

## **P2P: SHARED HUMANITY**

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It is during trials that the true test of strength and essence of a relationship. This is nowhere more truly than in times of disaster and calamities. The Philippines is the 3<sup>rd</sup> most disaster-prone country in the world according to the UN, next only to Tonga and Tuvalu (Pacific islands). It is also named as the number one most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change as it lies in the Pacific Ring of Fire and 6 degrees from the equator where the “factory” of typhoons and hurricanes is located.

Despite these unenviable positions, the Filipino people are still blessed with caring neighbors, and other “passengers” on Planet Earth who extend help when help is direly needed.

The devastation was great for both the organization Don Bosco Foundation for Sustainable Development and the communities of organic banana growers. Without succor extended by the network of friends and supporters, bouncing back from the unbearable suffering would have been more difficult.



*Datu Mondia Imbok, Balangon grower and tribe leader of Bagobo Tagabawa IP community in Buhay, Makilala with DBFSD staff sadly surveying the damages to the farms.*

It is during this time of catastrophe that the term people-to-people (trade) has taken on an entirely different and more profound meaning for us in Don Bosco Foundation and the communities, farmers/growers we work and partner with. The assistance extended to us and our communities by the partners/ consumers within the Asian People’s Link (APLA, Philippines’ ATPI, Japan’s ATJ and Korea’s PT Coop and DURE) made it clear that the p2p is beyond trade, truly crosses borders (geographical boundaries, social and cultural). We at the receiving end of the aid feel the profound meaning of p2p, beyond trade, it is about shared humanity. This recognition of our shared humanity is akin to an experience of an encounter with the Holy, regardless of faith or no faith.

Relief assistance responded to the immediate need for food and shelter of people. The shock of the horrible catastrophe, witnessing the crumbling of one's home and fleeing to survive in evacuation centers were very traumatic. These were compounded by the lack of food and water in evacuation centers. Becoming refugees dependent on kindness of donors for basic necessities such as food, clothing were also dehumanizing experiences. Distribution of relief packs, tarpaulins, slippers, water, even insulating pads for sleeping on to the victims are the easiest part. Medical and psycho-social interventions is the next level. We accessed trauma therapy from our network of alternative/integrative medical practitioners. These we were able to facilitate more easily because of the vehicles of our cooperative, our staff and the Foundation.

However, the most important and heavier challenge that needs a long-term perspective and strategic direction is the reconstruction and rehabilitation. We identified 3 levels of rehabilitation and reconstruction which needed to be undertaken and mapped out strategies to accomplish these tasks beyond relief.

- I. Basic rehabilitation of utilities and **humane** shelter;
- II. Rehabilitation of the livelihood of the people: Organic banana farms destroyed and abandoned during displacement (both in the aftermath of earthquakes/landslides and COVID19 lockdown);
- III. Transformation of the communities.

The crisis became a very good opportunity to evolve changes in mindscapes and landscapes towards sustainable and climate resilient agricultural communities.

## **I. Basic Utilities Rehabilitation and Basic Humane Shelter:**

### **1.1 Batasan Basic Shelter and relocation**

In Batasan, our base community, we gave up part of our organic Balangon farm for the temporary relocation (5 years) of 55 families of mostly IPs who lost their homes completely and whose former location was declared by MGB (Mines & Geosciences Bureau) of MGB as high risk area. We also provided them light building materials in addition to what they could salvage from their old house destroyed by the earthquake and some materials from religious nuns who also donated. For areas declared safe for reconstruction or rebuilding of houses and families with own lots /lands for relocation of a new home, DBFSD provide them with limited building materials such as walls and some lumber.



*Japanese partners, Naoe Akiyama, Vice President of ATJ and Co-chairperson of APLA, and Yuki Akamatsu of ATJ, visited the Batasan community.*

## **1.2 Survival Gardens for Food Security**

But our concept of rehabilitation was not limited to having a basic shelter. We incorporated the element of food security and required every household to develop a vegetable and root crops garden in land spaces provided for them. We also included the dispersal of seed packs and various planting materials for leafy greens and for root crops. Apart from this, these households were given training in organic production system and the appropriate technologies therein.

