

INITIATIVES IN CITIZENSHIP BUILDING IN ABRA PROVINCE

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Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Government (CCAGG)

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Introduction

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CCAGG’s emergence as a people’s watchdog started with a novel government program called Community Employment and Development Program (CEDP) which engaged non-government organizations to monitor the implementation of its various pump-priming projects. CCAGG did extensive information-dissemination on the CEDP during community meetings and through the mass media, transferred the monitoring technology learned from NEDA and instilled in the people ownership of the projects to be implemented in their locality. This way, an empowered people was formed.

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MPWH recommended the monitoring of the road project by a mutually acceptable civic organization or interested party.

The amount of three million pesos was allotted to two phases. Phase 1 consists of 3.78 kilometer road in the amount of P1,440,000.00 and Phase 2 for 2.66 kilometers amounting to P1,560,000.00 Both phases should have 6.0 meter width. The first phase was done by administration through *pakyaw contract system*.

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Capitol in Bangued. They read a billboard at the Provincial Engineers' Office which said that the construction of the Galungugong Footbridge was already on-going. This really angered them for they were not informed about it. They reported the matter to the Commission on Audit (COA). They also approached then OIC Governor Vicente Valera and Provincial Prosecutor Rodor Gayao for assistance but nothing resulted from this. It was their networking with their parish priest and the CCAGG which strengthened their resolve in their crusade for justice. A case was filed in the Office of the Ombudsman against Mr. Isidro Tuzon, the caretaker of the municipal government of Lagangilang during that election year. He was alleged to have withdrawn the fund for the Galungugong Footbridge from the Philippine National Bank (PNB) in Bangued and used the money during the previous election. Later, the Sandiganbayan indicted him and issued a warrant of arrest but which was not served him because an influential politician was allegedly protecting him.

Though justice was not meted out to the offender, this case was a success as it ushered social awakening and a thirst for justice among an ethno-linguistic people.

The sixth is on **“The Indomitability of the Human Spirit: The Story of the Indigenous People of Boliney, Abra”**. This is about the resilient indigenous communities in Boliney. Hard hit by the Killer Quake of 1990, Boliney was in shatters. Massive landslides buried alive seven (7) persons while another was carried by the rampaging river. Forest and habitat of wildlife were destroyed, houses collapsed, road networks were obliterated, fertile lands were washed out and rice terraces were heavily damaged. Irrigation systems were rendered useless.

In solidarity with the people of Boliney, seven Church-based agencies of Abra formed themselves into the Inter NGO Disaster Relief Services (INDRS) to coordinate and facilitate the delivery of the much needed relief services and rehabilitation efforts. CEBEMO of the Netherlands, OXFAM Canada and SAVE the CHILDREN funded the efforts of INDRS.

Initial relief operations included distribution of foodstuffs, blankets, clothing and farm tools. Medical missions were organized. The INDRS also helped in the relocation of some quake victims. Rehabilitation and reconstruction followed the relief work. The indigenous communities

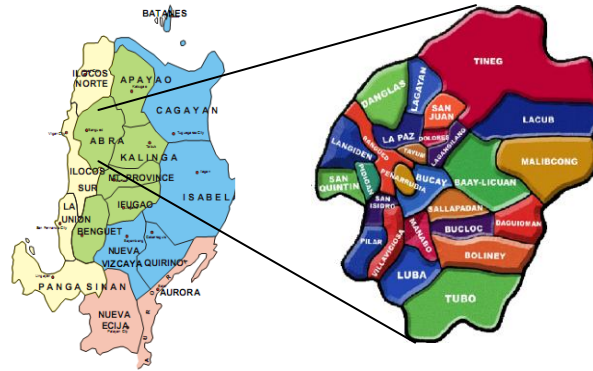
of Boliney, worked with grim determination to rebuild their destroyed properties. They used their age-old Innalluyon system (labor pool or labor sharing) which called for collective participation to effect collective take-off for their development. The food-for-work sustained them as they went about rebuilding what were destroyed and lost.

In three years' time, the indigenous communities of Boliney were able to re-establish their farms, irrigation systems, road network including footbridges. Agro-forestry projects were also put up. At hindsight, they said they were, unknowingly, rebuilding and rehabilitating their shattered lives from their traumatic experiences too. Their work of restoration was for them

This is the beautiful story of a people who, though scarred by the Killer Quake of 1990 strove hard to rebuild their shattered lives. Their partners in realizing their collective take-off were the seven Church-based agencies which form the coalition called Inter NGO Disaster Relief Services of INDRS. The government, for not reaching out to the quake victims of Boliney in their hour of need, lost its chance of making a dent in their lives.

Introduction

The Cordilleras of northern Luzon, Philippines is a mountainous region composed of five provinces of Abra, Benguet, Ifugao, Kalinga and Mt. Province, and the City of Baguio.



Abra is a landlocked area located on the western side of the Cordillera in northern Luzon. Its provincial boundaries are defined by Ilocos Norte and Kalinga on the North, Mt. Province and Ilocos Sur on the South and Kalinga on the East. It is approximately 408 kilometers north of Manila, the capital of the Philippines.

With an area of 397,555 hectares, it consists of 27 municipalities. Twenty-six of these are sixth class municipalities, while Bangued the capital town, is the only first class municipality.

The province of Abra has an extremely rugged terrain with mountains and hills running along the periphery and in its interior. It has an elevation varying from as low as 5 meters to a little near 2,000 meters above sea level. It is almost all uplands with the Ilocos range in the West and the Cordillera in the East. Such a topography accounts for the non-extensive arable plains. The Abra Valley composed of Peñarubia, Bangued, Pidigan and eastern part of Tayum is the biggest plain. Abra River and its tributaries are the sources of irrigation to the arable lands.

Eighty percent (80%) of its lands are forest and wildlife sanctuaries, ten percent (10%) for grazing and five percent (5%) each for rice and diversified crops.

There are two pronounced climates of Abra. June to October are the months of the northeast monsoon and the rainy season. This is also the season of typhoons which cause damages to properties and loss of lives. October generally starts the beginning of the dry season.

As to population, Abra Province has 230,953 (NSO 2007) people of which majority are farmers while the rest are fishermen, teachers, employees, businessmen, hunters and gold panners, weavers and drivers.

There are two major groupings of people in Abra; the Ilocanos and the Tingguians and packets of Visayans, Tagalogs and Moslem communities.

Today, the Ilocanos who are roughly 75% of Abra population settle in the lowlands. The Tingguians however, who are but 25% of the total population occupy 5% of the total land area of 397,555 hectares. They reside in the remote mountain areas which their forefathers, after a fierce struggle with the forces of nature and with the not too friendly neighboring tribes succeeded in carving their cultural, political and economic base which they call to this day their “ancestral domain”. (The Banao Development Plan p.3) Here, their ancestors grew and developed their forests from where they cut wood for housing, which gave them food and medicines. Their forestland became a watershed from which springs flow to numerous rivers teeming with fishes and which provided waters not only for their domestic and irrigation use but also for the low lying areas occupied by the Ilocanos. Life in their domain is simple, governed by indigenous laws through the Council of Elders.

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The CCAGG As A People's Watchdog

By: Pura C. Sumangil

Introduction:

Abra is an economically depressed province of the Cordillera region. In 1983, the National Council on Integrated Area development (NACIAD) recommended the inclusion of Abra as a priority area for integrated area development (IAD). This document stated that “socio-economically, Abra’s development process is characterized by the following:

- Low level of resource utilization affecting both land and labor;
- Low level of social amenities;
- Low level of infrastructure development, and
- Low level of popular participation in the decision-making process which has resulted partly to apathy and political unrest specifically in the uplands.

It is in this setting of poverty, apathy and political unrest that the Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Government (CCAGG) was born. It is a non-profit, non-stock and non-partisan province-wide organization whose membership of more than a thousand represent the cross section of Abra society e.g. farmers, housewives, students, out-of-school youth, Church workers, priests and professionals. CCAGG is an offshoot of the NAMFREL group that struggled hard for an honest and clean election during the presidential snap election of 1986. Realizing that they as a group attained what was inconceivable (as experienced during the snap presidential election), they decided not to disband as group to pursue their commitment beyond the electoral issues and concerns.

Organizational Vision and Objectives

From the original NAMFREL group of Abra emerged a bigger group which called itself “Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Government” (CCAGG): Theirs was a tall order, “to

establish a self-reliant community of a politically mature and economically emancipated citizenry who will work for good government.”

