



# **Building a Partnership to Overcome Domestic Violence in the Philippines: The Case of Tessie Fernandez and Bantu Banta**

by Mr. Gil Tuparan

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# Tessie Fernandez

In 1991, after several years of implementing its credit program for women of Cebu City, Lihok-Pilipina Foundation, Inc. noted that some active members faltered in their repayments or stopped their enterprises altogether for poorly explained reasons. Women leaders were failing to attend important meetings while many members often had to hurry home reportedly "to avoid family trouble."

Bothered by these observations from the weekly monitoring and evaluation sessions, Tessie Fernandez, Lihok-Pilipina founder and Executive Director, instructed her staff to tackle "family trouble" in cell meetings. She prepared a discussion guide to draw out the conflicts encountered by the women in their homes.

Floodgates were seemingly opened. Lihok-Pilipina soon realized that "family trouble" frequently meant battering of the wives. The women talked about the verbal and physical abuse they got from their husbands. They half-jokingly pointed to their bruises and scars and swapped stories about the reasons why their spouses hurt them.

At first, Tessie Fernandez just wanted to provide a forum where the women could ventilate their grievances. Indeed, having people who would listen and share experiences was already a big relief to the abused women. Two days after one such meeting, however, a badly bruised mother brought her two kids and a few belongings to the Lihok-Pilipina office. She wanted to leave her husband and had nowhere to go. Within a few weeks, three other women fled their homes and partners and rushed to the NGO for shelter and assistance.

## **Lihok-Pilipina Foundation, Inc.**

Lihok-Pilipina was started in 1984 when Tessie Fernandez organized a group of 20 women who were her neighbors in a depressed area in Cebu City. This was after she attended the wake of a child who died of dehydration. Although some of the women knew how to prepare the simple saltsugar solution that could have saved the child, there was no venue for sharing the information. With Ms. Fernandez's help they started meeting regularly to discuss health issues and the preparation of herbal medicines. Their talks soon expanded to include livelihood, land tenure and other family and neighborhood matters.

Six months later, four of the women approached Tessie Fernandez to borrow money to buy two sacks of peanuts that they planned to sell during the weeklong Sinulog fiesta celebration. These vendors usually got their daily capital from a usurer who charged them interest at the rate of 20% a month. Ms. Fernandez lent them P700, an amount that she did not expect to be repaid. After a week, the vendors came back with her P700 plus an additional P140 representing interest. She refused the

P140 but noted the vendors' capacity to pay and the possibility of developing rolling capital. Tessie Fernandez secured a P10,000 grant from the Assisi Foundation and established a rolling fund with provision for capital build-up. This was to be the start of the NGO's Social Credit and Livelihood Program. Currently with a revolving fund of about P6 million, the program linked rural women producers in Cebu Province and Hilongos, Leyte with urban women vendors and other establishments in Metro Cebu. Lihok-Pilipina had since been in the forefront of organizing communities in Cebu around such needs and issues as livelihood, health and nutrition, land tenure, water and sanitation, and domestic violence. Its programs included Water and Environment, Women's Education, and Community Organizing. It still carried out, albeit in a reduced scale, its Kabataan sa Paglaum (Children of Hope) program assisting street and working children. Mainly through Tessie Fernandez, it was also involved in national advocacy on domestic violence, gender in housing, sexual harassment, job discrimination and other relevant issues. But the NGO was best known for its Women's Support and Crisis Center and its work in support of the Bantay Banay, a community based program against domestic violence. Lihok-Pilipina stated its vision and mission as follows:

**Vision:**

Communities that are dynamic, non-violent, viable, effective, militant and self-reliant, where the dignity of women, children and men are upheld and continuously developed

**Mission:**

- To expose the women's question in the Philippines
- To organize women into viable self-help groups capable of directing and sustaining their own initiatives on issues like health, childcare, laws, livelihood, environment and other concerns
- To work for the acceptance by the Philippine society of the central significance of the women's perspective in the national struggle for social transformation

## **Overview of the Women's Sector**

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the women's sector got a major boost from state efforts to improve the status of women in the Philippines. These included the passage of the New Family Code in 1987, which significantly expanded the rights of women. In 1989 the country's first woman President issued Executive Order No. 368 adopting the 1989-1992 Philippine Development Plan for Women (PDPW). This led to massive gender sensitization programs targeting the different layers of the bureaucracy. Government-NGO partnership in the women's sector was also on the upswing because of the interaction in the formulation of the PDPW and the Country Report for the Beijing Conference.

Nonetheless, Filipino women, like their counterparts in many other countries, faced "the 'double burden' of bearing high responsibility for domestic as well as productive work."

The World Bank's "Country Gender Profile" of the Philippines points out the following issues and statistics:

