



Parawagan

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Parawagan

Along the borders of Metro Manila lies the municipality of Rodriguez (formerly known as Montalban), the quarry town of the province of Rizal. San Rafael, a barangay in Rodriguez, played host to almost 45% of the municipality's crushing plants. Located on the foothills of Mt. Parawagan, San Rafael was the second biggest barangay in terms of land area. It was the third most populated and ranked second in terms of income generated in the entire town.

By 2002, Barangay San Rafael had become known for successfully combating the problem of child labor. At the forefront of such efforts was Pagkakaisa ng mga Samahang may Wagas at Ganap na Adhikain para sa Montalban (Parawagan) – a federation of four peoples' organizations in the barangay that championed the protection and development of children.

Child Labor: The Global Picture

Most societies characterized by poverty and inequity were plagued by growing incidences of child labor and exploitation. In this context, a child's income or participation in household work in an effort to allow parents and other family members to work outside the household for pay could spell the difference between hunger and bare sufficiency.

Employers who aimed to realize considerable profits preferred employing children because they worked for less pay than adults. Children were less prone to complain or organize against oppressive labor situations –which render them vulnerable to the exploitative circumstances in which they work. These conditions include child labor performed, which threaten life of workers such as “muro ami,” fishing, quarry and prostitution.

The International Labor Organization (ILO) Minimum Age Convention No. 138 established that no child below the age designated for the completion of schooling could be employed in any economic sector. The general minimum age for employment was 15 years old.

Child Labor in the Philippines

Children comprised one-third of the Philippine population. A survey conducted by the National Statistics Office (NSO) showed that approximately 22.4 million Filipinos were children aged between five and seventeen years. The same survey showed 3.7 million or 16% of the overall population of children worked.

Majority of these working children or more than 2 million were employed in the rural areas, while about 1.2 million worked in the urban areas. As they devoted their waking hours to working, doing housework or attending school, these children hardly had any time for play.

Sixty percent or 2.2 million of child workers in the Philippines were exposed to hazardous working environments. In some cases, though their work entailed exposure to harmful chemicals, they did not enjoy the benefit of protective gear. Most work areas were unsanitary besides. No wonder then that at the end of a long day, these children were often exhausted. All these conditions impaired the children's natural growth, health and access to schooling.

The same NSO survey mentioned earlier revealed that 600,000 or 30% of the working children no longer attended school because of the high cost of education. Moreover, the

children's going to school meant their having to stop working, in effect diminishing family income. Those that did continue to go to school while being employed suffered low grades as a result of absenteeism and tardiness. And because of their heavy workload, these children, often too tired to go to school, dropped out eventually.

The Child Labor Problem in San Rafael

The prevailing poverty situation in San Rafael provided the backdrop for the problem of child labor in the barangay. The low level of household incomes, inadequate basic services such as health clinics, day care centers for children, road and water facilities, access to credit and the general lack of livelihood opportunities and a generally technically-handicapped community were characteristic of San Rafael.

That San Rafael was located at the foothills of Mt. Parawagan meant an abundance of "blue rock" in the area. Blue rock was widely used for construction. In the early '90s, when Mt. Parawagan was discovered to enjoy an abundant supply of blue rock, several quarrying companies, among them Vulcan Mining, Pacific Corporation, Sandrock Corporation and BEECO, set up operations in the area.

Prior to 1993, residents of San Rafael relied on small-scale farming and odd jobs to sustain their families' needs. A cursory review of the household profile of the barangay showed that eighty percent of household heads had low levels of educational attainment. The average household size of seven was considered large, given an estimated monthly income ranging between P3,000 and P5,000.

In 1993, when quarrying began in San Rafael, most of the residents in its eleven sitios shifted to manual quarrying as their primary source of income, ignoring its detrimental effects on the environment and the potential risks it carried to life and property due to landslides. With limited government support for livelihood schemes, manual quarrying became a very attractive alternative.

In general, the open pit workers particularly where child laborers were present sold the crushed rocks (grava) at P210.00 per cubic meter to the construction companies, lower than the P300-P350 per cubic meter sold by quarry companies to the construction industry. In 1997, research on child labor in San Rafael was conducted. Its results revealed that there were 87 full-time and 67 part-time child laborers working with their parents in the quarry site.

