

CHANGED

THE BRIDGE PROJECT
**LEADING
THE
WAY**

A community leader transforms a battlefield into a farming community





Philippine Business for Social Progress is the largest business-led NGO at the forefront of strategic corporate citizenship and business sector leadership, contributing to sustainable development and poverty reduction. Established in 1970, PBSP remains a consultant and partner of choice of companies and donors.

PBSP scales up impact by adopting the Collective Impact strategy to solve large, complex, systemic problems. PBSP organizes Platforms for Collective Engagements (PlaCEs) to ensure alignment and sustainability of initiatives by multiple stakeholders.

Responding to the changing landscape of CSR, PBSP's brand of corporate citizenship taps into the core business competencies of companies and promotes inclusive business as a strategy. PBSP also continues to strategically engage companies through social investment, responsible business practices, and philanthropy.

PBSP creates sustainable solutions to societal problems in its core program areas which are Health, Education, Environment, and Livelihood and Enterprise Development. It also provides off-the-shelf options for engagement of companies and their employees.

With a proven track record, PBSP provides end-to-end services in development consulting which include project and grants management, events and backroom management.



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TABLE OF CONTENTS



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IMPROVING ACCESS TO QUALITY EDUCATION

20 FOR THE LOVE OF HER STUDENTS

A school head in Maguindanao does not stop until her students get the quality education they deserve



22 EXPERIENCE IS THE BEST TEACHER

A Schools Division Superintendent in Basilan helps improve the lives of teachers and students with the help of kindhearted donors

TRIUMPHS OVER TB IN JAILS



08 RIDE TO FREEDOM

A former inmate and TB patient who lost everything rebuilds his life and strives to help others

12 WAITING TO BE FREE

An inmate-patient who almost died of TB struggles to finish his treatment and move on with his life



16 GIVING HOPE, CHANGING LIVES

A PBSP nurse in Zamboanga finds her purpose in treating TB patients



SPECIAL FEATURE: THE BRIDGE PROJECT

26 THE BRIDGE PROJECT

Enabling Investments and Opportunities for a more Inclusive Bangsamoro



10 SAVED BY DILIGENCE AND FAITH

From being an alcoholic to TB patient, this inmate finds redemption in treatment and in his deeper relationship with God

14 A MOTHER TO INMATES

A nurse in a Zamboanga prison goes beyond her duty to bring proper care to inmate-patients



28
MATLING
INDUSTRIAL AND
COMMERCIAL
(MICC)

30
AGUMIL
PHILIPPINES, INC.



32
AL-SAHAR AGRI-
VENTURES, INC.
(ASAVI)



34
LAMSAN,
INCORPORATED

36
KALTIMEX
RURAL ENERGY
CORPORATION



38
LEADING THE WAY
 A community leader
 transforms a battlefield
 into a farming
 community



40
FROM NOBODY
TO SOMEBODY
 An unemployed
 graduate is able to
 develop himself and his
 community through the
 assistance of the BRIDGE
 project

42
SECOND CHANCES
 A community leader gets
 another chance to improve
 his life and community
 through a new cooperative

ABOUT THE COVER



Bai Shejana Kanapia, the barangay captain of Fukol, Maguindanao, is the cover in this twelfth issue of CHANGED Magazine Mindanao edition. Through the Brokering Business Investments in the Bangsamoro to Achieve Inclusive Development and Growth (BRIDGE) Project, Kanapia was able to empower her community through the Bualan sa Fukol Producers Cooperative.

The magazine "CHANGED" features stories of inspiring people in social development whose lives were changed either through their involvement in projects undertaken by PBSP with its member-companies, partners, and donors, or through interventions in the communities we serve. The A in "CHANGED," is represented by the delta sign (Δ) which is also a mathematical symbol for change.

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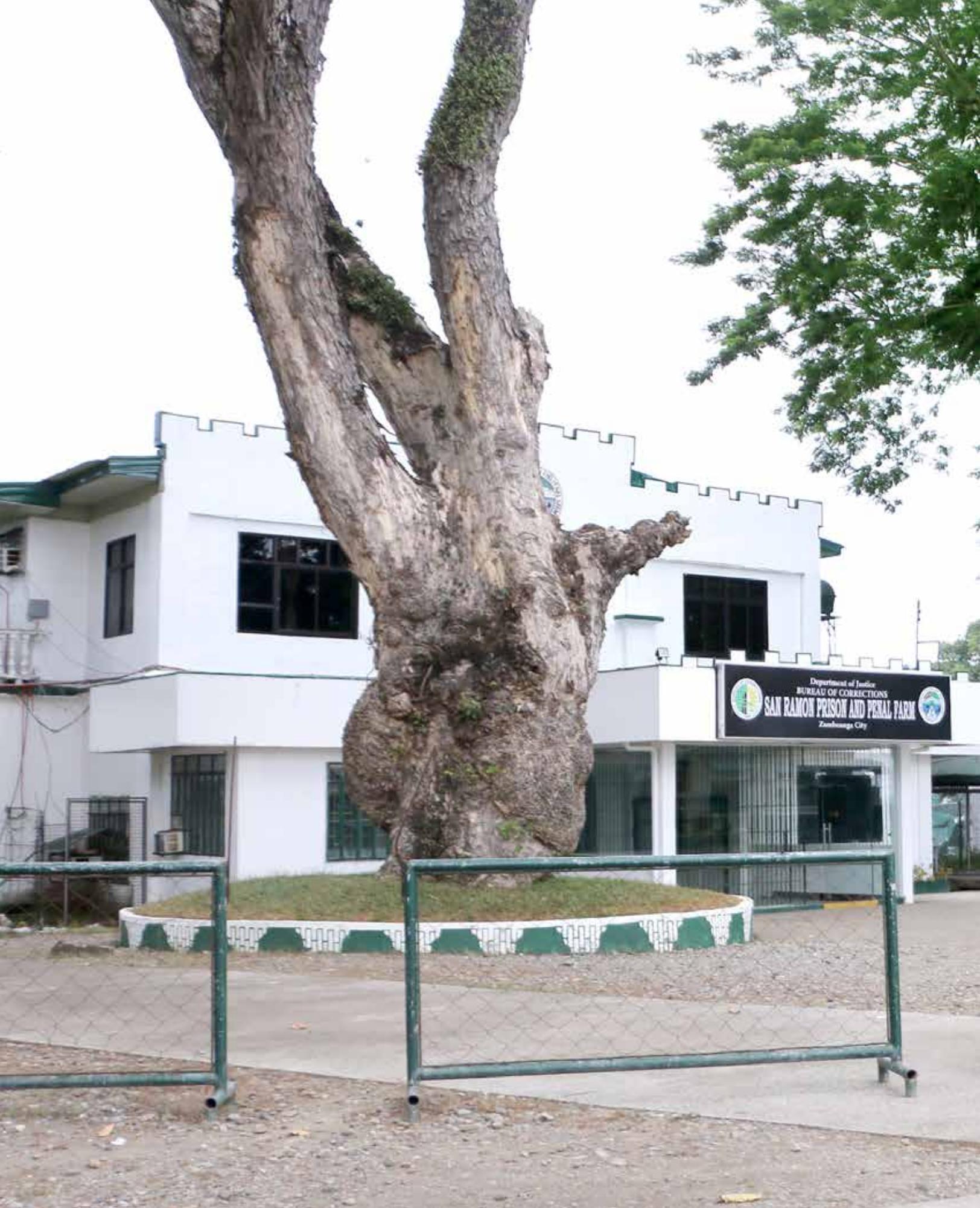
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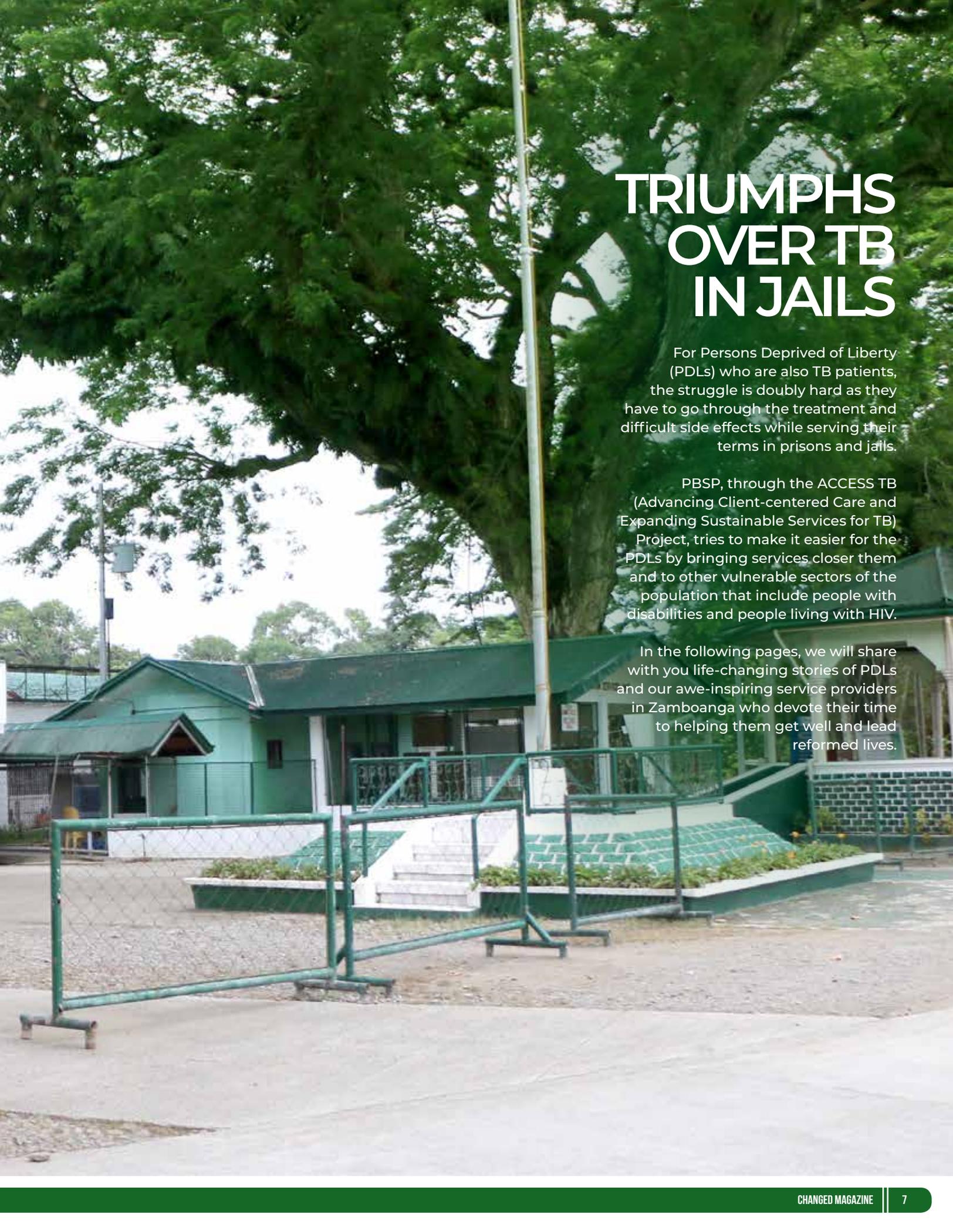
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TRIUMPHS OVER TB IN JAILS

For Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) who are also TB patients, the struggle is doubly hard as they have to go through the treatment and difficult side effects while serving their terms in prisons and jails.

PBSP, through the ACCESS TB (Advancing Client-centered Care and Expanding Sustainable Services for TB) Project, tries to make it easier for the PDLs by bringing services closer them and to other vulnerable sectors of the population that include people with disabilities and people living with HIV.

In the following pages, we will share with you life-changing stories of PDLs and our awe-inspiring service providers in Zamboanga who devote their time to helping them get well and lead reformed lives.

RIDE TO FREEDOM

A former inmate and TB patient who lost everything rebuilds his life and strives to help others

Strength is not measured by how much your muscles have grown from hitting the gym or running the treadmill but by the value of your determination to rebuild your life and help others after a “heavy lifting.” After all, life demands mental toughness to go on.

Jinan Janaide is strong. This former inmate and TB patient-turned-advocate proved it to himself and he has proof.

His wife and kid are his sources of strength. Together, they make a living for their family by selling their *ukay-ukay* business in downtown Zamboanga City.

He was happy when he learned that his wife was carrying their second child. But this would mean he had to work double time. When he was given an opportunity to be a pedicab driver, he did not think twice. Surely, he could not say no to an offer that would give him an easy PhP5,000-PhP10,000 a day. Who would? For him who was earning a little just to survive a day, the job was a big catch.

But only because it was more than just transporting passengers, it involved him being an accomplice for a drug business. He knew about it when it was offered to him, and he accepted it wholeheartedly.

Little did he know that this would not last for a lifetime and that he would be caught in a drug-raid on Nov. 1, 2002. From that day on, Janaide not only lost his freedom and strength but also his wife whom he asked to look for another man.

Realizing that he could no longer care for his family while in prison, he also told his wife to sell their business for no one would maintain its operation.

LIFE BEHIND BARS

Janaide slowly accepted his fate and went on with his life. He was strong, indeed, even when he learned that his kids were abandoned by his wife and left with her mother.

“I was selling cigarettes in prison, and even took on various jobs. I wanted to make sure that every time my kids would

THANKS TO the Access TB project, Jinan Janaide was cured from MDR-TB and is now working as a Sputum Transport Rider (STRider) for PBSP.

visit me, I can give them money for their studies,” said Janaide who also offered laundry and massage services to his fellow inmates.

He would even go as far as taking care of sick inmates.

“It also became my habit to care for my fellow inmates whenever they are sick,” he added.

FROM PRISONER TO PATIENT-VOLUNTEER

After nine years, Janaide was finally freed from prison, but he later found out that he wasn't truly free.

As soon as he left the San Ramon Prison and Penal Farm, he was imprisoned again, this time by Tuberculosis.

Janaide hid it from his friends and family because he did not want to cause further concern.

“I was thinking of my children. With the six-month treatment for TB, I would not be able to work. What will my children eat?” he recalled himself saying at that time.

In 2014, after completing six months of treatment, he felt devastated to learn that he did not get well. In fact, he had a different strain, which is the Multidrug Resistant TB (MDR-TB).

At that time, his family was already prepared for his departure because they saw Janaide in his weakest state.

“Instead of getting me cured, my family already bought cows and goats. They also chopped wood. They were just waiting for me to breathe my last breath,” he lamented.

But hope knocked on his door. Through the health center, Janaide learned that there was a PMDT Satellite Treatment Center at the Mindanao Central Sanitarium General Hospital which offered free medicines. PMDT stands for Programmatic Management of Drug-resistant TB, a component under the Advancing Client-Centered Care and Expanding Sustainable Services (ACCESS TB) project managed by PBSP that caters to drug-resistant TB patients like him.

Fortunately, he became one of the first patients in the country to undergo the shorter treatment regimen of nine months from the previous 18 to 24 months. Nevertheless, the experience for Janaide, wasn't as easy as he had expected.

The side effects of the medicine took a toll on him and challenged every bit of hope and strength he had. But he remained to be the strong person that he is. He had to for himself, his family and fellow patients.

That was when he realized that helping other patients was another way to give in return. He was encouraged to join the Samahang Lusog Baga, Inc., a support group composed of current and cured TB patients, while he was on treatment.

“I told fellow patients that the medicines won't kill them. What will kill them is the disease if they would not seek treatment,” said Janaide. “I was inspired to help even if I do not receive any salary. I also translate nurses' instructions into Tausug so the patients will understand,” Janaide revealed.

He is happy that his efforts produced results as more patients continue to take their medicines. But he is happier to be able to work and continue his advocacy at the same time.

TAKING HIS ADVOCACY TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Janaide was hired by PBSP to work as part of the STRider project which stands for Sputum Transport Rider.

STRiders are partners under the ACCESS TB project managed by PBSP who play a crucial role in ensuring that sputum specimens from treatment centers and other health facilities are delivered in sites with GeneXpert Machines in the fastest possible time. The machine is the WHO-recommended primary and confirmatory diagnostic tool for TB.

More than this, Janaide also brings patients to the treatment center, whenever he can.

“What I love about my job now is that I am able to help poor patients. I am happy that I am able to bring them to the treatment centers for free. This job given by PBSP is really a big help to my kids. PBSP really helps us and it's just up to us patients if we want to be helped or not,” he said.

Looking at himself now and what he has gone through so far, Janaide has nothing but pride for the person that he has become. His strength remains in his favor.

“I am not ashamed to interact with anyone. I grew stronger because I am able to live life without hardships again,” he said.