- Despite the higher education of women than men at all levels, there was gender inequality in the labor market, linked to the cultural stereotypes of gender roles. Women's share of the total labor force in 1994 was only 36%. In 1990, female labor force participation rate was 47.5% (79.8% for males) while unemployment rate was 7.9% (3.5% for males).
- Despite good access to education, females suffered from problems related to reproductive health, particularly high fertility and mortality rates. The leading causes of high maternal mortality -- officially, 74 per 100,000 live births in 1993 compared to 37 in Thailand -- were hemorrhage and hypertensive complications of pregnancy. These suggested the poor health service delivery, including lack of pre-natal, obstetric and post-natal care and poor access to family planning services. Maternal illnesses such as anemia and malnutrition affected almost half of all pregnant women. Access to health services was even poorer in rural areas - - for example, in poor rural areas only about one-third of births received medical attendance.
- The average income for men was higher than that for women with a female/male ratio of 0.45 in 1990. The gap was larger in urban areas (female/male: 0.36) than in rural areas (0.53). Women were found to be extensively involved in low-wage or informal sector activities. In addition, although there was no macro-level gender-disaggregated data on access to credit, anecdotal and more micro-level evidence suggested women's limited access to credit compared to men.
- The vulnerability of women workers in export processing zones and as overseas migrant workers was also noted. Poor working conditions, unfair labor practices and sexual harassment were believed to be rampant. 5. Violence against women, including rape, domestic violence, sexual harassment, incest prostitution and pornography, was identified as a major problem by the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women (NCRFW) in its 1995 Philippine Country Report on Women. However, the "culture of silence" made it difficult to have an accurate account.

Meanwhile, during the same period, Metro Cebu was undergoing rapid economic growth, due particularly to its export processing zone and international airport. The population of Cebu City grew by 24.5% from 1980 to 1990, aggravating the already difficult housing situation. It may be noted that the bulk of the city's population occupied only 17% of the city's land area. About 58%, or three out of five families, lived in informal settlements without tenure and often without basic social services such as access to water and electricity.

*"In 1991-1992, domestic violence was not even identified as an issue," Tessie Fernandez recalled. "We looked but didn't find much literature on the subject,*

*especially not in the Philippine setting. It was really something that everybody was trying to keep a lid on, something that people just didn't talk about."*

## **Women's Support and Crisis Center**

When the badly bruised mother suddenly appeared in Lihok-Pilipina, she could not stop talking. Tessie Fernandez's first thought was that battered woman needed to talk. Then she realized she needed a place to house the woman and her two kids; their NGO at that time was a one-room affair. They also needed, all on an emergency basis, food, clothes, transportation and people who would counsel the victims and document and file the case, as necessary. Lawyers would not be a problem as they had three lawyers on their Board of Trustees. But the logistics and other expertise requirements were problematic. The arrival of the battered wives presented a new set of issues and concerns for which Lihok-Pilipina was, in many ways, totally unprepared.

At first Lihok-Pilipina scrounged for whatever help it could get to respond to the first four abused women. Then it set out to systematically solicit the help of others. In September 1991, equipped with mostly informal agreements and loads of conviction that something had to be done, Lihok-Pilipina launched its Women's Support and Crisis Center to respond to victims of domestic rape and violence.

From the start, Tessie Fernandez recognized that the issue was so big that they could not take it on alone. At the same time, she knew that the subject was so new, sensitive and controversial they would encounter various forms of resistance, particularly from the various government agencies concerned. Thus, she called on her network of community organizers, development workers and former classmates in law school, tapping their social awareness and commitment to quickly build their "force-field." The Federacion Internacional de Abogadas (FIDA) immediately came forward to help. Ms. Fernandez personally approached shelter groups, convents and private individuals to provide temporary housing. Through "friends of friends," she also got the support of the University of San Carlos Psychology Department to counsel victims, conduct basic training of Lihok-Pilipina staff and serve as expert witness.

## **Tackling Domestic Violence**

The decision to put up the Center and tackle domestic violence was not exactly welcomed. Tessie Fernandez was known to be a maverick as an advocate of gender and urban poor concerns. Nonetheless, not a few quizzical eyebrows were raised, even by her husband, himself a prominent social development worker. Many thought that she was carrying it too far. At that time, domestic violence was something people deemed too personal to be discussed outside the family. Raising it as a public concern was, to many, simply too much.

Besides, it was not as if Lihok-Pilipina was running out of challenges in gender and development. It was doing well, safe and secure in its niche and image. Why rock the boat and go into a controversial issue that she and the entire Lihok-Pilipina had no experience in?

Tessie Fernandez had several reasons. First, based on the frequency that the subject came up in their cell meetings, she sensed that the reality of domestic violence was pervasive. Yet nobody was touching it. In the early 1990s, gender and development as a whole had not widely caught on and Lihok-Pilipina was practically the only major proponent in that field in Cebu. If they did not take on the issue of violence against women (VAW), nobody else would.

On a personal level, she was convinced that tackling the matter would give her a firmer grasp of power relations between intimate partners and within the family. These relations, she believed, were the foundation of what was expressed or reflected to the outside world. Hence, she assessed that directly confronting the domestic violence issue would provide fresh insights that would allow their NGO to better advocate and mainstream gender concerns.

She herself was curious and excited about the subject. She admitted that inevitably there was a certain level of detachment when helping the urban poor address land issues, resettlement and relocation, or access to resources.

*"Because at the end of the day, I knew I had a house to go home to, I had my own access," Tessie Fernandez explained.*

But domestic power relations were so personal that she was required to explore and confront her own issues with her husband and their growing family. The same thing applied to all Lihok-Pilipina officers and staff. Tessie Fernandez further said,

*"At first we thought of addressing domestic violence just as a strategy to resolve the difficulties in the credit program. But it became an issue itself because we found out that it was such a huge concern among the women."*

She pointed out that domestic violence was a rights violation that went far beyond the physical. The emotional and psychological violence prevented the women from fulfilling their other roles and diminished their capacity to run their household.

*"The cost of violence is just too big," she said. "For example, when spouses quarrel, family properties are destroyed. When the woman runs away, there is less income and the children have to stop schooling."*

Lastly, she explained that the exposure to the reality of domestic violence was a big jolt to the organization.

