
SITE VISIT: The Family Education and Community Development Program of Community of Learners Foundation (COLF)

By Feny de los Angeles Bautista, 1998.

The COLF Family Education and Community Development Program in Capas, Tarlac (Bo. Kalangitan) and Botolan, Zambales (Bo. Loob-Bunga and Bo. Mambog) was initiated in 1992 when Deutsche Welthungerhilfe (DWH), a German Development Agency committed to rural development, sought potential partners to implement a children's program. Amidst the massive rehabilitation and relief efforts to assist the displaced families when Mount Pinatubo erupted, the program officers of DWH felt that extra attention should be given to the children in addition to the relief efforts they were supporting through a large Philippine NGO, Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement (PRRM). The head of PRRM at that time contacted the COLF Executive Director and they explored the possibilities. COLF submitted a project proposal to DWH.

At the outset, the program was designed to provide a support system for the Aeta children and their parents through an integrated community-based program with a special focus on the early childhood years and with interventions for health, nutrition and education. COLF's approach to supporting children and families involved working directly with children and with parents who are the primary caregivers and teachers of their children. Thus, the project focused on the provision of basic services - health, nutrition and education - for both the children and the parents. Within the context of the parent education programs and the expansion of the program in the second phase to involve children aged 7 to 15, the community development efforts were also expanded. This was done by including other issues in the educational program for parents combined with initiating small-scale projects (sanitation, cooperation in running the children's programs, agri-based and off-farm livelihood projects) and eventually organizing cooperatives among the participating families. The framework for these complementary approaches to providing for the needs of the youngest members of the Aeta communities has been a holistic and integrated approach to supporting the development of children and their primary caregivers: their parents and siblings.

About the Aetas of Pinatubo

The Pinatubo Aetas are one of the most closely-knit and peaceful ethnic groups in the country. Their quiet lives around the slopes of Mount Pinatubo were painfully disrupted when Pinatubo erupted in 1991 and forced them to flee their devastated mountain paradise. They were resettled

in various government resettlement areas in the provinces of Zambales, Tarlac, Pampanga and Nueva Ecija, the 5,000 or so Aeta families struggled and managed to keep their clans and kin together. In the resettlement areas, they were able to retain their clan and barangay groupings. Groups of families refused to be separated from one another. For them, being together was literally a matter of life or death. This is both a source of strength for them as well as a challenge in terms of exploring options for their families' survival within the context of life in a resettlement area. Families work together in the fields and participate in a few government sponsored food-for-work projects together. Young female family members refuse to leave their families to work as domestic helpers in lowland communities despite the demand for these services and their financial needs mainly because it is unthinkable to live apart from their own families. In a way, this protects them also from the possibility of abuse and exploitation. But it also has implications for the kinds of livelihood and income generating possibilities that young women and even the younger males can pursue. This is why the project seeks to develop community-based and locally-based income-generating activities.

Aeta men are polygamous and this is very much a way of life for them. Both wives and their children live together and share all responsibilities. Domestic problems as a result of the polygamous relationship are very rare. Normally, the second (usually also the younger wife) takes the primary role of "mother and household manager" with control of the purse and attending sitio meetings and other community affairs on behalf of the family. The whole family shares the work. This has always been recognized within the program and there were never any efforts to attempt to change this aspect of their lives. Rather, it is accepted and respected as a matter of fact. The families are supported as families regardless of their composition or membership.

The elders in the clan continue to be the recognized leaders of the families. They do not hold an elective or appointive positions from any political groups, but simply the deep trust, respect and confidence of their clan members. Sitio meetings are often held - both formal and informal - as the need arises. The formal sitio leader and the family elders preside over these meetings. At this point, while the "oldest and the wisest" are the perceived leaders, it is interesting to note the gradual emergence of the younger, now educated males who serve as the "right hand man/consultant" of the older clan leaders.

This is a positive development because even if the elders are receptive to the project and are very much a part of the program, it is to be expected that the child-rearing practices and the organization of the cooperatives and livelihood projects will be directly applied by the younger generation. Since they will be the future leaders of the clans, this is really a timely opportunity to work with them and invest in efforts to develop their capacity not only in terms of leadership but also in terms of their practices as parents and caregivers of the Aeta families. They also serve as "bridges" to the government and non-government organizations in the resettlement sites, facilitating communication between their traditional leaders and these "lowlanders and their interventions."