Janaide may not be the typical hero in cape that people should look up to but for TB patients, he is the hero who rides a motorcycle and contributes to their freedom from TB.

SAVED BY DILIGENCE AND FAITH

From being an alcoholic to TB patient, this inmate finds redemption in treatment and in his deeper relationship with God

Having been orphaned at nine years old, Tatay Gaspar (not his real name), grew up being transferred from one guardian to another. But it was his growing alcohol addiction that led him to trouble, and eventually in prison.

“When I was a toddler, my elder sisters who were in a drinking session would dip their finger in coconut wine and put it in my mouth. My reaction that time was weird because of the foul taste and smell. At 11, I could already consume at least three glasses of wine. Nobody would care and dare discipline me. I was drinking almost every day with my friends,” recalled Tatay Gaspar who is now 58 years old.

A father of six kids, Tatay Gaspar took on several jobs in Cebu City to feed his family. He worked in a construction site and mango plantation. He also became an ambulant vendor, selling candies, cigarettes and iced water to bus passengers. But after a hard-day’s work, he would always unwind by drinking alcohol.

One day, as Tatay Gaspar was severely intoxicated, he committed a crime he would soon regret for the rest of his life – he raped his stepdaughter.

LIFE IN PRISON

Tatay Gaspar was sentenced to reclusion perpetua or permanent imprisonment and was sent to New Bilibid Prison in Muntinlupa City in 2003.

“When I arrived in the maximum security compound in Muntinlupa, my health condition worsened. I acquired Multidrug Resistant Tuberculosis (MDR-TB) and was seeking treatment. But I felt that to be able to fully recover, I should repent and be closer to God. I became a born-again Christian,” he shared.

Tatay Gaspar’s decision to reform paid off as he was transferred to the medium security compound. In 2009, he asked to be transferred to the San Ramon Prison and Penal Farm in Zamboanga so that his sibling who was residing in the city could visit him.

While he was happy to see his sibling from time to time in Zamboanga, Tatay Gaspar’s condition further worsened, and every time he coughed, he would see his phlegm tainted with blood.

GOING THROUGH THE TREATMENT

When he was sent to the prison hospital in June 2014, Tatay Gaspar

finally stuck to his treatment regimen at the San Ramon Prison and Penal Farm Satellite Treatment Center that was established with assistance from the Advancing Client-Centered Care and Expanding Sustainable Services for TB (ACCESS TB) project managed by Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP).

“It was not easy to take the medicines. There were at least 10 tablets (big and small) which all had strong side effects. After drinking it, I felt like my head would turn upside down and my stomach being scrambled. Sometimes I would vomit saliva and felt hot. When I would take a bath, my body temperature would stabilize. I could not eat well because the bitter taste of medicines remained for quite some time. I just endured the discomfort because I really wanted to survive,” he recalled.

Tatay Gaspar also received institutional support that included food packages and hygiene kits. The juice drinks given to him were helpful in minimizing the bitter taste of medicines while the food items were also effective in helping him get proper nutrition.

CHANGING FOR THE BETTER

To make good use of his time in prison and while undergoing treatment,



Tatay Gaspar made handicrafts. Finally, he was cured in 2017.

"I am thankful to the Lord because I do not have an illness anymore. I am also grateful to the nurses who took care of me. They were the ones who encouraged me to make handicrafts during my pastime. I even made a miniature replica of the treatment center out of recycled wooden materials. I gave it to the staff nurse as a symbol of my appreciation," he said.

Tatay Gaspar is now advocating a healthy lifestyle among his fellow Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs), and is also encouraging them to be closer to God through Bible studies.

"I am already content. At least, I have a God with me even though I am in prison. I always pray every time I wake up to thank Him because He has given me another day to do good things. With Him, I am far from doing bad things. There are no hassles in life anymore. I wanted to make God my priority now," said Tatay Gaspar.

HIS FAITH in God and freedom from TB helped Tatay Gaspar change for the better.



TATA IS GRATEFUL for the help of the doctors, nurses, and PBSP in curing his disease and giving him a second chance in life.

WAITING TO BE FREE

An inmate-patient who almost died of TB struggles to finish his treatment and move on with his life

In the many nights in his prison cell where a used coffin was temporarily stored, “Tata” (not his real name) would get chilling nightmares of him lying inside, lifeless.

With his condition back then, the 45-year-old inmate-patient at the San Ramon Prison and Penal Farm in Zamboanga City with Multidrug Resistant Tuberculosis (MDR-TB) Tuberculosis, couldn’t help but worry that his nightmares would soon come to reality even if he was already seeking treatment.

“I almost died. I could not eat well. I was in dextrose for a week to sustain my body. I only weighed 30 kilograms. The structure of my bones was already visible under my skin. I could not stand up anymore. I could only crawl when I wanted to go somewhere. I felt very weak. I was like that for eight months in 2016,” recalled Tata.

‘IMPRISONED TWICE’

Tata landed in prison because of illegal possession of firearms in 2013.

“I did not expect that they will put me in jail. I only got a señorita or a small pocket pistol and it wasn’t even mine. The owner was my cousin. I just took the liability. I felt pity for him because his children were still young and needed his support. The lawyer told me that my sentence in prison would be four years. But I have been staying

here for five years now,” said Tata, who used to work as a coconut tapper, and also sold charcoal and fried pork belly.

A year after he got in prison, Tata contracted Multiple Drug Resistant-TB (MDR-TB).

Tata felt he was imprisoned twice because he was locked in a separate cell for three months to prevent the disease from spreading to fellow inmates.

DEALING WITH TB

Tata availed the 18-month treatment from the satellite treatment center inside the prison that was established with assistance from the Advancing Client-centered Care and Expanding Sustainable Services for TB (ACCESS TB) Project, managed by the Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP).

“The side effects of the treatment were painful. It made me vomit every day, just by looking at the medicines. But after three hours, I could breathe freely. That relieving feeling became my motivation to complete the treatment. It was painful but effective. I could still tolerate the pain,” he shared.

Apart from the medicines, Tata also received institutional support like food packages and hygiene kits. It was given to him every quarter of the year.

“They provided me rice, eggs, canned

goods, noodles, biscuits, milk and chocolate drinks. The food items helped me recover. They really took care of me and made sure that I get cured,” he added.

ASPIRING FOR FREEDOM

Tata was finally cured of TB in May 2017. Apart from recovering his good health back, he was also allowed to return to the colony with the other inmates.

“I am thankful to the doctor and all the employees of San Ramon Prison and Penal Farm for taking care of me. They did their best to save me. I am also thankful to the Lord because he has given me a second chance in life. I became more faithful. I now always pray before I eat and sleep. I do not forget to thank Him for all the blessings I receive every day,” he said.

Because of his good behavior, Tata will soon get the full freedom he has long sought for as he is already eligible for parole.

“I have stopped smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol. Vices like these can cause health problems. I was exposed to these vices when I was young. Even after my parole, I will not engage in these activities. I want to change my life. I really miss my family. After prison, I will look for a stable source of income to help my family,” Tata said.

A MOTHER TO INMATES

A nurse in a Zamboanga prison goes beyond her duty to bring proper care to inmate-patients

For the thousands of inmates at the San Ramon Prison and Penal Farm in Zamboanga, there is one person they look up to for support, and she is Chief Nurse Aurora Caguiat. Caguiat who is fondly called “Mother Aurora” in the penal farm, has been with the institution for 39 years now. She knows every single one of the inmates, and even remembers those she met way back in 1978 when she was first assigned in the place.

“When I first came here in San Ramon, I was really shocked. I was the only staff in the clinic. We had no pharmacist or doctor. I had to learn to do everything from housekeeping to admin work and even patient consultations,” recounted Caguiat. “It was not the kind of life I wanted when I was a child. Being a nurse was never really the dream.”

A CHANGE OF HEART

Growing up in Ilocos, Caguiat never saw herself as a nurse. The eighth of 10 siblings, she wanted to become an accountant. However, when it was her turn to go to college, her parents were hesitant to send her to study in Manila. The University of Northern Philippines in Vigan did not offer Accountancy so she was forced to take up Nursing instead. During her early days in college, Caguiat found it hard to love her course. She felt like nurses were servants every time she would handle feces and urine for her subjects. She was disheartened and disappointed with her career choice.