To arrive at its expressed vision, the members formulated the following objectives:

- Catalyze the revitalization and formation of autonomous groups on geographic and sectoral levels;
 - Establish permanent structures for regular and direct consultation with the people on their needs, problems and interests
 - Deal effectively with all other agencies/institutions to ensure that the people’s interests are on the political agenda;
 - Support government programs which conform with the goals of the organization;
 - Fiscalize the government and semi-government agencies and contribute to the building of a new order based on the renewed power of the people in the quest for justice and peace, and
 - Undertake projects which are aimed to uplift the socio-economic and political conditions of the people of Abra.

The Community Employment and Development Program (CEDP): An Opening for CCAGG

In August 1986, the newly installed Aquino Administration launched a comprehensive employment program aimed at pump priming the sagging economy. Called the Community Employment and Development Program (CEDP), it had a budget of P3.9 billion pesos that financed small scale infrastructure projects like feeder roads, school buildings, health centers and communal irrigation systems using labor intensive method which gave employment to about one million people. These projects were implemented by the different line agencies and local government.

A key feature of the CEDP was the employment of the project beneficiaries in the locality to augment their income derived from farming. Another characteristic is the participation of a non-government organization (NGO) in monitoring the implementation of the program which

was jointly administered by the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) and the Ministry of Budget and Management (MBM).

On January 22, 1987, the CCAGG, represented by Ms Carmelita Bersalona, and Ms Pura Sumangil chairman and co-chairman respectively, signed a Tripartite Agreement with NEDA (represented by Mr. Joseph Alabanza, Region I Director) and the MBM (represented by Mr. Mario Bravo, OIC Regional Director).

In said Tripartite Agreement, NEDA authorized the CCAGG to:

- Participate in the identification, review and evaluation of all rural employment generation projects particularly the CEDP projects of Abra;
- Be a signing witness of the pre-bids and awards committee;
- Actively monitor project implementation of the CEDP in Abra.

In addition to the above, NEDA also committed to:

- Train the CCAGG on the technical know-how of monitoring;
- Furnish the CCAGG listings of projects to be implemented by the different line ministries as well as its guidelines for the proper dissemination to the CCAGG and to the people of Abra;
- Ensure that the recommendations of the CCAGG monitoring teams shall be acted upon by the implementing agencies after adequate discussion of the former's findings and recommendations.

MBM, on its side, will

- Provide the necessary documents on the releases of funds for the rural employment generation program, and
- Support the NEDA in the release of funds necessary for the monitoring activities to be undertaken by the CCAGG.

The CCAGG, on the other hand, agreed to:

- Monitor closely and effectively the projects/ activities based on the guidelines provided by NEDA and MBM;
- Provide NEDA Regional Office regular feedback reports on projects monitored based on the latter's monitoring format;
- Provide regular feedbacks to the implementing agencies and local development staffs including its proposals and recommendations to resolve problems and issues of project implementation.

Copies of the tripartite agreement were sent to Governor Vicente Valera, the Abra Provincial Governor at that time, to the MPWH Abra District and to the Provincial Planning and Development Office (PPDO)

Monitoring the CEDP:
a Challenge to the CCAGG:

The monitoring of the CEDP projects was accepted by the CCAGG as a challenge. It was also recognized as an opportunity to fight graft and corruption - the commonly perceived explanation why Abra is poor; why its people have been denied basic services like roads, schools, health care, irrigation system, to name but a few.

Monitoring the CEDP involved not only looking into the implementation of the project, its financial and physical status but also looked into the benefits derived by the community. For example:

- How many local inhabitants were employed in the project?
- How much income did they derive from their employment?
- How long did they work?
- What materials and equipment were used in the projects?

With the list of projects and project costs provided for by the NEDA and MBM, the CCAGG members went into massive information-dissemination using both Radio Station DZPA and TIMEK TI AMIANAN, a community newspaper. The CCAGG also visited project sites, held meetings with the communities to inform them of the projects to be implemented in their locality. The Abreños were elated. They almost can not believe that such information, unheard of in the past, were at their disposal.

The components of the program-of-work were explained to the communities. The what and the how of monitoring were also taught them. This proved fruitful, for the people, realizing that the projects were theirs, took special interest on them. They eagerly awaited the projects and when these were already being executed, they worked hard and monitored them as well.

Instances When the CCAGG Flexed Its Muscles As a Peoples' Watchdog.

While the CCAGGs were getting thrilled at their fulfilling engagement, the implementing agency, the Ministry of Public Works & Highways (MPWH) was meeting them with resistance. Programs of work were difficult to secure. Project engineers were not receptive to the CCAGGs. Never was there a chance when the in-house monitors of the MPWH and CCAGG did joint monitoring. When problems or flaws in project implementation were brought to their attention, the OIC District Engineer was simply indifferent. "They are simply laymen. They do not understand technical matters", he was heard to have said. The idea of laymen monitoring their work did not situate well with them. Other government units were hostile and cold. Even local executives, were indifferent (TIMEK TI ABRA, June 8, 1981). One municipal Council even banned the local CCAGG from monitoring projects in their own locality for accordingly, the latter only causes "destabilization, disunity, and hinder development" (Danglas Municipal Council Resolution # 09, series of 1990). It was sheer determination and belief in the good monitoring would bring to the province of Abra that kept the CCAGG going despite all odds.

At the same time that the CCAGG were going about with their monitoring activities, they also wrote news and other articles in the local diocesan newspaper to educate people and officials on the nature and purpose of monitoring. They insisted that monitoring is a right and duty of every

taxpayer to see where his taxes are used and that these are being spent well. Monitoring is also a government program which ushers in partnership between the government itself and a non-government organization in effecting meaningful project implementation for the common good.

In February 1987, the Abreños were alarmed by a full page Accomplishment Report of the MPWH Abra Engineering District published in the NORLUZONIAN COURIER, a regional newspaper based in San Fernando, La Union. It reported that the CEDP projects being monitored in Abra were already 100% finished. How can this be so when some projects were not even started, or barely begun or midway in implementation? Triggered by this publication, the CCAGG called for a big meeting. People came in droves. Many were angry and spoke in high pitch voices. Others were bitter and very disappointed with this turn of events. But cooler heads prevailed and before long, they were outlining what to do. Four teams were formed and dispatched to the various project sites to do investigation and photo documentation. To support the fact-finding committees, the concerned communities came up with sworn statements on the state of project implementation. With these as bases, the CCAGG prepared their letter-complaint where they asked that the CEDP projects and all other on-going projects be inspected. They also sought audience with Minister Vicente Jayme of MPWH. This minister with his deputies received the CCAGG delegation very warmly in the MPWH Central Office. Together, they read the complaint, looked at the photos to back up claims of project mismanagement and irregularities. This meeting ended with a request to Minister Vicente Jayme to send an incorruptible audit team to conduct a physical inspection not only of the projects under complaint but also other on-going projects like Soot Bridge in Soot. La Paz, Abra - Ilocos Norte Road, Abra – Cervantes Road, Bangued – Pilar Road, Junction Peñarrubia - Bucay Road and Mudeng - Langiden Road. The Minister acceded although no date was promised.

Two weeks later, quietly and unannounced, a special audit team from the MPWH arrived in Bangued, Abra on March 19, 1987. They were Director Marcos Kabiling (team leader), Atty. Bienvenido Merelos of the Legal Department and Engineer Guillermo Gregorio of the Bureau of Research and Standards (BRS). Upon their arrival, they called on the CCAGG and the engineers of the MPWH Abra Engineering District to a conference to explain the reason for their visit. A schedule of project inspection was prepared with both the Abra District Engineering and the

CCAGG joining. For three days, the composite team visited the project sites were made. The special audit team also interviewed the project beneficiaries. However, on their fourth day, two ammunitions for 12 guage shot gun double zero were planted in their service vehicles car which they read as a threat to their lives. They reported the matter to Police Superintendent Lt. Col Leon Badival, of the Integrated National Police Command of Abra who assigned to them security aid. But early the next morning, the special audit team left in haste for Manila carrying the documents pertinent to the projects they investigated.



The findings of the special audit team became Minister Vicente Jayme's bases in charging administratively on April 30, 1987, the following members of the MPWH Abra Engineering District: the District Engineer, Assistant District Engineer, Chief of Construction Section, Chief of Maintenance Section, Chief of Planning Section, In-house Monitoring Officer, a Materials Testing Engineer, two (2) project engineers and project Monitoring representatives.