Initially, these children attended school in the morning and then worked the rest of the day. However, most eventually stopped schooling and began to work full time to secure additional income for their families. From the perspective of the residents of San Rafael, child labor was never considered as an issue. This was not too surprising since child labor was common among the marginalized communities. Likewise, the rest of the residents of Rodriguez and even the local government did not consider it an issue.

Meanwhile, a non-governmental organization (NGO) operating in the area pushed for the closure of all quarrying projects – a prospect that did not sit well with the residents, as this would deprive them of their primary source of income.

Initial Organizing Efforts

In Barangay San Rafael, the households most affected by the problem of child labor were those in the sitios of Tabak, EEA and ESE, where most child laborers resided. In these areas, the household size averaged 5-7, the level of formal education was low, most residents did not complete secondary education and there was a lack of productive skills. Local neighborhood community organizations were formed among the residents in the different sitios to address various community concerns. Leaders of these organizations ultimately figured prominently in confronting the child labor issue.

The EEA Neighborhood Association (EEANA)

Residents of sitio EEA organized in response to two issues that had adverse effects on them: a) land tenure, and b) potable water supply. Despite a lack of organizational skills, the residents successfully resolved the twin problems. From being a mere participant in the activities of the organization, Rolando “Boy” Pagdanganan, a former member of the Federation of Free Workers (FFW), emerged as leader. Following the community struggle of the land tenure issue, Boy’s life centered on organizing his community.

Boy recalled how sometime in 1992, a man suddenly appeared in their sitio claiming ownership of the land where their houses stood. Alarmed, Boy and the affected residents sat down and discussed possible courses of action. During that meeting, Boy said, they could hardly develop a consensus as a number of affected residents actually wanted to surrender their rights to the claimant.

“Makikita mo noon ang kakulangan ng tiwala sa sarili ng maraming kasapi at ang kawalan ng pag-asa. Sa tingin ko, dala na rin ito ng kakulangan sa kaalaman at kakayahang pag-aralan ang isang problemadong sitwasyon. Ganyan naman ang kalimitan ng ugali ng mga mabihirap. (You could see then that we lacked confidence and felt utterly hopeless. In my opinion, this attitude sprang from our lack of knowledge and skills in analyzing problematic situations. This attitude was normal among the poor).”

Putting the opposing views to a vote resolved the impasse. The group decided to confront the issue by seeking assistance from the local government. But the problem did not end there as no one volunteered to seek out the municipal government’s help. Boy Pagdanganan lamented the fact that despite the prospect of dislocation, no one wanted to step forward to make a move. He said,

“Kung iisipin mo nakataya ang mga lupang kinatitirikan ng aming mga babay. Nagdesisyon kaming harapin ang problema pero nung kailangan ng mga taong tumirang kikilos ay walang gustong lumabok. Ang gusto yata ay maghibintay na lang ng kalutasan na di sila kikilos. (If you think of it, the lands where our houses were built were at stake. We had made a decision to confront the problem but no one came forward when we needed people to mobilize. Perhaps, they just wanted to wait for the problem to be solved without having to budge.)”

Eventually, Boy and three other residents mustered enough courage to seek information from the local government and found out that that their lands were not privately owned. In addition, they gathered that they could actually own the land themselves. Thus informed, they returned to their community and told them the good news. So, when the claimant returned to their sitio, the residents challenged him to produce his documents pertaining to

the properties. The claimant was also informed of the advice of the local government. After that confrontation, the claimant never returned.

In a separate incident, the possibility of losing their water source because of the operations of a quarry company, – Sandrock Incorporated, confronted the community. Armed with their newly acquired confidence, the residents were able to negotiate with company officials who agreed to help them find and install a new water system.

Unlike with the previous issue, more residents participated in the discussions and joined the mobilizations relating to the water source problem. At that point Boy Pagdanganan realized that for a problem to be solved, there was a need to act. He, however, pointed out the group's weakness.

“Nabuksan ang isip kong sa kabit na anong problema, kailangang kumilos kaya lang na kita ko ring hindi labat ay handang kumilos. (I realized that for whatever problem, there was a need to act but not everyone was ready to move).”