Aeta women traditionally participate in these decision-making processes within the family and the clan in a limited way. Their roles are passive compared to the men. They are seldom consulted especially in problem-solving situations. They are not even expected to be present during the sitio meetings. If they are there, they are usually expected to listen and provide their full support for

the decisions made by the men. However, in terms of running the household and taking care of the children, working in the fields and taking care of the animals and vegetable gardens, they are active and fulltime workers. Thus the activities of the parent education programs and the livelihood projects with the active involvement - even leadership of the women - have been gradual opportunities to provide the women with opportunities to express themselves, to assume a more visible and active role in decision-making starting with household issues and moving into activities that affect the groups of families in the sitio. Understandably it will be a long process that will require careful negotiation between the women and the men. But the program activities have certainly invested in this very important process of actively involving women and helping them to occupy a more respected place in their communities.

The Resettlement Sites: Bo. Kalangitan, Bo. Mambog and Bo. Loob-Bunga

Kalangitan Resettlement Area, Capas, Tarlac: One of the six provinces comprising Region 3 (Central Luzon), Tarlac is approximately 110 km from Manila via the Phil. North Luzon Expressway. The town of Capas is the second town in the province (from Manila). The first town (coming from Manila) of Bamban was totally devastated and 80% of its 12 barangays was buried in the lava flow of 1994. Kalangitan resettlement Area, located in the town of Capas, has been declared as an official resettlement site for Aeta families displaced by the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo in June 1991. While populated by mostly Aeta families, the area has also several lowlander families, most of whom were settlers in the area before the 1991 eruption of Mt. Pinatubo.

At present, families from 10 barangays (villages) have resettled in the area. The official political structure is the Tribal Council, composed of a tribal mayor, vice-mayor, secretary, treasurer, and 6 council members. Each sitio has its own council of elders (the sitio leaders) who are members of the Tribal Council as sitio representatives during assemblies and meetings. The household clusters retained the names of their original barangays, although they are now called "sitios" comprising the barangay of Kalangitan. The 10 sitios are as follows:

Kalangitan has a total land area of 75 hectares for home lots and 2,000 hectares allocated for agro-forestry. Of this 2,000 hectares, about 600 hectares have been declared by the government as available for distribution as farm lots to the resettled families. But seven years after the eruption, official transfer to the Aeta farmers is yet to be accomplished by the government. Some Aeta families use part of the 600 hectares as sitio farm lots, but majority of the Aetas prefer to walk and travel back and forth from the resettlement area to their original villages (approximately 15 kilometers from the resettlement area) to tend their fields and plant rice, bananas and root crops which form the bulk of the food sources of the families.

Each home lot measures 1,000 square meters. Certificates of stewardship were awarded to the resettlers in December 1992. The National Housing Authority provided most of the evacuees with housing kits which were used to construct the original houses. Other agencies provided housing materials, which together with materials gathered by the families themselves, were used to build the houses. These houses need repairs and renovations every year so that they will withstand the rains and typhoons particularly during the months of August to October.

The government has constructed a road network leading to and within the resettlement site. Several buildings comprise the “government center”: a multi-purpose government center, a health center, school buildings, a day care center, a cooperative store, a gymnasium and a non-operational 10,000 gallon elevated water tank.

Water systems established from 1992 include eleven artesian wells from government funds; seven units donated by the Japan International Cooperative Authority (JICA) and one donated by UNICEF (upon COLF’s request for the Project). Only two are presently working and this is definitely not enough to meet the needs of the entire resettlement area. There is no farm irrigation system provided by the government for the farm lots. Two farmers’ cooperative groups (Sitios Flora and Manabayukan) have purchased and installed their own irrigation facilities in their communal fields in their original villages in order to ensure an all-year-round planting cycle.

Climactic conditions: Both the provinces of Tarlac and Zambales where the 2 DWH-supported project sites are located fall under the Type III climate which is characterized by long dry season of from three to six months with little pronounced rain period. The temperature in both areas are generally fair. The warmest months are March, April and May. The coolest months are December, January, February.

Socio-cultural local factors and demographic structures for Kalangitan (as of December 1997; Source: NGO Clusters’ survey, September 1997)

Number of families: 473

Total Population: 1,985

Ethnic distribution: Aetas - 68%

Lowlanders - 32%

Sex Distribution: Male- 51%

Female - 49%

Age Distribution: 0-14 years old - 932 (47%)

15 and above - 1,053 (53%)

Educational Attainment: Elementary level - 48%

College level - 1%

Vocational - 4%

Unschooling - 47%

No. of residential lots: 500 home lot

No. of sitios: 10

Livelihood Programs/projects: Backyard vegetable gardening

Communal Rice and crops farming

Cogon gathering (seasonal

Banana gathering

Social Infrastructure: Government health center; one day care Center (30 children); multi-purpose hall

Gym, chapels, 5 public school buildings (elementary- high school)

Loob-Bunga Resettlement Area, Botolan, Zambales

Loob-Bunga is in the town of Botolan which is approximately 280 km (or five hours by land travel) from Manila.

