



Photo for the Month

In this photo, YP workshop participants leave the Infanta resettlement site where they stayed for a two-day immersion. The YPs are joined by children from the resettlement site in their daily routine of walking along unpaved roads to get to school.

Quote for the Month

DIWA (Hanap-hanap Ka)

*Hanap-hanap ka, kung saan-saan/
Ngunit di makita, hindi matagpuan/
Kahit sa mga sulok ng aking puso't
isipan/ Di ka na kumakatok at di na
maramdaman*

*Maaring ikaw nawaglit sa aking
paglalakbay/ O di yata ay naiwan sa
mga palaisipan/ At sa gitna ng
kabundukan, sa lalim ng karagatan/
Ika'y hahanapin ng sarili'y
matagpuan*

*Hahanapin ka nang muling
managinip/ Hahanapin ka nang
mabuo ang aking awit/ Hahanapin
ka nang matuloy ang labayin/
Hahanapin ka ng makita ang sarili.*

- **Noel Cabangon**, singer-songwriter

In this first e-newsletter of the year, we reintroduce our e-readers to the Young Professionals Program of TAO-Pilipinas since many have been added to the mailing list at mid-year or just recently. For those still quite unfamiliar with the YP program, our activities are aimed at young professionals and students in the field of human settlements --- architects, engineers, planners and the allied professions --- for them to take interest in working for the underserved sectors of society. We'd like to influence the academic training of would-be architects and engineers to include poor communities as their clientele, considering that majority of our population are poor. These three basic principles guide our work:

Everyone has a right to humane, decent and affordable shelter.

Good design could make a difference in the life of a community. A well-designed shelter is appropriate to the user's needs and culture, and contributes to the overall well-being of its user and the environment.

People should be able to participate in decisions that shape their lives and designers can facilitate people's participation in the design process.

For a review of last year's YP activities, we urge you to visit www.ypws.tao-pilipinas.org and check out what happened from our major undertaking in 2006, the five-day YP Workshop on Social Housing. The months ahead would see us integrate volunteer works in TAO-assisted projects as we move into the second stage of the Young Professionals Orientation and Training Program. Media exposure from last year also have given us the opportunity to talk more about our advocacy and we hope to establish more links with academic institutions and student organizations.

In this issue, we give you reflections from young professionals who have worked with us in bringing technical assistance to poor communities. These are dedicated individuals who have done more than lip service and took action. We hope they'll inspire you to likewise give something back to the community.

"It's time for us to go to the people rather than ask the people, especially the poor, to come to us."

YP Reflections



Marie Edraline Belga is a 23-year old BS Architecture graduate from the University of the Philippines who first applied as a volunteer during the preparatory activities of the YP Workshop in 2005. This involvement allowed her to gain some initial experience in working with community leaders and profiling the immersion areas. Edra has since been absorbed into the regular staff of TAO-Pilipinas and assigned as project team leader for the project SANAGMANA Subdivision Planning. After the required apprenticeship period, she plans to take the licensure examination for architects.

Changing Perspectives

For a young woman like me going into community development, it may seem that at first, one has all the enthusiasm to "save the world." That is what I thought back then. However, experience and reality has taught me that it is very hard work just to get around, or even try to make a little change. So I have eventually found out that the enthusiasm is still there, but at times, my energy might be dwindling. I am not to say that I have set aside my ideals, to do so would be to say that the world as it is now is just fine. It is fairly simple; I have hopes for a better, truly equitable society.

Right now, I can only do so much with words, I have sentiments, but I am a novice at uttering moving speeches. My energy was surging when I joined TAO-Pilipinas, I often dreamt of model housing projects being designed and constructed. For almost two years, my energy has its highs and very lows. Most of my encounters with the community, with the government, and with other organizations have left me with more and more questions. I ask, "Why?" Some words that I have heard have left me questioning my own judgment, my ideals, my methods and my principles. Some questions I have asked are still unanswered. All of these questions sometimes necessitate that I stop, breathe and give time for myself. Despite the confusions, working for community development has made me a more inquisitive, more analytical young woman. This is something I am very grateful for. I cannot imagine myself, gaining a greater world view if I have not been immersed in this work.

Taking action in the simplest way has replaced my blind hunger for a fiery battle for those who might seek fair access to social services. Whether it is as simple as making and explaining a subdivision plan, teaching technical drafting, or facilitating planning workshops, I do so because the community might need them. Small steps, but hopefully we will get there.

As for me, I am taking small steps too, in time I like to see myself as a person who would have a greater influence and power to initiate positive change with others. Maybe as an Environmental Engineer; I am crossing my fingers on that.

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YP Reflections



Anthony Vincent Michael Bicenio, 21, recently passed the licensure exam for civil engineers. BZ graduated from the University of Sto. Tomas where as a student leader, he was actively involved in volunteer works for academic extension projects. He was also a participant in the 2005 YP Workshop during his senior year and continues to volunteer for the project SANAGMANA Subdivision Planning.

Nagdaan ang mga araw ng 2006 at heto na ngayon ang taong 2007. Sinasabing kasama ng pagpapalit ng taon ang mga pagbabago. Nagdadala ito ng panibagong pag-asa, oportunidad, pagsubok at mga aral. Ang taong ito ay nagbigay kaagad sa akin ng isang napakahalagang aral, iyon ay kung gaano kahirap ang mabuhay.