*"Our initial assumption was that if we could give women access to and control over resources, then they would be empowered to decide for themselves and better their lives. For a number of years, that was our assumption until this issue of domestic violence came along."*

Tessie Fernandez and Lihok-Pilipina realized that helping poor women gain economic power was not enough to free them from conditions that prevented their full and active participation in the community. It turned out that the incremental income imposed an additional load on the women's triple burden of childbearing, child rearing and

homemaking. It came at the steep price of a heavier workload, more health problems, and greater tension in the family. Thus, following a series of reflection sessions, the credit and other programs were reviewed and adjusted based on the new knowledge, and Lihok-Pilipina decided to directly tackle the issue of violence in the home.

## **Teresa "Tessie" Banaynal-Fernandez**

Tessie Fernandez grew up in a house that faced the parish church.

*"We would pick up flowers from our yard and put them in the altar. If the church needed cleaning, we would go and clean it. My brothers served as sacristans during Holy Mass. We were raised that way," she narrated.*

At the back of the house could be found the health clinic.

*"After class, we would help out. My brothers and I became familiar with cases of human rights abuse, assisting in the treatment of burn victims or those whose ears were cut off, things like that. I was the one writing solicitation letters and reports on the injustices and violence committed."*

According to Ms. Fernandez, these experiences started her in the course of NGO work and social development, which became a continuation of her day-to-day expression of her Christianity.

She finished AB History and Sociology in 1972 in Xavier University and was first employed as a high school teacher in Lanao del Sur, one of the most depressed provinces in the country. After a year she went back to work in the Social Action Center of the Archdiocese of Cagayan de Oro. Tessie Fernandez then became involved in youth programs, in rehabilitation programs for refugees, and later in helping communities displaced by government projects. She wanted an organizing component in their interventions and sent some of their people to a training program on community organizing in Cebu. Eventually, she herself was able to attend the training. In Cebu City she was to meet and marry Francisco "Bimbo" Fernandez, the lead trainer of the CO development program.

Though originally from Cagayan de Oro City and deeply immersed in community organizing and social work in Northern Mindanao, Tessie Fernandez transferred residence in Cebu City, her husband's hometown. At that time they already had a child, with another one coming, and it became increasingly difficult shuttling by ferryboat between the two cities. Ms. Fernandez acceded to her husband's wishes, albeit grudgingly, and restarted her career in Cebu. She and Bimbo Fernandez have eight children with ages ranging from 10 to 20 years.

## **Creation of Bantay Banay**

To back up its findings and observations in the cell meetings, Lihok-Pilipina gathered data on the incidence of domestic violence and sexual abuse. Research in 33 barangays (villages) and in government hospitals, police stations and the City Prosecutor's Office

revealed that very few cases were actually reported. The NGO likewise conducted a house-to-house survey of women in two urban poor barangays. The survey showed that six out of every 10 women in the communities were battered or had been victims of domestic violence in 1990-1991.

In January 1992, Tessie Fernandez presented the results of the research in a multi-sectoral forum convened under the Urban Basic Services Program (UBSP), which was part of the UNICEF Country Program for Children. At that time she was playing a lead role in the implementation of the UBSP as head of the Cebu City Urban Poor Commission with the salary of one peso a year. The forum had representatives of various government agencies, the city government, barangays, NGOs, community groups and socio-civic organizations. The findings were met with astonishment and disbelief.

*"They were shocked," Tessie Fernandez recalled. "Some even exclaimed, 'What sort of women are these?!'"*

A barangay captain later proposed that a Task Force be created to address the problem. Others chorused that a broader, community-based program should be immediately implemented. This was the birth of Bantay.

## **Bantay.**

### **Bantay Banay Program and Structure**

Bantay Banay -- a name coined by Tessie Fernandez that literally means Family-Community Watch -- had evolved as a community program to prevent domestic violence and foster justice and peace in the home. Its core values were (a) empowerment of women and their communities, (b) protection of children and those vulnerable to violence, and (c) promotion of justice and peace in families. Its aims were as follows:

- To enable women to develop the capability to respond to their own problems and in the process develop their own strengths as persons;
- To prevent and minimize the incidence of domestic violence and sexual abuse and other forms of violence against women;
- To promote a multi-sectoral and community approach to domestic violence
- To mainstream the issue of violence against women and other gender issues into the program of government with corresponding budget, policy and logistical support.

Bantay Banay involved first a neighborhood network of paralegals, counselors, social development workers, members of the police, community patrol groups and other volunteers. At the next level was an Interagency Committee or Council (IAC) composed of representatives of the Local Government Units (city or municipality and their barangays), state agencies (Philippine National Police, Department of Health, Department of Social Welfare and Development, and others) and NGOs and other civil society groups. A network of these IACs and their members had been formed among the



different Bantay Banay areas for mutual assistance in training, ongoing education and sharing of services for cases cutting across provinces and regions.

At the grassroots, Bantay Banay was also the name of the community-based organization tasked to access its own resources and facilitate referrals for temporary shelter, immediate medical check-up, counseling, legal assistance and livelihood. Operating under the principles of self-help and volunteerism, Bantay Banay groups engaged in community patrol, provision of support to victims, monitoring of cases, and advocacy of justice and peace in families.