Resettlement Site Profile/Socio-cultural local factors:

Number of families: 1,565 families (7,027 individuals)

Population mix: Pure Aetas - 30%

Mixed - 40%

Lowlanders - 30%

Number of barangays: 11

Electrification: No provision for site electrification

Civil Works and water systems: Concrete access roads and drainage

Bailey bridge

Functional water system but badly in need of repairs; natural water stream from the mountain provide alternative clean water source

Social Infrastructure: Government health center, tribal market,

Productivity center, four public elementary and two high school buildings, 10 day care centers

At the time that the program was initiated the Aeta children and families really lacked access to basic services especially health, nutrition and education (specifically early childhood education and adult education), community organization and livelihood support. In terms of shelter, there were also inadequacies because of the lack of provisions as well as the damage suffered during the heavy typhoons each year. In the past years, the participating families have been able to benefit from the programs and there are definite improvements in the health and nutritional status, school survival and learning achievement of the children who have participated in the early childhood development and middle years program. Prior to this the drop-out rate was alarming and the older children especially could not cope with the demands of formal schooling. The program has enabled them to maximize the available public education programs. Without it they would have continued the intergenerational cycle of being illiterate and unschooled and unable to explore various options for employment

However, there are inherent weaknesses in the quality of the available public programs for children. For example, health services are especially erratic and medical supplies are either lacking or totally unavailable for the rural health unit while the costs of medicines for tertiary care at the provincial level are beyond the reach of the families. In terms of education from the early childhood years to the primary years, quality and cultural sensitivity are the main weaknesses. The formal approaches and the relatively rigid approach to implementing the curriculum combined with the erratic attendance of the teachers (particularly in Bo. Kalangitan) are detrimental to the learning achievement of the children. While they are now better prepared for formal school as they participate in COLF's early childhood development programs, there is still a need to support the given the inadequacies of the formal school system. Another important need of the children to enable them to benefit from schooling is the support or participation of the parents. Since many Aeta parents were unable to go to school, the role of the Family Education program has been to help them with their own literacy education as well as to understand how they can support their

children's own education. The program goal is to provide an investment in the long-term sustainability of the program interventions. Simply attending to the basic food and shelter needs and their livelihood is not enough if Aeta children and their parents will be unable to gain and maximize access to educational opportunities, whether formal and informal. The parents also had to learn about the basic health needs and child care practices that would ensure their children's health. Even if there were public health services in the early years of the program, it was observed that the parents did not seek access to these services. Now the situation has changed - the appreciate the importance of the services e.g. check-ups, growth monitoring, immunization but the services are no longer provided on a regular basis.

An important feature of the program is the emphasis on parent education aimed at improving the quality of care that parents can provide their children. A case in point is the prevalence of malnutrition among these Aeta children in the communities served by the project. While there have been significant improvements, COLF remains committed to breaking and hopefully reversing the vicious cycle of malnutrition, illness and worsening malnutrition among the children especially those below age 6 who are most vulnerable to irreversible developmental disabilities. It is not enough to address the immediate causes i.e. inadequacy of food and illness by providing interventions or assistance to directly respond to these. In the long term, the underlying causes of malnutrition, poor health and delayed development causing learning problems must be the focus. This continues to be the basis for the children's program's approach to malnutrition. Among these underlying causes of malnutrition are: 1) household food security (thus the need to strengthen the agri-based program and off-farm income generating projects, the Basic Food Cooperative); 2) health services, access to safe water and sanitation (thus, the facilitation of representation with provincial governments and sources of support for installation or improvement of water sources); 3) Caring practices (feeding practices from breastfeeding to introduction of complementary foods, rehabilitation of the malnourished children, food preparation), the protection of children's health (immunization, maternal health care, well-baby and well-child check-ups, growth monitoring); 4) providing emotional support and cognitive stimulation to children (parent education, parent-child-development workshops and activities through the home-based and center-based programs); 5) caring for and supporting mothers (parent education, interaction with mother and fathers to promote support for / sharing of family care responsibilities, promote child spacing and family planning)

The Family education program has also invested in the teaching of skills directly related to livelihood or income generation opportunities. In terms of the capacity of the adults - especially parents - to provide for the basic needs of their families, there have been some improvement mainly due to the investments in adult education - for child care and family support, for literacy and livelihood. This investment has been especially important for the women - not just because they are the primary caregivers but also because they have been able to demonstrate their competence in terms of income-generating activities and their leadership in community activities. At the same time, many of the men have learned more about their responsibilities as caregivers and the importance of cooperating with their spouses/partners in caring for their families.