Sa isang pagkakataon noong unang linggo ng Enero 2007, natanong ko sa magulang ko kung kami ay may natatagong isang milyong piso, wala, ang tugon nila. Muli akong nagtanong, limang daan libong piso? isang daan libo? Dito natapos ang aking pagtatanong dahil sermon na ang sumunod. Nito ko lang nalaman kung gaano kahirap ang magkaroon ng isang daan libong piso.

Ang pagmulat na ito ay nagdala ng madaming tanong sa aking isipan. Sa totoo lang ay naguguluhan ako, sapagkat ang mga minimithi ko para sa hinaharap ay nangangailangan ng higit pa sa halagang nabangit dito. Pinangarap ko na makatulong sa maraming tao, naisip ko na hindi ako magiging sakim, na ibabahagi ko ang anumang labis sa aking pangangailangan.

Nabago ang pananaw ko sa mga programang kinalahokan ko at ngayon lang nalinaw sa akin kung ano ang halaga nito. Inakala ko kasi na ang mga taong tumutulong sa mga nangangailangan ay pawang naglilibang lang. Ang pagbibigay ng mga bagay na napakahalaga para sa isang tao ay hindi pala madali para sa karamihan. Ang nakakalungkot, ang karamihan ang siyang nangangailangan.

Tanggap ko na sa ngayon ay napakadilim ng kasalukuyan. Maging ang kinabukasan ay hindi ko nakikitang malaking pagbabago mula sa kadiliman na ito. Matagal na tayong nababalot sa kahirapan at kung ating susuriin, mas mahirap pa tayo kumpara sa nakaraan. Marami ang may kaalaman ngunit konti lang ang tumatanggap dito, at mas konti pa ang gumagawa ng hakbang tugon dito.

Masasabi ko na dakila ang mga organisasyon tulad ng TAO-Pilipinas. Nakakamangha ang mga kasapi nila na kaya nilang ibahagi ang kanilang oras, kaalaman at pagkatao. Marami ang nagpapasalamat sa mga tulong na mula sa mga organisasyon na tulad nito. Nakakalungkot na hindi pa sapat ito upang lutasin ang suliranin, na kulang ito para pagliwanagin ang hinaharap. Marami pang bagay ang dapat gawin, mga aspeto na dapat kilatisin at marami pang tao na dapat magising.

Sa pagwawakas, sana ay maisip natin. Tunay na pagpapala ang pagkabuo ng mga organisasyon na tumutugon sa problema ng lipunan. Ngunit sa isang banda, ito ay palatandaan lang ng ating pagkukulang. Isang pangarap, na isang araw, hindi na natin kailanganin ang mga organisasyong panlipunan, sapagkat natugunan na ang lahat ng pangangailangan.

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“It’s time for us to go to the people rather than ask the people, especially the poor, to come to us.”

YP Reflections



Ma. Veronica Hernando is a 25-year old licensed Interior Designer who has been employed in private design firms after graduating from Assumption College. However, Erika has opted to become a full-time student of Master of Community Development to pursue an alternative career path as a development worker. She was a participant in the 2005 YP Workshop and has since volunteered in various TAO-assisted projects. She also teaches art classes for children at Ateneo.

Interior Design has been associated for a long time as a profession for the elite and never as one with a social concern. It has always been a misconception that Interior Designers only design homes for those who are rich, five-star hotels, high-end buildings. Many think that hiring interior designers only mean lavish furnishings, expensive materials and grand interiors. As a college student in Assumption College, we were made to realize our social responsibility towards our society especially to those who are less fortunate whatever our chosen profession may be.

My experience during the Young Professionals Workshop last August 2005 further enlightened me that as an Interior Designer or any other profession you have chosen, you can help our less fortunate fellow citizens uplift their lives and move towards a society that will recognize the needs of this sector.

The workshop provides an overview of the current scenario of human settlements issue in the Philippines and in the world. It provides a lot of insights regarding how Technical Professionals can help the sector that belongs to the "bottom of the pyramid". We can provide technical help for the communities to enable them to formulate a community development plan. To layout a subdivision plan can also help the communities lobby for their rights for security of land tenure. The highlight of the workshop was the immersion in various communities. I must say it was a fun-filled experience despite being surrounded by the harsh realities of life. In the community where I stayed, their favorite pass time was videoke. I do not know how to sing but it didn't matter, we all sang anyway which was part of the whole experience. The community will welcome you with such warmth and cheerfulness that you forget that Tondo is a place marked as dangerous. It only proves that it is unfair to stereotype all of the people living there as "bad" people. When you experience living with them, even if it was only for two nights, you realize they are just the same as we are – they work hard, they laugh, they cry, they have dreams. However their living conditions will make you also realize how harder life is for them. Witnessing how they live will make you appreciate how lucky you are to have basic necessities such as water. In the community where I stayed, they do not have any water supply so they have to buy water in containers. Every drop counted. But one of my realizations is we should not feel sorry for them but rather recognize that they have their own potentials just waiting to be tapped. They just need to be given equal opportunities for a better life. Their voices just need to be heard. We come to help them learn to help themselves. We do not go there as if to save them. We must also make them realize that they are the key factor towards their own development. We only serve as a catalyst.

To end my reflections, I would like to share a question posed by one of the participants. He asked, "Up to where do we extend our help?" There will always be a "battle of emotions" between wanting to make a name for yourself, earning lots of money and the desire in your heart to be of service especially to those who are poor. Is there any chance you'll be able to do both as a young professional? The answer might not come your way right after the workshop but it's a step forward towards realizing what you really want and what is important to you.

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