“My elder sister, who is also a nurse, explained that nurses are not servants. She told me that what I was learning

in school was only the art and when it came to the actual profession, it would be different. It was only then that I started to see nurses in a different light. And when I got here in San Ramon, that’s when I fell in love with the profession,” she revealed.

As the only staff in the clinic, Caguiat worked hard to learn the ins and outs of San Ramon. She studied the manuals and familiarized herself with the available medicines in the pharmacy. She learned to do patient consultations with the inmates.

“I was all by myself here in San Ramon for a couple of years. Thankfully, a doctor was assigned here in 1982,” she said.

Caguiat’s daily interaction with the inmates taught her to love nursing even more.

“In the 1980s, we already had so many inmates here. I had to look after the health of every single one of them. During that time, the prison also had a colony barrio where the dependents of the inmates lived. I also looked after their families and delivered the babies of the mothers,” she recalled.

More than that, Caguiat even taught the mothers how to cook and imparted some livelihood skills to help them start anew when their husbands are released. This routine continued for her until the barrio closed down in the early 90s.

A SECOND CHANCE IN LIFE

But not all was rosy throughout Caguiat’s stint at San Ramon. In fact, she almost lost her life while on duty.

“I was stabbed in the back and my lungs collapsed. I stayed in the hospital for two weeks and I had to recover for six months. It was really a painful and difficult time for me. Looking after my five kids became difficult,” she revealed.

After the incident, her parents insisted that she leave San Ramon and work abroad. But she decided to stay.

“For some time, I would be scared whenever I saw the inmates. Just the color of their uniform scared me. I kept praying that I would be able to get over my trauma. I never thought about resigning even though it was my second chance in life,” Caguiat shared.

A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON TUBERCULOSIS

When Caguiat arrived in San Ramon, there was already an existing TB program. However, it consisted mostly of referrals and assisting patients to take their medicines.

“Since the inmates are not allowed to leave the vicinity, I would take the sputum specimen to the hospitals outside and acquired the medicines,” she recalled.

Her perspective on TB changed when she was introduced to the Advancing Client-centered Care and Expanding Sustainable Services for TB (ACCESS TB) project of Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP) in 2015.

She said: “There was a big difference in the TB program when PBSP came to San Ramon. There was a mass screening among the inmates

and the medicines were readily available for all. Medical equipment became accessible.”

Caguiat also learned about the Multi Drug-Resistant Tuberculosis (MDR TB) through PBSP, including the importance of wearing masks for protection. Before, she said they were hesitant to use masks because the inmates thought that wearing mask already means one has TB.

HOPE FOR THE INMATES

The treatment of TB gave hope to the inmate-patients. The cured ones became healthier and stronger. In fact, they were able to re-integrate themselves back to the colony.

“They were able to go back to their routine. They even went back to school. We have an Alternative Learning System here in San Ramon and the inmates learned to read and write,” Caguiat shared. “The inmates are very happy, even their families. They are really grateful for the help that PBSP gave to them.”

The ACCESS TB program also opened learning opportunities for Caguiat and the inmates.

“One of the challenges we had when the Programmatic Management of Drug-Resistant Tuberculosis (PMDT) just started were the complaints of inmates about the side effects of the medicines. Several trainings and information dissemination on MDR TB helped the inmates understand how the treatment works and the side effects. Later, it became less difficult to encourage them to take their medicines regularly,” she added.

The PMDT also inspired volunteerism among the

inmates through the Bantay Kalusugan program. This is where inmates look after the health of each other to lessen the challenges of treating patients. Inmates who graduated from the PMDT also advocated the importance of treating TB.

A FULFILLING JOB

A mother to the inmates and to her five children, Caguiat’s career as a nurse is not only fruitful but also fulfilling.

“I never thought that with my small salary, my husband and I would be able to send all our children to college. Now, they are all professionals. Thinking about it now, I realized I have no regrets that I did not go abroad to work,” she said.

With only a year left before her retirement, Caguiat hopes that PBSP will continue to help the inmates in San Ramon.

“I am really thankful for all the help that PBSP gave to the communities, especially to the inmates and the beneficiaries. I will always be grateful to PBSP for changing our lives. I hope that the nurses who will be assigned in San Ramon in the future will have the same passion and commitment that I have. It’s not just about giving the inmate-patients medicines, it’s also about counselling. They are also human beings and they will always be a part of my family,” Caguiat said.

A NURSE for 39 years, Aurora Caguiat found fulfillment in helping inmate-patients at the San Ramon Prison and Penal Farm.



Amid the coughing patients and the masked nurses, a cheerful woman in her pink scrubs brings smiles to the faces of her patients as she encourages them to take their medicines.

Shermain Labrador, a 29-year-old nurse at the Satellite Treatment Center (STC) of Mindanao Central Sanitarium in Zamboanga City, may not be living her dream as a doctor but she is still happy to be giving life-changing treatment to TB patients as a nurse.

TAKING A DIFFERENT PATH

Labrador's plan to study Medicine didn't materialize when her family encountered financial problems. Her father had to undergo kidney operation and their business in Sabah went bankrupt.

"I had to help my family financially. You don't think about yourself anymore, you also need to think about what would be good for your family. So I took up Nursing instead, thinking it would be my stepping stone to become a doctor. Plus, it would still give me the opportunity to give hope and change lives from helping patients get well," she revealed.

After graduation, Labrador immediately worked as a volunteer nurse for six months

PBSP's ACCESS TB project widened Shermain Labrador's understanding of TB and helped her care for her TB patients.

GIVING HOPE, CHANGING LIVES

A PBSP nurse in Zamboanga finds her purpose in treating TB patients

at the Natal Intensive Care Unit of Zamboanga Medical Center.

"It was a bittersweet experience. I saw the newborn babies and the joy in the eyes of the parents. But at the same time, I also saw the pain in the parents and babies who had complications." Labrador shared. "Once, I talked to a father whose wife had just given birth. He was so happy when he approached me. Then moments later, their baby died. It was really heartbreaking to see his happiness turn to despair."

Working as a volunteer nurse taught her how to work with patients from different walks of life. After her stint there, she went on to work as a nurse in a private clinic.

A REWARDING JOB

In 2015, Labrador left her job as a clinic nurse to work for the Advancing Client-centered Care and Expanding Sustainable Services for TB (ACCESS TB) project being managed by Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP). Her friend encouraged her to apply and luckily, she was hired and assigned at the San Ramon Prison and Penal Farm in Zamboanga City.

Her understanding of tuberculosis widened as she handled the inmate-patients in San Ramon.

"I was already aware of TB since college. I also had the notion that TB is a disease for the poor. But with PBSP, I saw how the disease evolved and learned about the Multidrug-Resistant Tuberculosis," she shared.

Labrador was trained to handle MDR-TB patients and also learned about the strategies to control and prevent TB. Her daily interaction with the inmate-patients helped her to see the Persons Deprived with Liberty (PDLs) in a different light.

"Surprisingly, the inmate-patients at San Ramon were easier to care for than the patients from the community. It was easier to monitor their intake of medicines and encourage them to undergo MDR treatment. Often, the patients in the community would skip their medications and would not even go to the clinic for their check-up," she revealed.

Labrador felt rewarded for all her hardwork whenever she saw the perseverance of the inmate-patients to overcome TB and help prevent a TB outbreak in prison.

"We already had inmate-patients who graduated from the Programmatic Management of Drug-Resistant Tuberculosis (PMDT). It's fulfilling to see them become healthy again and go back to the colony free from TB," she said.

ADVOCATING FOR TB

While Labrador may be having difficulty convincing TB patients to complete their treatment in the community, she is not showing any sign of defeat.

"Just because they do not want to take their medicines does not mean that you should give up on them. It is our responsibility to ensure that they will go back to the community cured from TB," she declared.

Apart from caring for the patients, Labrador also helps remove the stigma and correct the misconceptions of her co-workers on TB. Her experience and training helped her overcome these challenges and explain to people that TB is not as deadly as it seems. It is curable and controllable.

With the hope that more people will be cured from TB, she continues to do her best in treating and educating her patients.

"I am thankful to PBSP for giving me this opportunity. I am happy to see my patients complete their treatment and transform from being sickly into healthier individuals. The thought that I am able to change their lives and give them hope is very fulfilling," Labrador said.





IMPROVING ACCESS TO QUALITY EDUCATION

For decades, the ARMM region where the poorest provinces in the country are located, has long suffered from the lack of resources in education. This is one of the major reasons why students are not in school or drop out even before they graduate from elementary.