An important aspect of the development of children and families is the presence of community support systems and a shared responsibility for the welfare of the youngest members of the community. The nature of the cooperatives that are being organized within the program are no

just socio-economic in their orientation. They are intended to reinforce the community's responsibility to the children as they are at the most critical stage of human development. In the case of the Aetas, the vulnerability of this indigenous group is most evident in the fragile situation of their children and the continuing lack of basic social services.

The Aetas value family ties and the clan is the natural grouping on which the program's organization has been based. But sometimes, there is a need to transcend family relationships to successfully achieve goals for the well-being of the community. The opportunity to learn ways of working together, particularly problem-solving, conflict resolution and planning joint activities must therefore be systematically presented within any community-based program. There is still a continuing need to invest in the strengthening of the cooperatives where they have been organized and to organize them where they are not yet organized. The commitment of the cooperatives to sustaining the children's programs is critical.

Activities of government agencies and other organizations

From the time the Aeta families were resettled in Kalangitan and Loob-Bunga and in their other resettlement areas within the region (since November 1991), site management has been shifted between two government agencies. From 1991 through early 1993, a Task Force managed and implemented social and livelihood activities in the resettlement sites. This Task Force was headed by the Technology and Livelihood Resource Center (TLRC). Other government agencies in the Task Force are: the Department of Agriculture (DA), the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), the Department of Education, Culture and Sports (DECS), the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), the Department of Health (DOH), the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), the municipal mayor, and a representative from the Provincial Governor's Office. In 1993, the Philippine Congress, through legislative action, created a special body called the Mount Pinatubo Commission (MPC) to manage the resettlement sites and coordinate the implementation of all programs (including infrastructure) related to these resettlement sites. The MPC has a total operating budget of 22PhP billion for rehabilitation and livelihood projects for all families in the 65 resettlement sites and all engineering and civil works for these sites.

The MPC courses its supervisory functions through the respective governors of the provinces involved. The MPC and PGO appointed a Site Manager for each resettlement area to directly act as overall link between the sites and the MPC-Provincial government. Municipal level officers of the DSWD, DOH, DAR and DA (government agencies tasked to deliver basic services) supervise their respective workers. The DECS public school teachers are directly under the district office as the DECS is a centralized government agency.

Each site has its own Inter-agency Committee composed of the representatives of the above-mentioned government agencies and all the NGOs and people's organizations, religious and civic groups, tribal leaders. The committees in the two project sites meet once a month to discuss issues and problems for the respective areas.

Services in Kalangitan:

DECS operates the public elementary and high schools in the area. There are 4 teachers residing in the town proper of Capas who commute daily, while 2 teachers are residents of Kalangitan. From 1993 to mid-1996, the MPC paid for the salaries of the 6 teachers assigned in Kalangitan. Since 1996 the local DECS office fully subsidizes the teachers' salaries. The major problem has been the lack of teachers who can be assigned to the area. Priority sites for the local DECS are the public schools in the lowland barangays in Capas; and Kalangitan, being an upland community is last in its list of priority areas. Public teachers assigned in the area complain of the difficult travel from Capas to the site, which is about 8.5 kilometers of rough dirt road. Some teachers leave their assignment after a few months and request for transfer to other more accessible barangay schools.

DSWD maintains an on-and-off day care program in the area. Two day care workers (residents of Kalangitan) are responsible for this program. The irregular operations of the program is largely due to the lack of funds from the local government unit to pay for the honorarium of the day care workers, thus discouraging them from regularly operating the centers. There are also insufficient provisions for the supplemental feeding program.

The municipal DOH in Capas assumed responsibility for the provision of basic health services in Kalangitan since 1996. The local Rural Health Unit sends a medical team composed of a doctor, a nurse and a midwife to Kalangitan twice a week to provide medical services. But this schedule is rarely implemented. The residents cannot tell anymore when the doctor is coming and so have turned to COLF for their health needs and continued to use their traditional herbal cures. Whenever the medical team does come, the main problem is the lack of or the unavailability of medicines. Often the local doctor would approach COLF and ask for medicines, supplies and assistance for vehicle support to transport a patient needing immediate medical attention.

There are no livelihood-oriented government agencies currently operating in the area. The families continue to till and cultivate their communal fields and majority of the Aetas travel regularly foot back and forth their original villages to gather root crops. Aside from COLF, only one other NGO remains in Kalangitan. The Holy Spirit Mission (composed of religious sisters) provide catechism classes for the Catholic families and small-scale rice production for 50 families.