## **Forcing the Issue**

*"At first, we just wanted to respond to the women coming to us. To do that, we had to quarrel with the police. In fact, I think we quarreled with everybody,"* Tessie Fernandez wryly recalled when asked about the early goings of their Women's Support and Crisis Center and the Bantay Banay program. *"We had to force the issue. We had no choice."*

The positive developments in the women's sector in the national scene took time and much effort before they became operating realities in Cebu City. Even the agreements reached in the multisectoral Bantay Banay Task Force were easier said than done notwithstanding the commitments made to immediately address the issue of domestic violence.

*"I knew from my experience as a community organizer that government would not attend to your concerns unless there was pressure. At the same time, I had the advantage of knowing the Mayor and of working in the City Government,"* Tessie Fernandez added.

Thus, the systematic pushing of the issue of domestic violence and linking it with city governance became a conscious effort under the Bantay Banay program.

## **Getting the Support of the Police**

A specific instance exemplifying Lihok-Pilipina's early difficulties with the Philippine National Police involved a woman who approached the NGO for assistance. She wanted to report the physical abuse inflicted on her by her husband. Tessie Fernandez herself called up the police station about sending the woman over so the police could record her complaint in the police blotter.

A little later, her staff called that the duty officer refused to record the incident and instead, told the woman to go home and maybe improve her cooking so that she would not be beaten up. Tessie Fernandez stormed the police station thereafter, and was given the following explanation by the duty officer: based on experience domestic disputes went nowhere and charges were usually dropped. Those entered in the police blotter became "unresolved cases" that counted against the station's performance record.

Thus informed, Ms. Fernandez learned that the system itself was a problem. In lieu of the police blotter, she suggested coming up with a separate list for cases on domestic violence for future reference and follow-up. The duty officer grudgingly agreed, while complaining about the additional hassle and paperwork. Much later, Lihok-Pilipina sent all police stations a record book for cases of domestic violence and sexual abuse.

Rape cases were different altogether. The police had to record these incidents because rape was clearly a criminal offense and more "controversial" in nature. One time, the police called to say that the woman Lihok-Pilipina sent over merely kept on crying and refused to talk. They had scolded and needled her, so a Lihok-Pilipina staff reported. This made Tessie Fernandez livid. Eventually, she arranged for the traumatized woman to be interviewed in the Women's Support and Crisis Center with a police officer present. She instructed the policeman not to speak a word and to attest merely that the woman's sworn statement was made in his presence.

Tired of what she called an "anti-woman system" and the organization's many battles with the police, Ms. Fernandez approached the Police Chief in charge of staff development and offered to train the police on gender sensitivity. The Chief was interested but confessed that they had no budget for such. Ms. Fernandez sought the help of the Mayor instead, and received initial funding. Soon, gender sensitivity trainings were conducted one after the other for the police force of Cebu City.

## **Winning Over the DSWD**

Lihok-Pilipina's research findings to the effect that six out of ten women were battered received significant media attention not only in Cebu City but also in no less than the front page of the country's leading newspaper in terms of circulation. Moreover, the story caught the eye of then President Fidel Ramos, who called the attention of the Department of Social Welfare and Development.

Expectedly, the regional officials of DSWD in Cebu felt the heat from their Secretary, who reportedly demanded: "How come you don't know about this?" The DSWD Region VII officials in turn reprimanded the NGO for coming up with such a study without coordinating with their office. Thus, despite the agreements forged in the Bantay Banay Task Force between and among the government agencies and civil society groups, the relationship of Lihok-Pilipina with DSWD was off to a rocky start.

*"Actually, it was only the DSWD Region VII Office which felt threatened by us," Tessie Fernandez clarified. "Those in the provincial and lower levels were only too happy that we were around to help. When the regional officials found out that their people in Bohol, Dumaguete and other areas were working with us, they had no choice but to lower their guard."*

Inevitably, Lihok-Pilipina and the DSWD had to work together in Cebu because, Ms. Fernandez believed, the line agency was losing too many of its litigation cases. According to Ms. Fernandez, this was because the DSWD simply referred each case to a

pro bono lawyer and left it at that. The performance indicator then was apparently confined to referrals made rather than the resolution of cases.

At one time, the DSWD regional office was losing a celebrated case and badly needed help. This involved a businessman from a prominent family in Cebu who had his domestic helper raped by his male servant in his presence. The businessman suspected the maid of stealing from him, an allegation that the helper vehemently denied. Problem was the businessman told the boy to leave his employ and make himself scarce, so that no one could corroborate the maid's story.

Lihok-Pilipina had been monitoring the case and attending the court hearings. One day, after the DSWD again failed to produce the male servant, the judge instructed Lihok-Pilipina to produce the witness in 24 hours, otherwise the case would be dismissed. The judge was familiar with the NGO and knew Tessie Fernandez.

So, when Ms. Fernandez instructed her legal staff, *"Tell the judge this isn't our case!"* The judge countered: *"I know you can produce the witness."*

After obtaining from DSWD all possible leads regarding the boy's whereabouts, Lihok-Pilipina used its extensive network in the urban poor communities and found the boy in an automotive shop. Since the boy corroborated the helper's story, the businessman was sentenced to a life sentence in prison. The DSWD regional officials were happy and relieved that they did not lose the high profile case.

Afterwards, Ms. Fernandez instructed her legal staff to touch base with the DSWD. The staff explained to their DSWD counterparts that in Lihok-Pilipina, lawyers were not left on their own even if they were being paid to work on a case. The NGO would do its own sleuthing and sit down with the lawyer to analyze the case and agree on how to approach the matter best.

