and Php36,000 of their dry and fresh seaweeds from their latest harvest.

Eventually, the Cabac seaweed farmers became known as the main producers of fresh seaweed cultivars to other PBSP-tapped associations for the expansion of their farms. Such is their popularity that the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources is now partnering with their association to further help in expanding their farms.

With a bigger income now, Real is able to provide the basic needs of his grandchildren and even spend on some luxuries—like refurbishing his home and buying some appliances.

“My farm can now produce more than 200 kilos every harvest. We did not even spend anything to set up our farms and yet all the income we get from it is ours. We really thank PBSP and KKS, who only wanted us to take care of our farms in return for their assistance. This is easy to accomplish because tending a seaweed farm is very easy. This really is a dream come true for us older fishermen who already have old and tired bones,” Real said.

A BRIGHTER FUTURE AWAITS

A mother of three gets to augment her family's income through hairdressing skills she learned from Project AWESOME

Twenty-seven-year-old Jessabel Ofiasa married at an early age and is now a mother to three kids. To support the family, her husband opted to work in one of the establishments in Cebu City. In order to save, the husband had no choice but to go home to his family only once a month.

With her eldest son's schooling, health problems of children and the high prices of commodities, she had difficulty making both ends meet. Ofiasa grabbed opportunities to help her husband in the family expenses. When PBSP informed the Women's Association in Brgy. Okoy in Santa Fe of a beauty care training, she was among the women selected for the activity.

Ofiasa did not waste any opportunity to learn. She attended the 10-day beauty care training which was a component of Accelerating Women Empowerment through Sustainable Opportunities for Microenterprises and Employment or Project AWESOME implemented by Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP), in partnership with Lutheran World Relief (LWR).

Project AWESOME aims to provide women associations with opportunities in northern Cebu's tourism industry. It includes the provision of skills and enterprise development trainings, organizational strengthening to increase women-owned or operated tourism-related enterprises, and facilitation of access to market, finance, and other business development services through public-private partnerships.

Ofiasa focused on every detail of instructions and demonstrations given during the training. She was a first-timer in using styling tools such as electric blower and electric straightener but because of her genuine interest and enthusiasm, she ended up like a pro in the hands-on training.

Thanks to this intervention, Ofiasa is now earning as a freelance beauty stylist, and her present income has surpassed the money



OFIASA is one of the participants of the 10-day Beauty Care training by Project AWESOME.

remitted by her husband. The Beauty Care Training which lasted for 10 days and was indeed a gift to her family. To date, she already earns at least PhP10,000 a month from doing hair rebonding, hair coloring, and manicure and pedicure services.

Before, she used to rent the electric hair straightening tool until such time that the Project AWESOME Project provided each participating association with an electric hair blower and hair straightener. The association assigned the tools to those who attended the Beauty Care Training on a first-come, first-served basis, and Ofiasa was one of them.

With her newly acquired skills, Ofiasa hopes to open a beauty salon someday. She expressed her thanks to PBSP and LWR for conducting the training, for providing tools and materials and, importantly for the motivation, encouragement and giving hope to the marginalized group of society.



JESSABEL OFIASA now earns at least PhP10,000 a month as a freelance beauty stylist.



UNITED TO BUILD SCHOOLS

For its education program, PBSP envisions that more Filipino children will be able to stay in school and complete their elementary and high school education. PBSP leads the Bayanihang Pampaaralan (BP) consortium, a private sector-led initiative that seeks to address the education crisis through strategic partnerships with stakeholders from government, schools and communities.

The Olango Challenge, an open water swimming event, is among the numerous efforts of PBSP and BP to deliver support to public schools. Since its launch in 2008, it has built nine classrooms and provided scholarships to more than 100 senior high school students on the island.

In this section, the Olango Challenge seeks to remind us that with better education, the future of many students shine with renewed hope and promise.



THE FAMILY THAT SWIMS TOGETHER

*A family of four goes full force in supporting
a swim race that helps build schools*

When mother Hee Suk, daughter Ki Kyoung (Angela), and son Byoung June (June), all joined the 3K competitive swim of the Olango Challenge last 2017, father Taig Seong would vigilantly watch their progress from the port.

He would not let them out of his sight until each of his family has completed the course and safely made it to the finish line.

The Jeon family has been joining the open water swim organized by Philippine Business for Social Progress since 2014, but it was only in 2016 that all three joined together. As the eldest, Angela was the first swimmer of the family until younger brother June was old enough to compete. It was during their practices, when Hee Suk would casually join them in the pool that made Taig Seong think: why not make his wife join the Olango Challenge as well.

"My dad originally wanted us siblings to join triathlons and randomly browsed online for available competitions when he came across the Olango Challenge. He found out the event aims to build classrooms and decided we join that instead," Angela said.

Their first open water swim proved to be more challenging than a normal swim race in the pool. Aside from the current,

they easily lost their sense of direction. But the family continued swimming every year because it was for a good cause.

"The thought that just a little contribution that we make as a family, even a little assistance, could bring such a big difference in Olango, is really neat. I really respect this organization that can bring so much happiness to the students on the island," June said.

SWIMMING TO BUILD SCHOOLS

It was father Taig Seong, a professional rower in his university years, who saw the potential of his children while he chanced upon them swimming on a pool. He was not a personal fan of swimming, but he used to study in a Korean sports university. He also researched on swimming, and he used this knowledge to help train his children so they can become professional swimmers in the future.

In preparation for sporting events like the Olango Challenge, he made it a point that they took their practices seriously because he wanted them to complete the race course like what real athletes do.

"For me, it is more important that they finish the course rather than win it. It is more important for them not to give up on the swim and take the Olango Challenge seriously because helping others is a serious thing to do," he said.



KOREAN NATIONAL Hee Suk (second from right) and her family are avid supporters of PBSP's Olango Challenge. They have been joining the swim meet since 2014 because they share the same advocacy.

For Angela, joining the event allows her to help students who have less in life. Being privileged as she was, she never experienced how hard it was to study in public schools until she started teaching English in one. Then a student volunteer, she saw how 50 pupils would get cramped inside a small classroom.