Services in Loob-Bunga:

The DECS services in Loob-Bunga are fully operational. There are two big elementary school buildings, the Upper and Lower Loob-Bunga Elementary schools offer the complete elementary school program (Grades 1 to 6). 16 teachers work in the school. There are also two high schools offering the first to fourth year secondary school program with 6 teachers employed. Most of the teachers reside in Loob-Bunga, some live in the nearby barangays also in Botolan. Loob-Bunga is

very accessible to the town proper of Botolan, only about 2 km. away, and is serviced by regular passenger jeeps and the local tricycles (motorcycles with side passenger seats).

The DSWD operates 10 day care centers servicing the 3-6 year olds. Twelve day care workers handle the programs in close consultation with COLF, particularly in terms of the workers' use of the ECD Resource Center located in the COLF "center" which was set-up in 1996 with DWH support. The municipal mayor is more supportive of the day care program now and even increased the day care workers' allowances in June 1997.

The local DOH has not assigned a medical team in the area since the MPC-PGO team's phase-out in 1996. Local residents use the Botolan Health Center or the nearby Taugtug Resettlement Health Center.

The project is recognized by the Mount Pinatubo Commission, the Regional Office of the Department of Social Welfare and Development and the two provincial governments as a highly effective and significant contribution to the lives of the Aeta children and families served by the project. In terms of its integrated and comprehensive design, the project's approach is very similar to the flagship program for poverty alleviation that has been initiated in 1994 by the Ramos Administration in 23 priority provinces. This is the Comprehensive and Integrated Delivery of Social Services (CIDSS). However, the COLF program is more successful in terms of the quality of the educational programs for the children and parents, the level and degree of their participation.

The two project sites serve also as Resource Centers for day care workers in the provinces where they are located, Day care workers are the main service providers in the public early childhood development programs. This is a very important contribution to their training. COLF's staff assist them by providing them with support and technical assistance as needed.

The Participating Families

A total of 1,087 Aeta families for two project sites comprise the primary target group for Phase 2-4 of the project.

The breakdown is as follows:

	Tarlac	Zambales
Children aged 0-3	200	385
Children aged 4-6	50	70
Children aged 7-17	169	280
Parent	185	389
Families	461	626

Total number of families: 1,087

Total number of children 0-3: 585

Total number of children aged 4-6: 120

Total number of children aged 7-17): 449

The target families live in 12 different sitios in Kalangitan (Kawayan, Bagingan, Gayaman, Manabayukan, Malasa, Maruglo, Binyayan, San Martin, Flora, Kalangitan, Golden City, Mabilog)

In Loob-Bunga, they live in 9 different sitios (Mambog, Palis, Dangla, Kasoy, Mayamban, Kayanga, Burgos, Belbel, Bareto).

The primary target groups are Aeta children and parents (mostly women for the parent education programs, both men and women for the parent education/livelihood programs). Most parent participants have not completed elementary education. Most of the parents are evidently underweight.

Children aged 0-3 are participating in the home-based playgroups. Children 4-6 are in the center-based playgroups in Kalangitan and in the home-based playgroups and center-based program in Loob-Bunga and Mambog. Among the children in Kalangitan, 50 children in the center-based and home-based programs are still malnourished (50% first-degree, 25% are second-degree, and 25% are third-degree). Among the children in Loob-Bunga, 20% of the children in both programs are still second-degree malnourished. The others (80%) are still slightly underweight despite the significant improvements in their nutritional status compared to the initial years of the project. The fluctuations in their nutritional status - which accounts for the fact that there are still malnourished children among the participating families - is because of the instability of food supplies beyond the center-based and home-based feeding program.

Children aged 7-17 participate in the home-based program for two primary purposes: to help them cope with formal school and to educate them as active community members and child care givers for younger siblings and as parents in the future.

The feeding program is implemented primarily for the children aged 6 and below. However, malnourished children aged 7 to 10 have also been provided with feeding rations in selected cases. About 75 children in the middle years age group are first-degree malnourished.

Community volunteers comprise a sub-target group - they are the parents and young people who have been recruited as parent/teacher-trainees and who will be critical for the continuation of the children's program. Their ages range from 17 to 36.

The target groups were selected on the basis of urgency of needs and their lack of access to the existing public programs. Since this is Phase 4, additional criteria were applied for their participation in livelihood projects which are part of the parent education programs and this was their sustained participation in the children's and parent's education program and ability to commit to the agreements reached among the members of the parents' groups.