Lihok-Pilipina also emphasized the importance of winning the case as opposed to merely reporting it. The attitude and capability to pursue a case, even after five o'clock in the afternoon, was essential. The DSWD people presented their many limitations, including the lack of a transportation allowance or insurance especially after five in the afternoon. The parties then agreed to help each other under the Bantay Banay network and in similar undertakings. Since that time, the DSWD became very active in the program and served as the lead convenor in some Bantay Banay areas.

It should be noted that at the national level, the DSWD used Lihok-Pilipina's research findings to lobby for the approval of its proposal to President Ramos to create Women's Desks in all police stations nationwide. President Ramos issued an Executive Order on the subject in 1992, after the survey data on the incidence of domestic violence came out in the papers. This EO facilitated Bantay Banay action on cases of domestic violence much later.

## **Working with the Medical Institutions**

As with the police, Tessie Fernandez had an early run-in with the medico-legal section of the Cebu City Medical Center (CCMC), the city government hospital. When told by her staff that the attending female physician berated the rape victim sent for medico-legal certification thus: "You have been raped already and yet you refuse to spread your legs!" Ms. Fernandez could only shake her head in disbelief. She calmly went to see the doctor and invited her to attend their NGO's gender sensitivity workshop, which the doctor did. Her frank discussions with Lihok-Pilipina led to a series of training sessions for the medico-legal staff of CCMC, the PNP Crime Laboratory and even private hospitals like the Vicente S. Sotto Medical Center (VSSMC). The sensitization seminars underscored that afflictions could be more than physical, so interventions should be more than medical.

CCMC later on established its "Violet Room" and the VSSMC its "Pink Room", to provide the victims of physical and sexual abuse privacy, treatment with sensitivity to their feelings and immediate attention. The hospitals also integrated violence against women (VAW) with their medical curriculum. Meanwhile, the Silliman University in Dumaguete City made VAW part of its nursing curriculum. Tessie Fernandez joined the panel that critiqued the modules.

The City Health Department's working relations with Lihok-Pilipina and Bantay Banay were auspicious from the very start. In large measure this was because Tessie Fernandez was concurrently working in City Hall as head of the Cebu City Commission for the Urban Poor. She worked with City Health on the activities of the Cebu City Interagency Committee for the Urban Basic Services Program as well as the Cebu City Task Force on Street Children. City Health helped Bantay Banay and the Crisis Center to give first aid to victims and, through its Social Hygiene Clinic, to address cases of reproductive tract infection and sexually transmitted diseases. Lihok-Pilipina, in turn, helped City Health by providing inputs on community organizing and gender.

Tessie Fernandez also encouraged the Department to look into the women's relationship with their spouses, particularly in cases where the woman sought medical attention but did not show any obvious medical problem. She pointed out that the problem could possibly be due to stress or trauma in the home. Eventually the City Health Department became adept in detecting such cases and referred them to Lihok-Pilipina.

## **Relations with the Church**

From the start Bantay Banay included the priest and lay leaders of Guadalupe parish, in whose church Bantay Banay family dialogues were usually held. However, the Catholic Church as a whole was initially lukewarm to the program. Ms. Fernandez felt that the Church was wary of the women's agenda and was still smarting from the frequent attacks against its conservatism, especially as regards gender issues.

*"Unlike other women's groups, we were not adversarial," Tessie Fernandez explained. "But neither did her group actively seek the Church's support. "We just went ahead and did our work."*

Eventually the Church became more supportive of Bantay Banay because it recognized that the program was not anti-family in its approach to help resolve domestic conflicts. Tessie Fernandez pointed out that the best resolution of marital disputes might not necessarily be conciliation or the preservation of marriage every time.

*"Oh, but even the Church knows that that is not possible in all cases. That's why it has a marriage tribunal and allows annulment."*

A priest currently headed the Bantay Banay Interagency Committee of Cebu City because as Ms. Fernandez candidly explained, "That is also our way of influencing the Church."

## **Establishing Bantay Banay Community Organizations**

Alaska Mambaling and Sambag II were the pilot areas of the Bantay Banay program in Cebu City from 1991 to 1992. Working with the existing women's organizations in these barangays, Lihok-Pilipina spearheaded the conduct of an information drive, including orientation briefings and Gender Sensitivity Training (GST) seminars. Core groups, Area Task Forces and Interagency Committees were later formed. Other trainings on violence against women (VAW), laws and legal processes, basic counseling, conduct of family dialogues and on-the-job case handling followed. The trainings were mostly for women but later also covered the men, local support groups and the youth.

From these two pilot barangays, Lihok-Pilipina expanded its organizing and training to other community groups and areas, particularly those already covered by its Social Credit and Livelihood Program. Groups under the Cebu City Government's Urban Basic Services Program and the Cebu City Task Force on Street Children were likewise included.

At the community level, Bantay Banay had an easier time. With the women's organizations providing the impetus, barangays organized their community watch groups to monitor the neighborhood for incidents of violence against women and children, and to provide a support system for victims of domestic violence. Communities mobilized local resources to provide emergency food, temporary shelter in their homes, transportation, information, follow-up and referrals to concerned government agencies and NGOs. Work under Bantay Banay was rendered voluntarily.

As the community groups became more aware of their duties and rights, they gained confidence and became more aggressive in dealing with the government agencies. Ms. Fernandez issued two reasons for wanting to sensitize the institutions and agencies.