"I feel proud that I joined the Olango Challenge. I even tell my friends that, 'You know, I did this, and they're building schools for it and they are on Olango island.' And even though I don't want to swim under the sun, I really liked the fact that I swam the whole thing and in a way, I'm also helping build a school," Angela said.

Hee Suk, on the other hand, wants to do more.

"I'd love to do it all the time because it is for the children. I also like to volunteer and help in the actual work of building the school, like painting the walls," she added.

MOVING (AND SWIMMING) AS ONE

The Jeons have always been working as one unit. As the father of the family, Taig Seong makes the decisions while the rest followed where he leads them.

Before enjoying his retirement in Cebu, Taig Seong used to work for a construction company and would move his family

wherever he was assigned in. They started moving around Korea and later transferred to Malaysia and Singapore in 2006 before settling down in the Philippines in 2012.

"I think the most important thing is that we are together. I believe that it is really important to decide as a family and move as one instead of separating," Taig Seong said.

Now that they have stayed in Cebu for more than seven years, Taig Seong is happy that he decided to move his family to Cebu. Aside from exposing them to nature, the transfer to Cebu introduced the family to the Olango Challenge, which helped them develop compassion for the poor.

To continue supporting the event, the Jeons posted this year's event on their online Korean community social media account so more will be participating in the event. They hope the Olango Challenge can feature shorter distances so more non-swimmers who just want to finish the course can also join. Both Hee Suk and June also participated in the 1K fun and 3K competitive swims of the Olango Challenge this year.

"I really respect Jose Antonio Aboitiz because he really thinks it's a good thing to build schools for a lot of people. I myself keep telling this one thing to my children all the time: education is the future. It's really great that there are people who try to give education to poor children," he said.

WHEN STRANGERS HELP

A downhearted teen finds renewed hope in the scholarship provided by PBSP through the Olango Challenge

Kathleen Joy Ompad, 18, used to think her life is just one disappointment after another.

She was in third grade when her parents decided to leave Olango island so they could explore fishing in Mindanao for a better life. They would send money to her older sister but it seemed that it wasn't enough because they often had nothing to eat and spend for days.

Life became harder when Ompad's older sister started to have a family of her own. She soon realized that she had no one to depend on but herself. She once heard from her school adviser that education is the only way to have a better future and she took that to heart. At the age of 11, she started accepting laundry and other household work while her summer vacations were spent doing various jobs for her rich relatives just so she could continue studying.

Ompad was 16 when her parents finally came back. But she found out that they only returned because her father had terminal cancer and her aging mother was too old to work and to look after him. Instead of becoming a full-time student as she hoped, her parents' return only pushed her to balance school, work, and family. Expenses shot up and the family was buried in debt after her father's eventual passing a year later. This pushed her to decide to give up her last year of senior high school and just work full-time.

"Sometimes I wished my parents never left us in the first place. At least, I can still see and talk to them. But I have to set my feelings and dreams aside and continue working since I still have a family to look after," she said.

But just as she was wallowing over what she thought would be her last day in school, the unexpected happened. She was chosen as a scholar of the Olango Challenge, an open-water swim race organized by PBSP to help raise funds for the school children of the island.

COOKING FOR SURVIVAL

Ompad chose the cookery strand for senior high school because she considered it a life skill. She thought that if she knew how to cook, she could survive anywhere. It will also be

another entrepreneurial opportunity if she wanted to earn more.

The scholarship assistance took care of her monthly school expenses so she was able to save more money from her part-time work and help her family. Ompad and her classmates also received financing for their immersion uniforms and assessment fees for national and technical vocational certifications.

"When I received the scholarship, I thought I was dreaming. It was an opportunity I could not ignore, and it came at the right time," she exclaimed.

Her school, which also caters to senior high school students under the Technical-Vocational-Livelihood track, also received shielded metal arc welding equipment and sewing machines. This will help students hone their practical knowledge so they can be job-ready.

ON THE JOB

For Ompad, getting the scholarship was already a big help because it pushed her to work for her dreams. What she did not expect though was for the project to continue helping her up to the point of giving her a job.

With the intervention of PBSP and the project, Ompad and the rest of the scholars were given guidance on preparing for job interviews as well as developed their skills through job immersions. Then, in a job fair also organized by PBSP, she was able to land her first employment—one of the chef's assistants in a renowned restaurant on Mactan island.

Now, Ompad's plans are brighter. She is looking for a new job with a bigger pay so she could save enough money to help her family and at the same time, pursue higher education to become a culinary expert.

"Before, I thought my entire life will be filled with disappointment. But now I can see that my odds are looking up. I never thought this would happen to me, and it's all because of these people I do not even know. I owe them a lot and I can only repay them by doing good," she said.



KATHLEEN OMPAD is one of the scholars of the Olango Challenge and was able to land a job at a restaurant on Mactan island.

13th Issue

CHANGED

OLANGO CHALLENGE



ERWIN BUDLONG, a professional and accomplished kayaker, is a constant supporter of the Olango Challenge, ensuring the safety of swimmers during the competition.



CEBU'S 'WATERMAN'

A marshal of the Olango Challenge helps make a difference by pursuing his passion

The moment seawater touched his *baruto* (local outrigger canoe), Erwin Glenn "Buzzy" Budlong knew his love affair for the ocean would last a lifetime. He was seven years old then.

Now, Budlong is an accomplished man of 46 and is known among the paddling and kayaking community as the first and only Filipino kayaker who successfully navigated the Philippines for more than 3,000 kilometers in just 88 days. As "Cebu's own waterman," he is the proud founder of Island Buzz Philippines, an adventures company that aims to provide a unique and authentic paddling experience of the Cebu islands and its surrounding seas.

These triumphs do not come as a surprise for him. Born on a coastal town to a fisherman for a father, their family already had this intimate affinity and symbiotic relationship with the sea. He would remember most of his childhood spent in welcoming his father and his peers after a successful day's catch and listening to their exciting sea adventures. Right then and there, he knew that one day he would have an adventure of his own.