How the Aetas help themselves

At the early stage of the project (Phase One and Two), for Kalangitan, the original intent was to coordinate with the PRRM who would initiate agri-based livelihood/income generating projects. At the time that their project in Kalangitan was terminated, there was only one small cooperative that was composed of women who were engaged in mushroom farming that was operational. At that same time, the smaller Basic Food Cooperative organized by COLF was operational. PRRM entrusted the continuity of the mushroom farm to COLF. There were initial problems with this since the structure for the mushroom farm was dismantled. However, the project was successfully

re-started as the participating women were active members of the COLF PEP program and the COLF livelihood coordinator and staff assisted them in rebuilding the structure and providing for start-up needs. With DWH support also for staff development, further training on mushroom growing was undertaken by COLF staff and the parents to address the problems encountered by the women.

Another program, which the families relied on for income, was the “Food for Work” program of the government agencies led by the Department of Social Welfare and Development during the early years of the project. This was not done on a regular basis and the income earned during those intermittent programs went directly to purchasing rice and other basic needs. The Department of Trade and Industry promoted a credit scheme for livelihood project shortly after PRRM ended its project in Kalangitan, however, the interest rates were too high and COLF project families were discouraged from participating because it would not have been viable for them. It was also the opinion of COLF staff that they were not ready to assume the responsibilities tied to those credit schemes.

In Mambog, Botolan, Zambales, the Sta. Monica Social Action Center worked in 11 pilot areas with a credit program linked to rice to production. COLF worked with them for the children’s program only. They also provided support (e.g. living quarters) for COLF staff in the first year of the project.

By Phase 3, the “experimental” cooperatives engaged in vegetable gardening, animal-raising and rice farming were set-up albeit on a very modest scale of production. These comprise the self-help efforts of the participating families. One Basic Food Coop exists for each of the two project sites. But only half of the sitios are participating because there was a need to ensure that the families were ready to fulfill their obligations. It is envisioned that the membership can now be expanded to more families.

From the beginning until the present, many of the Aeta families continue to help themselves to augment the income from the small-scale livelihood projects initiated under the project by going to their old homes to pick fruits and root crops. They sell these in the resettlement sites or the town market (Botolan, Capas).

There are a few participating families who have family members (older children) who are employed in the province or in Manila and who earn income for the family. But they are mostly employed in low-paying jobs e.g. as domestic/household helpers, contractual bus drivers or farm help. Thus, their contribution is not enough to sustain the whole family.

Agriculture and related off-farm projects (food production, crafts) continues to be the most promising option for the target group. Thus this has been pursued in the last two phases of the project.

The participation of Aeta families in the Educational Programs

In terms of children’s participation in the three program components (center-based, home-based, middle years’ program), the level of enthusiasm continues to be high and their attendance has

been regular and sustained. This is due primarily to two factors: the children's own interest and the parents' support for their continuing participation.

The adults (all except two are women) who participate as trainees and as volunteers for the children's program are continuing to show positive signs of increasing competence. They continue to attend the sessions in both center and home-based programs and carry out their responsibilities (i.e. assisting in the facilitation of learning experiences, working with the children in small groups, attending to the requirements of the feeding program. At this point the COLF staff still assume the primary responsibility for planning the curriculum and daily activities for the children. However, in Phase 4, the training of the parent-volunteer/trainees will also include preparing them to take on more of the responsibilities for planning the day to day activities.

The other program component requiring the participation of more parents also on a more intensive basis is the parent education program. In terms of decision-making about the agenda and the topics for the parent education programs, they have been actively involved in this since the start of Phase 3. They raise questions, issues and suggest topics that they want to learn about and the COLF parent education curriculum is developed accordingly. In this regard, the women have been the most active participants also in making decisions.

In terms of the livelihood projects, their participation has been significantly more positive and they have taken the responsibility the parent education groups are organized according to existing sitios and the families who live in each sitio. Since the cooperatives and livelihood projects are also anchored on this program, they are also sitio-based and groups of families are organized as sub-groups that then comprise the cooperatives (one in each project site). Their access to credit is as a group. The men have been very involved in the rice farming and banana planting projects - including the planning, training and actual implementation. The women have taken the lead in the other projects (vegetable gardening, food production, crafts). However, the encouraging thing is that they have shared responsibilities for all livelihood projects and have divided the labor in a way that is most effective from their point of view. The women have taken more of the responsibilities for the tasks that allow them to remain closer to home and with the children. But this does not mean that the men have not been supporting them in child care responsibilities. At this stage, there is an evident change in the men's participation in child care.