Eleven engineers of the MPWH Abra Engineering District were formally charged of Dishonesty and/or Grave Misconduct on the basis of the Audit Team's findings:

1. Projects were certified as 100% complete when actually construction works were still on-going;
2. Except for Soot Bridge, all road projects were without plans and specifications. Program of work and estimates were approved without benefit of required detailed engineering in violation of MPWH Rules and Regulations;
3. Program of work for funding purposes were the same program of work utilized for construction purposes without being revised to suit actual condition;
4. Specified materials in the program of work were substituted with different or inferior quality particularly materials used in the repair of both Sinalang and Luba Elementary School Buildings;

5. Cement which has a limited storage duration was included among the materials for procurement notwithstanding the fact that the time of actual construction is dependent upon the release of construction funds;
6. There were no pre-construction plans and as built plans for each road project rendering it difficult, if not possible, accurate determination of work accomplishment;
7. Quality of work appears to be below standard. The physical appearance of all barangay roads do not show that rolling or compaction was done;
8. There was laxity of project monitoring in the District office;
9. Engineering, administrative and overhead expenses charged to project funds exceeded authorized percentage;
10. End-users of project were made to accept alleged completed projects without being advised on the extent of work accomplished.

The eleven engineers were required to answer the above charges in writing and under oath within five days upon receipt of the charges. They were to state as well whether they elect to have a formal investigation of the charges against them or to waive their right to such an investigation. They were also advised of their right to be assisted by a lawyer.

All the respondents filed their respective answers. They also opted for a formal investigation which actually took place sometime in June 1987 after the Congressional elections. The venue of the investigation was Manila, at the MPWH Central Office, which was thought of by the CCAGG as the ideal place. It was a neutral place, and away from social, political and moral pressures.



Assigned as hearing lawyer was Atty. Ladislao Vinluan, Legal Officer II of the MPWH. The prosecution was represented by the MPWH Legal Panel composed of Atty. Angelita Sabio and Atty. Camilo Fronza, with Atty. Arnedo Valera, CCAGG's counsel assisting.

The defense lawyer was Atty. Venusto Franco. During the formal investigation of Administrative Case # 87-15, he presented the eleven (11) respondent-engineers to the Hearing Officer.

The prosecution panel presented three (3) vital witnesses. They were Engineer Marcos Kabling, Team Leader of the Special Audit Team, Mr. Joel Altea, MPWH Comptroller, Ms. Sheralyn Narag, OIC COA Auditor of the Abra Engineering District. All three government officials were vital witnesses to the case against the eleven MPWH engineers. There were also eight (8)



witnesses from the CCAGG (its chairperson, and co-chairperson, two engineers, a community journalist, two housewives and a young farmer).

Engineer Marcos Kabling was at the witness stand for three full days. He spoke of his team's findings on the twenty (20) questioned CEDP projects. He said "Our findings confirmed the complaint of the CCAGG that the projects were still on-going when reported as 100% finished" The respondents' lawyer elected not to listen anymore to the two other special audit team members namely Atty. Bienvenido Merelos and Eng'r Guillermo Gregorio.



Ms Sheralyn Narag, the OIC auditor of the MPWH

Abra brought all the vouchers of the 20 questioned projects. The respondent-engineers were so shocked when she submitted the voucher of payment to the Norluzonian Courier for the publication of the Abra MPWH Accomplishment Report which negated the claim of the eleven engineers that the accomplishment report was not paid for.

For the respondents, the following testified: OIC District Engineer Jerome Borjal, Asst. District Engineer Roberto Cataniag and COA resident auditor of the MPWH, Mrs. Romualda Ballo. For the rest of the



respondents, their sworn statements filed in answer to the formal charges were considered as their testimony. The prosecution panel waived the right to cross examine them.

The OIC District Engineer Jerome Borjal and Assistant District Engineer Roberto Cataniag, under cross examination, accepted that the certificates of project completion and turn-over of



projects to end-users were done in good faith and did not cause undue damage to the government. OIC District Engineer Jerome Borjal said that these were internal agreements arrived at among himself, his assistant district engineer, accountant, auditor and all unit chiefs to obligate fund allocation, otherwise, the fund allocation would be reverted to the general fund. The resident COA auditor, Mrs.

Romualda Ballo testified that though vouchers and appropriate checks were prepared, she released them only upon actual completion of projects.

Mr. Joel Altea also testified that “the steps and methods undertaken by the respondents were irregular.” Mr. Altea spoke of the Funding Treasury Warrant System where fund allocated for a certain project will not be reverted despite the lapse of the year.

The hearing of Administrative Case # 87-15 for Dishonesty and/or Misconduct against the eleven engineers started in July 1987 and went on until August of the same year. The CCAGG members acting as witnesses stayed on and off in Manila for two months. It was a great learning experience: the ordinary housewives, out-of-school youth, young professionals, old women taking the witness stand hoping and praying that by doing so, it could bring about a better Abra. The two months saw the outpouring of support to the organization.



Ordinary citizens would come to hand in a few hard-earned pesos. Farmers would bring rice and vegetables which were cooked as *baon* and eaten under the huge acacia trees in Intramuros. The Diocese of Bangued would lend its vehicles for the trip to Manila. Others would pay for the gasoline. A few others volunteered to drive the witnesses to the City.

The local media was pro-active as well. They did not watch the issues with folded arms. They were and still are very much concerned, involved and supportive of the issues regarding the caase against the eleven engineers of the MPWH.

On the last day of the hearing, the CCAGG was assured that in fifteen (15) days or so, the case would be resolved. But it was not so. Efforts to follow up the case were made through letters, telephone calls, telegrams and visits to the Legal Department of the MPWH. The MPWH's answers to queries were one and the same. "The documentary evidences submitted by the respective parties are voluminous; sorting them out and studying them is not easy". Meanwhile the CCAGG heard of the intervention made both by then Abra Provincial Governor Vicente Valera and Congressman Rodolfo Bernardez in behalf of the eleven engineers. The CCAGG personally got copies of their letters praying for their return to office as the district badly need them. There was also a campaign for signatures endorsing the return of the said engineers to Abra Engineering District for "lack of qualified men to undertake road-building".

Smear Campaign and Threats to the CCAGG

As the resolution of the case against the eleven engineers is being awaited, a smear campaign against the CCAGG was made by their detractors. They said that the CCAGG has a political motive for doing monitoring work and before long, they will run for political posts.

Threats were directed too to some of its leaders. Consider the following stories:

1. A hired gunman monitored the movement of the chairperson and in one occasion was about to execute his plan to shoot her. Fortunately, her car was full of student-

volunteers. With the sight of the young students, the gunman changed heart. This was later shared to a military intelligence officer.

2. The residents of Janssen Hall '79, a ladies' dormitory of Divine Word College of Bangued (DWCB) being managed by the CCAGG co-chairperson were roused from sleep because of an anonymous phone call which said that the building would be bombed in the early morning. Imagine the pandemonium created by such an irresponsible call. The young ladies were wailing like anything. To pacify them, the security guards of the school and the police made rounds every now and then to thwart the threat.
3. The car of the CCAGG monitoring head, a lady-engineer, was persistently trailed by unknown men after late meetings in communities. The decision to move in groups must have discouraged the pranksters after some time
4. But the grievous of all was the killing of Atty. George Tugadi, the legal officer of the organization at the height of its monitoring activity. He was shot dead by an unknown assailant as he, with some companions, were stepping out of an eatery. The killer disappeared in the darkness of the night. Till today, the crime remains unresolved.

Public Support to the CCAGG

The reshuffling of Department Secretaries saw Secretary Vicente Jayme transferred to the Finance Department. Hon. Fiorello Estuar was named OIC Secretary of the DPWH.

Suspicious that effort at whitewashing of the case was being done, friendly, supportive and sympathetic groups came out with their public support to the CCAGG's quest for justice for Abra. The Federation of People's Economic Council of Abra of Abra addressed a resolution to then Acting Secretary Fiorello Estuar, which said in part:

“ .. that the case be resolved on the basis of the evidence presented in the spirit and justice and without succumbing to pressures being exerted by politicians and

other vested groups. The severity of the Aquino Government in dealing with graft and corruptions by erring government officials is now at an acid test”.

The Clergy of Abra also prepared “An Open Letter in Support of the CCAGG for the People of Abra”. The letter said in part:

“The CCAGG acted, not to seek punishment of any individual, not for any personal gain or gratification but for the sake of the common good of the Abrenians and to help advance the cause of honesty and justice within our government”.

In said “Open Letter”, the Clergy of Abra, obviously referring to the interventions made by our top provincial officials, stated further:

“.....we would strongly condemn any act or any attempt by others to influence the verdict to be rendered to the case”.

As an expression of concern to the well-being of the CCAGG who have become victims of threats and smear campaign by detractors, the Clergy of Abra in said letter added:

“.....need it be added that we would also condemn any attempt to inhibit or threaten any member of the CCAGG for any activity, justly and conscientiously carried out.”

The interventions of the Provincial Governor and Congressman of the lone district of Abra for the eleven engineers and the support of the People’s Economic Council and the Clergy of Abra to the CCAGG made news.