Although initially imposed as a precondition to occupancy, the beneficiaries have now love the idea and practice of vegetable gardening for their food security. Some of them have also realized surpluses in their production that they either sell some to the weekly Market Day (Wednesdays) and exchange with their neighbors.

This has become the envy, challenge and inspiration and MODEL of other groups and constituents of the barangay (village). During the COVID19 pandemic, the threat of the possibility of food shortage (specifically rice) has afforded DBFSD the opportunity to push a policy in the village LGU to require every household to develop their own “Survival Garden” with root crops and vegetables. The 676 households were formed into groups/”cells” who undertake food production in vacant , unused lots and those loaned from landowners for communal “Survival Gardens” apart from individual gardens. Now, almost 100% of the population have vegetable plots and gardens.

Apart from these initiatives, DBFSD also accessed 500 different fruit tree seedlings distributed to 57 initial households to incorporate in their small gardens and farms.



Happy women who were able to set up their vegetable patches of FAITH (Food Always In The Home) and "Survival Gardens" after the earthquakes and currently CoViD crises.

*"Survival Garden" with root crops and vegetables for family consumption and selling to market weekly*

1.3 There are at least 6 Spring Development Projects (apart from the Metro Kidapawan Water District source in Batasan) which serve the water utility needs of the community. However, these have been damaged, some rendered totally without water as springs dried up and relocated somewhere else. The major spring water source was relocated by the earthquake within the rubber farm of DBFSD but still after 8 months, the water though very strong has not cleared. Batasan, through

The spirit of volunteerism and "bayanihan" as villagers are installing a trial water supply system using a newly identified spring source.



the village LGU has been provided with #2 diameter SDR 11 water pipes and couplings/accessories for a new source near the hot springs to be tapped to supply the majority of the village. The installation however is not yet finished and still ongoing because of the risk of still intermittent tremors (even after 8 months) which is still causing continuing landslides in the area and because of the restrictions imposed by the guidelines of the COVID19 lockdown response.

## 2. Brgy. Buhay, Makilala

### 2.1 Relief Assistance



During the height of the evacuation, there were Muslim constituents who remained in Buhay to safeguard their animals and belongings. There were looters from outside Buhay who came with vehicles to loot the destroyed houses of house appliances which cannot be brought during evacuation. We visited them, and breached the NO GO ZONE signs placed by the MGB. We brought along with us a doctor who treated the injured, medicines, sacks of rice and food packs. They requested for PE pipes so they can reconstruct and temporarily repair their spring water supply which was damaged by the earthquakes/landslides. These we promptly brought to them (with ATJ) and they were able to repair their water supply system.



We also visited those who went to the evacuation center, both IPs and Muslim Maranaos (at MIST campus in

barangay Concepcion ) and linked them to and facilitated the medical mission of AKKAP.

### 2.2 Rehabilitation/Relocation site

The case of Buhay is pathetic. There is a dearth of land space for relocation site. The best potential locations are owned by Visayan settlers who understandably

wouldn't sell their lands for relocation site to government or who would sell only at the highest price. The current evacuation site of the IP communities of Datu Imbok is for sale, 3 hectares at PhP1M (net) per hectare. The government is in the process of negotiating and processing for the sale of the 3 hectares to be allocated for the IP/Bagobo Tagabawa earthquake victims/homeless, the Muslim Maranao victims and the Visayan settlers who also need to be relocated. This land space has been inspected by the MGB (Mines and Geosciences Bureau) of DENR and approved by the NHA (National Housing Authority).

If the process is completed, the land will be subdivided into small lots and each family will be given a free basic house. There is however an issue as to another level of safety question. The land space may be safer than most from potential landslide as it is relatively flat but the question is of toxicity from agrichemicals applied massively by the conventional Cavendish banana plantation surrounding the area. The exposure of the women and little children is a time bomb which will explode in the future. The health risk involved is serious.

The IP community of Datu Imbok already expressed that they want to be relocated in a space exclusive for the IPs, or at minimum, away from the Muslim Maranao population because they want to continue with their way of life which are deemed "haram", offensive and a big no-no to the Muslim community, namely: raising pigs and dogs. This is also potential time bomb waiting to explode in the future.