*"First, we needed them. We were not familiar with the issue of domestic violence and we had no prior experience in working on violence per se. Second, while working with the grassroots organizations, we had to enable the agencies at the top to respond well." In fact, the NGO had to check the growing hostility.*

*"Whenever we referred a group to an agency, they would often end up quarreling with the government personnel involved in the way a case was handled," Tessie Fernandez recalled.*

The agencies complained that the sensitized women were too assertive and vociferous. For their part, the Bantay Banay leaders protested against the ignorance, inaction and insensitivity of the public servants. In the communities, a critical success factor was the involvement of men. Tessie Fernandez explained,

*"In Bantay Banay, we learned as we went along but eventually we had to let both men and women understand that domestic violence is the product of a whole system."*

In the beginning, organizing involved only the women. Then Lihok-Pilipina realized that during orientation sessions and training programs, men would be present at the back, mostly out of curiosity. On one occasion, the women were trying to mediate a domestic conflict in the barangay hall. The husband in question became violent and attacked the women present. The timely intervention of the other men present helped subdue the attacker and control the situation.

After learning more about the program, a growing number of men insisted that they be allowed to join.

*"So we started including men in the gender sensitivity sessions," Tessie Fernandez said. "Besides, we were also having problems with some couples endlessly fighting. The wives would assert their rights and the husbands would say, 'What are you talking about?'"*

## **Expansion to Other Areas**

As word spread about the possibility of extending assistance to victims of domestic violence, more cases surfaced and were referred to the Women's Crisis Center and the Bantay Banay.

*"Some of them would go to City Hall but Mayor Tommy Osmena would refer them to us," Tessie Fernandez recalled. "At first that was just okay. But as the numbers grew, I had to tell the Mayor, 'You know, we're the NGO and we should be referring cases to you, not the other way around!' He replied, 'But you can do it better. Why don't I just give you money to continue what you are doing?'"*

In 1994, Mayor Osmena provided funds for Lihok-Pilipina to organize Bantay Banay groups in an initial batch of 15 barangays. Funds were released for the construction of a modest three-story building for the Women's Support and Crisis Center. According to Tessie Fernandez, the financial assistance helped to underscore City Hall's support for the Bantay Banay Program. Meanwhile, some of the cases required Lihok-Pilipina to operate outside Metro Cebu. Tessie Fernandez recounted,

*"We had this case involving a 17-year old girl from Dumaguete City who killed her boss. We had to look for contacts there to dig up her birth certificate and other relevant papers. We thought that if we had a group in Dumaguete, it would*

*not have been as difficult for us.” Ms. Fernandez recalled yet another case involving a married woman who was raped in Bohol. “They asked for our help and we had to send our lawyer there. We thought that if they had a group which could respond to the case, then it wouldn't have cost that much.”*

Lihok-Pilipina purposely did not want to grow bigger, however. Ms. Fernandez wanted to avoid the experience of some NGOs which would have up to 200 people working in an area only to pull out completely upon the completion of the project.

*“We didn't want a project-based intervention. I didn't see development to be that way. We might as well deal with the community if not as a client then as a partner,” she said.*

Thus, from the start Lihok-Pilipina worked with an anchor NGO or agency in the establishment of Bantay Banay in the other areas. This anchor organization was responsible for fostering the creation of the local Interagency Committee, for getting the referral system to work, and for matching the needs and resources of the stakeholders. Lihok-Pilipina's assistance came mostly in the form of trainings and consultancy services.

In 1995, Lihok-Pilipina started a program funded by Misereor, the overseas development agency of the Catholic Church in Germany, to expand Bantay Banay in seven other cities and 12 municipalities. In 1998, 13 more cities and municipalities were covered with assistance from Misereor and the TUCP-DAW Project. Today, Bantay Banay may be found in 50 of the 80 barangays of Cebu City. It has also been replicated in 41 other cities and municipalities across seven regions in Bicol, the Visayas and Mindanao. In February 2001, the Dubai International Award for Best Practices (DIABP) recognized Bantay Banay as a Best Practice in improving the living environment.

*“I think the problem of domestic violence was widespread and finding a solution was close to the heart of the people. At first, domestic violence was not considered an issue and nobody wanted to take it on. When somebody did and the issue was recognized and the cases were adequately responded to, then people stepped forward and Bantay Banay rapidly spread.”*

Tessie Fernandez explained how a multi-sectoral self-help program like the Bantay Banay quickly grew and thrived. In fact, groups from Batangas in Region 4, Cagayan in Region 5 and Metro Manila had been to Cebu City for exposure visits in the Bantay Banay barangays, agencies and NGOs.

Although the entry strategies and approaches to establish Bantay Banay in other areas were the same, replications were initiated in various ways. Within Cebu City, Lihok-Pilipina identified and targeted for replication the areas where more victims of domestic violence came from based on the records kept in the Women's Support and Crisis Center.

Outside Cebu City, the program spread mainly because of the interest shown by the women's groups and NGOs. These organizations would invite Lihok-Pilipina to organize Bantay Banay in their areas or at least give an orientation to the local groups. In this

regard, Mandaue had the Bidlisiw Foundation, Lapu-lapu City had NORFIL, Naga and Legazpi had COPE Bicol, and Victorias had Dawn Foundation, to name a few.

In Dumaguete City, the Center for Women Studies and Development of Silliman University spearheaded the formation of Bantay Banay. In Jasaan, Misamis Oriental, Bantay Banay was organized through the initiatives of the parish priest. The academic institution and local church coordinated with the local stakeholders to make the program work.