This is also the reason why Budlong is very passionate to support advocacies that help nurture the seas. One of which is the Olango Challenge, an open water swimming event organized by PBSP that aims to raise funds for schoolchildren.

"That time, it was quite exciting to know that this is a sport that will be done for the first time in the country. I even thought that it was fitting that it started here in Cebu, where we are known for our beautiful beaches and rich marine ecosystem. Aside from the advocacy it supports, I am also a fan of novel experiences. There was no way I could say no (in supporting the event)," he said.

WATER SAFETY AS PRIORITY

Island Buzz Philippines has been a member of the technical team of the Olango Challenge since its launch in 2008. As marshals of the race, Budlong and his paddlers help ensure the safety of swimmers on the water and act as first responders for any emergency.

As first responders, they watch out for signs of water emergencies among swimmers. These include fatigue, cramps, being hit by other swimmers, near-drowning, and jellyfish stings. It has also become their task to guide back swimmers who have gone off course.

"Open water swimming is a very intense sport. It also presents a lot of risks since this is all happening in open water. We want their experience in the open sea to be as enjoyable as possible and to ensure their safety," he shared.

By supporting the event, he knows he has helped a lot in making the Olango Challenge and its cause successful, on top of doing what he loves to do best.

"We take our roles seriously, so we make sure we are equipped as first responders of the race. This is a serious trust that is handed to us by the organizers, and we are so lucky that we keep on receiving this trust," Budlong added.

PERSONAL FEATS

In 2009, Budlong became the first and only Filipino who successfully kayaked the Philippines with Singaporean and Guinness World Record-holder Khoo Swee Chiow as part of the 40th year celebration of the Filipino-Singaporean diplomatic relations. Through their expedition, they have established the first kayak trail in the Philippines from Saranggani, Mindanao to Pagudpud, Ilocos Sur.

His accomplishments did not stop there. Budlong also wants to make Cebu as the paddling capital of the Philippines and promote the country as the paddling adventure destination of Asia. Because of these goals, he became the first to explore Cebu in five legs using five watercrafts in 2016. This, for him, was a way to promote his love of the water.

On the other hand, he would often organize informal camps for kids to regale them with exciting stories about the sea, to replicate what he has experienced as a child. By getting them eager with the wonders of the sea, he also hopes to develop their own consciousness in preserving the seas.

While planning for his next outdoor adventure, he would also organize paddling events and coastal clean-ups to support his cause for the environment. His latest advocacy was promoting the *bigiw*, a local canoe that originated in the Visayas but is slowly disappearing in the seas. To help promote it, he even brought one to the Olango Challenge race this year as his personal watercraft.

"My ultimate dream is simple: I just want to be able to enjoy the sunset while I'm floating on clean waters. Just as long as I can continue doing that, then I am happy," Budlong said.

SPECIAL FEATURE: EDUCATION STORY

WORK FOR IT AND IT WILL COME

*With hardwork, resourcefulness, and help from donors,
a cookery teacher is able to give the gift of quality education*

There's no denying the fact that Cherry Rosales is up for anything as far as teaching in a public school is concerned. After all, the 29-year-old cookery teacher chose to give up her comfortable teaching lifestyle in a private school for three years so she can finally serve students who need her the most.

"I was once a public school student so I knew I had to return and give back by serving as a teacher. As soon as the opportunity came, I took it," she explained.

What she did not account for, however, was how difficult the shift of experience would be. When Barrio Luz National High School (NHS) opened their senior high school program, the rooms were not enough to accommodate their needs, and some facilities like Rosales' food laboratory were not given their own spaces.

In a cookery session, experience is the best learning method. Hence, Rosales had difficulty instilling the necessary skills in her students with neither room nor tools to use. To solve the situation, she slowly bought the basic tools and equipment from the school's budget and her own pocket. She also gathered whatever available table she could find to have something to cook on, and brought stoves and cooking tools. During rains, she supervised their practical lessons at the school lobby so they wouldn't get wet.

In the previous private school, everything she ever needed was handed to her. This time, she had to be creative so her students would not feel outcasts because they had no room of their own.

"I didn't like the idea that I was receiving my salary but was not sharing any with my students, given the hard situation they were in. I want my students' futures to be great so I need to invest in them. Our classes were not perfect but we made the most out

of our situation. What was important for me was for them to learn the basics," she said.

DREAM COME TRUE

Last year, her dream for her students to have a cookery laboratory finally happened through the funding of Telstra Foundation Philippines in partnership with PBSP, and the Department of Education (DepEd). Through the assistance, Telstra Foundation Philippines was able to provide all equipment, tools, and cooking materials while DepEd latter provided the space.


When Rosales and her students held their classes inside the laboratory for the first time, all of them were elated.

"We were so happy when we finally saw the utensils. It was like looking at things for the first time; we've never been so excited looking at knives! Sometimes, my students would even ask me if we can really use the utensils," she recalled.

Now that they have their own laboratory, Rosales is happy to be able to shift her focus on developing the skills of her students to prepare them for the real world.

The cookery laboratory is the only facility of its kind in public schools in Cebu City. So when people learned about it, more students started enrolling at Barrio Luz NHS. Unfortunately, the school couldn't accommodate all so it had to turn some of them down.

"I am surprised but I think I expected this to happen because even DepEd would brag about our laboratory to anyone. We have a complete, ideal setup. We have a refrigerator and our own stoves now so I can finally teach all that my students need with no limitations. This project has such an impact to us, we really thank Telstra Foundation Philippines and PBSP for that," Rosales said.

A full-page photograph of a woman with long dark hair, smiling at the camera. She is wearing a light pink short-sleeved button-down uniform with a lanyard and ID badge. She is holding a silver microphone in her right hand. The background is a green chalkboard with some faint writing. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

ROSALES' ROLE as cookery teacher is now easier with the new cookery laboratory established by PBSP and Telstra Foundation Philippines.