The success of their mobilizations, though small, and the insights he gathered challenged Boy to seek ways and means to strengthen his organization. But he was in a quandary. Despite having been a member of a labor union before, he did not think his skills were adequate. He said in an interview,

“Lalong tumibay ang paniniwala kong kung kikilos kami sa tamang paraan, apagtatagumpayan namin ang mas mabigat pang problema tulad ng kahirapan. Pero noong mga panahon na iyon, wala naman akong kaalaman kung paano pa mapapalakas ang samahan. Kabit noon pa, di na ako naniniwala sa isang samahang ang lider lang ang kumikilos. (My belief that if we acted collectively and systematically, we could overcome bigger problems, especially poverty. But during those times, I did not have any skills to strengthen my group. Also, I always disliked the idea of an organization whose leaders did all the work.)”

The Tabak Community Development Association (TACDA)

Sitio Tabak was located dangerously near the quarrying project of BECCO, a quarrying company. Wary of potential landslides that occurred elsewhere in San Rafael due to quarrying activities, the residents organized themselves and protested the establishment of new quarrying companies close to the neighborhood. A 48-year old housewife who proudly recalled how she was challenged by the passive posturing of the men folk to lead the mobilizations, Mrs. Procesa Lozada or Procy, stood out in these efforts. She recalled telling the men:

“Kung ayaw tumindig at kumilos ng mga lalaki, kaming mga babae ay kaya namin. (If the men do not stand up and act, we women can do it).”

Earlier, in the mid-90s, Ka Totoy Andrade and Ka Lady Reyes led the anti-quarry campaign of the local residents but failed to obtain their full support since the communities merely wanted to stop the projected operations of BECCO because of the potential danger posed by its proximity to the community. At that point, Procy thought she had to take a more active role in pursuing the interest of her affected fellow-residents. She said,

“Nakita kong sunod-sunuran lang ang mga kasamahan ko sa kagustaban ng mga lider namin. E wala namang pinupuntahan parang walang direksyon. Sa aking pag-iisip, kailangan ng bigit pa sa rally ang kailangan para mapatigil ang isang maimpluwensiyang kumpanya tulad ng BECCO. (I saw how my fellow residents blindly followed our leaders. Nothing was being gained. There seemed to be no direction. To my mind, efforts should go beyond rallies in confronting an influential company like BECCO).”

Following her instincts, Procy started to encourage her neighbors to participate actively and start thinking of strategies to confront their problem. Without any training in community organizing whatsoever, she knew she had her limitations but continued her efforts anyway:

“Kabit wala akong alam sa pag-oorganisa, naglakas loob akong makipag-usap sa aking mga kasamahan para maunawaan nilang kasama dapat sila di lamang sa pag-attend ng miting kundi na rin sa paghanap ng solusyon. Di ko alam kung tama ang aking pamamaraan pero pinagpatuloy ko pa rin. (Despite my lack of competence in community organizing, I talked with my neighbors hoping that they would recognize their role, not only in terms of attendance, but also in terms of proposing solutions to our problem. I wasn't sure if my methods were correct but I did them anyway).”

The local organizations, including the Sama-samang Magkakapitbahay ng ESE (SMAC), had other issues to confront, besides. Procy Lozada and Boy Pagdanganan summed up the level of community organizing prior to the entry of CO Multiversity. Procy, for her part, said:

“Mayroong mga kanya-kanya kaming pagkilos. Ang iba ay naging matagumpay, sa iba naman ay nabigo kami. Ngunit sa pangkalabatan, ang mga pagkilos namin ay kulang sa sistema at masinop na pag-aaral. Iilan lang din ang mga aktibong nakikilahok dahil sa kinasanayan na sa mga samahang aktibo lamang ang lider. (We had our own initiatives to confront our problems. We experienced both victories and failures. But generally, our actions were unsystematic and lacked thorough analysis. Only a few actively participated, perhaps because of previous experiences where leaders dominated the activities).”

Boy Pagdanganan added:

“Kung titignan mo, malaki talaga ang kakulangan mismo sa hanay namin. Kulang kami sa nagkakaisang pananaw, kulang kami ng kakayahan. Kami nga mismong bagong tayong lider ay may kakulangan din sa kaalaman sa larangan ng pag-oorganisa. Tapos, problem pa namin ang pangaraw araw na kakainin ng aming mga pamilya. (If you looked at it, there were many limitations among our ranks. We did not share the same perspective, we lacked skills. Even among emerging leaders like us, there was a definite lack of organizing skills. On top of this, we had to look after the daily needs of our families).”

While these groups initially worked independently in confronting area-specific problems, they gradually gravitated towards a common issue – child labor. In time, they formed a federation –CO Multiversity (COM).

