

Sharing by the Volunteer Workers' Association of Bondoc Peninsula, Inc.

The Volunteer Workers' Association of Bondoc Peninsula, Inc. (VWAB), of Quezon province, was launched in 1997 with mandates based on the Local Government Code of 1991. The organization promotes partnership effort of local government units (LGUs) and civil society. Its essential objective is to strengthen Barangay Development Councils (BDCs), and institute direct linkage between civil society organizations (CSOs) and LGUs.

VWAB follows four (4) basic stages in assisting BDCs. These stages are: (a) harana (serenade)—establishing of “Link of People with Government”; (b) bayanihan (mutual help)—through facilitation of “Participatory Barangay Development Planning”; (c) Moriones—through the strengthening of the local “Committee on Good Governance”; and (d) kuliglig-palay—facilitation of proper “Land Use Planning.”

The unique experience of VWAB in promoting transparency and accountability in local governance is seen in its facilitation of a bottom-up approach in planning and implementation of programs and projects at the barangay level. It also encourages volunteerism, conducts participatory monitoring, and provides technical assistance to barangays.

The Socio-Political Setting:

The Volunteer Workers' Association of Bondoc Peninsula, Inc. (VWAB, Inc) serves the 3rd District of Quezon Province. This district is composed of 12 municipalities comprising the Bondoc Peninsula, the majority of which belong to 4th and 5th income class. Bondoc Peninsula has a total of 364 barangays, and is 250 kilometers south of Metro Manila. It has a land area of 2,200 sq km, and a population of 500,000. The majority of families depend on subsistence farming with landlessness confronting them. Thirty percent (30%) of those who live in coastal areas depend only on fishing. And 2/5 of the population of coastal Bondoc use traditional fishing methods which yield very little because of rampant commercial fishing within municipal waters.

Feudalism and centralized decision making at the local level still prevail in the Peninsula; two reasons for active civil society and empowered local-barangay officials to jointly undertake and initiate the participatory processes towards good governance in Bondoc Peninsula. This situation gave birth to the local Volunteer Workers' Association of Bondoc Peninsula, or VWAB, Inc., formally recognized by the Securities and Exchange Commission in November 2000.

“In my two terms with the barangay council, I never experienced a training on local governance voluntarily brought by government as service to our barangay.

“It is common practice for our MLGOOs (Municipal Local Government Operations Officers) to invite all elected barangay officials to an orientation on local governance topics. If a municipality has 46 barangays, these are simply grouped into two; one group would have about two hundred and sixty barangay officials as participants! Thus during the training, while the trainers are discussing, some participants chat with each other, others drink liquor, still others sleep, and some tell funny stories among themselves. Aside from the participants being jam-packed in

the covered court of the municipality, the training is limited to only about three days.

“This results in low learning. Consequently, many barangay officials do not fully understand the role they are supposed to play in the barangay.

“Thus, in cases where one or two barangay councilors get actively involved in pursuing the participatory processes for the development of their barangay, the notion that they may be communists easily prevail in the barangay.

“For me, those who misinterpret the democratic and participatory processes are victims of their lack of awareness on the essence of good governance at the barangay level. It was an unexpected opportunity for me when I got invited by the Bondoc Development Program (BDP), a bilateral project implemented by the Philippine government and the German agency GTZ, for a consultation on Local Governance where one of our agreed points was to have a discussion with the DILG Provincial Director, Mr. Jose Colar.

“On Aug 31, 1999, we went to the DILG Provincial Director of Quezon to convince him to allow us to undergo a training course on local governance related topics, and later on for us to share our acquired knowledge and skills on barangay administration, local finance, local legislation, and participatory barangay development planning with other barangays of Bondoc peninsula. We succeeded in convincing the Provincial Director.

“Next we proceeded to the Local Government Academy or LGA, to discuss with its Director Elena Panganiban our wish to become partners of DILG in facilitating trainings on local governance, especially in far-flung barangays.

“We felt uneasy when we entered the office of the LGA Director, who asked us what it was that we wanted. Each of us narrated the need of our barangays, where we wanted to be of help. But she told us to first produce a good track record before we can be accredited by her office.

“The experience we had with the two offices prodded us to really exert extra effort, to improve our own capabilities to be of better help to our barangay colleagues who need additional know-how on governing a barangay.