On September 21, 1987, MPWH Acting Secretary Hon. Fiorello Estuar invited the CCAGG to a

meeting at the DPWH Central Office in Manila. In the meeting he informed them that it was CCAGG's zeal and persistence in pursuing the case against the eleven engineers that convinced the MPWH to establish an office now known as "Complaints and Action Center" (CAC). This office is tasked to receive and handle complaints from peoples' organizations against anomalous transactions and mal-implementation of projects by their field personnel.

The Acting Secretary also informed the group members that the proceedings and the resolution of Administrative Case No. 87-15 against the eleven engineers for Dishonesty and/or Grave Misconduct were turned over to the State Prosecutors of the Department of Justice for review. This made the CCAGGs asked themselves what could have transpired to have triggered the transfer of the whole proceedings of the case to be reviewed by the state prosecutors? Acting Secretary Estuar said that meanwhile that the case is being reviewed, can the CCAGG help pinpoint who are the big fishes among the eleven engineers? The members declined by saying that "from the evidences which were submitted, one can identify who among the charged engineers are the big fishes". This ended the meeting of CCAGG with Acting Secretary Estuar on September 21, 1987.

Weeks dragged on and no clear ending of the case was yet in sight. Then the verdict of "Reprimand" came to the ears of the CCAGG. They were very unhappy. Telegrams, letters of angry concerned citizens chapters from all over Abra swarmed the Secretary's table. There was no way out but to reopen the proceedings for review. The documents were turned over to state prosecutors of the Department of Justice to review the proceedings.

On November 10, 1987, an anxious CCAGG made so by the Department's seeming inaction on the administrative case, addressed a letter to Secretary Juanito Ferrer of the MPWH copies of which were sent to President Corazon Aquino, Finance Secretary Vicente Jayme, and Senator Vicente Paterno. The letter reiterated its trust in the sincerity of the Secretary in



reflecting the government's program of transparency and in the integrity of the state prosecutors who are reviewing the administrative case. They also said:

“the case does not only involve legalities. There is more to it. There were cues that could not be put to print like the intense emotions that unfolded as each witness presented by the prosecutors took the witness stand, cues that could have been understood and better felt by a sensitive and just hearing officer.

The CCAGG also said in their letter:

“the administrative case as a test case would withstand any attempt to whitewash or even by political interference because in it lies the answer to the question whether the government is really sincere and able to restore the faith of the people in their government”.

Towards the end of their letter to Secretary Juanito Ferrer, the CCAGG added:

“The administrative case against the eleven engineers is not just a question of kilometer of roads built or not built... not even a question of services provided or not provided for the people. It boils down to a question of the government's credibility regarding its claim to want to clean up corruption which threatens the social, economic and political life of the nation”.

Finally, on February 5, 1988, the much awaited decision on Administrative Case No. 87-15 for Dishonesty and/or Misconduct came out. It was signed by Secretary Juanito Ferrer on November 22, 1987.

The respondents are found under the facts of having falsified the certificates of completion in the number of counts, as follows:

1. Mr. Jerome P. Borjal - 9 counts;
2. Mr. Roberto B. Cataniag - 9 counts;
3. Mr. Rolando B. Barbero - 6 counts;
4. Ms. Marietta P. Barreras - 6 counts;
5. Mr. Rey Arcena - 6 counts;
6. Ms. Ofelia A. Javier - 6 counts;
7. Mr. Carmelo B. Benedicto - 2 counts
8. Mr. Sandy B. Benedito - 2 counts;
9. Mr. Jeromoe Navarro - 2 counts;
10. Mr. Pompeyo j. Berona - 1 count; and
11. Mr. Paulino Ferraren, Jr. - 1 count

However, though the respondents are culpable for falsifying of the certificates of completion in the respective number of counts, DPWH resolution argued that what the respondents did does not amount to dishonesty. The resolution defined “dishonesty as the conscious and willful effort to resort to fraudulent or deceptive misrepresentation or conduct calculated by the subject to earn for him or another unwarranted advantage or profit. To the credit of the respondents, dishonesty does not categorize any of their conduct. Their acts did not bring them any unwarranted advantage or benefit”

The DPWH resolution further said that certifying the projects as completed though still on-going are tantamount to official misconduct abhorred under the civil service decree. But considering the context in which the misconduct was committed, the same is not serious enough.

Under the guidelines issued by the Civil Service Commission, misconduct is a grave offense. However, in view of the many circumstances mitigating liability, the penalty is reduced to the next lower in degree. Applying the minimum of the penalty, each respondent should be penalized with suspension from office for one month and one day without pay for each counts, and, as regards respondents Jerome P. Borjal and Roberto B. Cataniag, transfer to another station, as additional penalty.

The respondent- engineers were penalized as follows:

1. For the District Engineer and the Assistant District Engineer, suspension from office for nine months and nine days and an additional penalty of transfer to another district within Region I without demotion in rank or diminution of salary;

2. For the chiefs of Construction and Planning Sections respectively, the Monitoring Officer and the Materials Testing Engineer, suspension from office for six months and six days, at the end of which they shall be reinstated to their respective positions;

3. The Chief of Maintenance section was suspended from office without pay for two months and two days, after which he shall be reinstated to his position; and

4. For the three project engineers, suspension from office without pay for one month and one day after which they shall be reinstated to their positions.

Three weeks after the above decision was handed down, a telegram from NEDA Central Board came advising the CCAGG of its choice as “Most Outstanding NGO in Region I. The President of the Philippines, Mrs. Corazon C. Aquino, in a ceremony at the Heroes Hall in Malacañang Palace last February 15, 1988 presented the CCAGG the Presidential Plaque of Appreciation for “OUTSTANDING COMMUNITY SERVICE” for the implementation of development projects under the Community Employment and Development Program.



The CCAGG Chairperson, Ms. Carmelita Bersalona (hidden from the camera) and the two civil engineers, Engr. Irene Bringas and Engr. Loreto Bringas of the monitoring team received the plaque of appreciation from Pres. Corazon

Aquino beside the beaming NEDA Dir. General Solita Monsod and DBM Sec. Guillermo Carague. Thirty members of the CCAGG attended the awarding ceremony at the Heroes' Hall at the Malacanan Palace in Manila in the presence of Cabinet secretaries and members of the Diplomatic Corps.

The Presidential Award encouraged the CCAGG to go on with its monitoring activities. As it grew in number, its coverage of areas to be monitored also expanded.

On May 26, 1988, a memorandum to District Engineer of the Abra Engineering District of the Cordillera Administrative Region was sent by the Regional DPWH Director advising them of the inclusion of the CCAGG as witness in the Pre-bids and Awards Committee (PBAC) to ensure that bidding and awarding of projects are done honestly and efficiently. Also, the regional director directed that no project shall be paid without the monitoring report of the CCAGG.

That was a real victory of the Abreños!

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KEEP IT BURNING: A SPEECH IN MY SLEEP*

By Conchita “Chit” Quintero

Suddenly there was a new spirit among the concerned citizens of Abra as they came together with new force and enthusiasm to fight it out, find the guilty party and kick him out of power!

Several government agencies conniving with the hocus-focus of the money the road were brought in shadows.

As a community journalist in the area, I know the identity of the shadows. So, I went into an editorial slumber defining and analyzing as I run to each one pointing onto their faces. This much I said to them in my sleep: Ladies and gentlemen, so you are the men and women behind the lost of thousands of barangay road funds for Abra. And you have been pocketing the money all these years to deprive the people of good roads.

Do you know that because of you so many children could not go to school because the roads are unpassable especially the rainy season? Do you know that many could hardly eat three meals a day because food could not be transported by the vehicles neither could they be carried because the distance is too far? Money was scarce in those remote areas because no finished produce could be sold and could be bought again because of bad roads. You see, the story goes back to very poor barangay roads? Do you realize that those barangays very few are really educated because it is so expensive for them to stay and live-in in the town as an alternative to walking kilometers of bad roads twice a day? You, because of you, in desperation many families separated so one can go overseas to look for a job and get out with that poverty in many areas of Abra while you got fat with all the barangay road funds. Many rebelled because their cries were unheeded

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complaining about your bulging pockets and palacial houses here and in the cities. And in their fight for their freedom to speak and to fight for their rights there were killing here and there.

Ladies and gentlemen: I saw in my journalistic venture a child of Abra peppered with bullets. I trembled that time as I documented the story of an old mother murdered beside his rebel son. I screamed with hatred of you when I was forced to go and document the murder of a pregnant woman. All these came about because you are a thief.

Now, that your king, the king of thieves is disposed and you are left on your own in Abra to answer all the money you deprived us, we want you to know that we knew you are getting fat with stolen money but we were so weak and powerless then utter even a whimper. It is enough that you know that we all know about your bags of money. Still, we do not have the money to run after you. Others will be more of an expert to do that for us. What is important now, for us, your victims of to prevent thieves like you to serve again. Our direction now is to break our passive resistance and talk louder the next time we see thieves like you, It is a shame too our children that we allowed someone like you to lord over us while these kids rebelled the big difference of what we teach and what they see.