Partners with Local Peoples ‘Organizations

It was within the aforementioned context and level of local initiatives that CO Multiversity entered San Rafael. At the height of the anti-quarrying campaign in 1997, a local church-based environmental group invited COM to assist in the training of the local community organizers of Sagip Kalikasan.

However, after a year, COM decided to field its own community organizers (COs). CO Multiversity's community organizing was premised on the belief that the establishment of a strong and autonomous people's organization (PO) that could engage the institutions of authority and power affecting their access to resources for survival and development was essential to transforming marginalized communities.

Despite a respectable track record in collaborating with local communities and the acknowledged need to obtain outside support, COM organizers had to double their efforts to gain the acceptance of the residents. Procy Lozada explained,

“Noong unang dating nila ay matamlay ang tanggap ng mga taga-Tabak sa kanila. Hindi maganda ang naging karanasan namin sa mga NGOs. Dati kasi, at di ko na sasabihin kung anong grupo, may mga NGO na nagpupunta dito at nangakong tutulungan kami. Pinapirma kami sa isang dokumentong di namin gaanong nannawaan. Pagkatapos noon ay nawala na lang sila. Sa pananaw ng mga taga rito, ginamit lang kami para sa sarili nilang interes. (When the COM organizers first arrived, their reception from the residents of Sitio Tabak was lukewarm. Previously, we had unpleasant experiences with NGOs. Before, and I will not specify the NGO concerned, an NGO entered our community and promised to help us. We were requested to sign a document, which we really did not understand. After that, they left and never returned. Thus, we felt we were just used to further their own interest).”

However, COM organizers gained credibility and acceptance when they handled the strategy sessions pertaining to the BECCO issue as part of the training process with the local COs of Tanggol Kalikasan. While resolution of the issue was a main concern, COM saw the need to raise the awareness level of the affected residents by “breaking the culture of silence.” Likewise, the need for active, critical and creative participation was emphasized during reflection sessions among small groups.

Applying the tried and tested CO methodology of collective decision-making, action and reflection, the issue against BECCO progressed. Simultaneous with a petition to the local government demanding the closure of BECCO, COM saw the need to ventilate the issue on a wider scale, primarily to exert more pressure on the decision makers. The local organizations conducted two public action mobilizations. The first one was with the Mayor where more than two hundred residents participated in the rally. The second mass action was held at the Provincial Capitol where a dialogue with the Governor resulted to the holding of a public hearing.

The strategy was to force the decision makers to go through the normal process within the soonest possible time lest the efforts be overtaken by the actual operations of BEECO. A month after the December 1997 public hearings the DENR issued an order stopping the BEECO quarrying project.

Looking back at how the initial collaboration between the community and a support institution successfully resolved a critical issue, Boy Pagdanganan and Procy Lozada shared their insights. Procy said:

“Hindi lang pala mahalaga ang pagkakalutas ng problema. Mas mahalaga pala ang kolektibong prosesong dinaanan at kung paano nakilabok ang mga apektado. Mahalaga rin pala ang masusing pag-aaral ng iba't ibang anggulo ng problema upang ang mga pagkilos ay maging magtagumpay. (Aside from resolving the issue, far more important was the collective process and the

participation of the affected residents. I also learned to appreciate the importance of a thorough assessment of the problem in increasing the chances of success).” Boy Pagdanganan added, “Ipinakita rin ng mga CO ng COM ang mga bakbang-bakbang ng pag-oorganisa tulad ng pag-groundwork o isahang pakikipag-usap sa mga apektado. Dati, basta nagpapatwag na lang kami ng pagpupulong at doon pinag-uusapan ang problema. (COM organizers provided us the opportunity to learn a systematic method of organizing consisting of steps such as “ground working.” This refers to the process of speaking with residents before the meeting to ensure they have an understanding of the issues to be discussed during the meeting.)”

Throughout the four years it assisted San Rafael, COM maintained a facilitative role. COM used issues awaiting resolution as entry points or opportunities for affected residents to go through a process of collective decision making, action and learning. The community organizing processes involved in issue resolution such as problem identification, meetings, role-playing and evaluation were used to encourage people to participate actively and critically.

