

***Sharing by the Albay Women Volunteers' Association, Inc.***  
**(AWVAI)**

*The Albay Women Volunteers' Association, Inc. (AWVAI) is affiliated with other existing women's associations in Albay, particularly those sponsored by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). It has a distinction of not being controlled by politicians.*

*Among the activities of AWVAI are: piglet dispersal, distribution of toilet bowls, livelihood trainings on "entrepreneurial activities," medical missions to remote barangays, special projects called "Ina ng Barangay," and a radio program called "Makapamilyang Bareta sa Albay."*

*One unique experience of AWVAI in promoting transparency and accountability is that of having "organized women, particularly those who joined politics, serve as catalyst of change with their uncorrupted ideas."*

## **A. The Socio-Economic Setting**

The total land area of Albay province is 2,552.6 square kilometers and is composed of three cities, and fifteen municipalities grouped into three congressional districts. Of the total provincial land area, 73% is devoted to agriculture, 12.45% is forestland, 1.15% is wetland and the residential and other uses account for the remaining 13.40%.

In 1995, Albay had a population of almost one million with an annual growth rate of 1.10% and a density of some 370 persons per square kilometer. Rural population was 70.28% while urban population accounted for 29.72%.

Of the total 515,000 labor force, ninety percent (90%) were employed and ten percent (10%) were unemployed. The average income of a family of six is about P3,000.00 the province's literacy rate is ninety three (93%) percent with some seven hundred and ninety eight pre-school to graduate levels.

Albay is a major supplier of geothermal energy to the Luzon grid with its 330-megawatt Tiwi Geothermal Plant and 210-megawatt BacMan Geothermal Plan at the boundaries of Manito, Albay and Bacon, Sorsogon. Local electrification is provided by the Albay Electric Cooperative, Inc. (ALECO). All of the cities and municipalities are energized for a 100% electrification coverage.

The Province boasts of mineral resources in the islands of Rapu-Rapu and Batan now being tapped by private firms.

Albay has a good road network of 1,506 kms. with sufficient numbers of public utility jeepneys, buses, and motorized tricycles plying the streets. Metro Manila is only ten to twelve hours away serviced by at least twenty bus companies. The Philippine National Railways has rehabilitated its southline up to Albay offering the cheapest alternative especially for cargos and the metropolis. Aside from having the only trunkline airport in the region located in Legaspi City, the province has an international seaport, a national port, seven municipal ports and one fish port.

Albay's communication requirement is serviced by Bayantel, Digitel and Matelco with complete facilities for long distance, overseas calls. Other companiew offering similar long distance

services are PLDT, RCPI, PT&T, and the Bureau of Telecommunications. Telegraph services which operates for fourteen to sixteen hours daily, as well as teletypes, landlines, cell/mobile phones, HF/CW radio and VHF radio facilities are also available.

The three main agricultural crops of the province are rice, corn and coconut. Other crops like abaca, banana, vegetables, root crops, and legumes are likewise being produced. Major forest products are acacia, narra and other hardwood products while anahaw, nipa, caragumoy and nito are some of the minor palm products.

Varying fish species and marine resources are found in the waters and major fishing grounds of the province. Anchovy registered the biggest catch in the '90s. Inland fishing, composed of brackish water and freshwater resources had an estimated annual production of 10,900 metric tons.

Business activities thriving in the province vary from manufacturing, trading, ceramics, marine/aqua culture, real estate and mining.

The trading sector gets the biggest share with 41.94%, followed by services with 40.60%, manufacturing, 17.06%, real estate with 0.35% and marine/aqua culture with 0.05% the traditional exports are coconut oil, perlite and abaca fiber, while non-traditional products are mostly gifts and housewares, synthetic hair goods and abaca pulp and paper.

Albay has an ideal climate for investment and business undertaking. Commercial establishments from Metro Manila and other regions have started to invest in the province which has prioritized tourism development and business investment.

These developments and the available resources of Albay have challenged the members of the Albay Women Volunteers Association, Inc. to make their presence felt and get involved in their respective communities. The women volunteers felt that they need to grab the opportunity to liberate themselves from the confines of homes to reach out to communities.

AWVAI was organized sometime in August 1997 by two civic-spirited lady professionals, businesswoman Remedios "Gigi" Manzanilla and Dr. Ana Maria T. Kare of Malinao, Albay. A core group was formed with friends and acquaintances that laid out the concept and collated public opinion. Public response was positive that in less than 3 months, a province-wide community-based women's organizational campaign was already taking place.