OVERCOMING OBSTACLES AND CHALLENGES OF TB

At present, Tuberculosis still remains to be one of the fatal diseases in the country. The fight against the disease is even more catastrophic for patients who have Multidrug-Resistant Tuberculosis (MDR-TB). Not only are they diagnosed late, they have to go through the grueling effects of non-stop, months-long treatment.

PBSP, through the ACCESS TB (Advancing Client-centered Care and Expanding Sustainable Services for TB) Project, aims to save lives made more vulnerable with this disease.

In the following pages, we will present inspiring stories of our resilient patients who overcame the odds in order to survive with the help of our dedicated and selfless service providers.

STRONGER TOGETHER

A family of five overcomes MDR-TB and gets a better life with help from PBSP's ACCESS TB program

Two years ago, Eunice Benlot never imagined that her life would be saddled with such misery. First, she was diagnosed with Multiple Drug-Resistant Tuberculosis (MDR-TB) and found out she may have spread it to all of her children, too. Then she discovered that her husband was cheating on her and eventually left their family for his mistress.

From then on, the Benlot family household in Barangay Rizal, San Carlos City, Negros Occidental became abuzz not with tinkling laughter but with continuous coughing and vomiting sounds. Aside from her, it was her eldest child, Mary Grace, the older of twins who got infected first. Then followed her youngest, Chester. Her third child, Michelle, had MDR-TB next and then finally the younger of twins, Mary Jane, got diagnosed last because she was stubborn enough not to get tested.

After learning about it, her husband called her the harbinger of bad luck. Considering how she may have brought the worst stage of tuberculosis to the household, she was somehow ready to accept such fate.

THE FAMILY WITH TUBERCULOSIS

It was in 2014 when Eunice first felt something wrong with her body. She was always tired, had non-stop cough and felt dizzy after a few hours of working. Still, she brushed it off, thinking it was only fatigue that drained her body. It was normal to feel tired after working laborious hours as a housekeeper of an inn owned by richer relatives.

She also thought she would never have TB again, thinking she was cured after completing the eight-month treatment.

When she finally lost her voice and weight, her husband forced her to seek medical attention. That was how she learned she had MDR-TB, and since she had been infected with it for years now, treatment was needed immediately. It was news she wasn't willing to accept initially—but nothing was as bad as knowing she could have destroyed her children's future when all of them were diagnosed with the same disease a few months after.

Getting treated in San Carlos City was out of the question for Eunice since the injection and medicines needed daily would cost thousands. And even if the family could afford it, the city health office did not have the required office or the available medicines to facilitate treatment.

She was also referred to centers in Cebu City and Bacolod City, but with no money for food, transportation, and lodging for a two-year treatment, she thought getting cured was impossible. So when PBSP finally set up a Programmatic Management of Drug-Resistant TB (PMDT) center in the city, she was full of renewed hope and happiness.

"We were truly blessed since the treatment center was already here before my children were diagnosed. If the center was not here then, I don't think I could survive it," Eunice recalled.

GETTING TREATMENT

While some would think that undergoing a non-stop treatment for two years was unfortunate, the Benlot family now thinks it was the best thing that happened to them. The new PMDT center is only a few steps away from their homes but thousands-worth of medicines were given for free. To help them cope with the treatment, they were also given allowances for fares and meals.

The process of getting completely cured was harder to hurdle, though. It was the mother, Eunice, who had most difficulty. Sometimes, the nurse would have to pound capsules for her just so she could drink it. The daily injections and pills got her more irritated and depressed, which made her harder to deal with.

The side effects of the drug—hours of nausea and splitting headaches—also discouraged the family from getting treatment that the nurse sometimes had to visit her home so they would not skip treatment.

For the children, the hardest part was how to balance both studies and medication, especially for then high school student Chester.

"I hid my situation from my friends and in school because I admit I am embarrassed about it. I already know why I had it, but I don't think all my classmates or friends would understand my situation. So I skipped school for a few months so I can focus on my treatment," Chester admitted.

Aside from the physical pain of getting the meds themselves, the family had to face other challenges, too. They had to deal with a cheating husband and father as well as defend themselves against neighbors who wanted to have nothing to do with them lest they get infected, too.



“We realized how blessed we are that we were diagnosed with MDR-TB right when PBSP came in. Yes, it was a difficult experience, but it can be cured. And the most important thing, we became stronger, more blessed, and richer because of it.”

Amid all these, the experience unified the family. While there was no one strong enough to be their support system, there was comfort in knowing how the other felt because they all have the disease. To help each other, they took turns in the house.

By getting treatment together, they would also join activities that the PMDT center would organize just for them. Apart from enjoying themselves, they also found themselves useful by sharing their skills and compassion with other people. While their bodies have become stronger, their minds have also matured.

“What I couldn’t forget was the summer outing and our Christmas outreach. We enjoyed the summer outing because we got to bond with other patients and use our talents in singing, dancing, acting, and art. But the Christmas outreach was different because we got to share a portion of our allowance so we can cook and feed other people and even give gifts, even just for a day. It was very memorable,” Mary Jane said.

FREEDOM AT LAST

It was in 2017 when the family all graduated from MDR-TB: Eunice in March, Mary Grace in April, Chester in May, Michelle in August and Mary Jane in September. It was, collectively, the best gift they received.

Their first mission as a fully cured family was to rebuild their home back after their father’s eventual passing from an undiagnosed illness last March 2017. With help from their PMDT nurse, Dirk Alfaro and his friends, they were able to set up their own sari-sari store, which is now earning at least Php1,000 a day.

Through the generosity of some of Alfaro’s friends, Mary Grace and Mary Jane both got a scholarship for college. Michelle, on the other hand, also worked to help Chester with his studies and shoulder some of the household expenses. She will resume her studies once Mary Grace and Mary Jane have found jobs of their own.

The daily allowances they received also helped: since there were five of them, they were able to save more than Php20,400 a month, some portion of which they used to pay off the loan of their lot so they can completely own it. Upon the advice of Alfaro, they also set aside a portion of their allowances and placed it in a bank.