Emmanuel “Boy” Marcelino, program coordinator for the child labor program, summed up COM’s intervention in San Rafael by describing his role as follows:

“Sa loob ng komunidad, lagi ko silang pinapaalalahanang may kakayahan sila at kung sila ay tuloy-tuloy na magsasama ay walang problemang di malulutas. Naging tulay din ako upang sila ay maingnay sa iba’t-ibang sektor sa labas ng komunidad. (Within the community, my role was to remind them constantly of their competence and of how, if they continued to think and act collectively, there was no problem that could not be solved. I also served as a bridge for them to link up with various sectors outside the community.)”

Prior to 1997, the child labor issue was never in the consciousness of the residents of the three sitios, namely: Tabak, EEA and ESE. Likewise, the sitios’ residents formed different peoples’ organizations independently of each other. Finally, however, a problem surfaced that affected all three sitios. This problem had to do with the children. It eventually paved the way towards the formation of a federation – the Parawagan, which eventually focused its efforts on development and the protection of children’s rights.

In mid-1997, a jeepney terminal was constructed in the town proper of San Rafael. While the newly opened facility put some order in the dispatch of the jeepneys, it actually created problems for the schoolchildren. Whereas before there was enough space in the jeepneys for children going home from school, this time only limited seats were available when the jeepneys reached the school. Thus, the schoolchildren had to resort to hanging onto rear railings of jeepneys, resulting to many accidents.

As a result, parents, including Procy and Boy, sat down to discuss ways to avoid future accidents. Just as the parents needed to obtain the approval of the barangay captain for any of their recommendations, they also needed to convince the jeepney drivers to support them. Boy recounted that their meeting with the jeepney drivers was the first time they mobilized other sectors to strengthen their ranks. With their combined force, the barangay captain had no choice but to give in to their demands. He agreed to let a number of empty jeepneys stand by the elementary school premises during dismissal time.

Compared to the BECCO quarrying issue, the jeepney terminal issue was a simple one, yet it brought significant developments. First, it was the first child-related issue ever confronted by the residents. Second, it was the first collaborative effort among the residents of sitios Tabak, EEA and ESE. Recognizing how collective efforts could successfully resolve common community problems, the leaders, among them Boy Pagdanganan and Procy Lozada, began to float the possibility of forming a federation. After consultations with their respective members, they agreed to form Parawagan whose general objective was to protect and promote the interests of its members. Its charter member organizations were TACDA, EEANA and SMAC. By this time, the erstwhile leaders Ka Lady and Ka Totoy chose not to join the new organization. Procy tried to explain their decision thus:

“Gusto kasi ng dalawang yun ay sila ang magkontrol ng samaban at gusto nilang ang agenda nila ang isulong, yun bang total closure ng mga quarry. (What the two wanted was to control the organization and push for their agenda, which was total closure of the quarries).” Boy added, *Nakita naming ang kanilang pamamaraan ng pamumuno na kakaiba sa mga pagkilos naming sa tulong ng COM. Siguro ay nakita rin nilang hindi kami kayang hawakan sa leeg. (We saw the difference between their methods and the methods we used with the help of COM. Perhaps, they also realized that they could not control our groups).*

When asked what they meant, Procy elaborated:

“Gusto nila sila ang magdedesisyon samantalang kami nagkokonsulta sa mga miyembro. (They dominated decision making, while we tried to consult our members).”

It was at that point when CO Multiversity secured the approval of a child protection and development program from International Labor Organization-IPEC. The program signaled the start of a partnership between San Rafael and COM. The timing was fortuitous since the different peoples’ organizations of Tabak, EEA and ESE had just organized Parawagan. The organization thus served as the principal mass base organization.

The Participatory Action Research (PAR): Raising Community Awareness on Child Labor

One glaring gap in the child labor issue was its not being perceived as an issue or concern by almost all the local community sectors. Almost everyone was not aware of its existence. The first task then was to come up with hard data on the child labor situation. A formal research was conducted in 1997 by nine community volunteers who were trained in participatory research. Using methods such as focused group discussions, workshops and consultations with parents and children, the volunteers came up with actual figures, contributory factors to the occurrence of child labor and recommendations for its resolution.