On November 10, 1997, the AWVAI was registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission under SEC Registration No. 00375. It was also later accredited by the Department of Social Welfare and Development under Certificate of Accreditation No. BSR-00-0262 date February 19,2001. The birth of AWVAI in Albay came at a time when the need for expanding the women's role from that of a simple homemaker to that of a community worker is most wanting.

## **B. Programs and Projects:**

Membership in AWVAI is premised on the principle of volunteerism. As a non-government entity, non-profit corporation and non-partisan organization, AWVAI is open to women who are ready, willing and able to contribute a part of their time, talent and treasure in support of the organization's vision and mission. The organization's primary objective is to promote and

develop a healthy and self-sufficient family, being the basic component of a barangay. To attain this, the AWVAI initiates programs aimed at enhancing traditional family values, livelihood, health and sanitation, disaster preparedness and response, environmental conservation, and peace and security. To its members, “a strong family makes a strong barangay.”

Through its five years of existence, AWVAI has carried out various socio-civic and community development projects and activities under its lined up programs. The organization, in line with its education and training thrust, has conducted basic orientation among its members, survey analysis, recruitment, skills training, and advocacy program and study on women and children’s issues.

Under its social services program, the organization has conducted regular medical missions and outreach projects not only in depressed urban areas but in far-flung barangays as well. As the association undertakes laudable projects in community, it also initiates and maintains linkages and alliances with other non-government organizations, government line agencies, local government units, and other concerned entities. Its programs are also being continuously assessed and evaluated to determine their impact to the community it serves.

One of its special projects that gained the admiration of local spiritual leaders is the “Ina ng Barangay.” The AWVAI also maintains a radio program, “Makapamilyang Baretta sa Albay,” where issues on women and family are taken up for public information and advocacy.

The unique experience of AWVAI in addressing transparency and accountability issues came when the organized women joined the political arena, particularly in the local government. AWVAI founding president, Gigi Manzanilla entered politics first when Board Member Sofio Ayala of the 2nd District of Albay died in 1999. Then she won on the next elections as topnotcher board member. She has then sponsored more than 35 approved bills, several of which were landmark legislation such as the two gender and development ordinances and resolutions concerning women and children’s rights, family values, and family health and welfare. With AWVAI, she held consultative meetings with the women sector; she also espoused the inclusion of gender and development in the annual budget of the local government units in the province

### **C. Tools and Strategies:**

The tools and strategies undertaken/carried out by AWVAI include the following:

1. Recruitment of members and organization of chapters at barangay level;
2. Ensure attendance of women leaders in the organization of municipal chapters;
3. Carrying out of activities that benefit needy communities, e.g.: distribution of wheelchair for the disabled, medical missions, swine dispersal, distribution of toilet bowls to indigent families, livelihood trainings, and feeding programs in poor communities;
4. Airing over DZRC of the radio program “Makapamilyang Baretta sa Albay” from 9-9:30 p.m., from Monday to Friday;
5. Search for “Ginang ng AWVAI”;
6. Blessing of the “Ina kan Barangay” Shrine at the Bicol Heritage Park in Camp Gen. Simeon Ola, Legazpi City;

7. Push for the accreditation of the organized municipal chapters which, to date, have a total of 10,000 members in all towns and cities of Albay;

8. Active participation in the Ibalong and Magayon Festivals, fiestas and commemorative events in the towns and cities of Albay, and spearheading the celebration of the Women's Month in Albay with the theme "KAISA KA!" (which stands for "Karapatan ay Isulong Tungo sa mga Adhikaing Kababaihan"— Advancement of Rights that Realize the Ideals of Women");

9. Active participation in discussions with government agencies and local councils, including the Regional Development Council;

10. Affiliation with groups for women or advocating the interest of women like the National Council of Women (NCWP), Ugnayang Kababaihan sa Pulitika (UKP), and National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC), in the country; and UND-Beijing+5 Women's Conference in New York, and ASEAN GAD Conference, internationally.

## **D. Lessons Learned from Volunteer Work:**

Because of the dedication and commitment of AWVAI members, the group has served as a key in carrying out the development of communities in the province of Albay.

The womenwork have acquired their voice and put expression to the role they wish to carry out in their respective communities. A strong indication of this is the passage of a GAD (Gender and Development) ordinance in Albay which assures the allocation of 5% of annual barangay, municipal, and provincial budgets to women's programs and disadvantaged groups.

Politically, AWVAI has shown that it is possible to elect leaders from the ranks of women.

The womenfolk of AWVAI are living proof that women can contribute significantly to their community if given the chance by society.