Project Preparation and planning

DWH was involved in supporting relief efforts through PRRM immediately following the eruption of Mount Pinatubo in 1991. It was initially DWH who thought of the idea that it would be helpful to initiate a children's project in areas affected by the eruption. Since PRRM was their partner for several other projects, it was PRRM who recommended COLF and at that stage COLF went to visit the sites. In consultation with PRRM, these two sites were selected, visits and consultations were held with the prospective target groups and a project proposal for one year was submitted to DWH. At the end of this first phase (one year), DWH commissioned an evaluation of the project by Ms. Ursula Pattberg. Recommendations made by the project evaluator were taken into consideration in the preparation of the project proposal. Proposals for a second and then a third phase were subsequently approved and implemented. Ms. Barbara Chambers, the former program officer for Children's Programs of the former Asia desk visited the project site twice during the

previous years and two information officers and journalists also visited the project. During the third phase, DWH provided additional support in the form of a consultancy/training grant for the organization of cooperatives.

For this current phase (4), the preparation of the project has entailed more planning in cooperation with the target groups/participating families in terms of their specific needs and interests for the educational programs. Another stage of planning with a smaller group of families and the local staff who are in the early stages of organizing a cooperative has been undertaken. This planning process over the last ten months has been the basis for the preparation of the cooperative organization and livelihood component of this project proposal.

It is necessary to highlight the fact that at this point, not all of the project beneficiaries (participating families) are in a position to be members of the cooperatives which are being organized. While they participate in the children's programs and the parent education programs, their level of involvement has been more in terms of access to the basic services which they consider helpful for their needs. At a later stage, however, it is possible that they can become members of the cooperatives rather than mainly beneficiaries of the education and health programs.

There are families (100 in Kalangitan and 70 in Loob-Bunga) who have been more actively involved, who also showed more interest in community development activities and were more responsible in the implementation of livelihood projects. They are the prospective members of the two cooperatives which will be organized in each of the project sites: Basic Commodities Cooperative in Kalangitan, Tarlac and Community Caregivers Multi-purpose Cooperative in Loob-Bunga, Zambales.

Other project partner

The other project partners aside from the funding agency and the local government units officials are the service providers from the government agencies in the two resettlement sites. But as noted previously there are constraints with regard to the regularity and quality of services provided that are needed by the target group. This is why it is necessary to invest in teaching the participating families, the necessary skills to improve the quality of child care (health care, feeding practices, food security, support for the formal and informal learning of their children). This will enable them to cope with these limitations which are anticipated to continue. As long as the Aeta families also do not develop the capacity to assert their rights to have access to basic social services, they will continue to be neglected. Thus, the educational program precisely was developed to help them develop this capacity and to raise their level of expectations about the quality of services that they should seek for their children.

COLF has also taken the initiative to establish working relationships with the service providers at the local government unit levels (barangay, municipality, provincial) to facilitate the access of the Aeta families to their programs particularly for health and for primary and secondary education and for additional support services e.g. food for work or relief goods from the Department of Social Welfare and Development. In order to ensure the continuing impact of project interventions specifically in early childhood development, COLF has also extended its support for

capacity-building programs for the local government unit's day care workers and for the primary school teachers from the public schools in these two project sites.

For the coming Phase, more efforts will be made also to coordinate with the Department of Agriculture or the National Irrigation Authority through the provincial governments in order to explore the possible forms of assistance for irrigation and water supplies in the two project sites.

In addition, new working relationships will have to be established with the newly-elected political leaders at the provincial and municipal levels for both project sites. Their awareness of the needs of the Aeta communities in these two project sites will be important.

Sustaining the Program: The Future of the Program

Phase IV of the program begins in October 1998 until September 2001. At the end of Phase IV, all learning materials and feeding supplies and all farming equipment will be turned over to the cooperatives in each project site. One vehicle (purchased with DWH funds) will most likely be turned over to the Loob-Bunga cooperative with an agreement that the Kalangitan cooperative can also use the vehicle for the livelihood projects.

The cooperatives and the local staff who are going to be members of the cooperatives in the two project sites will be responsible for the care of these equipment and materials to be used for the continuation of project activities.

The sustainability of the children's programs will be ensured by the project's investment in the training of local staff (residents in these communities), parent-teachers and youth volunteers/older children. Their training is focused on the implementation of an integrated early childhood development program, the provision of after-school support for children who are in school and parent education in child care. The local staff are expected to continue to lead and coordinate the implementation of the children's programs. This commitment has been secured also as a condition for their access to a COLF credit scheme. Funds (outside of project funds) are being set aside (as part of COLF's local counterpart) which these local staff will invest in a viable, non-competing (for time and energy) income-generating project for their own families that will provide them with a source of income while they continue to implement the children's program. Thus, at least four each among the local staff are also being prepared for the day to day management of the children's program. They will not be entitled to salaries after the project ends as they will earn income from these projects and will also be cooperative members.

