



# Joining Hands for a Renewed School Community:

The Case of Consolacion Central

Elementary School by **Shenna Kim Carisma, CPAg**

**An early Greek philosopher once said that it takes a community to educate a child.**

On the island-province of Cebu, it literally took a community to re-imagine and re-create a school community for the children of Consolacion Central School.

Consolacion, 12 kilometers north of Cebu City, is a second-class municipality with a population jumping to 87,500 as of 2007 from the last census of 53,000. Its economy is fueled by the increase in commercial and retail businesses and export manufacturing industries. The town's industrial potential is further underlined by the opening of an international port on the coastal barangay of Tayud.

Hence, the once laidback Consolacion faces the same problems of any urbanizing municipality. Pockets of impoverished communities are burgeoning throughout Consolacion's urbanizing barangays. At the same time, there arise several issues: an increasing crime rate, poor waste management, environmental degradation, juvenile delinquency and drug addiction. Under these conditions, making resources available for basic service delivery has become difficult.

## **Bgy. Cansaga and** good governance

Barangay Cansaga, one of Consolacion's urbanizing barangays, is not immune to such pressures. Thus, the Center for Participatory Governance (CPaG), a social development NGO with a long-standing track record on advocating and implementing participatory governance initiatives in Cebu decided to work in Bgy. Cansaga. CPaG's entry into the barangay had an advantage. Among the poor communities in the area were people's organizations that CPaG could help mobilize, and the barangay officials were open to adopting new ways of governance.

CPaG tapped the ability of Peter Cabillada, a father to two daughters, and community leader who was keenly aware of the problems his community faced. Peter was a barangay councilor when he first began working with CPaG, exposing him to good governance principles and concepts through activities sponsored by the Center.

It was during Peter Cabadilla's tenure as barangay councilor, and through the efforts of CPaG, that he co-sponsored a resolution endorsing the partnership of CPaG and Bgy. Cansaga in pursuing Barangay Development Planning through Participatory Learning and Action (BDP-PLA)

In Peter's words, "Ang pagpaapil sa mga katawhan sa panggobyerno sa barangay makabatyag kanila sa ilang responsibilidad sa komunidad, mao nagkadaghan ang partisipasyon sa katawhan, hilabi na sa mga kababainhan." (Involving men and women in governance, specifically in decision-making processes, deepens their appreciation of their responsibility as citizens, making them more active in community affairs.)

In 2004, Bgy. Cansaga was awarded by the Municipality of Consolacion as the Most Outstanding Barangay for its work in activating the Barangay Development Council (BDC) and crafting a comprehensive multi-sectoral development plan involving the community. This strategic plan has served as guide for the barangay officials to appropriate resources for neglected social services, including health, daycare education and drainage.

Since then, Bgy. Cansaga has been a template for neighboring barangays such as Tayud, Casili, Nangka, Lamac and Pulpogan. The local chieftains want to replicate Cansaga's experience in mobilizing its residents; they have been consulting with Peter and CPaG on how to improve their barangay governance.

In Bgy. Cansaga's participatory planning experience, a community leader who joined the first planning process remembers, "Pinaagi sa BDP-PLA, igo na ang paggamit sa pondo sa barangay ug nakita sab namo ang kaadunahan ug katakus sa mga residente sa barangay nga mahimo namong patabangon sa kalambuan sa barangay." (Through BDP-PLA, barangay funds are effectively used and we discover a wealth in human resources that the community can tap for its development.)

Peter Cabadilla assumed the office of Punong Barangay in 2007 and in that capacity, institutionalized the Barangay Development Council<sup>1</sup> as the mechanism for planning, monitoring and

evaluating the strategic plans of Bgy. Cansaga. He regularized a continuing dialogue with community residents by calling for sitio (barangay districts) assemblies each month to update constituents on the progress of plans and other developments.



Peter Cabillada, a father to two daughters, and a community leader is PTCA head of the Consolacion Central school.

CPaG for its part maintained its support for Bgy. Cansaga through the Bayanihan sa Kalunsuran (BAKAL) project. The CPaG-BAKAL linkage would host All-Partners Meetings where the lessons and strategies under the project would be disseminated and shared among the various barangays covered by the CPaG.