Goodbye, thieves of barangay road funds! Don't you ever seek to be nominated come election time because we will throw you out of the window like a stinking dead rat!

First People in Abra: Tubo Experience

By: Maria Teresa GB. Beñas

This study is about a poor tribal community deprived of the basic infrastructure facilities and social services, struggled through peaceful means to claim what is rightfully due to the people.

The study relates the mal-implementation of various infrastructure projects in Tubo, an upland municipality in the province of Abra. The projects were funded by the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) under the Low Income Community Assistance Program (LICAP) during the administration of then President Corazon C. Aquino. The projects were in the form of hanging bridges, spring development, school buildings, health centers and barangay roads. Funds for these projects were released to the local government units (LGUs) for implementation.

The said projects were intended not only to provide basic infrastructure facilities in the rural communities but to provide employment to the people as well since the mechanics of projects implementation were that of the concept of the Community employment Development Program (CEDP) of the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH).

However, the said projects were not implemented, if ever implemented, were of sub-standard quality. This means, the project implementers did not follow the specifications in the program of work for the projects as indicated in the result of the monitoring and evaluation conducted by the CCAGG.

Efforts of the community people and the local officials led by the vice-mayor and the members of the Sangguniang Bayan (SB) to thresh the matter with the mayor then, but all proved futile because of the indifference and arrogance of the late mayor who looked down on his own constituents as weak and incapable of doing something to resolve their problems and are unable to get what they want.



And so, the people of Tubo staged the first ever People Power movement in the history of the province of Abra. And such an initiative did not end there and then. It was a beginning of a sustained effort to rally for what is rightfully due to community such as the tribal people of Tubo.

Historical Account

Tubo is a remote municipality in the province of Abra. It is a mountainous tribal community located in the southeastern tip of the province. It is within the tri-boundaries of the provinces of Abra, Ilocos Sur and Mt. Province.

The road networks in Tubo are very poor. These are impassable and are literally closed to vehicular traffic during the rainy season starting from the month of May until September. Because of this, Tubo is isolated from the rest of the province. People have to hike long hours carrying their loads on their back or head. They walk from Poblacion, Luba and in worst instances, even from San Ramon in Manabo, a town before reaching the municipality of Luba. Roads are restored only in the month of October. Only then can passenger jeeps could travel on a daily basis.

That was the condition of the people during those years. Today, they are a little better since the local government unit had procured its own bulldozer for the LGU to do the immediate clearing and widening of their roads during the rainy seasons. But still, because of the swelling rivers vehicles cannot traverse. People are still left with no choice but hike. Lately though, the people have devised a way of facilitating their travels during the rainy seasons. They leave some of their vehicles in town or in Pega, Luba across the river in Poblacion, Luba to establish connections in between rivers that separate the municipality of Tubo from the rest of the other towns in the province.

Tubo is inhabited by the “*Maengs*” one of the 10 sub-tribes of the Tingguians, ethnolinguistic group in Abra. The Maengs speak the dialect also known as “Maeng”. They are known for their special character as industrious and peace-loving people.

In 1986, Jose Segundo, a native of Tubo but grew up in the City of Baguio was appointed OIC Mayor. As Officer-in-Charge, he was enthusiastic and was very good to his constituents. So that in 1987, he got an overwhelming support from the people and was given a fresh mandate by being elected mayor without much difficulty during the elections. However, he eventually changed in the manner he dealt with his people. He became ungrateful for their support and did not perform his mandate as the local chief executive.

Segundo’s term was characterized by unbridled graft and corruption. Many small projects like hanging bridges, school buildings, spring development, health centers and barangay roads that were funded by the LICAP of the DILG as well as the CEDP of the DPWH were not properly implemented as per approved program of work, if at all implemented.

These projects were painstakingly monitored by the CCAGG. The results of the monitoring were later presented to the people and discussed during the community meetings called for the purpose.

Meetings are normally convened by the *ili* to discuss their issues and concerns to thresh out solutions to their problems and make decisions to resolve their problems.

The people called for special meetings to tackle the issue on the projects in their municipality. Series of community meetings were conducted to tackle their problems regarding the non-implementation of their infrastructure projects. Most of the time, meetings were held in the evenings after they retire from the day’s work.

The results of the monitoring were presented both to the office of the Commission on Audit (COA) and the community people affected by the projects. The Provincial COA was then headed by Ms. Teresita A. Pajara. She was very cooperative with the CCAGG monitors and

even guided the monitors as to how and what to monitor by providing the CCAGG with the necessary documents that proved the results of the monitoring were objective and correct.

In the case of these particular projects in Tubo which were funded by the LICAP, Pajara witnessed and attested to the truthfulness and objectivity of the results of the CCAGG monitoring. The results of the monitoring were presented to and discussed by the “*ili*” (villagers). Meetings were convened to discuss their issues to resolve their problems. During their meetings, the villagers urged their Vice-Mayor and Sangguniang Bayan members to tackle the matter with their mayor. But the late mayor was apathetic and arrogant and did not want to listen to the plight of the people of Tubo. Other efforts to thresh the matter of the reported irregularities were ignored by the mayor

Because of the deliberate rejection by Mayor Segundo to face the issues raised against him, his constituents were forced to stage a direct action against him. This was so far the first direct action recorded in the history of the province of Abra.

In 1988, the people of Tubo led by then Vice-Mayor Camilo Gaspar and the members of the Sangguniang Bayan (SB) staged a demonstration rally in Bangued. Hundreds of people from the municipality came down to Bangued, the provincial capital town. They were joined by their tribal members who are residing in Bangued like the students and professionals working in Bangued. They converged in front of the Provincial Capitol. As they gathered together in front of the provincial capitol, they played their “*gansa*” (gongs). The sound of the gongs attracted the attention of the people in Bangued and immediately drew a crowd in town. They carried with them placards that were carefully-worded. The placards carried slogans stating the sentiments and aspirations of the people for clean and honest government that is responsive to the needs and problems of the people in their locality.



The activities involved in the demonstration rally were carefully planned. First, they displayed their sense of nationalism and patriotism by singing the national anthem. Then, they informed the people who were crowding around them who they were and their purpose in coming to Bangued. Since the governor was not yet ready to receive them, they proceeded to the office of the district engineer at the DPWH, about a kilometer away from the provincial capitol.

The Tubo people marched their way to the DPWH with their gongs which attracted more and more people in town. They dialogued with Assistant District Engineer Geronimo Corpuz. They inform Corpuz about the poor state of Tubo made even poorer by the irregularities and anomalies in projects implementation. They enumerated all the CEDP projects supposed to benefit them but were never implemented in their municipality. The Assistant District Engineer promised to look into their complaints.

The dialogue was cut short when a message from the Governor's Office came telling them that Governor Vicente Valera was already waiting for them.

Again they marched through the highway to the provincial capitol amid the rhythm of their gongs.

In the outset of the meeting, Governor Valera was hostile to the people. But the leader of the demonstrators, Mrs. Dominga Maguensay who was carrying a megaphone said: "*Annak nakami. Immaykami agipulong kenka nga amami. Saannakami koma nga ungtan.*" (We are your children. We came here to report our plight to you who is our father. You should not scold us for this.) Tactics were employed by the community organizers of the CCAGG and the reporters of the DZPA in order to get into the Governor's Office because the cordon sanitaire was then very tight that not everyone and anyone could just inside the governor's office and get an audience with him that easy.

When the reporters and facilities from the radio station DZPA arrived for the live coverage of the dialogue, the atmosphere of the meeting completely changed. The governor became more

patient and he listened to the complaints of the people. He promised to look into their complaints.

However, the issues and problems were not resolved after the direct action undertaken in Bangued despite the promise made by the governor to look into their problems. Of course, everyone knew and expected that the governor was just constrained to face the people at that time and simply tried to appease them.



Series of consultations with Atty. Cesar Bigornia of the Structural Legal Assistance Group (SALAG) who served as their lawyer, the people of Tubo headed by the Council of Elders (who happened to be also the Vice-Mayor and the SB members), filed an administrative case against the mayor in the office of the provincial board chaired by Atty. Alberto Benesa, the Vice-Governor at the time.

The hearing of the administrative case against the mayor was well-attended by the other municipal mayors. According to some mayors then, their attendance was to show their moral support to their beleaguered fellow mayor at the same time to observe the proceedings as this was the first case of its kind and the mayors then were also anxious that the event was a signal that same fate might befall them too in the near future should their own constituents gather their strength and guts to raise their issues against them also.