“We realized how blessed we are that we were diagnosed with MDR-TB right when PBSP came in. Yes, it was a difficult experience, but it can be cured. And the most important thing, we became stronger, more blessed, and richer because of it,” Eunice shared.

Now, MDR-TB-free, the family is ready to move on to a better life—stronger and, most importantly, together.

“ Now that I am finally free of MDR-TB, I want to live my life with no regrets after having been granted this new chance. So I am going to use whatever means I can to help others. ”

AFTER SUCCESSFULLY completing her treatment, Inday Lopez now makes it her personal mission to refer as many MDR-TB patients like her as she can.

REBIRTH OF A SOCIAL BUTTERFLY

An active housewife from an island in San Carlos City triumphs over MDR-TB in spite of the odds

When Lolita “Inday” Lopez, 47, learned she had Multi-Drug-Resistant Tuberculosis (MDR-TB) almost two years ago, her mind went blank.

A high-spirited person, she immediately panicked when she felt unusually down and sickly with non-stop coughs. When she sought medical attention, she did not expect she had MDR-TB, which can be deadly if not diagnosed and treated immediately. Having no information about this type of TB made her panic even more. To make it worse, she had also been diagnosed with diabetes.

The thought of not being able to do her normal activities further dampened her morale. She also had to deal with the fact that MDR-TB treatment will be very expensive and hard to find, making her feel even more helpless.

Although San Carlos in Negros Occidental is already a city, it still lacks the capacity to treat special cases like MDR-TB. Lopez lives in a remote island with very limited schedules for trips going to the mainland. Hence, she would need to travel a lot and spend more just to get full treatment outside of the city. It was a total change in lifestyle that she could not afford.

“I am usually a positive person so it would take a lot to dishearten me. But at that time, I really felt helpless,” Lopez revealed.

Fortunately a Programmatic Management of Drug-Resistant TB (PMDT) satellite treatment center in San Carlos City opened, offering patients free medicines for the 18-month MDR-TB treatment.

GETTING CURED BY ALL MEANS

While this development has solved a big part of her problem, the treatment experience proved to be nowhere near smooth sailing.

Lopez would recount how she had to hire her own boat so she could leave the island in her own time. Aside from the additional expense for this, it was the experience of

the medicines’ side effects that was harder to bear. The waves and nausea did not mix very well for her: there were times she had to literally crawl through rocks after docking, because she was too weak.

Sometimes, she had no choice but to skip her treatment because of strong rains and waves. There was also the trauma of facing the injection. The pain after getting injected the first time was so severe that she had to mentally prepare herself for the numerous times that she would get it. Sometimes, Lopez would finish her medication last even if she was the first to arrive because she kept on holding off her injection.

Her additional medication for diabetes further complicated matters. One of them was having limited food options.

For Lopez, it was the ultimate punishment not to be able to socialize and live the life that she wanted. As a result, she became irritated and depressed on the first few months of treatment.

“I was completely different from who I really am, which I hated. And even if I wanted to be high-spirited, my tired body just couldn’t take it. But the idea that I no longer need to spend thousands a day for my medicine was already the greatest blessing I could get out of this situation. So I had to at least try to be more conscious of my demeanor,” she revealed.

Lopez’s behavior improved when she started feeling signs of recovery. On the third month, she could already breathe without coughing and walk on her own. She celebrated this milestone by dancing at home.

By the 10th month, she was finally free of injections. A Satellite Treatment Center (STC) was also set up on their island so she didn’t need to go on a boat ride to get her treatment. Because of this improvement, Lopez was able to complete her treatment. Such was

her zest to hurdle it that she and the STC were hailed as one of the best performing patients and centers in the city.

When she finally graduated from MDR-TB, the first thing she did was go to her neighbors and be the social butterfly that she truly is.

“I could not forget about my last injection: I visited the center as always and got ready. Then Dirk, our nurse, just told me that I already had my last shot yesterday. I felt so relieved! I know that there are things that took forever, but I am glad I let that go,” she said with a laugh.

PAYING IT FORWARD

Lopez, whose husband is an overseas worker in Kuwait, owes the success of her treatment to her strong support system through her brother, her PMDT nurse, and children.

Her nurse consistently motivated her to be treated while her brother was responsible for carrying her around and cooking for her. Her children tolerated her moody spells and continued to take care of her every day.

For Lopez, the line was very thin between hope and death in MDR-TB so she now makes it a point to help as many potential TB patients as she could. Lopez became one of the former patients who provided a lot of referrals for TB screening by roaming around her neighborhood and sharing her experience with hopes of inspiring others to get tested as well.

She is now working to help eradicate the stigma that makes it harder for potential patients to admit that they may have to get tested for TB – that is by being a testimony of treatment success.

“Now that I am finally free of MDR-TB, I want to live my life with no regrets after having been granted this new chance. So I am going to use whatever means I can to help others,” she said.

“ As patients, you have a choice on how to react, and I chose to be positive because TB should not be the end of my world. Yes, it gave me a challenge, but the important thing is that it can be curable and I was getting treatment.

”

On that summer Kent Canonigo went to Manila, he was expecting for the best experience to come.

He was processing his requirements for a visa so he can work in the United States. It was his father's plans for him, and as future breadwinner of the family, it was his dream to have a better life so he can better provide for his parents and siblings.

But his life took a different turn when he saw the results of his physical exam: he had tuberculosis.

As far as he knew, he was healthy and exhibited no signs of the disease, not even severe coughing. Still, Canonigo accepted his situation with no fuss, and the fact that he had to put his dreams on hold for a few months.

Determined to get well and push through with his plans, he stayed in Manila to complete his treatment. But one day, the hospital had to stop it and he again received unexpected news. He turned out positive for Multi-Drug-Resistant Tuberculosis (MDR-TB).

"I had no choice but to accept it. I

NOTHING CAN BRING HIM DOWN

For this former patient, MDR-TB didn't cripple him but made him even stronger

just kept thinking that everything happens for a reason, and I will come out better after this," Canonigo said.