“We decided to also visit Dir. Oskar Balbastro of the National Economic and Development Administration (NEDA) of Region IV, who, after taking time to listen to our intentions for Bondoc Peninsula, to help facilitate participatory development planning in the barangays, encouraged us to take the initiative.

“He said he had not heard yet of any group which volunteered to do so in the region. And he was happy that one such group as ours came by, and encouraged us to do whatever we can. We went home gladdened by his encouragement.

“After a few days, we were invited by the Bondoc Development Program (BDP) to participate in the Participatory Bondocwide Training in Local Governance, which was designed with our participation and inputs, together with the DILG provincial specialists, Local Government Academy (LGA), Center for Local & Regional Governance (CLRG), and the M&E Staff of NEDA Region IV. It was to last for 11 days, which became a problem for me because it was already difficult enough not to work in our farms for 5 days... how much more for 11 days?

“Because of the initial expectation that those who would participate in said training would earn honoraria as resource persons at the barangay level, this training had a big number of participants (56 persons), but on its last day, we were only 33 left. Others gave up when they realized that this training could not be used for political purposes, and there was no financial benefit to be derived. Those of us who passed were then asked to next test our learning and insight in our own barangay.

“After seven (7) months we were called back for a consultative and feedback session.

“At first there was insistence by some of those who attended to collect honoraria for barangay services rendered. But at this point, I raised my hand and told my colleagues: Look, what if there are barangays interested to learn from us, but do not have the money to pay for the resource persons? I added: We were fortunate to learn from this investment of BDP on our training, without spending for it. Why can't we also share what we learned with our barangay colleagues for free? This was seconded by only one person, Kgd. Nelly Laurio of the municipality of San Andres. I knew at this point that many got mad with me, but I also knew that many in Bondoc Peninsula would benefit from my suggestion.

“There were only five (5) of us who initiated this volunteerism for good governance. We chose to start serving the barangays with trainings on strengthening their Barangay Development Council (BDC), because the successful implementation of the Barangay Development Plan rests with this council, according to the Local Government Code of 1991.

“In the next few months, twenty (20) more individuals responded to the call for volunteer service for good governance. We have at present roughly forty (40) active volunteer members of the organization.”

Kgd. Imelda C. Javier
Founding Chairperson, VWAB Inc.

B. VWAB Programs and Projects:

The members of VWAB assist the barangay governments in strengthening their Barangay Development Council. The facilitation of barangay development planning is another service that VWAB provides the barangay in a participatory and creative manner. VWAB likewise responds to requests for trainings on barangay administration, local legislation, local finance, gender and youth development, and human rights. Crosscutting concerns are those on transparency and accountability, as well as formation of volunteer groups, plus issues on agricultural and coastal resource management, monitoring and evaluation of projects, and other issues which the barangay people want to be informed about through trainings and sharing.

C. Bondoc Peninsula Culture/Traditions in the Design of Tools and Processes for Carrying Out Voluntary Work

Every VWAB Inc. member aims to contribute to the sustainable development of Bondoc Peninsula. Thus, VWAB considers the day-to-day cultural practices and life of Bondoc Peninsula in the design of tools and processes for carrying out volunteer services:

1. Serenade – still done in the rural areas of Bondoc Peninsula, where gentlemen serenade the ladies they love, and through songs they express their feelings of love.

VWAB also does the serenade in their work. This is done through community visits and informal discussions with barangay officials and residents, where the people are enjoined to participate in workshops and trainings that heighten their awareness of development work needed for their barangay.

The serenade is crucial in volunteer work because it enjoins civil society to participate in the formation of local special bodies, and join the planning workshops. The tangible output is the 5-year Barangay Development Plan formulated in a participatory and creative manner.

2. Moriones – Bondoc Peninsula is near the Marinduque province where Moriones is staged as part of the Holy Week activities. In the Moriones, one of the important characters is that of Pontius Pilate, who washed his hands of the responsibility for deciding the fate of Jesus Christ, leaving Him to the whim of a mob...

In conducting training courses, VWAB sees to it that one accepts responsibility and accountability to prevent corruption and violation of human rights. Thus, during barangay elections, VWAB emphasizes during barangay candidates' fora that the likes of Pontius Pilate have no place in local governance.

3. Kuliglig Palay – a favorite game of children in Bondoc Peninsula where children form two groups with a leader each. One hides the grains of palay, and the other group makes a guess. Each correct guess entitles the group a leap towards the finish line. The group that reaches the finish line first wins the game. This game involves a lot of guessing, craftiness, and a poker face for one to be able to win.