Many hours were spent during the hearing of the administrative case in their reiteration that the truth of the charge does not lie in the air conditioned room when the hearing is hearing is being held but in the purported project sites.

The Provincial Board issued a suspension order to Mayor Segundo. He was meted a preventive suspension of 60 days to prevent the mayor from unduly exercising pressure on his constituents while the case was being tried by the Sangguniang Panlalawigan (SP).

But nothing substantive was attained at the provincial level as the hearing dragged on and the witnesses were even harassed. The auditor still recalls vividly how she was harassed by the defense lawyer of Segundo, Atty. Romeo Bringas. The harassment not only came in the form of nasty words trying to discredit her but even came to the point of filing an administrative case against her. The mayor, through his defense lawyer filed administrative cases for grave misconduct, gross dishonesty and abuse of authority. But with the popular support of the people, the media and the CCAGG, Pajara did not waver in her determination to stand as witness. In like manner, the people of Tubo who charged their Mayor through their officials led by Vice Mayor Camilo Gaspar and the SB members turned out to be the accused also. One day, we found them in the municipal jail because the mayor filed his counter-charges and they were arrested. The defense lawyer exerted his influence over the municipal trial court judge whom he helped in his appointment as judge during his presidency in the Integrated Bar of the Philippines in the province.



Again, another show of people power was displayed by the people of Tubo. The Tubo students and professionals residing in Bangued all gathered together in the municipal building. This called the attention of the municipal mayor of Bangued when he went to his office. The municipal trial court, the municipal police station and the municipal jail were all housed in the same municipal building then. And so, then Municipal Mayor Luis Bersamin, Jr. intervened for the immediate release of the officials of Tubo. Of course, the CCAGG mobilized its members again to raise the needed amount of money and produced the documents needed to bail the jailed officials.

Cognizant of the honesty and truthfulness of the auditor regarding the case filed against the local chief executive, Segundo later apologized and retracted the charges he filed against Pajara.

Realizing that nothing substantive would really take place in the provincial level, the people of Tubo later elevated the case to the Ombudsman. The case was filed with the Office of the Ombudsman and docketed as Case Number OMB-1-89-0181 to 0189 for 59 counts of malversation of public funds through falsification of public documents.

The hearings were conducted in Manila. Again the show of people power was displayed by the people of Abra in support of the people of Tubo. Since resources were not much and the people of Tubo could not afford the costs involved in the hearings of the case in Manila, people moved to raise funds for people of Tubo.

The CCAGG had for the first time, hosted the Dinner and Dance for the People of Tubo. They sold tickets at P100.00 per cover and the patrons were given the chance to dine and dance during the party held at the Janssen Hall. Many joined the party. Many also gave their cash donations but did not attend the party for one reason or another.

The youth leaders also had their own version of fund raising dubbed as “Barya-Barya Para sa Hustisya”. The youth leaders passed a hat to their fellow students at the Divine Word College of Bangued and were able to raise so much.

Another show of solidarity also came from the Ateneo Law School of the Ateneo de Manila University with their own “Lugaw Para sa Hustisya”. The law students sold *lugaw* at a cost and the proceeds were given to the people of Tubo to sustain their mobilization as they travelled to Manila for the hearings at the Office of the Ombudsman.

Many more individuals and organizations like the Aksyong Para sa Kapayapaan at Katarungan (AKKAPKA) in Manila gave support to the people of Tubo.

The observance of the due process of law was however taking the case longer than expected. The people were becoming weary and anxious.

Meanwhile, the combatants from the underground movement wanted to take the law into their own hands. They asked the people in the community to allow them to take over the case of Mayor Segundo. They assured the people that “in just a minute, Segundo will go and the people’s case will triumph.” But the officials, the alders and the community were resolved to deal with their problems through peaceful means. They told the combatants that they have faith in the judicial system and do not want to resolve their case through violence.

When the local elections in 1992 was about to come, the people of Tubo decided to do something about their problem which remained unresolved over the years since they raised their issue. They held community meetings where they discussed their life under a corrupt leader, how they were deprived of basic infrastructure facilities and social services meant to improve their living condition. They realized the answer to their problem was a change in leadership. That even if they have not money as they are poor, they could do so much with their number if they unite to unseat Mayor Segundo in the coming elections.

And so they held more meetings in the various communities to strategize and convince the people that they needed to field a common candidate who will be pro-people and will pursue a people-centered development agenda. As a result of the series of community meetings conducted in all the barangays, only two of the 10 barangays in their municipality gave their support to Segundo during the 1992 elections. The people of Tubo were able to put into power the leader of their choice.

The case however died a natural death and was never resolved during the lifetime of the mayor. Segundo was shot to death during his visit in one of the barangays in Tubo.

Lessons learned/Learning experiences



Number yields power. People may be poor and have no money to influence power and decisions, but if they are united, they can effect change that they want. And conflicts need not always be resolved through violent means. There

are always peaceful ways of resolving problems and issues especially if these are coupled with a firm resolve and determination to pursue said issues and problems.

The case of Tubo is a concrete example of how people power worked. The power the people of Tubo had wielded had attracted support from various sectors and individuals not only in the province but in the national levels as well. It's because the people have seen the determination of the people, not only of their leaders, to claim what is rightfully due them from the government.

People may fail in the attainment of their goals and objectives, but, in unity and oneness, coupled with solidarity from their outside world, they are able to cope with such failures and accept these with gracefulness and take these failures as a learning experience and plan to do better in the next step ahead. Despite failures, people still have the nerve to turn down alternative courses of action that would resolve their issues through violent means. Through People Power, people will always say, "there is no way to peace except peace alone." Hence, people will always keep their faith in the justice system as a peaceful means of resolving conflicts.

Conclusions/Insights/Recommendations

People power can work only when people are given the right and adequate information and proper education to prepare them for a direct action. The right information provides the people the guide toward decision making. These sets of information have to be provided assisting organizations and individuals who are authority. However, though, the people may be righteous, still, the need for a system that would work on their favor are also necessary form them to attain their end. Otherwise, all their efforts become an exercise in futility.



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It can not be denied still, that support from higher echelons of government to the initiatives of local communities to end the culture of corruption is a necessity. And sheer determination by

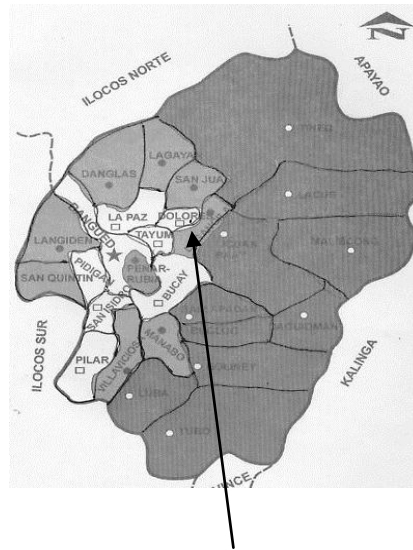
national government to really establish a graft and corrupt-free society is needed to carry out its mandate of good governance.

The Empowered Adasens of Bacooc, Lagangilang, Abra: A Case Study
 By: Dr. Elsa D. Bagioan PhD.

INTRODUCTION

Bacooc is one of the barangays located in northern Lagangilang, Abra. In the north, it is bordered by Paganao, in the south by Brgy. Cayapa, in the west municipality of San Juan and in the east by Brgy. Licuan – Baay. Mountain, hills, valleys, plains, and a river are gifts of nature found in Bacooc. With terrain and rough road, the travel time from Lagangilang town proper to the said place is twenty minutes by jeepney and two hours by foot.

Map of Abra



Brgy. by the Kileng, caves its (20)

Location Site



Brgy. Bacooc is inhabited by the Adasen ethno – linguistic group. Cole (1920) had his own theory that the Tinggians were drawn from the so – called primitive Malay migration of the people of the South – eastern Asia. In their movement eastward and northward, they were met with the absorbed remnants of earlier migration, made up of people closely related to the Polynesians. The results of this inter - mixture is evident not only among the

Tinggians but also to other Filipinos.

Bacooc community members attend the lay-og, death anniversary of Dacalan Pastor Mariano B. Laory (2006) recounted that the Adasen ethno – linguistic group traces their origin from the Malay, who settled in Conner, Apayao, after having landed by boat in Cagayan. As the group increased in number, some of them moved downward to Abra. One of those who came from Conner was Dao – ayan, joined by two other families. His group explored the Tineg River and

settled in the mountains and valleys. Later, they established their settlements in Agsimao, Caniogan, Alawa, Caganayan, Lapat and the whole of lower and upper Tineg. Still, they moved downward and occupied some parts of Lagayan, including Bai. They stopped in the northern portion of Lagangilang and finally, they settled in Paganao and Bacooc. As years passed by, some of the residents of Bacooc moved to Cayapa and its sitio, Palpalitpit in search for a wider place to settle.