THE PROCESS OF HEALING

He returned to Cebu to continue his 18-month MDR-TB treatment and finish his last school year as a Mechanical Engineering student.

At that time, Canonigo was working on a thesis with his group and other college graduation preparations. So he resolved not to allow the disease to cripple him, especially that medication was already given for free. Aside from the inconvenience of getting sick, he also does not want to further burden her parents with additional costs on medicine because there are expenses lined up for his graduation.

Life had been strictly a hospital and school routine for Canonigo during the treatment. He would drive to the center, get all the necessary medication, and then tried to move on by going to class as any regular student should be.

On his first day of treatment, he suffered from a very strong, dizzying spell, a side effect of the injection and pills. This prevented him from focusing in class. After that, he made sure to

take all his medication early in the morning so his body can get used to their side effects before school.

Throughout his experience, not once did he divulge his situation to his peers. He hid his bouts of nausea and headaches as much as he could. But the physical effects were harder to conceal. On the first few months, his skin got darker and he developed skin outbreaks. His peers noticed that he lost focus at times, especially when completing their group thesis. He would also beg off on their usual night-outs and basketball activities. Such was the effect that he lost his girlfriend in the process.

"Whenever they would ask, I would just tell them I was stressed with our workload. People would presume that I did not say anything to avoid the stigma of this disease, but that was not really the case. I know there will be special considerations made for me if I told them and I wanted to avoid that. I just wanted to feel normal, at least in school, and I really just want to graduate on time," Canonigo revealed.

FROM PATIENT TO ADVOCATE

Others may feel that they had been a victim of TB but for Canonigo, he was even grateful that the disease made him a stronger person.

"For months, I internally grappled with the fact that this disease hit me. But the orientation and constant reminders kept reminding me that sometimes it has nothing to do with me. Tuberculosis just works that way, but now we have the technology to help us fight it. Going through that process of acceptance was almost therapeutic," shared Canonigo who has also learned to be mature, more patient and optimistic.

After "graduating" from MDR-TB and school, one of the first things he did was share his experience of triumph with his religious community as a way to remove the stigma attached to the disease. He also wanted patients to know that they can find free treatment.

Canonigo said, "As patients, you have a choice on how to react, and I chose to be positive because TB should not be the end of my world. Yes, it gave me a challenge, but the important thing is that it can be curable and I was getting treatment."



FOR MDR-TB survivor Kent Canonigo, his unexpected ordeal with the deadly but curable disease made him stronger in handling life's challenges.

SURVIVING THE SECOND TIME AROUND

*The man resolves to be a better person
after his two-time ordeal from TB*



REMY ENERLAN finds strength in the support of his aunt Perlita, in overcoming TB the second time around.

On that fateful day, Remy John Enerlan patiently waited in line. Before him was a small crowd who wore masks just like his. It would take a lot of time getting used to the sight but considering his ordeal, time was what he had in spades.

When it was finally his turn to drink the medicines – the first of what would be many routines – he thought it would be easy. But when he went home, he started to feel the side effects. First, he felt a little light-headed. When a few more hours passed and the feeling worsened, he started panicking. He was just about to get a glass of water when he collapsed and woke up a few hours later in a bed, wearing an oxygen mask.

The first thing that came to mind was that the pain was over. The doctor told him what happened was actually a good thing. It meant that his body was reacting to the treatment.

It was a Sunday afternoon and a few days after he had laid his mother to rest when Enerlan, a Multidrug-Resistant Tuberculosis (MDR-TB) patient, just overcame the worst experience of his life.

FINDING THE CURE

Remy was 20 years old when he was diagnosed with basic tuberculosis (TB) for the first time. Like most patients, he had the disease because of a weak immune system that may have been caused by a rough lifestyle.

As a tattoo artist and a part-time guitarist of a struggling band, he spent more time partying than sleeping. He was the only child of a single mother so all her attention was on him. Finding a stable job was not that much of a concern. Eventually, getting immersed in a lot of crowds lowered his immune system, which made him more prone to the disease.

“When I learned I got it (TB) the first time, I was fine by it. I know people would be scared but the treatment was only for a few months and that was all that mattered to me,” he added.

When he completed his treatment, he had strict orders not to get stressed and weaken his immune system lest the disease would recur and worsen. Thinking that he knew his body more than anyone else, he resumed to

partying. A few years later, his mother got sick that he had to find work to pay for her hospital bills. Construction work was the easiest to get for a high school dropout with no experience.

While the job did help pay for the bills, he ended up suffering the consequences. Days of working on dusty construction sites in the morning and sleepless nights spent preparing for the funeral of his mother who finally succumbed to kidney failure, weakened his immune system. It was the perfect time for the TB virus to once again hit Enerlan.

When he started developing fever and coughs a week after, he already knew that it was MDR-TB. After confirming his suspicions, his first thought was where to find treatment knowing how expensive it could get. Luckily, his clinic referred him to a Programmatic Management of Drug-Resistant TB (PMDT) center that gave medicines for free.

GETTING HIS GROOVE BACK

There are a lot of takeaways for a patient who has completed his MDR-TB treatment. It was a test of tolerance, especially after collapsing to the effects of injections and pills received for the first time. The physical effects were also undesirable: he had darker skin and lost his appetite which made him lose weight. But it was an experience he was willing to bear to ensure his survival.

It was also the greatest test of friendship. After learning of his predicament, his kind peers would still visit and bond with him. They even volunteered to pitch in for his fare so he could continue going to the center.

Those experiences taught him to be a responsible patient, to show appreciation to his friends and aging aunt who was taking care of him now. For two years, he religiously showed up at the center for treatment. And then one day, he was told that he no longer needed to because he was done.

“

When I learned I got it (TB) the first time, I was fine by it. I know people would be scared but the treatment was only for a few months and that was all that mattered to me.

”


“At first, I did not believe the nurse because I had been doing it for so long I got used to the routine. I am glad they made my experience as less painful as they could with the free fare and food packs,” he said.