We discussed with Datu Imbok the possibility of relocating to a safe land space within the ancestral domain, without land title and forego the "free house" from the NHA (National Housing Authority). The free housing units of NHA cannot compensate for the long term effects of constant exposure to the toxic pesticides (although Dole Stanfilco right now is experimenting with the use of biological in its plantation). For the sake of their intergenerational health, now and into the future of their grandchildren's progeny, they can forsake a freebie from government. Besides, the normal way of the NHA constructs houses is not based on appropriate design based on sustainable principles. There is just a space for the houses in close proximity to each other, no provision for gardens and no possibility of raising livestock in the backyards.

As the legal requirement for the municipal LGU (local government unit) and the NHA for relocation/construction is on titled land, the land within the ancestral domain (CADT-Certificate of Ancestral Domain) is out of the question. And so, the only alternative is to buy a land parcel within the ancestral domain suitable and with low if not zero risk.

Fortunately, a 3-hectare banana farm within the ancestral domain owned by a



The Proposed Relocation Site within the ancestral domain covered by CADT

Virgin forest within strict protection zone

3 hectares of built up area (banana farm) for sale at PhP150,000

tenured migrant (settler) is up for sale for PhP150, 000. Adjacent to it is also a 3-hectare abaca farm being offered at PhP150, 000.00. Water supply is existent for drinking and for fishponds and agricultural use. There will be 80 or more IP families (those who do not have relocation site and cannot

rebuild in their own high risk sites) who will be making use of the land for housing with provision for spaces for gardening and backyard livestock, even cluster fishponds. The community can rebuild their IP Tribal office, their churches, their tribal hall, etc. (I happened to visit the original site and it was really scary. Just beside the structures was a huge landslide which carried the houses and the banana crops of the farmers).

The community already agreed to relocate within the ancestral domain and we have agreed with them to ask ATJ to allow us to buy the land for them, help them with materials for construction while they give their counterpart of locally available materials and their labor.

The information has already been relayed to the Municipal Planning Office and formal process has commenced for a formal request for assessment by MGB if necessary and of formal inquiry as to the possibility of assistance from the LGU and NHA even with the relocation within ancestral domain and not in private titled land.

### **2.3 Community Development & Transformation**

WE aim to include a space and a hall for training and community activities as we intend to really work beyond Balangon with them by educating them on many other life skills such as fertility and population management/reproductive health, hygiene and sanitation and of course, agro ecology and environmental education to make them guardians of the protected area of Mt. Apo.

### **2.4 Expanded Sustainable Livelihood**

As mentioned earlier, both the earthquake and the COVID19 pandemic though disastrous, offered opportunities. Many realized the resilience and sustainability of Balangon market which continued on despite COVID19 pandemic while other crops already closed all trading activities (copra, rubber, cut flowers, etc.). The reliability of the p2p trade was demonstrated in stark contrast of the other conventional commodity trades.

Thus, rehabilitation and reconstruction of houses and living spaces are not the only immediate tasks but as well as of organic banana farms within the context of agro ecology/integrated diversified organic farming system. Expansion of adherents and producers of organic Balangon bananas is the way to sustainable environmentally sound and socially responsible livelihood. Even with the dearth in planting materials, farmers are working at macropropagation of whatever existing Balangon crops they have. Because of the surge in interest in Balangon among IPs and non-IPs in Buhay, we have included seedlings dispersal to existing and new farmers who would like to expand their crop inventory and be on board the Balangon p2p trade initiative. In this way, rehabilitation/reconstruction after the earthquakes and the raging pandemic is more comprehensive with long term sustainability as goal.

The assistance from APLA, ATJ and Japanese consumers, PTCoop and DURE, will in the future come full circle, when the bananas from these funds shall be shipped to Japan and even Korea in the future. Words are not enough to capture the essence of the relationship. The gratitude of the farming communities is overflowing. Even if the words “Thank you”, “Salamat”, “Arigatou Gozaimasu”, “Gamsahabnida”, we say them from the bottom of our hearts.