Thus, these neighboring Adasen barangays of Paganao, Bacooc and Cayapa form a cluster popularly known as PABACA.

The account of the landing and settlement of the Adasen was narrated to Laory by Gayban, as told by Ex – Mayor Layugan of Tineg, who heard it from Taoig. Taoig heard it from Dao-ayan, the leader of the migrants from Conner, Apayao.

This oral account was validated by the author herself when she attended a Bible seminar organized by the SVD priests in Sunnyside, Baguio. She met Mark from Conner Apayao, who speaks the same dialect she uses, the Adasen tongue. They had a sharing and both traced their origin from Cagayan.

Bacooc, an old Tinggian settlement is mentioned in the article of Fr. Friedrich Sharfp, SVD entitled “ Ilocos Sur in 1842 ” in the Ilocos Review (1992). He mentioned Bacooc, one of the pagan communities of eighty settlers, who paid their tribute to the Spanish government in Vigan, Ilocos Sur. This information is supported by Miss Emilia Tugadi of Bacooc, a retired teacher, who narrated that her great grandfather named Tugadi, was the former Tinyente del Baranggay of Bacooc during the Spanish regime. According to her, Tugadi ran swifter than the horse. As the leader of Bacooc, he used to go to Vigan to remit their tax, in the form of honey wax to the Spanish government. He was so speedy that his G – string was flapping in the air. He would

start his journey on foot at dawn and his extra - ordinary speed would bring him to Vigan on time for the opening of offices.

Another writer who wrote about Bacooc is Cole (1920) in his book, *The Gentle Savage*. One of the Tinggian villages that he visited was Bacooc. He described it as a beautiful place, surrounded



with a grove of palm trees, *bua*. These palm trees served as their water shed where the folk would draw out their drinking water from springs. He also noted that the villagers were a hospitable people led by a chieftain, who accommodated him in his bamboo hut. Cole was touched with their hospitality and after few days of staying with them, he was pain - stricken to leave the village. He bid goodbye to the villagers with a heavy heart.

A pose with Bacooc folk

From an an old Tinggian Adasen settlement, Bacooc has increased in population from 80 pagans (Scharpf, SVD, 1992) to 300 voters of 95 households. Of this, twenty percent are professionals. Farming is the major activity of the people. Their products from their rain – fed fields are rice, corn, tobacco, root crops, legumes and vegetables. Bacooc is also known for its century – old mango trees, found in the vicinity of the barangay, farms and forests. These mango trees, planted by their ancestors, used to be owned by the whole villagers and harvesting time was a grand reunion of the whole clan.

The journey of Bacooc folk towards development has manifested itself concretely in their fight for the implementation of the Cayapa – Bacooc – Paganao Hanging Bridge. Thus, this case study is written to document their experiences as an empowered people.

II. Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to document the experiences of the empowered folk of Bacooc, Lagangilang, Abra in their quest for good governance and their well – being as a people.

Specifically, it sought to identify the problems encountered in the implementation of the project, as well as the enabling factors that contributed to the success of the hanging bridge case.

III. Significance of the Study

This study is beneficial to Brgy. Bacooc folk because it is an affirmation of their committed efforts towards good governance. As an indigenous people (IP), it also makes them realize that their customary system and practices could become instruments towards their political, socio - cultural and economic development.

It is also significant to the youth because it inculcates in them the Tinggian values of unity, commitment, self – sacrifice and integrity, which are relevant in our present times, when the young are easily influenced by Western culture, life style and values. It would help them develop their identity as Tinggian Filipinos.

Likewise, this study manifests the benefits of networking among the indigenous peoples (Adasen), non – government organization (CCAGG) and the Roman Catholic Church in the quest for quality services of the government. Collaboration has strengthened Bacooc folk in their struggle to actively participate in the building of a just society.

CHAPTER II METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study is a qualitative research which made use of the case study method, an in – depth study on Cayapa - Bacooc – Paganao Hanging Bridge.

Key Informants of the Study

This case study was conducted in Bacooc, Lagangilang, Abra. Key informants were the selected Bacooc folk who actively participated on the fight for the hanging bridge, the CCAGG staff and significant others who knew something about the case.

Data – Gathering Instruments

The researcher used the interview schedule in gathering data. Focus group discussions were also used to retrieve collective memory and to validate data gathered. Visiting the site and perusing CCAGG files were also done to supplement collected information.



Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study focused on the Cayapa – Bacooc – Paganao Hanging Bridge, supposed to be constructed in Galungugong, a portion of the Malanas River in Bacooc, Lagangilang, Abra.

This study has its limitations. The documents kept by Brgy. Bacooc Capt. Quirino Ban – o are missing and presumed to be burned by his children, who were not aware of the value of such documents. Papers included the program of work, the results of the court hearings, photos and other pertinent data about the hanging bridge case.

Another limitation of the study is that, many details and significant dates are already forgotten by the respondents and the researcher herself, considering the many interventions that occurred in their lives, with the 2 decades and 3 years that have passed.

Furthermore, seven of the council of elders, who painstakingly followed up the hanging bridge case already died. This limited the access of pertinent information that could be drawn out from them.

CHAPTER III

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

The Conceptualization of the Foot - Bridge Project

In 1986, during the transition of the Ferdinand E. Marcos regime and that of Corazon C. Aquino, Brgy. Bacooc community, through the leadership of Brgy. Captain Qurino Ban-o, envisioned to become a sustainable barangay with the implementation of projects such as Clean and Green Program, Backyard Gardening and the establishment of infrastructure projects among which is the Cayapa – Bacooc - Paganao Hanging Bridge. One of the Brgy. councilors, Luisito Bay -oan drafted a resolution for the construction of a 125 meter - hanging bridge and forwarded it to the Local Government Unit (LGU) of Lagangilang, having in mind the beneficiaries and impacts of said project.

The Cayapa – Bacooc – Paganao Hanging Bridge, Its Beneficiaries and Impacts

The Cayapa – Bacooc – Paganao Hanging Bridge has the following beneficiaries and impacts: Fifty households in Dakwang, a secluded sitio of Paganao due to the Malanas River would have an easy access to the neighboring barangays in the PABACA area, as well as town proper of Lagangilang and the capital town of Bangued. In case of emergency like accidents and sickness, the hanging bridge will facilitate the people’s travel to clinics or hospitals.

Seventy five farmers from Dakwang and Bacooc, who have their rice fields, swidden farms and mango trees in Sisim would benefit from the hanging bridge by reducing their travel time and hauling costs of their agricultural products. Ama Aluyo Agcongay, who visited his rice fields in Sisim was swept by the strong waves of Malanas river. Francis Abao, a four year old boy, who joined his cousin and uncle in harvesting mangoes in Sisim, fell down from the cliff and

drowned in Galungugong on March 6, 1994. Just recently in September, 2009, during the typhoon Ondoy, Ama Kay –an Cadatal, who went to gather firewood was carried downstream by the raging waters. His body was retrieved in San Juan. Had there been a constructed hanging bridge, lives would have been saved.

Several barangays of the municipality of Lacub which are Bacag, Ambalag, Apao, Ginginabang and Lablabing would prefer to go to the PABACA area via the Galungugong River. Folk from these places oftentimes go down to visit their relatives, barter their products, sell their catch of fish and wild pigs, or go marketing in the town proper or in Bangued. The way, through the foot bridge is a short - cut route in going down to the lowlands compared to the long and winding road in Lacub, Abra.



Aesthetically, the construction of the hanging – bridge in Galungugong would complement the beauty of the river, nestled in towering rocks and mountains. The hanging bridge overlooking the serene and clear water of Galungugong would provide an additional attraction to tourists and picnickers.

Galungugong, the site for the construction of the hanging bridge.

The Hanging Bridge Program of Work

This foot bridge was funded by the Low Income Community Assistance Program (LICAP) of the late Pres. Corazon C. Aquino. It would have been implemented in 1986 - 1987 by the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), Bangued, Abra, under Engineer Simeon Borja. It had a total project cost of P 348,000, deposited at Philippine National Bank (PNB), Bangued. With a span of 125 meters, it would be constructed in Galungugong, a portion of the Malanas River, connecting Bacooc and Sitio Dakwang, Paganao, Lagangilang, Abra. Together with the hanging bridge was a farm – to - market road from Brgy. Bacooc to Galungugong, the construction site.

