

NGOs find new ways to solve old problems

By Michelle Remo

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MANILA, Philippines--The task to make the Philippines a better place does not fall on government alone.

Sharing this responsibility are nongovernment organizations who do their part, whether in environmental protection or in livelihood and social development.

NGOs' attempts to turn their ideas into actual projects are hampered, however, by the perpetual lack of funds.

Since many are forced to survive on a shoestring budget, NGOs and other cause-oriented groups could not reach as many beneficiaries as they want to.

To help raise the needed funds, the World Bank organizes the "Panibagong Paraan [New Ways]," a biennial activity where NGOs, civil society groups, academic institutions and other private firms present their projects to potential funding agencies.

Project for the deaf

Organizations with the best project ideas during the last round won as much as P1 million each, which would be used to bankroll their projects.

One of the winning entries was the project entitled: "Invoking Governance to Enable the Deaf to 'Listen' to the News" submitted by Gualandi Volunteers Service Programme Inc. (GVSP).

Under the proposed project, the daily news aired in Cebu will be translated using sign language so the deaf will understand it. GVSP initially wants its project implemented in Cebu, but later on targets to expand it to other provinces in Central Visayas.

GVSP project manager Clark Duterte Pelaez Jr. says the group hopes the project would eventually be implemented nationwide to help the deaf.

GVSP estimates that there are 2,000 deaf in Cebu alone.

GVSP's project entails providing sign language education to people who want to serve as news interpreters for the deaf, and forging tie-ups with news organizations.

The project is estimated to cost P1.6 million. It got P1 million from Panibagong Paraan, with the balance to come from counterpart funds to be sourced by GVSP.

Members of the GVSP have been serving as volunteers to the Mission for the Deaf, a congregation of priests, nuns and brothers helping the deaf community.

Cordillera Rice Project

Another winning entry was the project entitled: "Cordillera Heirloom Rice Project: Partnerships in Building Farmers Competency for Global Competitiveness" to be implemented by Revitalize Indigenous Cordilleran Entrepreneurs Inc. (RICE).

Victoria C. Garcia, RICE executive director, says her group advocates the promotion of livelihood among farmers in the Cordillera region.

RICE activities include helping farmers develop ways to improve productivity and enhance the quality of their rice produce.

Garcia says Cordillera is a place suitable for producing organic rice. Currently, she says, farmers in the region produce only small volumes of rice for commercial distribution.

Each registered farmer sells only 25 kilos of the special rice a year as the bulk is consumed by the family, she says.

With proper technology, post-harvest facilities, and enhanced training on productivity, farmers will be able to make a decent living out of producing organic rice, Garcia adds.

To pursue its advocacy, RICE implements various activities including skills training and encouraging Cordillerans to maximize the income-generating potential of their land.

RICE buys the produce of Cordillera farmers, and then exports the products to the United States.

Garcia says a number of farmers quit farming as they are not armed with proper productivity skills and the needed facilities. With the efforts of RICE, some were encouraged to go back to farming, Garcia says.

But she adds that RICE needs additional funds to raise the income and productivity of Cordilleran farmers.

With the P1-million grant from the Peace and Equity Foundation (PEF) through the Panibagong Paraan, Garcia says RICE will be able to improve post-harvest facilities for the farmers, and work on securing accreditation for the Cordillerans' rice produce from the Organic Certification Center of the Philippines.

Garcia adds that the grant will also help RICE produce manuals illustrating the proper farming techniques.

Rice Husk Gasifier Stove

Also winning P1 million was the project entitled: "Commercialization of the Central Philippine University College of Agriculture's (CPU-CA's) Super Turbo Rice Husk Gasifier Stove."

CPU-CA dean Dr. Reynaldo Dusaran says the college was able to develop a stove that uses water and rice husks as fuel.

The grant from the PEF will help in the manufacturing and distribution of the stove in Dingle, Iloilo.

Dusaran says many households in the area use wood for cooking, which has led to the cutting of too many trees in the forests of Iloilo.

The stove will help prevent further erosion of forests, he says.

Dusaran also says the use of the stove will help improve waste management in Dingle, where most of the residents depend on farming for their livelihood.

He says one of the problems is how to properly dispose rice husks.

With the popularization of the stove, Dusaran says, farmers will be able to put husks, which are usually just thrown away, to good use.

He adds that farmers will also be able to improve their income by selling husks to households using the stove.

"We want to fast-track the adoption of this technology in our local community, especially to the rice producers. We want to train locals so they themselves will learn how to make the stove," he says.

Worthwhile projects

These projects involving the deaf, Cordillera farmers and the new stove are just some of the worthwhile projects that won funding from the World Bank and its partner institutions.

These funding institutions include Team Energy, Philippine-Australia Community Assistance Program (Pacap), USAID, People's Equity Foundation, British Embassy, and Canadian International Development Agency (Cida).

Other organizations that helped in the implementation of Panibagong Paraan 2008 were the Caucus of Development NGO Networks, League of Corporate Foundations, Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement, The Asia Foundation, Philippine Center for Population and Development, International Finance Corp., Department of the Interior and Local Government, the local government of Puerto Princesa and the Asian Development Bank.

"With Panibagong Paraan, groups hoping to implement projects for the benefit of a community have better chances of getting financial support. A group does not have to be popular to generate funds, but only has to have a bright idea that is worthy of funding," says Leonora Aquino-Gonzales, Panibagong Paraan team leader and senior external relations officer of WB.

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