The majority of children and families (the non-coop members) are expected to continue to participate in the children's programs and parent education programs since they now appreciate the positive impact of these programs on their children's development and education.

The technical viability of the children's program components of this project will be ensured given the investments made in the staff's training over the past 6 years. However, it will also be clear that even after the project ends, they will be given access to continuing training by COLF to ensure that the technical quality of the programs are maintained. They will also be formally part of the cooperatives to be organized in each project site with the same responsibilities and rights as

the Aeta families as coop members. However, they will have additional responsibilities for the children's programs.

"Parent-teachers" who have been recruited as volunteers and have been involved in training for the continuing implementation of the children's program are expected to continue to assist the local staff until they reach a stage of readiness for a more active role in coordination. They will continue to receive technical support from the local staff as well as participate in the workshops and other training activities that COLF will still provide in the future (post-project). There are two options for their compensation: they will be supported through honoraria (cash or in-kind) to be paid out of the cooperatives' share in financing the children's program or they will simply receive their income as cooperative members with their contribution mainly as assistant teachers for the children's and parent education programs.

The economic sustainability of the project is dependent on the organization of the cooperatives. The cooperatives have been in the early stages of their organization, through the continuing participation in the parent education programs, livelihood projects combined with additional education on cooperative building. From this early stage, the unique feature of these cooperatives which are in the process of being organized include a specific objective related to the continuation of the early childhood development program. Income of the cooperatives are to be divided as follows: 40% goes to the cooperative revolving funds (used as the loan facility for small-scale enterprise development/micro-credit, purchase of seedlings for succeeding cycle of rice production); 20% for the group savings fund; 20% - 40% to repay loans (depending upon the income from production); 20% to the children's (ECD) program fund. The share of the children's program also includes some food supplies which the coop can provide. As the coop is expected to repay loans (for the next phase this will include costs of additional 7 hectares of land for rice farming and revolving funds for the coop's other livelihood projects) the share of the children's programs from the coop's income is expected to increase as well.

On the technical viability of the cooperatives, this is partly dependent upon the Livelihood Coordinator who is a resident of Mambog, Botolan, Zambales. He has no intentions of migrating. He and his wife have been involved in the project from its early stages. He will continue to work as a "consultant/resource person" for the cooperatives. He will also avail of a special credit scheme to enable him to initiate an income-generating activity for his family in exchange for continuing work with the cooperatives. The technical and financial viability of the livelihood project thus, relies on the investments made in continuing participation of the livelihood coordinator and the training of the parents as well as the support that can be extended. The cooperatives have also been provided with information and introduced to potential technical support systems which are geographically accessible.

The socio-cultural viability of the project is heavily dependent on its nature as an educational program designed for the family - from the youngest members, the older siblings (who are children in the middle years or adolescent years), the parents and grandparents. The program's curriculum was built on their needs - assessed by the target groups themselves and also by the project proponents. The project has also strived to build on local Aeta culture, traditions and customs while introducing certain practices in child care and education that are compatible with their own beliefs. Health practices that were introduced did not require them to turn their backs

on traditional and indigenous medicines. But they were helped to understand the value of immunization and hygiene and sanitation. Educational approaches were learner-centered and thus, culturally relevant. The Aetas—for so long disenfranchised from the formal school systems—now appreciate the value of formal schooling and are being helped to seek access and strive to complete schooling.

The younger generation of Aetas among the participating families are more confident in relating to the local institutional structures especially the public schools. They have also learned - in the years preceding their own child-bearing and child-rearing years, how to take care of their children, not only in terms of physical care but also in terms of psychosocial support. This is a valuable long-term investment in the future children of the participating Aeta families. Better-educated sons and daughters today who will be mothers and fathers tomorrow. They are learning about and reaffirming the best of their own culture and the best of lowland, so-called “modern” practices that are important for child survival, development and protection. At present, their own parents are also learning about and taking concrete steps to break the vicious cycle of poverty malnutrition, homelessness and instability, lack of education by participating actively in the educational programs and the livelihood projects. This is a powerful model and learning experience for the younger generation of Aetas - for both the young boys and girls and the young women and men among these Aeta families. The project’s contribution to facilitating this kind of inter-generational learning is the most significant investment in socio-cultural viability of the project.

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