Bgy. Cansaga was in fact a beneficiary in some of the trainings that CPaG implemented through BAKAL, specifically its co-production and co-financing trainings. In its writeshop and BDP package trainings under BAKAL, Bgy. Cansaga was able to join and benefit from the lessons imparted by CPaG's work in other areas such as Barangay Tayud and Barangay Inayawan.

Applying the lessons learned in participatory governance, Peter Cabadilla and other Bgy. Cansaga parents took on the challenge of leading the Parents-Teachers-Community Association (PTCA) of Consolacion Central School.

As PTCA President, Peter pushed for the PTCA to undergo a strategic development planning process using the tools of BDP-PLA.

## The school's **dire situation**

Located in Bgy. Cansaga at the heart of Consolacion's Poblacion, the 65-room school has a population of 3,257 schoolchildren. Enrolled under a general curriculum are 2,895 students (88.9 percent), while 289 students (8.87 percent) are under an advanced Science and Technology curriculum.

The school, built in 1930, is the only public institution in the Department of Education (DepEd) Division's northeast area with a Special Education Center for children with special needs. Four specially-trained teachers care for 73 children.



Like most public schools, however, Consolacion Central School operates within a tight budget. It has a shortage of teachers, with the teacher-student ratio at 1:43.4. Its main building is a run-down structure, vulnerable to fire because electrical wirings snake through its ceilings. The toilets



**Feeding is sponsored by both the municipal government who donates the rice and chicken, vegies and the students who can afford to give five pesos each month.**

in each room cannot be used because of poor maintenance and inadequate water supply. The school's library is oftentimes used as a function area for activities, and its books and reference materials are extremely outdated. The computer laboratory has a computer-student ratio of 1:40. It comes as no surprise that in the latest National Achievement Test, the school's performance slipped. Grade III performance was at 54.42 mean percentage score (MPS) while Grade VI NAT result was at 67.8. Consolacion Central School students used to be among the top performers in the annual National Achievement Test (NAT) among public elementary schools in the province. The budget allotted to Consolacion Central School from DepEd and the Municipality is not sufficient to address the improvement needs of the school. Although the PTCA was able to generate Php179, 000 from the P25.00 membership fee over the years, this fund was left unused and activities were confined to the regular bi-annual meetings without any significant accomplishment to report.

"I held dialogues with the school administrator, teachers, parents, and students to understand the school situation," recalls Peter Cabadilla. "I believed that the positive results of PLA in Cansaga could be replicated in a school setting." With a resolution from the PTCA Board, Peter sought CPaG's help in guiding them through the PLA planning process.

## Mapping out a **collective vision**

And so it was that on a rainy Sunday, July 20, 2008, over 60 parents, teachers, and students gathered to map out a plan to renew Consolacion Central School, with CPaG's facilitation. Over

three Sundays and a holiday, teachers, parents and students came together to craft Consolacion Central School's Development Plan (2008 – 2010).

The Plan encompasses five thematic areas for improvement:

1. Infrastructure and classroom development,
2. Faculty and administration development,
3. Students' welfare and development,
4. Parents/guardians development, and
5. Environment, emergency, safety & security

Similar to the PLA process in barangays, the medium-term development plan, along with a new articulation of the school's Vision and Mission statements, was presented for the approval of the PTCA General Assembly. Maximizing the occasion, other community stakeholders -- congressional district representative, municipality officials, barangay officials, provincial board members, non-government organizations and various private businesses -- were also invited to contribute to the realization of the plan with a pledge of support.

This pledging session generated a total of over Php1.5 million from the invited guests, excluding pledges of support in the form of free trainings and a feeding program. Some parents also donated money totaling Php13, 000 while most of the parents present committed their time and labor to specific repair and maintenance activities identified in the plan. Bayanihan2 community spirit

**Mrs. Victoria Lim has taught in this same school for 30 years now.**



"The community spirit and voluntarism of the community was apparent," relates Peter. "Parents offered their service to clean the school grounds and trim the trees, while mothers and guardians offered to cook champorado and arrozcaldo every Monday and Thursday for the feeding program." One parent also volunteered his service to patrol the school grounds on certain nights to complement the school's one security staff, since breaking-and-entering and theft occasionally happened in the school. Another parent who owned a private construction company volunteered his service in assessing the conditions of the classrooms, toilets, drainage & sewage system and the school's perimeter fence.