PBSP, through the support of member-companies and its donors such as the Australian Embassy, seeks to address this issue by providing disaster-resilient schoolbuildings, teacher trainings, scholarships and other forms of educational assistance to schools which need it the most.

In this special Mindanao issue of CHANGED, we bring you our selfless educators in Mindanao who go to great lengths in the pursuit of providing quality education to their students.

FOR THE LOVE OF HER STUDENTS

A school head in Maguindanao strives to give her students the quality education they deserve

In a classroom in Tomicor Elementary School (TES) in Maguindanao several years ago, around 40 students would work on their seatwork and share books with their classmates. The age disparity among the kids, aged six to 10, was very much evident, especially in physical features. But there is one thing in common among all of them — they are all in Grade 1.

In most elementary schools in the country, six-year-old kids are enrolled in the first grade. But this was not the case in TES. While the parents in the community were willing to send their kids to school, the lack of classrooms and roads affected their access to basic education.

Some children would even hike for six to seven kilometers just to attend class, others would go to school with an empty stomach. During the rainy season, the kids who were present in class would get wet in their dilapidated classrooms.

Such was the state of TES for quite some time that it eventually had to close down. Kids were no longer coming to class and the classrooms could not provide an environment conducive to learning.

But this situation did not deter TES school head Evelyn Legaspi-Alibadbarin from encouraging the community to value education. Known in the community for her passion in teaching, she was soon able to revive the love for learning among children and their parents.

TEACHING STUDENTS AND PARENTS

When Alibadbarin first arrived in the school, she was disheartened to find out its state and the plight of the students. There were only 48 students and one serviceable classroom.

For almost six years, she was the only teacher in the school, handling both Grade 1 and Grade 2 classes.

The number of students was also a problem. Schools were required by DepEd to have a minimum number of 40 enrollees but there were times when TES had fewer students. Hence, it closed down for a couple of years.

“I went to every house in Tomicor, even hiked to the sitios in the mountains, just to encourage the parents to send their children to school. The next year, our students doubled. Children who stopped studying enrolled again. I had Grade 1 students as old as 10 and Grade 2 who were already 15 years old,” Alibadbarin shared.

The determination of the children to learn and go to school inspired her to double her efforts. Most of them would travel on foot for six to seven kilometers every day just to attend class. Some even go to school without slippers. The kids would bring cassava, kamote tops, or banana as food for their lunch and snack.

Apart from the students, Alibadbarin also went out of her way to teach literacy to parents through the DepEd

Alternative Learning System (ALS) every Saturday.

“Most of the parents of my students did not know how to read or write. So during weekdays, I would teach their children. Then, on Saturdays, I would teach ALS and basic hygiene to the parents. I am happy that later on, these parents were even able to work abroad,” she said.

NEW HOPE FOR TOMICOR

From then on, good things started to come to the school.

In 2006, TES was able to receive rice allocation from the World Food Programme to improve the health of the children. The parents also supported the feeding program.

Later, an additional teacher was assigned in TES to help Alibadbarin manage the school. The parents even contributed Php5 every month for the allowance of the teacher when there was no government subsidy yet.

Finally, her dream was fulfilled when TES became the recipient of PBSP’s classroom construction project. The project also brought in support from the local government which funded the construction of the road to the community to enable transport of materials for the classroom that will be built.

The classrooms constructed by PBSP and funded by the Australian Embassy are disaster-resilient and made from

quality materials. It also includes ramps for students with disabilities and a water tank that can hold water up to two weeks.

REAPING THE FRUITS

“The new classrooms will really help us improve the education of the children,” said Alibadbarin who never dreamed of becoming a teacher when she was young.

Born in Iloilo, Alibadbarin came from a family of teachers. Seeing their struggles and hardships, she decided to pursue Commerce instead. But due to the insistence of her parents, she eventually ended up in the same profession.

For five years, Alibadbarin reported to a central school in Maguindanao each day, taught Grade 6 pupils and then prepared the lessons.

Her seemingly routinary life changed when she was transferred to TES in 2003.

“When I was assigned here in Tomicor, that’s when I felt that I was really an educator. I fell in love with teaching because I saw how much the kids needed to learn. It was more challenging than

when I was in Ampatuan. Here, I had to double my efforts to reach out to my students,” she shared.

Alibadbarin is now happy to see her school and students flourish. From 48 enrollees in 2003, TES now has 572. Several of them are not only active in school but are also competing and winning in academic competitions.

The local government and even the Army are now very supportive of the children. The latter helps with the civic education of the kids and even play basketball with them during weekends.

But amid all these positive changes and while her work at the school is seemingly done, Alibadbarin is not ready to leave yet.

“I do not want to leave Tomicor. I still want to help the children. But if they are going to replace me, I really hope that it will be someone who has the same passion and dedication to help these children,” Alibadbarin said.



A PASSIONATE teacher, Evelyn Alibadbarin is happy to see her students flourish and receive support from the community and PBSP.

EXPERIENCE IS THE BEST TEACHER

A Schools Division Superintendent in Basilan helps improve the lives of teachers and students with the help of kindhearted donors

Apart from lack of classrooms, electricity used to be a problem in Basilan schools. Teachers and students endured the searing heat inside poorly lit classrooms. After class, teachers stayed in dark faculty lounges to prepare lesson plans and visual aids for the next day while mosquitos feasted on their arms and feet.

The teachers, on the other hand, were confined in their small worlds, and rarely, if ever, attended trainings that improved their method of teaching. They also had no choice but to use old, worn out books in their classes. Basilan Schools Division Superintendent Dr. Nurhaya Abdurahim has long worked to improve the condition in her province and sought assistance from various sectors. Fortunately, after all her hard work, the life-changing interventions came.

A GIFT FROM HEAVEN

Abdurahim never imagined that her schools in Basilan would be given school buildings by the Australian Embassy, in partnership with Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP).

"We never really asked for classrooms, it was a gift from heaven. It was Rommel (Gonzales, a PBSP Senior Program Officer for Education in its Mindanao Regional Center) of PBSP who brought the good news to us one day. And so, we got new classrooms for Maluso Central Elementary School, Shipyard Elementary School,

Batungal Elementary School, Atong-atong Elementary School, Kasawi Elementary School, Sumisip Elementary School, and Lower Batu-Batu Elementary School," Abdurahim said.

These schools received disaster-resilient school buildings with classrooms that have separate comfort rooms for boys and girls, wash area, and are PWD-friendly.

"The schoolbuildings are a bit elevated so that floods won't easily get inside the classrooms and wet the floors. It's totally different and way better from the old classrooms," she added.

LIGHT AND HOPE

Because the lack of electricity in Basilan schools had been so frequent, the learning conditions had affected the students as well as the teachers who couldn't maximize learning due to limited resources. So when Panasonic Corporation and PBSP came to give solar lanterns to several schools in ARMM and Zamboanga, they couldn't be any happier.

"When solar lanterns were distributed to the schools, we never heard complaints from our teachers anymore. They complained back then because they just needed help so they could do more. And because there is no electricity, lack of equipment, and poor working conditions, it was really a struggle but never a hindrance. The lanterns somehow renewed

the enthusiasm of students to go to school and the teachers to work harder. It gave them light and hope," Abdurahim said.

THE MANY FIRSTS

To capacitate the teachers and help them further improve their teaching, Abdurahim and her teachers had also undergone capacity building trainings in English, Science, and Math through the Education Quality and Access for Learning and Livelihood Skills (EQuALLS) project of the United States Agency for International Development. The trainings contributed to the improvement of the teachers' competency in teaching the three core subjects, particularly the least-learned and least-taught competencies.

"If you're teaching in a public school and you get a chance to attend trainings, it would really help your career. You'll learn new things, you'll get teaching materials and equipment that you could use to make lessons easier, EQuALLS gave that to our teachers," she said.

For Abdurahim and the teachers, however, the trainings meant so much more than what it intended to provide. It gave them many firsts, an experience that they've never had in their long years of teaching.

NEVER TOO LATE TO CHANGE

Abdurahim is grateful that in her stint as SDS she has witnessed the working

conditions of teachers in her division improve. She herself has been deprived of many things and her own success is a testament of the many difficult experiences she has had in her life. These developed her character and skills as an educator.

Her stature today is actually a mean feat for Abdurahim who chose to get married at 16 and have children than go to college. For 10 years, she wore just one salawal (a two-legged outer garment reaching from the waist to the ankles) that she used for farming and can't recall wearing shoes for 10 years.