With validated data on hand, the next task of the local organization was to inform and educate the different community actors on the prevailing child labor situation. Boy Pagdanganan, Procy Lozada and the rest of the Parawagan leaders became the initial recipients of an orientation workshop cum training conducted by COM whose objective was to equip local organizer-leaders with the tools they needed to educate the community on the

child labor issue effectively. Procy Lozada shared her insight on the initial activities as follows:

“Dalawang mahalagang aspeto ng pag-oorganisa ang natutunan ko. Una, kailangang buo ang pagkakaunawa mo sa isang issue- yun bang cause and effect. Tulad ng isang puno, pinutol mo ang sanga o bunga pero tuloy pa rin ang pagtubo nito dahil hindi mo naman naputol ang ugat. Pangalawa, sa isyu maraming sektor ang apektado at kailangan silang makilabok sa anumang pagsasaayos nito. (I learned two aspects in organizing. First, one needed to have a holistic view of an issue – the cause and the effect. Take a tree for example. While you might have succeeded in cutting off the branch or fruit, the tree would continue to grow if the roots remained in tact. Second, in any issue, several sectors were usually affected. All these sectors should therefore participate in resolving these issues).”

A series of education and orientation sessions facilitated by Boy, Procy and the other local leaders were conducted among community residents, the local organizations and the local government. Not surprisingly, their reaction was “We did not realize there was a child labor problem in San Rafael.”

On being a facilitator, Boy Pagdanganan said,

Dati mahiyain ako pero nung nakita kong hindi maganda ang sitwasyon ng mga batang di nag-aaral at maraming magulang na ayaw kumilos, na-challenge ako. (Before I was shy but when I realized that there were children who did not go to school and parents who refused to lift a finger, I was challenged).

In the course of a seminar-workshop for the children, the participants realized that while the issue at hand was the protection of children’s rights and their development, there was no organization for children. The Empowering Children’s Heart Organization (ECHO) was formed, with Rolando “Rollie” Macula as its first president. Rollie was the most vocal and articulate among the participants, perhaps owing to his being a “mamimitpit” when he was 16 years old. He said,

“Malaking bagay ang karanasan ko bilang isang child laborer sa quarry. Naranasan ko ang mabilad sa araw, ulan at magkasakit dahil sa trabaho. Napilitan din akong huminto ng pag aaral dahil sa trabaho sa quarry. Hindi ko nagawa ang mga normal na gawain ng isang bata. (My experience as a child worker greatly helped. I experienced being exposed to the sun and the rain. I also got sick because of my work and I did not enjoy the activities of a normal child).

Soon after, ECHO became a member organization of Parawagan.

Multi-Sectoral Forum: Developing the Peoples’ Agenda

Having succeeded in raising awareness among various sectors, the group’s next objective was to elevate the level of awareness to an agenda formulated by the different stakeholders including the affected child sector, their parents, the local government, NGOs and other individuals and institutions who could contribute to the resolution of the child labor issue. Developing a people’s agenda was expected to provide a definitive and common framework among the stakeholders. Boy Marcelino of COM shared his insights:

After the series of education and orientation sessions, together with the local organizations led by Parawagan, many ideas came to the fore. These had to be consolidated and translated into a framework of action.

However, the common agenda had to be the product of collective decision making among the stakeholders. Within the ranks of the Parawagan, a series of small group meetings was conducted to elicit ideas and suggestions for the agenda. Boy and Procy, meanwhile, were having their first experience of interacting with high local government officials. In their analysis, the local government and other government agencies were institutions that would have a bearing on the final resolution of the issue. Procy said:

“Sa patnubay nila Boy (Marcelino), natuto at lumakas ang loob kong makipag-usap sa mga taong may matataas na katungkulan. (Under the guidance of Boy (Marcelino), I gained confidence and learned to interact with persons in authority).”

To this Boy Pagdanganan added,

“Laging inilalagay sa isip namin ng mga taga COM ang karapatan ng malayang pananalita at pamamahayag. (COM constantly instilled in us our right to free expression).”

As a fitting activity, a multisectoral forum was conducted with the stakeholders --children, parents, officials of barangays the municipal local government, representatives from national agencies and NGOs -- present. It is worthwhile to note that the ILO International Program on Child Labor Elimination (ILO-IPEC) provided consistent support from the PAR to the multisectoral forum and subsequent initiatives that addressed issues raised at the forum such as education, credit, etc. In the said activity, the child labor issue and the “people’s agenda “ to eradicate the problem were presented.

The other stakeholders were then asked to give their reactions as well as their commitment to the agenda.