## **The Bantay Banay Network**

With Lihok-Pilipina pushing, the task force created in the January 1991 multi-sectoral forum gradually gelled and became functional.

*"Regular meetings were called, initially every week, just to discuss and clarify and agree,"* said Tessie Fernandez.

Lihok-Pilipina served as the secretariat, and had a direct hand in calling the meetings and setting the agenda. Areas of common concern were identified, namely, training, family dialogues and direct services such as legal aid, medical services, crisis intervention and counseling. Roles, procedures and activities were eventually worked out and referrals and better relations were soon forged.

The group came to be referred to as the Bantay Banay Interagency Council of Cebu City. It grew in size as more NGOs, POs and agencies joined and became actively involved. It had three committees, namely: organizing, education and support group for direct services. Lihok-Pilipina continued to serve as secretariat, purposely refusing to chair the group to promote ownership and participation of the members. The Council met monthly, although Ms. Fernandez admitted that due to her other engagements, she had not attended the last three meetings.

Interestingly, the Council operated without any formal agreement among the members or an official sanction from government. According to Tessie Fernandez, the GO and civil society groups were simply linked by the common desire to address the issue and did their work based on their appreciation of their respective roles and responsibilities. There was no apparent need to formalize the structures and systems because Bantay Banay had been mainstreamed within the different stakeholders.

*Ms. Fernandez narrated, "One time, a group was doing research on Bantay Banay and they went to the police to ask where they could find out more about the program. The police answered, 'you ask us, it's our program.' The group went to City Health and the staff there gave a similar answer. So everybody kind of owns the program and we're very happy with that. The mainstreaming happened because those trained in the different agencies adopted the program as part of their work."*



## Open and Loose Structure

The open and loose structure of the program was also reflected in the Bantay Banay network across provinces and regions. For example, any institution could come and join as there were no rules that set a condition for membership. Where replicated, Bantay Banay was known as Bantay Pamilya, Bantay Abuso, Bantay Panimalay, Bantay Budhi or Bantay Kaliwat, depending on the local Interagency Committee or Council (IAC) formed. Based on the needs and opportunities in their respective areas, the local IACs and their partner agencies likewise defined their own structures, programs, fund sources and priorities. For example:

- In Jasaan, Misamis Oriental, Bantay Banay was incorporated in the municipal development plan. The local DSWD and police were directed to put the program in their budget and implement it.
- In Cagayan de Oro, since 1997 the City's Urban Health and Nutrition Program funded the efforts to expand Bantay Banay in different barangays. Recently, Bantay Banay was formally adopted as a program of the City Government.
- In Tagbilaran City, the IAC put up its own Bantay Banay Foundation to access its own funding. Efforts expanded to five other municipalities in Bohol Province. The IAC also succeeded in making the provincial prosecutors pass a directive to its members not to enter a plea bargaining agreement in cases of rape.
- In the different provinces, the partner agencies linked the issue of violence against women with their specific concerns. Thus, there were efforts to integrate VAW with housing, rural development, youth and children concerns, health, and other concerns. Tessie Fernandez explained, *"We don't control Bantay Banay anywhere. We never say they should use the Bantay Banay name and they are free to determine what projects they want to implement. And yet they recognize Bantay Banay and come to us. I think it's because we're effective and they see it. Also, by providing a win-win situation where people can recognize their own strengths, they are able to see ours."*

Bantay Banay had its first National Congress on 31 January 1999 in Cebu City. It was attended by close to 1,000 representatives from the different areas. Congress petitioned the incumbent President for the implementation of the law requiring LGUs to earmark 5-10% of their budget for Gender and Development (GAD). A support petition for the passage of the Comprehensive Law on Domestic Violence was also presented to the solons who were present. Bantay Banay also issued awards of appreciation to LGUs, officials and legislators who directly supported the program.

## Mainstreaming and Sustainability

Aside from the creation of the differently named Interagency Committees, Women's Commissions were formed by the LGUs of Victorias, Cebu, Cagayan de Oro, Minglanilla and Talisay, among others. The LGUs of Jasaan, Dausi and Inopacan incorporated

Bantay Banay in their Municipal Development Plans. The LGUs of General Santos, Davao, Bohol and Dumaguete passed related resolutions, ordinances and/or codes.

Medical institutions likewise mainstreamed programs to address domestic violence. As previously mentioned, the Cebu City Medical Center put up its Violet Room and the Vicente S. Sotto Medical Center, its Pink Room for victims of domestic violence. The Silliman University, Cebu Doctor's College and even the Holy Spirit High School in Bohol incorporated violence against women in their curriculum. VAW was likewise integrated in the policies and programs of such national government agencies as the TESDA, POPCOM, DOH, DSWD, PNP, DILG, PCUP and BJMP.

On the matter of budget allocations, 66 of Cebu City's 80 barangays reported full compliance with the requirement to allot five percent of their budget to Gender and Development concerns. The LGUs of Naga, San Carlos, Bayawan, Tacloban, Hilongos, Calbayog, Butuan and Malaybalay, among many others, likewise set aside funds for Gender and Development (GAD) and Bantay Banay activities. DILG, TESDA, DAR, PNP, PCUP and DOH, as well as by the parishes of Guadalupe, Basak, San Nicolas, Jasaan, Sugod and Wao had budgets for relevant training programs and related activities. Politicians likewise provided funds for infrastructure, programs and specific activities in the 6th District of Cebu, the 3rd District of Bukidnon and in Bohol Province, to name some.