She topped the entrance exams on several courses when then President Ferdinand Marcos gave college entrance exams as incentives to families of rebel returnees. This made her realize that she was still smart even after 10 years in the farm.

Her husband was totally against her schooling and threatened to sue her if she insisted. But she decided to go back anyway and made do with whatever resources she had. That included wearing just one pair of blouse and skirt in school for two years.

Because life was hard, she decided to work abroad as a tutor but ended up as a domestic helper in Saudi, earning \$200 a month. Her experience was so bad that she ran away from her employer's house and met Filipinos who were kind enough to help her fly back to the Philippines.

But Abdurahim's struggles never made her lose hope.

When she returned, she pursued her studies again for two years. When she graduated, she was able to teach for the first time at Tipo-Tipo National High School in Basilan in 1988 and later transferred to Maluso High School in 1991. It took her 10 years to finish her postgraduate studies because she had to attend to her daughters' needs going to college. Because of her perseverance, excellence in her profession, Abdurahim was finally appointed as a Schools Division Superintendent in 2011.

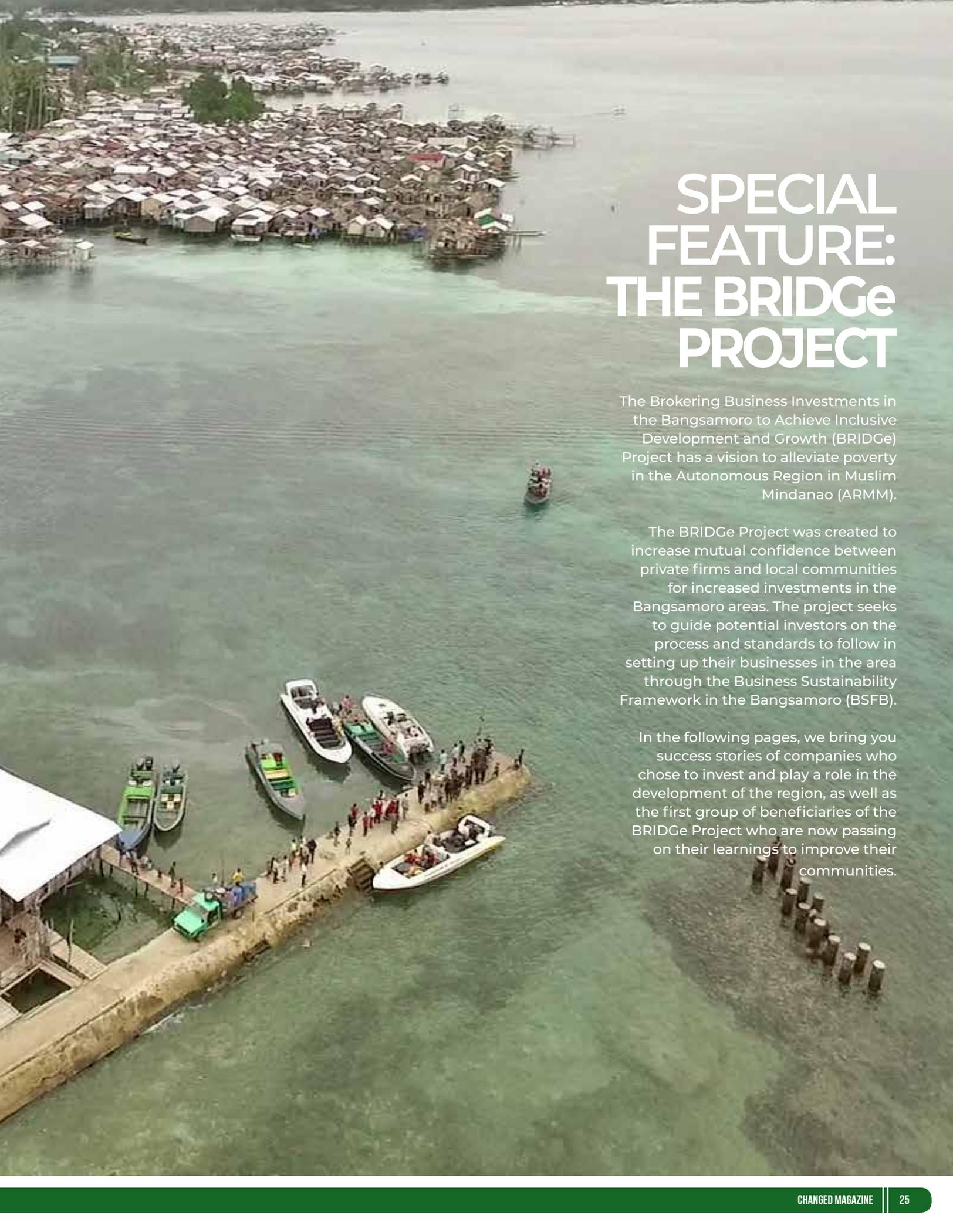
Since then, she has strived to improve the lives of students and teachers who mostly had the same plight as hers.

She believes that nothing is truly impossible when one works hard and maintains a positive perspective in life.

"I always tell parents that even if you get married and have kids, you shouldn't stop chasing your dreams and lose hope. We are here, the teachers and the DepEd, we are willing to help you. You have to realize, that your life will stop moving forward if you allow it. But if you work harder, you can change your life. It is not the end of everything, there's still hope," Abdurahim said.

BASILAN SCHOOLS Superintendent Dr. Nurhaya Abdurahim seeks to improve the learning conditions of her schools with the help of partners and donors.





SPECIAL FEATURE: THE BRIDGE PROJECT

The Brokering Business Investments in the Bangsamoro to Achieve Inclusive Development and Growth (BRIDGE) Project has a vision to alleviate poverty in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

The BRIDGE Project was created to increase mutual confidence between private firms and local communities for increased investments in the Bangsamoro areas. The project seeks to guide potential investors on the process and standards to follow in setting up their businesses in the area through the Business Sustainability Framework in the Bangsamoro (BSFB).

In the following pages, we bring you success stories of companies who chose to invest and play a role in the development of the region, as well as the first group of beneficiaries of the BRIDGE Project who are now passing on their learnings to improve their communities.

The BRIDGe Project

ENABLING INVESTMENTS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR A MORE **INCLUSIVE BANGSAMORO**

The Brokering Business Investments in the Bangsamoro to Achieve Inclusive Development and Growth (BRIDGe) Project aims to boost mutual confidence among private companies and local communities for increased investments in the region.

Implemented by the Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP), Hineleban Foundation Inc., and the Regional Board of Investments – ARMM and funded by the Australian Embassy, the BRIDGe Project is aligned with the efforts of the national government, led by President Rodrigo R. Duterte, and the local leaders to support the passage of the Bangsamoro Organic Law and its eventual approval by plebiscite which will give considerable autonomy and resources for the accelerated development and stability of the region.

A Program Advisory Committee composed of senior executives and officials representing various sectors, and assisted by a highly competent Technical Working Group, provides invaluable insights and directions to the BRIDGe team.

Consequently, the BRIDGe Project has developed the Business Sustainability Framework in the Bangsamoro (BSFB) which lays down recommendations to potential investors on how to do business in the region, showcasing the experience of pioneering investors which have thrived not only by themselves but in partnership with the communities where they operate. Underlying this business model is the concept of Inclusive Business which integrates and enables low-income communities to become part of the value chain of a company's core business either as employees, suppliers, distributors, retailers, and customers who are then able to access goods and services at affordable prices.

From this framework, the BRIDGe Project expects more investors, either new locators or businesses expanding their operations, to reach out to more communities and engage them in the long-term and often arduous goals of development in a peaceful and egalitarian environment that the BRIDGe partners and supporters envision in the Bangsamoro.