Bringing Back the Child Laborers to School

Despite the growing awareness on the child labor issue as a result of the education campaign and the multi-sectoral forum, there remained 87 full-time and 67 part-time child laborers in the quarry sites. The immediate objective was for these children to stop working and return to school.

Returning to school meant a loss of income for their families. To address the matter, Parawagan leaders and COM organizers decided to embark on a two-pronged strategy. First, the parents have to be convinced that their children should be in school. Second, support institutions that would provide educational assistance to the child laborers should be identified.

Under the guidance of Boy Marcelino, Boy Pagdanganan, Procy Lozada and Rollie Pacula patiently tried to convince the parents of the child laborers to allow their children to return to school. Boy Pagdanganan said,

“Hindi naging madali ang pangungumbinsi sa mga magulang. Kaya pabalik-balik kami nila Ate Procy. Kailangan matiyaga ka. (It was not easy convincing the parents. Procy and I had to repeatedly go back to them. You had to be patient).”

Rollie for his part was responsible for preparing the child-laborers for their possible return to school. Educational scholarships were needed. COM introduced Parawagan leaders to the Educational Research and Development Foundation (ERDA), an NGO supported by ILO-IPEC that provided basic school supplies, uniforms and miscellaneous fees for elementary and high school students. Conscious of the need to transfer resource accessing skills to the local POs, COM encouraged the parents to create an education committee that would negotiate with ERDA. To prepare the members of the committee, COM conducted formal training sessions on simple project proposal writing and negotiation. Actual negotiations with ERDA were then done by the Parawagan leaders including Boy, Procy and Rollie. After a series of meetings with ERDA, the local organizations' (TACDA, EENA and SMAC) project proposals were approved. An Educational Assistance Project was started in 1998 with 129 beneficiaries. In 1999, the number had increased to 154 including the child laborers in the PAR survey.

Gradually, the local leaders acquired organizational skills, which they could use in future undertakings. Procy remarked,

"Dati-rati kung may pangangailangan kami sa barangay, ang alam lang namin na pamamaraan ay barangay resolution tapos ibibigay kay mayor. Ngayon medyo may kaalaman na kami sa pagsusulat ng project proposal. At nagamit namin ito sa mga iba pang proyekto ng mga miyembro namin. (Before, whenever we needed something from the barangay, we would pass a barangay resolution and submit this to the mayor)."

Boy added,

"Nadagdagan din ang aming kaalaman sa paghingi ng suporta sa mga pribadong ahensiya. Sabi nga ni Ate Procy, dati kay Mayor lang lagi. (We also learned to seek support from private agencies. As Procy said, before we were only dependent on our mayor)."

Linkaging and Resource Mobilization

The approval of the educational assistance program encouraged the other organizations to seek the support of other institutions for various concerns. Having been equipped with project proposal making and negotiation skills, EENA took the initiative to link up with Botika Binhi and succeeded in establishing a community-based generic drugstore. All four groups were also able to access funding from the Department of Labor and Employment for the establishment of a peanut butter making business. Later on, they successfully negotiated for a P100,000 grant from the Department of Agriculture to expand their business.

Aside from obtaining funds for socio-economic projects, Parawagan was able to access funds for skills training on basic bookkeeping and accounting. Procy remarked,

"Malaki ang naging tulong ng COM sa amin. Ipinakilala kami sa kanilang mga contact na mga NGO. Itinuro din sa amin kung paano lumapit sa mga ibang ahensiya ng pamabalaan tulad ng DOLE at DA. (COM was of great help. They introduced us to their NGO contacts. They also taught us how to link up with government agencies like the DOLE and the DA)."

Rollie agreed:

“Tama si Ate Procy. Ang napansin ko rin, pinagsasabihan kaming magsama ng iba pang miyembro sa mga pakikipag-ugnayan sa mga ahensiya. Kaya marami ang natututo. (Ate Procy was correct. I also noticed that the (COM) always encouraged us to bring along other members whenever we coordinated with these agencies, which was why many learned).”

Consolidating Gains

Sustained Education Campaign

Despite the success of almost all the endeavors of Parawagan, both the community leaders and COM organizers knew that the efforts would have to be sustained. Otherwise, the issue of child labor would re-emerge in no time.

Thus, organizing and advocacy efforts continued. Rollie Pacula and his organization took several initiatives to raise the awareness of adults on the rights of children further. They mobilized two jeeploads of children that went around San Rafael distributing leaflets and posting stickers. As the jeeps went around, children’s issues were ventilated over a public address system.