Bantay Banay was regularly covered by radio programs in Calbayog, Naga, San Carlos, Malaybalay, Baybay and Dumaguete. Stories on Bantay Banay and Lihok-Pilipina were periodically reported in local dailies and other publications. Meanwhile, Lihok-Pilipina continuously pushed for better data collection and reporting within the Bantay Banay network. Lihok-Pilipina was also working to create manuals for their training programs in each of the different levels to facilitate Bantay Banay replication in other areas. Continuous education and awareness programs were being pursued to promote community conflict resolution and to encourage the abused women to "break the silence" and speak up.

Meanwhile, most Bantay Banay groups moved on to address other community needs and concerns outside of gender and family issues. Its efforts included the cementing of footpaths, the installation of street lights, and the improvement of slum areas as well as resettlement and campaigns against drug addiction and gambling. In many cases, Bantay Banay paved the way for other programs on livelihood, population, environment and urban development.

*"I think the culture has changed, the issue has been mainstreamed, " said Tessie Fernandez. "Yes, I believe it will outlive us."*

## **Reflections and Insights**

*"There's soul-searching nowadays among community organizers like me, whether the organizing that we know is still effective in this age of new technology and globalization," Tessie Fernandez shared. "Some believe that our CO principles no*

*longer apply. Personally, I've been using these principles and they still work in the different levels, from the community groups to the national networks.*

*"Like, for example, 'Start where the people are.' This is still very applicable. Start with their issues. How do they feel about it. What are their concepts. "Or 'From concrete to abstract; from small to big.' In fact that's how we started. We didn't begin by explaining power relations, we simply addressed the beatings and bruises. With the police, we offered to help them do their jobs and only later did we try to introduce gender and development concepts. This way, they grew bigger, learning and validating the concepts as they went along.*

*"And then there's 'The personal is political.' In a lot of our work, we've had to resolve our own issues in gender and in domestic violence. Personal reflection is a continuing process in Lihok-Pilipina. Many of the processes and strategies we use are tested first in our organization. These include questions like what is your concept of violence? As a child how did you feel and what did you do when you encountered violence? Or how to identify abuse in childhood, the staff went through that also.*

*"We also emphasize that we cannot expect others to do what we don't do ourselves. So we ask our staff and group leaders to define their concepts of power and the principles stemming from these concepts. Like, we are different but equal. And we are all capable of violence, whether man or woman, rich or poor, able or disabled.*

*"On the other hand, in community organizing we were trained to handle power in a way that would ensure you overcame or neutralized the power of the other party. It had always been 'power over' or 'power against.' But when I went into this issue of domestic violence, I recognized that this could not work, especially not in intimate relations within the family. Our experiences in the Women's Crisis Center and Bantay Banay, plus my readings on the subject, have given me a very different perspective.*

*"Likewise, in the past the emphasis was on turf and distinctive edge, even among NGOs. In Bantay Banay, however, we have shown that beyond that, there's also a win-win situation for everyone, acknowledging everyone's capability, whether GO, or civil society, and recognizing that there is not a single group that can be everything to the client. We have learned and grown with that."*

## **New Project**

In 2001, Lihok-Pilipina partnered with the Solidarity for Justice and the Office of the Ombudsman and the Civil Service Commission to launch a new project to monitor government performance.

*"There are so many laws on women and urban poor concerns but the enforcement is a different thing," Tessie Fernandez noted.*

Working with women and urban poor organizations, Lihok-Pilipina checked the compliance of 19 offices with regard to Republic Act No. 6713 (Law on Moral and Ethical Standards for Government Employees). The NGO prepared a checklist of requirements prescribed by the law and discussed this with the community groups. Their representatives then transacted with the agencies and noted, among others, the presence of flowcharts and organizational charts. They also checked whether or not there were fixers, observed the work attitude of frontline personnel and noted the availability of the supervisors. The compiled results were then presented to the heads of the offices in an "Integrity Forum."

Tessie Fernandez recounted, *"Some heads grudgingly accepted the findings and promised to institute the necessary changes. Others got angry at us for not telling them in advance that we were going to monitor them!"*

In August 2001, Lihok-Pilipina again sat down with its NGO and GO partners and the women and urban poor groups to launch a new monitoring survey on "Client Satisfaction Rating," the results of which were to be compiled and presented in another Integrity Forum. Already, Lihok-Pilipina received reports from the people's organizations about the favorable results of their first survey. For example, in the Bureau of Internal Revenue, a huge billboard was put up showing the flow of transactions and who was in charge of which office. In the Land Transportation Office, an investigation and shakeup were apparently done, especially after the report on the presence of fixers reached media.

Lihok-Pilipina and its cooperating groups and agencies agreed to conduct monitoring surveys and Integrity Fora every six months. According to Tessie Fernandez, NGOs and POs in other sectors such as the environment and agrarian reform said they would also use the monitoring tools to check on the government agencies they worked with.

This case was written by Mr. Gil Tuparan, under the supervision of Prof. Ernesto D. Garilao, Asian Institute of Management. All case materials are prepared solely for the purposes of class discussion. They are neither designed nor intended to illustrate the correct management of problems or issues contained in the case. Copyright 2002, Asian Institute of Management, Makati City, Philippines and Synergos Institute, New York. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, used in a report or spreadsheet, or transmitted in any form or by any means – electronics, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise – without consent from the Asian Institute of Management and Synergos Institute. This case was made possible through a grant from the Synergos Institute.