Developed:

The Business Sustainability Framework in the Bangsamoro (BSFB)



3

communities with investment plans

1. Amai Manabilang, Lanao del Sur
2. Maluso, Basilan
3. Talayan, Maguindanao

The BSFB benchmarking tool



4

organizations/communities trained on enterprise development and resource management

1. Bualan sa Fukol Producers Cooperative
2. Magungaya Lanting Producers Cooperative
3. Tamar-Marader Makauyag Producers Cooperative
4. Barangay Punud in Amai Manabilang

The CLICK Technical Assistance Package
 Consult government
 Leaders engagement
 Inclusive business development
 Community acceptance
 Feedback



5

companies documented on community engagement model

1. Matling Industrial and Commercial Corporation
2. Lamsan Incorporated
3. Mount Kalatungan Agri-Ventures, Incorporated (MKAV II)
4. Agumil Philippines, Incorporated
5. Al Sahar Agri-Ventures Incorporated (ASAVI)



MATLING INDUSTRIAL AND COMMERCIAL CORPORATION (MICC)

Malabang, Lanao del Norte

Matling Industrial and Commercial Corporation (MICC) was established in 1928 by American educators, Ralph Edmund and Iva Pearl Spencer in Brgy. Matalin, Malabang in Lanao del Sur. The company started as a coconut plantation that provided source of livelihood and income to the residents with copra as its original production. In 1960's Matling shifted to cassava production and processing.

Matling helped the beneficiaries of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) and some employees to form the Matling Multi-Purpose Cooperative (MMPC) in 1992. The company employs about 800 employees from Brgy. Matalin where the cassava plantation and processing plant are located. They gave out farmlands to employees and the cooperative so they can plant cassava and abaca. Then they buy their produce after harvest, enabling the people to earn additional income aside from their regular salaries. The company also has a scholarship program from kinder to high school and feeds 500 to 600 children through its Spencer Foundation School, Inc. and Ralph Edmund Spencer Foundation, Inc. (RESPI).









AGUMIL PHILIPPINES, INC. Buluan, Maguindanao

Established in 2010, Agumil Philippines, Inc. is a company in Buluan, Maguindanao that is engaged in palm oil processing. Its milling plant processes 30 metric tons of palm oil per hour and its operation reaches 22 hours during peak season. In 2013, the mill was improved to enable it to process 45MT/hour. Its wastes from the mill are turned into biomass and used as electricity for Buluan households and neighboring municipalities where company employees live.



Before establishing the mill, Agumil held consultative meetings with the barangay and local government officials and put in place feedback mechanisms to ensure cooperation and harmonious co-existence between the company and the community. The company also established the out-growership program in year 2000 which introduced technologies and processes in planting and production of oil palms to local farmers who along with fisherfolk, were trained to become oil palm growers and producers. The company buys all the produce of the growers.



AL-SAHAR AGRI-VENTURES, INC. (ASAVI)

Talayan, Maguindanao

Al-Sahar Agri-Ventures, Inc. (ASAVI) opened in 2015 as a cavendish banana plantation with an expected total land area of 2,600 hectares spread in the municipalities of Talayan Buldon, Barira, and Mangudadatu. Its plantation office is located in Brgy. Tamar while the packing house is at Brgy. Marader.

The establishment of ASAVI in Talayan paved the way for the piloting of the Community-Company Joint Venture (CCJV) model of the BRIDGE Project. They organized communities in four barangays into cooperatives that started practicing the key elements in the Business Sustainability Framework in the Bangsamoro (BSFB).

Al Sahar employs 835 employees from Talayan, with 18 percent of women assigned in the packing house. The company respects religious affiliations and pays for the employees' government-mandated benefits such as SSS, Pag-IBIG and PhilHealth. A company nurse attends to health conditions of their employees at work. They hold Values Leadership Training programs and orientations for employees on Islam customs and traditions. On employee protection at work, the company provides personal protective equipment (PPEs) especially to employees handling chemicals. Al Sahar also ensures conservation and protection of natural resources through enforcement of its garbage segregation policy.







LAMSAN, INCORPORATED

Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao

Lamsan Inc. is a corn wet-milling company in the Philippines established in 1971. Its products include cornstarch, corn gluten feed, corn gluten meal and corn germ processed in their own manufacturing facility in Barangay Crossing Simuay, Sultan Kudarat in Maguindanao.

Lamsan respects religious affiliations and religious duties of employees. Roughly 80 percent of the 400 employees come from Sultan Kudarat. The company sends their employees to review schools to help them become full-pledged licensed engineers. Employees are given all the government-mandated benefits and their health insurance is extended to their families. The company also offers scholarship to employees and their qualified children through the Study Assistance Program.







KALTIMEX RURAL ENERGY CORPORATION

Bongao, Tawi-Tawi

KALTIMEX Rural Energy Corporation (KREC) is an Indonesian power firm providing electricity to off-grid Indonesian islands and operating in five other countries including the Philippines. It has set up an 8MW capacity diesel power plant in Bongao, Tawi-Tawi worth PhP811 million. The plant employs 34 workers.

KALTIMEX saw the need of Bongao for electricity and consulted local government leaders prior to the establishment of the power plant. It started operations in 2015 and is now providing 24/7 power supply throughout Bongao through the Tawi-Tawi Electric Cooperative, Inc. (TAWELCO).

KREC secured environmental compliance and permits from the Department of Energy and ensures proper disposal of waste fuels and by-products from the power plant. They hired experts from abroad to train their employees in the operations of the plant. The company provides a staff house for employees who work in the night shifts and live in far places. Food is Halal in their mess halls and the company provides uniforms and PPEs such as helmets, shoes and reflectorized vests.







Bai Shejana Kanapia grew up in evacuation centers as her community suffered from constant armed conflicts in Maguindanao. She was just 10 years old when the all-out war between the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) escalated in the late 1990s.

“Our place was like a battlefield. The war was on and off. When I was still young, I used to fall in line to get relief goods from a non-government organization. We were their beneficiaries,” said Kanapia, the chairperson of Bualan sa Fukol Producers Cooperative and Barangay Fukol in Talayan, Maguindanao.

After college, Kanapia did not expect that she would work as a field staff in the same organization that helped her in the past.

“I could not forget that time when the military bombed our village because they were suspecting the enemies to be hiding there. All our houses were burned. The Tedurays evacuated and went down to nearby towns in Upi and Talayan, Maguindanao,” she recalled.

BAI SHEJANA KANAPIA finds fulfillment in empowering the community through livelihood trainings and the BRIDGE project.

COVER STORY:

LEADING THE WAY

A community leader transforms a battlefield into a farming community

TRANSITIONING TO A BETTER STATE

The disaster isolated Brgy. Fukol which became unproductive for a long time. Only grasses were left on the mountains. The residents were scared of strangers.

But everything changed when her mother became the barangay captain.

"Different organizations were welcome to enter the community. There was reconciliation. The conflict between Tedurays and Maguindanaons eventually disappeared. We now have a Barangay Councilor who is a Teduray. We also have a Maguindanaon Council. Each tribe has a representation. We now live harmoniously. The Maguindanaons are supporting the Tedurays in farming. The Tedurays, on the other hand, are giving back to Maguindanaons every harvest season," Kanapia revealed.

Kanapia was one of the beneficiaries of the Brokering Business Investments in the Bangsamoro to Achieve Inclusive Development and Growth (BRIDGE) Project. The project is funded by the Australian Embassy and is managed by the Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP), in partnership with Hineleban Foundation, Incorporated (HFI) and the Regional Board of Investments (RBOI) in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

"We received a lot of livelihood trainings. We were able to visit a Manobo farm in Bukidnon and a catfish farm in Sarangani. The demo farms were ideal to our mountainous place. We were motivated to develop our own community that includes the Teduray tribe. When we returned home, we applied the technology of backyard gardening through our Gulayan sa Barangay project. Every *sitio* in the barangay established a common vegetable garden," she shared.

Through the assistance from the BRIDGE project, Bualan sa Fukol Producers Cooperative was established in 2017 and Kanapia became its first chairperson. In May 2018, she was elected Barangay Captain of Fukol.

BIG PLANS

Under her leadership, the community are now empowered and confident in voicing out their needs and concerns.

"The same thing happened to me. I became more eager to help the community. Before, I did not care. Through the trainings and our visits at the demo farms, I was inspired to duplicate it. I wanted it too for the people of Brgy. Fukol, I wanted to change our lives. Even though we live on the mountains, we still wanted to

have income-generating activities like planting of crops," Kanapia said.

She also made sure that their cooperative's own vision and mission would reflect these aspirations of the people. At present, it has already 50 members.

"I also want the cooperative to be part of the community and for them to also benefit from it," added Kanapia who plans to develop it further and enable it to accept grants from donor agencies.

Kanapia is also hoping to make their place an eco-tourism hub in the future with a mini-resort that can cater to tourists.

"We can sell various products made by our women's organizations including handicrafts and farm produce from our vegetable gardens. I am also planning to make a canteen in the cooperative where the tourists can dine for only PhP100. The entrance fee of PhP100 can go directly to the community as their income," she said.