Critical Collaboration with Local Government

Rollie also joined Boy and Procy in maintaining coordination with local government officials. Rollie advocated for the cooperation of the communities with local government as a significant aspect of sustaining child protection.

“Sa isyu po kasi ng child labor, nangangailangan ng tulong mula sa munisipyo dahil doon naggagaling ang mga panukalang maaring magbigay ng proteksyon sa aming mga kabataan. (We needed the support of the local government since local ordinances that could further strengthen our efforts emanated from them).”

Their efforts paid off as they secured the support of Councilors Alberto and Dulla.

Mass-Base Expansion

In 1999, mainly through the efforts of Parawagan, the Barangay Council for the Protection of Children (BCPC) was established, paving the way for even closer coordination between the barangay and the residents of the three affected sitios. After starting at San Rafael, Boy

Pagdanganan went around the other barangays and conducted orientation and seminar workshops. Eventually, in 2002, the first Children’s Desk in Montalban was established.

The Formalization of the Parawagan

After three years of working together on common issues, particularly child-related issues, the general assembly of Parawagan decided to register the federation with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC).

In February 2000, Parawagan, composed of four independent peoples’ organizations, namely the Tabak Community Development Association (TACDA); the EA Neighborhood Association (EEANA); the Sama-samang Magkakapitbahay sa Sitio Ese (SMAC) and the Empowering Child’s Heart Organization (ECHO), was formally constituted. Most recently, two other organizations joined the federation.

In recognition of the efforts of the organization, Parawagan was elected as the NGO representative in the Municipal Development Council, with Boy Pagdanganan as its designated representative.

CO Multiversity Phases Out

After four years of partnering with the communities of San Rafael, COM functions in an advisory capacity for the community federation, confident that they had institutionalized a problem solving process among the POs assisted. The three leaders, Procy Lozada, Boy Pagdanganan and Rochie Macula, had been provided with basic organizing skills to enable them to mobilize their members and at the same time link up with external support groups.

All the child workers in the quarry sites stopped working and went back to school. While the desired alternative source of livelihood had not yet been established, various economic initiatives were begun.

In a recent interview, Procy said,

“Kung tutuusin, bata pa ang aming samahan pero maganda ang pagpapalaki sa amin. Hindi na lang isinubo sa amin ang mga solusyon ng COM. (Though we were remained a young organization, we could say we were adequately reared. COM did not spoon-feed us with solutions).”

Boy Pagdanganan agreed,

“Natuto kaming mag-isip ng mas sistematiko. Natuto rin kaming makiharap sa ibang tao. (We learned to think more systematically. We also learned to interact with other people).”

For his part, Boy Marcelino summed up his contribution to Parawagan’s success:

“Sa loob ng inilagi ko sa kanilang community, lagi ko silang pinapaalabanang may kakayanan sila at kung tuloy-tuloy na magsasama ay walang problemang di malulutas. Naging tulay din ako at ang mga kasama ko upang sila ay mai-ugnay sa iba’t-ibang sektor sa labas ng kanilang komunidad.” (During my stay with the community, my role was to remind them that they had the competence to solve community problems. I told them that if they continued to move together, there was no problem that they could not solve. I also served as a bridge for them to link up with the outside world).

During the most recent reflection session of local leaders, one elderly participant likened their situation to a familiar scenario between a parent and a grown-up child, who after being nurtured into a self-reliant individual continued to seek his parents for advice and approval once in while. He ends:

“Di tulad ng dati, hindi na bababa dito sa atin ang mga organizers ng COM tulad ni Boy. Parang magulang na bibigyan ng kalayaan ang kanyang anak para salubungin ang hamon ng buhay. Malaki na ang pinagbago ng ating mga samahan at natuto tayo sa tulong ng COM. Pero sana huwag silang magpakalayu-layo. (Unlike before, Boy (Marcelino) and the other organizers need not come to our place so often. The situation could be likened to a parent giving his son or daughter freedom to face life’s challenges. Our organizations significantly changed with the help of COM, but hopefully, they would continue to stay just around the corner).”

This case was written by Mr. Victor Bagasao, 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. This case draws from document entitled Parawagan: Community Organizing Towards the Progressive Elimination of Child Labor, The Montalban Experience produced by Community Organizing Multiversity in cooperation with the ILO-IPEC. 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.