

THE FILIPINO AT HIS BEST!

Filipinos are steeped with great values. One of the most endearing of these is the “bayanihan”. “Community help” comes close as a translation but it actually is much more involved and spirited. It means an entire community uniting and rallying passionately behind someone in need or a worthy cause. The Binalot DAHON Program is exactly that - a passion, a fervent advocacy.

Binalot actually is a slice of the noble Filipino spirit. True to its mission of championing Filipino culture, it has transformed a centuries-&-generations-old gastronomic custom of serving food wrapped in a banana leaf (“binalot” literally means “wrapped”) into one of the most unique and successful stories in the Philippine fastfood restaurant industry. It is, thus, heavily dependent on the steady supply of banana leaves. As the business grew, sourcing became increasingly difficult. Binalot traced the supply chain to its source, discovered and was touched at the sight of banana plants growing abundantly in their natural mountain habitat and an entire village of poor farmer families who, just like Binalot, rely on them. It was then that Binalot decided to act on their plight. The DAHON program, thus, took root.

Now an entire community – all 28 families, 120 men, women and children – supply and deal directly with Binalot. The payback was almost instant. We now have a reliable supply of banana leaves, reasonably priced and up-to-specs. But our gratification really stems from the fact that these farmers now have a long-term sustainable livelihood and they are earning double!

Like the humble banana plant that from a single underground stem bears even more as years pass, the “harvest” in the DAHON initiative has gone beyond expectations.

OPPORTUNITY FOR EDUCATION

Manang was a mother of three children and already well into her 50's. Poor and just barely subsisting, her 19 year old eldest daughter had to work as a househelp in Manila to earn just enough to send one of her siblings to school. Upon hearing of the DAHON project, the whole family joined. Today, the two elder sisters are leaf harvesters and cutters while the youngest transports - on horseback - their merchandise to the pick-up station. The eldest now attends vocational college. The other two are in high school.

JOBS IN THE BARRIOS

Joey, like most young Filipinos, moved from his rural town to Manila to earn a living and find his luck. He ended up working as a contractual crew for a fastfood chain. After his 6-month contract expired, he couldn't land another job. Impatient, he decided to take a vacation in his hometown but planned to go back to try again. It was then that he was introduced to DAHON and never left Nagcarlan since. He now earns much more than what he got at the fastfood chain. That's one less urban congestion headache.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Nagcarlan women used to be simple homemakers depending entirely on the men for their daily survival. Today, they work as leaf cutters and have regular income augmenting their husbands' meager earnings. That's women economic power.

POWER TO THE ELDERLY

Even old Nagcarlan folks like Manang are actively involved in the community enterprise. They have greatly benefited economically with a renewed sense of self-worth and achievement. They now realize that old age is not a dead-end.

BONUS TO THE ENVIRONMENT

A “bonus” beneficiary of the DAHON project is the environment. Before, trimmings and waste materials from preparing the banana leaves piled up adding to the mounting garbage problem. Today, the community dutifully rounds up all the waste and uses them as compost nourishing the soil for even more banana plants!

COMMUNITY BEAUTIFICATION

With volunteer, unsolicited donations Binalot received in support of the DAHON advocacy, we were able to renovate and repaint the community chapel cum day-care center.