With big dreams, empowered people and a determined leader, the promise of a better future for the people of Brgy. Fukol will surely come to reality.

FROM NOBODY TO SOMEBODY

An unemployed graduate is able to develop himself
and his community through the assistance of the BRIDGE project

Haron Midtimbang Kadatuan was unemployed for a long time ever since he graduated college. There was not enough employment opportunities for him in his own hometown in Talayan, Maguindanao.

"I could not get a decent job even I finished Community Development and Public Administration at Mindanao State University (MSU) in Maguindanao. Being a college graduate was not an assurance. Like others, I was idle at home. Sometimes, I would help my father in the coconut farm so my younger siblings could continue school," said Kadatuan who is now 40 years old and is eldest among seven siblings.

Kadatuan's parents made sure that he and his siblings could finish college through farming. His mother is a housekeeper while his father has a coconut farm. His parents really took care of them and guided them not to get involved in any kind of vice.

Being a college graduate and a good person was not enough. He wanted to make a difference. Kadatuan's hometown remained undeveloped in spite of its rich natural resources. He felt that he had to do something that could help develop his community.

TRAINED TO LEAD AND SUCCEED

His opportunity came when he was chosen to be one of the beneficiaries of BRIDGE or Brokering Business

Investments in the Bangsamoro to Achieve Inclusive Development and Growth. The project is a grant from the Australian Embassy and is implemented by Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP) in partnership with Hineleban Foundation, Incorporated (HFI). The project aims to increase mutual confidence between private firms and local communities for increased investments in the Bangsamoro areas.

"The first things we received from the project with the help of HFI were calliandra and giant bamboo seedlings. We used it to make our farm safer and more disaster-resilient. The last things we received were catfish fingerlings. We released and grew it in two fishponds as additional source of income. We also received a lot of trainings. One of the highlights in the trainings was how to make organic fertilizers. This is important to me because I am also a farmer. Aside from making organic fertilizers, we were also trained on how to handle a cooperative. At this point, we were able to form the Magungaya Lanting Producers Cooperative," he shared.

Kadatuan became the first chairman of the cooperative in Barangay Lanting in Talayan, Maguindanao. Later, he ran and won as Barangay Captain in the elections last May.

UNLOCKING POTENTIALS

Because of the trainings, about 60 percent farmers in Barangay Lanting

are now using organic fertilizers during planting season.

"We are not buying fertilizers anymore. A sack of fertilizer could cost at least PhP2,000. We are able to save money now. I also passed on lessons from the trainings such as not burning fallen leaves from trees and plants because we could convert and use it to make organic fertilizers. I also told them not to use chemical fertilizers because it could cause landslides. The chemicals could make the soil soft and take away its nutrients," shared Kadatuan.

The men of Brgy. Lanting are now also helping the women do backyard vegetable gardening.

"Before, only women do backyard gardening. Because of the training, men motivated to help. We realized that vegetables could add income aside from corn as our main product. We were surprised that the market value of vegetables were high such as bittergourd, eggplant and string beans," he said.

Aside from the cooperative's communal vegetable garden, almost every household had vegetable gardens in the backyard. The income from the communal vegetable garden could reach PhP8,000 per harvest every four to five months. The income would be then be returned to the cooperative.

More than the increased income, Kadatuan saw how the cooperative

transformed the community. The people became closer, and family members helped each other more. The community became more literate about finances. They were able to sell catfish to the market for PhP10,000. The income was not spent. Rather, it was deposited to their bank account.

With this, the members of the cooperative would not doubt where the money went. No single person could withdraw the money because the cooperative had required signatories.

As for Kadatuan, he feels that his life has more purpose and meaning now that he has become a well-respected leader in his community. He even holds two positions, as chairman of both Magungaya Lanting Producers Cooperative and his barangay.

“Because of the trainings, I met a lot of people like in PBSP and Hineleban. I became closer to the people. Unlike before, I was only thinking about myself. When PBSP and Hineleban entered the community, I became focused on its projects like the cooperative’s catfish farming and vegetable gardening. I was a nobody before but when I became the chairman of the cooperative, the people saw my potentials. They also elected me as their Barangay Captain. This was my first time to serve the public,” he said.

Kadatuan and his community’s potentials were discovered and developed because of the many things they learned from the trainings under BRIDGE project. He hopes this valuable skills and knowledge would help him achieve his dream of a more progressive place for his people.

THANKS TO THE TRAINING he received from the BRIDGE project, Haron Midtimbang Kadatuan was able to teach financial literacy and organic farming to the members of his community.



Datu Ronnie Udzung had a bad experience with the cooperative he managed for five years. He could no longer pay the loan that was used to provide farm inputs to farmers. Because it lacked the capital to further operate, he had no choice but to close it.

“We secured a loan from the bank but we were unable to pay it. We did not apply for another one because we were afraid we could not pay anymore. Our production loan failed. We provided farm inputs to corn farmers but their crops died due to drought. When our area failed, it was not in my mind anymore that our registration was already expired. When I went to Cooperative Development Authority (CDA), they told me that I needed to pay some amount. Since I had no money left, I had no choice but to close the cooperative,” recalled the 59-year-old Udzung.

Back then, his hometown in Talayan, Maguindanao was hit by El Niño several times.

“Our main produce was corn. It was a delicate crop. During the rainy season, the corn would sometimes drown. During summer, it would also die. The ideal climate should be raining at night and sunny during daytime. Climate change really had a consequence to us, especially to farmers,” revealed Udzung.

DATU RONNIE Udzung may have failed to maintain the cooperative he started before but he is starting over with a new cooperative established with the help of the BRIDGE project.

SECOND CHANCES

A community leader gets another chance to improve his life and community through the establishment of a new cooperative

NEW HOPE

He later found new hope when visitors from Hineleban Foundation visited and helped them set up cooperatives in each barangay through trainings.

"I was recommended to head the new cooperative because I already got experiences on how to handle projects," said Udzong who became the first Chairperson of Tamar-Marader Makauyag Producers Cooperative in Talayan, Maguindanao.

The Tamar-Makauyag Producers Cooperative was established in 2017 under the assistance of the BRIDGE Project or Brokering Business Investments in the Bangsamoro to Achieve Inclusive Development and Growth. Funded by the Australian Embassy, the project is being implemented by Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP) in partnership with Hineleban Foundation, Incorporated (HFI). The project aims to increase mutual confidence between business firms and local communities for increased business investments in the Bangsamoro areas.

"The project helped us in organizing the people. We came up with our own by-laws, articles of incorporation and list of members. We were also able to secure a certification from CDA. After that, we availed a lot of trainings. We toured a lot of demo farms in Bukidnon, Davao del Sur and North Cotabato," said Udzong

who felt motivated to be back in the cooperative business.

HANDS-ON LEADER

Udzong was able to impart his knowledge to his members on cooperativism. He really exerted effort to teach them.

"We had meetings every month. We discussed things on how we could get capital and hopefully start a project. For example, we plan to submit a proposal to the Department of Agriculture (DA) for a corn sheller machine. If we could avail one, we would go to all corn farmers and offer them to process their produce on-the-spot. We could also propose to avail a tractor from DA. If rented by farmers, we could earn PhP2,000 per hectare. If we could plow five hectares in a day, we could generate PhP10,000. That should be enough for the cooperative to survive. The income would be divided among members but some amount should be allocated for the cooperative," he explained.

This time, the cooperative brought a lot of positive changes to the people. They were empowered through trainings on values formation and backyard vegetable gardening conducted through the BRIDGE project.

"Some of the people were able to apply the skills they learned from the demo farms. They already knew how to plant properly. They now know

that they needed to cultivate the soil before they would put cabbage seeds. They already preferred to use organic fertilizers since chemicals could cause health hazards," he shared.

SERVING THE COMMUNITY

Udzong became closer to the people in the community through the cooperative. He also became familiar with the services of the different government agencies like the DA.

"I was handling a small community, like a little barangay captain who served the people. Since I knew so many things about the cooperative, I was able to provide useful information. Many residents already knew me because of my responsibility in the cooperative," he said.

Udzong wanted the cooperative to play an important role in the community. When farmers are trapped in debt, it could provide services like soft loan. He wanted them to realize that the cooperative could help them if they would be willing to be part of it.

For Udzong, the cooperative is now giving him second chances to improve his life and continue helping people in his community.

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MINDANAO REGIONAL CENTER (MRC)

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