Now that Enerlan has graduated from MDR-TB, he has become more cautious with his health. He now prioritizes sleep and learned to say no to late-night parties. He also became more conscious of the food he eats. While his MDR-TB is now a thing of the past, there is still that lingering thought that it can recur, so he wanted to keep his immune system as healthy as possible.

He is also dreaming big now and plans to continue his studies this coming school year so he can get a better job to help his aunt.

“Did I miss TB? Definitely not. But I am thankful it urged me to become a better man,” Enerlan said.





AS A NURSE under the Programmatic Management of Drug-Resistant TB (PMDT), Dirk Alfaro does not only ensure his patients' complete recovery to MDR-TB but assists them to become active members of society once again.

PROVIDING TREATMENT WITH A HEART

A nurse from San Carlos City commits to a life of service by treating patients with MDR-TB and helping them reintegrate in society

In the scuffed up outdoor lobby of the San Carlos City Health Office in Bacolod, around 10 to 15 individuals, all wearing masks, would lounge around in an enclosed space referred to as the directly observed treatment (DOT) Area.

Inside the DOT Area was a man in charge of all of them. Depending on their circumstances, he would lend them his support as they smile, vomit, or cry like their world has finally ended.

It was all in a day's work for Dirk Alfaro, whose four years of service as a Programmatic Management of Drug-resistant Tuberculosis (PMDT) nurse is defined by the number of patients he saves day by day from the hardships of Multi-Drug-Resistant Tuberculosis (MDR-TB).

This was not the life he envisioned for himself. He wanted to be an accountant until his family persuaded him to be a nurse and pursue a life of service. During his on-the-job trainings though, he was dismayed to find some nurses mistreating patients. This caused him to have second thoughts about the profession. Rather than compromise his principles as a nurse, he decided to help in his aunt's business instead and sold frozen goods at the city market.

He continued doing this for years until he was offered the PMDT nursing stint from a long-term TB program funded by The Global Fund with PBSP. After learning that such job entails the kind of ideal service he envisioned, he immediately applied for the job and the rest was history.

"The first words the dean said before offering the job was, 'Are you content to stay in this life forever?' Then, it just dawned on me. I just knew this is the ideal job for me," he said.

THE FIGHT CONTINUES

If there is someone who truly knows how agonizing MDR-TB can be to patients, it is Alfaro. As a PMDT nurse, he makes sure that all those referred to their center as potential MDR-TB cases are properly screened, oriented, and cured with no interruption, if possible. Throughout the process, he would witness how his patients carried the burden of having such a deadly but curable disease.

When he received his first batch of patients, he was so stressed about their resistance to treatment that he sometimes scolded them for their stubbornness.

"I found their behavior very hard to tolerate, at first. Here is a program that already gave you free drugs that cost thousands a piece and yet they still resist them. The program even gave them daily allowances for food and transportation so they really should be going to the center. But after listening to their stories and seeing how the entire process—not just the side effects of the drugs—affected them, I became more compassionate," he revealed.

Hence, he makes it his mission to ensure that these patients have an extended support system in him and in their co-patients. If one couldn't make it, he would deliver the medicine to them so their medications remain uninterrupted. He would organize monthly activities to persuade them not to skip their daily treatment. One time, he held a monthly contest for patients who had the best attendance, and rewarded them with a pack of groceries bought from his own pocket.

To make them feel that they are still worthy members of society, he would plan other activities that will urge them to move and not just sit still in the center. These activities include having their own Buwan ng Wika, Sportsfest, Nutrition Month, and summer outing since they could not skip treatment on holidays. Even celebrating Halloween was not excused from Alfaro's creative activities.

"You have to fill their minds with a lot of positivity to motivate them. I also find it an effective strategy to bond them together so they can feel that they are not alone in their fight against TB. Tuberculosis can be a very isolating disease so I want to create this community where they have each other to depend on," explained Alfaro.

One of the events he takes pride in organizing is his Baga-Bayani Awarding Ceremony, an annual activity that recognizes who he calls as real heroes who continue to fight against TB. They include former patients who gave referrals on potential TB cases, service providers in satellite treatment centers, and patients who judiciously completed their treatments.



DIRK ALFARO gives special care to his patients (left photo) and even organizes Buwan ng Wika, Nutrition Month and other activities to encourage patients to get involved and work with their fellow patients.

He may be compassionate but Alfaro makes sure his patients understand how strict he can be in enforcing rules and schedules to ensure their full recovery to MDR-TB.

"What I also want to stress is that TB is also a serious disease so they should take their treatment seriously. You can just imagine how many millions the donor has invested to make this program successful so we have to perform our roles to the best of our ability," Alfaro said.

LIFE AFTER TB

While providing complete treatment for patients may seem enough for other nurses, Alfaro looks at it differently. He is more concerned after his patients' lives after TB.

While the stigma of the disease was no longer as bad as before, not all patients could get jobs right after treatment. To be fully free from MDR-TB, it takes years of reforming the body back together and rebuilding the immune system so cured patients can be healthy enough

to take on hard labor. Because of this, he is worried about fathers and mothers who need to support their families.

To help them, he started with teaching his patients on how to properly handle their daily allowances. Under his strict guidance, patients would set up their savings accounts and pay their monthly government contributions to secure their social benefits.

He also began soliciting from his batchmates working overseas to fund scholarship grants and livelihood interventions for deserving patients. Through his efforts, he was able to send four scholars to school and four livelihood interventions. These include a sari-sari store, a carinderia, a sewing machine, and a pedicab. All of these expenses have been properly liquidated to secure the trust of his peers.

In the future, he plans to reach more barangays by setting up 31 health centers so he can inspire more nurses like him to facilitate 'treatments with a heart.' Looking back, Alfaro is proud of what he and his patients have become: now active members of society even after experiencing something as crippling as TB.

“If this project promises to give patients ‘life after TB,’ we can’t just stop after treatment. We have to do something to ease them back into society especially that they have been gone for so long. I know this is beyond what is expected of me, but there really is no stopping as long as you do what you love.”