How the Malversation of Fund was Discovered

Bgy. Captain Qurino Ban-o and his councilors went to Bangued Capitol for a meeting sometime in 1986. They passed by the Engineers' Office and saw a billboard which indicated that the Cayapa – Bacooc – Paganao Hanging Bridge was an on – going project. This enraged them because not even a single cable wire was brought to the construction site. Immediately, they reported it to Commission on Audit (COA), Bangued and COA started its investigation. They discovered that the report of the engineers is a lie. COA personnel also checked the deposited fund in PNB and they found out that P 150,000.00 was withdrawn by Isidro Tuzon of San Isidro, Lagangilang, Abra, the caretaker of the Municipality of Lagangilang due to the up – coming national and local election in 1987.

Immediate Actions Done

Upon arriving from Bangued, Bgy.Capt. Qurino Ban-o, his councilors, council of elders and community folk had a meeting and they planned on what to do to follow - up the lost fund. The following morning, they rode on 3 passengers' jeepney, and proceeded to the office of Ex-Governor Vicente Valera to dialogue with him on the hanging bridge case. According to Ama Quirino, the governor did not respond to the group's query about the case but cajoled them by promising instead a capital for them to establish a barangay cooperative store. The group left the office of the governor with a heavy heart because their problem was not attended to.

As they went out of the capitol, they remembered to approach Fiscal Rodor Gayao, whose office was at the adjacent building to ask for his help. They were lucky enough to see him and they felt relieved when he said that he is going to endorse the case to the Ombudsman. With this, a ray of hope shone on the hearts of the Bacooc folk and they went home holding on to the assurance of Fiscal Gayao, the elevation of the case to the Ombudsman.

Church Intervention

Fr. Michael Brillantes, the parish priest of Holy Cross, which includes Bacooc deeply felt the ordeal of the community folk. One afternoon, he and his catechists proceeded to Brgy. Bacooc and called for the council of elders and the young professionals for a meeting. Among them were Luisito Bay-oan, Gina Agcongay, Banayos Paingan, Melicio Quinto, Bernardo Daipan, Luis Tugadi, Aluyo Agcongay, Benjamin Bay-oan, Delfin Etten, Gaspar Barbosa, Crisanto Domingo and Qurino Ban - o. The group narrated their experience during their dialogue with the governor and their disappointment when the governor evaded the issue of the hanging bridge



Council of elders during the deliberation on the hanging bridge case.

fund. Fr. Mike proposed that the group would approach the newly - elected mayor of Lagangilang, Hon. Romeo Villamor to follow – up the hanging bridge fund. Deliberation was done to plan for the dialogue. Tasking was made as to who was going to talk first, the second and the last. A dry run was done to make the group ready for what to tell and when to tell it.

The following morning, Fr. Mike transported the council of elders to Lagangilang. The group proceeded with confidence to the municipal hall where the late Mayor Romeo Villamor was waiting for them. The dialogue started and went smoothly as planned. However, Mayor Romeo Villamor justified himself saying that it should be Isidro Tuzon who should explain what happened to the fund. Unfortunately, he was nowhere to be found. In spite of the absence of Isidro Tuzon, the dialogue communicated to the municipal mayor that the group was truly determined to fight for their claim of the fund.

CCAGG, A Non – Government Organization Intervened

The cry of the people of Bacooc and their quest for good governance has reached the office of the Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Government (CCAGG), a non – government

organization, who has an avowed commitment in the development of the Abrenians. The CCAGG immediately responded to their appeal for help by sending their staff in the person of Miss Aurelia Velasco, to interview Ama Quirino and other elders about the case. Consequently, CCAGG helped Bacooc folk in filing a graft and corruption case against the municipal caretaker, Isidro Tuzon.

After a year of struggle, with the help of the church, individuals, CCAGG and God, Bacooc folk received a notice to attend a court hearing in Sandigan Bayan, Manila. The case was entitled, Isidro Tuzon Versus People of the Philippines. Ama Quirino spearheaded the fight together with the researcher and Mr. Luisito Bay – oan. Along the way, CCAGG was always there assisting Bacooc folk in almost everything - from legal assistance, financial, moral, spiritual, including the provision of a safe stay in Manila. The group went to the city to attend the court hearings in Sandigan Bayan accompanied by a CCAGG staff. Ama Quirino, before appearing to the court was practised by Atty. Bigornia and Fiscal Verbano, on what to say and how to answer during the interrogation. During the court hearing, Ama Quirino answered well while the respondent, Isidro Tuzon never appeared in court.

A Warrant of Arrest Was Served

After several court hearings, the criminal case filed by Bacooc folk against the municipal caretaker was gradually prospering. The Ombudsman found sufficient evidence of guilt and elevated the case to Sandigan Bayan. The villagers of Bacooc were always represented during the hearings while the respondent always failed to come. Finally, a warrant of arrest was served to Isidro Tuzon – a victory of the People of the Philippines, particularly the Bacooc folk. However, the warrant of arrest did not materialize and the punishment was not meted out to Isidro Tuzon because he was protected by an influential politician. And yet, the small voices of the people of Bacooc were listened to by the government and the truth has triumphed.

Problems Encountered in the Hanging Bridge Case

In the search for justice on the foot bridge case, the following problems were identified:

Corruption. This is a massive problem, which costs our country billions of economic losses. The fund for the Cayapa – Bacooc – Paganao hanging bridge is just a droplet from the bucket of economic bankruptcy. Corruption takes away needed public funds that could be used for development and poverty alleviation of the Filipinos.

Padrino system. This is a system which involves an influential person or politician to condone the sins of the suspect by protecting him or conniving with him. This has prevented the punishment of Isidro Tuzon to be meted out because a politician is believed to be protecting and hiding him.

The search for justice is a long process in the judicial system. It took four years for the foot – bridge case to be resolved. Had it been in the indigenous system of the council of elders, justice would have been arrived at in two or three days.

Belonging to different religions has become an impediment in the search for justice. At first, the community folk in Bacooc were united in following up the case. Later on, when the Roman Catholic Church intervened, the Iglesia ni Kristo ceased to involve themselves in the crusade.

Enabling Factors that Contributed to the Success of the Hanging Bridge Case

The following are the factors that contributed to the success of the foot – bridge case:

The hanging bridge case was an awakening of social responsibility among Bacooc folk. Before, they used to keep silent and passive in citizens’ participation but when the case called for their duty, the council of elders did not waste time and gave themselves wholeheartedly in the search of the hanging bridge fund. Some community members, led by Ama Quirino persisted until the end, in spite of the threat to their lives - all for the common good.

Networking among community folk, church and non – government organization.

Alone, the community folk would not have been empowered to follow up the case, but thanks to the local church led by Fr. Michael Brilliantes, the parish priest of Holy Cross in Lagangilang and the CCAGG, led by Miss Pura Sumangil who provided spiritual, moral, technical - legal and financial support to the people. The working together has helped in bringing about the truth about the hanging bridge fund, justice and good governance.



The utilization of the council of elders.

The council of elders was the first group who were awakened to search for the lost fund. They stood firm until the end for what they believe is right. Sustaining them were their ingrained Tingguian values: truthfulness, integrity, unity, commitment and self - sacrifice.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The Galungugong Foot Bridge case is a significant experience to the people of Bacooc. It has brought about their strengths – their empowerment as an indigenous people, their active participation in good governance, the utilization and effectiveness of the council of elders and their working hand – in- hand with the Church, a non – government organization, the CCAGG and concerned individuals.

On the other hand, it made them also aware of problems involved in the case like the massive corruption in our country, and *padrino* system in our government. Belonging to different religions may also affect the community's unity in their search for justice and good governance.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are forwarded based on the findings:

1. Regular consultation and meetings with the project beneficiaries be conducted by implementing agencies to make people truly own the project and actively participate in all its phases from the planning, implementation and monitoring.
2. Networking among indigenous peoples, government, non – government organizations, the church and other partner agencies should be established and strengthened for the sustainable development of cultural communities like Bacooc.
3. Continuous education of indigenous communities towards development by schools, Church, GO and NGO like CCAGG. Radio Program, like the CCAGG *Allangugan* is a worthwhile venue for information dissemination and popularization of issues towards citizenship building.
4. Regular meetings, trainings and recollections of elected officials to inculcate in their hearts and minds, their noble duties as public servants.
5. Cultural activities and celebrations maybe conducted to strengthen and sustain indigenous knowledge, systems, traditions and practices. IKSPs could also be used in the formulation of policies for the integral development of the IPs.



Children learn to dance the tadek.

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Mr. Luisito Bay – oan, Bacooc Lagangilang, Abra

Bgy. Captain Rafael P. Agcongay, Bacooc, Lagangilang, Abra

Aluyo Agcongay, Bacooc, Lagangilang, Abra

Miss Gina Cardona, Bacooc, Lagangilang, Abra

Mr. Manicag Etten, Bacooc

Kagawad Quirino Ban –o, Bacooc

Miss Pura Sumangil, Chair, CCAGG

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Council of elders

Women

Professionals