Adding to the budget from the funds of the PTCA, parents purchased materials for the renovation of the toilets and perimeter fence, while contracting out the necessary labor. To address the more costly projects in the Plan, the PTCA officers continued to mobilize resources by soliciting support from local officials and business groups. Fundraising activities, including raffle draws, also took place.

To sustain the motivation of those involved in crafting the plan, working committees were formed and strengthened based on the thematic concerns. Each committee was responsible for mobilizing resources for the implementation and monitoring of their sector's plan.

"Tungod kay gipaapil mi sa pagplano, na feel namo that we became part of the community and in the transformation of the school. Dapat lang nga mulihok ug mutabang pud sa pag-imple-ment tungod kay ang among mga anak naa diri ug naa man ta resources especially skills nga strength nato," enthused Jimmy Grajo, a parent who was active from the start. (Since we were involved in the planning process, we own the plan, are part of the school community and have a responsibility in the transformation of the school. It is but necessary for us to help in implementing the plan since our children are enrolled here and we have the resources, especially our skills, which is our strength.)

Under the leadership of Peter Cabillada, the PTCA conducts itself with full transparency. It regularly reports the progress of the plan's implementation, the support/funds generated from donors, and makes a full accounting of the PTCA's finances and use of funds. According to Peter, "the PTCA is now functional. Parents are encouraged and willing to counterpart as they see that the officers of the PTCA are sincere in doing their part." "It is a good experience nga nakaapil mi sa planning ug naka-express sa among opinion kuyog mga mature – parents ug teachers," says Jospet Tibon, a student participant in the PLA process. (Our participation in the planning process was a good experience since we were given the chance to express our opinion along with our elders -- parents and teachers.)

This sentiment is echoed by another student participant, Axl James Dayon. "Nalipay mi nga gipaapil mi ug ang among suggestions naapil sa plano especially ang pagsolve sa malnutrition, improvement sa school facilities like additional computers and ang among security." (We are thankful that our suggestions were considered and included in the plan, such as addressing the problem of malnutrition and improving the school's facilities, including additional computers, and improving security.)

A marked improvement in the relationship of teachers and parents is also noticeable. Teachers laud the fact that concern for their welfare is included in the plan, e.g., stress management for teachers and trainings for their improvement.

Mrs. Victoria Lim, Master Teacher II and participant during the planning, expressed her gratitude on the process. "Klaro na ang PTCA karon because of the clear action plan and participatory ang

process. Planning is a good step. Ug maayo nga sa pagplano, involved ang mga teachers, students and parents kay nakuha ang mga problema sa tanan sektor ug nahatagan pagtagad ang mga concerns. (The PTCA is now functional because of the clear action plan and the participatory process. Planning is a good step. It is also good that teachers, students, and parents are involved because the concerns of the different sectors are given due consideration.)

## Challenges ahead



**Science High students discuss their participation in the school's planning sessions.**

Nearing the end of a school year, the PTCA is faced with a challenge to sustain and motivate the continued participation of the stakeholders in the school community. It is the challenge for the planners – “dreamers”, as they call themselves -- to ensure that the vision is kept alive by putting the plan into action. It is also the challenge of the entire community, even beyond the municipality of Consolacion, to support the realization of this plan. More than well-educated citizens of Consolacion, the school is out to mold the next generation of globally-competent Filipinos imbued with a strong sense of citizenship.

The application of PLA in Consolacion Central School, with its emphasis on a strategy of co-production/co-financing/ cost-sharing, underlies the effectiveness of PLA as a tool in mobilizing the citizens to effect community development through transformed governance practices. On this premise, CPaG's governance programs and services continue to hold relevance and should be sustained, and even scaled up, in the Municipality of Consolacion.

As the BAKAL Project enters a new phase in the cycle of community transformation and development, CPaG faces the challenge of replicating similar models of partnership in other communities. The Center also has the task of developing and multiplying good-governance champions, like Peter Cabillada, who are the best spokespersons for good governance as the new brand of politics. Advocates of transformed governance approaches are the catalysts for sustaining and broadening the gains made by the communities.

1 The Barangay Development Council (BDC) is a local special body, composed of the barangay council and PO/NGO representatives mandated to formulate a comprehensive multi-sectoral development plan for approval by the Sangguniang Barangay (barangay legislative council).

2 Bayanihan is the traditional Filipino value of cooperation and communal unity and cooperation to achieve an objective.