THE JOB OF SAVING LIVES

*A banker gives up her lavish lifestyle
to fulfill her passion to serve as a PMDT nurse*

W

enever nurse Aurelie Durano had to clean up human feces and urine thrown carelessly at the tent where she was treating Multi-Drug Resistant Tuberculosis (MDR-TB) patients, she would wonder why she chose this life when she could have easily been living a far better one.

This was one of the hardest struggles that she and her patients had to deal with from an uninformed community in Barangay Sambag 2, Cebu City where the Programmatic Management of Drug-Resistant TB (PMDT) Satellite Treatment Center (STC) of the Vicente Sotto Memorial Medical Center is located.

Before becoming a registered nurse, Durano was already a Master's Degree holder in Business Administration and an accomplished banker. But in spite of earning a lot and having a comfortable lifestyle, she felt bored and thought her life was meaningless. So when her close friends and batchmates invited her to take up Nursing, she did not hesitate to join them.

Right after graduating and getting her license, she quit her banking job so she can focus on Nursing full-time. For her first job, she was assigned at a TB-DOTS facility as head nurse, an opportunity that gave her the life of service she yearned for.

However, it also came with a price: her monthly salary was less than half of what she usually earned. Working in a public health facility was also more stressful than working in a fully air-conditioned corporate office. But she persevered because her work has become her personal passion.

"At first, I just wanted to be a nurse because it was interesting and I had nothing else to do. But later on as I started working as one, I realized that this profession is so underrated and meaningful that I took it really seriously. I earned less but I learned and gained more from other aspects in life," she revealed.

PART OF AURELIE DURANO'S
daily routine as PMDT nurse is
to educate their neighbors from
an uninformed community that
MDR-TB can be cured.

LIFE AS A PMDT NURSE

Because of her experience doing TB-DOTS, she was offered to be part of a long-term program that provides MDR-TB treatments. The program, funded by The Global Fund in partnership with PBSP, also established PMDT Centers in Cebu, where Durano would later be working as one of the pioneering service providers.

Her first year as PMDT nurse did not come easy since the treatment facility was not yet completely set up by the partner hospital. To fulfil their duties, she and a fellow PMDT nurse had to find a cornered space inside the hospital when making reports and use a tent located outside the hospital for screening and treatments.

Every day, they would wheel boxes of medicines into the tent, administer treatment, and reassure patients verbally abused by rude neighbors who did not take the news of their arrival kindly. It was another challenge they needed to hurdle: dealing with neighbors who used to think of them as bad luck.

The community was very creative in making their opinions known. They stole their chairs and tables, hurled snide words while they were passing by, and threw human wastes when Durano and her patients were in the middle of treatment.

"At first, I ignored them because we somehow understood where they were coming from. We wanted to deal with the situation but we were busy catching up with our tasks that we had to focus on our patients first. But the situation got worse, I had to even take care of my patients' morale. Their behavior needed to stop," she said.

EDUCATING THE CRITICS

While it is deadly, MDR-TB is a curable disease and Durano made it a point to convey that message to their neighbors in the language they understood.

She started by throwing their wastes back at them while demanding for their respect and explaining—in a loud, no-nonsense voice—how TB will not infect them as long as they have a strong immune system. In the afternoons, she would visit the community to claim back her stolen chairs and give them a rundown on what TB is and how it can be prevented. She would also offer to provide free TB screenings and treatment to ensure the community's health.

"Later, I found myself being even thankful that they would steal our chairs because it gave me another chance to educate them about TB. It can happen anywhere,



“ This is what makes our job fulfilling: to be part of the solution to a global problem. TB is a very serious issue and sadly, not everyone is willing to take on the challenge because of fear. But if you are willing to be part of the solution, you have to be ready to take some risks. And the nature of the program will also comfort you; they will not allow you to be conquered by TB. ”

but it is curable, and they need to remember that,” Durano shared.

She continued this for over a year until a PMDT building was finally built. By that time, most of the scorn from the community had died down, especially after discovering that they continued to have no MDR-TB cases despite the presence of the PMDT center.

LIFELONG COMMITMENT

While dealing with their community, Durano also focused on providing uninterrupted treatment to patients. She feels truly blessed to be part of a program that does not only give free treatment but also monthly allowances for food and transportation. With the program's add-ons, she finds her task of motivating patients to complete their treatment much easier, especially those that came from far-flung barangays.

For Durano, the best part of being a PMDT nurse is the time when she tells patients that their treatments are finally complete. The fulfillment she gets from this is also a validation that that the

program's investment on her as a nurse did not go to waste.

"If there is another thing I am grateful for in this job, it is the fact that I had the chance to learn TB from the inside out," Durano said.

As a PMDT nurse, she was trained on how to properly diagnose, screen, and treat MDR-TB cases. Since her task also includes orienting patients on TB prior to treatment, she gains more information on how to prevent and cure the disease.

Because of this intricate knowledge of TB, she takes extra care in strengthening her body. She eats healthy food and prioritizes time for sleep. She does this to be a more responsible wife and mother especially now that she has a family of her own.

She also wants to be strong so she can continuously have the strength to hurdle the challenges of her profession, knowing that the fight to overcoming MDR-TB takes a long time. It is a challenge she is willing to accept, a challenge she has sacrificed her old, comfortable life for.

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Tel. Nos.: (632) 527.7741 to 48
Fax No.: (632) 527.3743
Email: kjrivadelo@pbsp.org.ph

VISAYAS REGIONAL CENTER (VRC)

Mezzanine Floor, The Persimmon
Plus, MJ Cuenco Avenue,
Mabolo, Cebu City
Tel. Nos.: (032) 232-5270
Fax No.: (032) 232-5286
Email: pbspcebu@skynet.net

MINDANAO REGIONAL CENTER (MRC)

Second Floor, Suites B203 and B204
Plaza de Luisa, 140 Ramon Magsaysay
Avenue, Davao City
Tel Nos.: (082) 221-2251 to 53
Fax No.: (082) 221-7201
Email: pbspmro@philwebinc.com