In volunteer work, VWAB sees to it that the negative aspect of kuliglig palay (guessing game) is highlighted and avoided, just as in planning, barangay officials and their constituents must not hide from each other their vision of development for their place. A systematic and participatory method of bringing about development is considered, and the well-being of the people guides the Barangay Development Council in efforts towards sustainable development of the barangay.

D. Lessons Learned as Volunteer Worker:

"I joined VWAB, Inc. as a process observer, taking part in field-based activities in the barangays first, before deciding to attend the BDP-sponsored formal training course for volunteer workers on good governance, with resource persons from the DILG Provincial Office, conducted on July 16-21, 2001 at Catanauan, Quezon.

"Serving the barangay as volunteer worker, I believe, is our way to reach out as ordinary citizens and realize our power. Unity among civil society groups leads to the formation of a home-grown volunteer organization that may initiate legal local governance activities, and contribute to

addressing the problems before us: economic, environmental, livelihood or the lack of it, and even that of corrupt officials... Thus VWAB, Inc. is there to continuously make us aware of the need for change, for the good of society.”

John Misleng
VWAB, Inc. Member

“I saw the importance of helping others through the examples of my parents. I came from a poor family but my parents were a helpful couple. My barangay life has exposed me, as I grew up, to different instances of human rights violations in Bondoc Peninsula.

“In 1992, I started work as community organizer. Then in 1999, I attended the Participatory Bondocwide Training on Local Governance of BDP. This is it! I told myself. I found my wish in serving others, volunteering work for good governance. Funny, but others thought I was receiving salary as volunteer worker. In this work, I would also hear insulting remarks. But my mother advised me to go ahead, where I was most happy. Volunteer service for good local governance is now part of my life. This is where I am happy, serving others, and not expecting anything in return.”

Ma. Cecilia Lily R. Ricafrente
BOD Member, VWAB, Inc.

“I am a farmer in continuous search for knowledge. In attending different trainings, I observed the weak processes which lead to low retention of learnings among participants. I attended the BDP-sponsored Participatory Rural Appraisal training course. Here, as volunteer barangay development planning facilitator, I have seen the importance and psychic reward of volunteerism. For several years now, with my continuing field visits of barangays of Bondoc Peninsula, I realize life’s difficulties foremost... When are we going to have lasting peace in the area? I found the answer when I found this group of volunteer workers, coming from different persuasions but who are united in one voice, and one direction, towards development and peace in Bondoc.”

Marcial Gonzales, Jr.
VWAB, Inc. Member

“In my daily interaction with barangay officials and ordinary citizens of Bondoc Peninsula, as I facilitate planning workshops in the barangay, I experienced the physical difficulties of being a volunteer worker, reaching out to several far-flung areas of Bondoc Peninsula. But these difficulties are nothing to me, compared to the self-fulfillment I feel after serving each barangay. But there are times that I come to think: Why should I serve as volunteer worker? Why suffer the difficulties? Why sacrifice my time for my family when I know they also need me? Why should I do this volunteer work? I am happy with what I am doing, and this is where I found the meaning of loving and helping others, as one big family. I am happy for this is my way of praising the Lord... SERVING others, without expecting any return, except that my volunteer service will contribute to a progressive and peaceful Bondoc Peninsula.”

Rolando Roldan
Vice President, VWAB, Inc.

“I stopped schooling in 2000. I started thinking of going to work, but when I heard that BDP was inviting participants for a Participatory Barangay Development Planning Course, I decided to join it instead. While on training, I was a bit confused with the approach. It was totally different from my exposure with formal education. Here I felt the wholeness of the training, where I learned of the

importance of our environment, listening to the needs of others, and understanding the reasons for some complaints. Part of our training was the practicum in remote barangays. Here, I experienced the goodwill of people in far-flung areas. I also experienced walking for hours because of poor farm-to-market road situations in most barangays of Bondoc Peninsula. In this manner I became a volunteer for good governance. It was as volunteer worker that I got my exposure with different agencies, NGO's/PO's, and different sectors of society. I have realized that becoming a volunteer means a big sacrifice on our part. I thought of taking some rest, but will I forget the joy I feel when I'm out in the field? The people I have come to know and real friends I found along the way?"

Clodualdo Rivadulla
VWAB, Inc. Member