

Surpassing the challenge of the Chico River through the BFT

Monday, 10 October 2011 00:00 Written by Shirley S. Dayao

It must be an innocent thought to assume the Malin-awa BFT as cool with its means of transporting merchandise through boats. Operators of the BFT have to spend P15 fare to cross the 174.67 kilometers long Chico river to import and export food merchandise inside Malin-awa, Tabuk City. Crossing the river could be an exciting thought...but not when you're faced with its one kilometer wide diversion dam, coward it may seem I cannot dare cross it...

To transport goods and merchandise across the river, one has two choices which are both risky and life-threatening. The first option is through motor boats. This method is not secure, especially during rainy days as the strong pressure of flowing water can flip the boat over and drown its passengers. The second option is rather suicidal. The dam proponents built a concave pathway along the diversion dam which measures a meter wide. The pathway is also an open dispatch of water flowing freely reaching the knees or higher depending on the water depth. If one loses balance with a sudden rising of the waves, imagine falling down and be trapped in the sharp, pointed metal remains of the dam construction. I was left haunted with a dilemma for the people living in the other side of the river... until I met Auntie Linda, the manager of the Malin-awa BFT.

Auntie Linda, a native of barangay Malin-awa is in her early 60's. Her eyes mirrored hope and braveness that reflects their attitude during the dam resistance in 1970's. She recounted some of their experience during the horrible plight of their village as they resisted the dam construction. The thing that catches my interest was her phrase "we are still struggling with the dam's construction and its consequences until now," she said as she stole a glance at the part of the diversion dam which took the life of her husband many years passed. Their small village of 1, 749 populations was almost isolated due to the presence of the diversion dam. "The flow of the water became very strong making it risky, and impossible to cross during typhoons," she sadly added. The villagers limit their agricultural products to volume they can consume and afford to transport either by foot or by boat along the chico river. They also limit buying goods to be brought in the village.

What disturbed my mind is how they are coping to survive. Auntie Linda made it easy for me when she said, "we are so blessed we were provided with a barangay food terminal." The barangay food terminal (BFT) was pushed by the

current Aquino Administration to attain 2013 food sufficiency target. It is a barangay-based market which directly links farmers and consumers to dispose and buy safe, quality and affordable foods.

Auntie Linda said that the BFT has well satisfied its purpose in their village comprised of 265 households. Most folks buy their daily kitchen needs in the BFT since it is cheaper than the other stores. "Most villagers need not cross the Chico river to avail of cheaper commodities in Bulanao and Dagupan, Tabuk City because we offer them here in the BFT," Auntie Linda said. She explained that most households in Malin-awa gain small income because they are restricted to invest on larger production due to the problem on transportation. Auntie Linda recalled that Malin-awa was always short of fish supply when the BFT was not yet installed in their area.

The BFT likewise serve as market outlet for local farmer's legumes, coffee and fruits. The BFT purchase them and link these products to other BFTs in Tabuk City. "In fact, we do not get big profit since we buy farmer's produce at good price and dispose at lesser interest. However, we are very satisfied with the idea that we are also helping our co-villagers ease the hardship of living caused by the restrictions of the diversion dam," Auntie Linda said. The BFT is encouraging the farmers to improve and expand production. "It enhanced teamwork among the villagers to uplift the socio-economic status of our barangay," she added.

The BFT is manned by 58 women, comprising the Malin-awa Rural Improvement Club Cooperative. This organization was established in 1992 with a starting capital of PhP10, 000 which they used to construct a women's center in 1994. The center was used as a daycare classroom in the barangay until they divided it into two to accommodate the BFT on October 7, 2010.

Most of their members, despite having not reached school were very supportive to their club's goal. Driven by thirst to embrace development in their barangay, the Malin-awa RIC immediately seek the help of the City and Provincial agriculturist to help them avail of the BFT in 2008.

Auntie Linda believes that their BFT needs more improvement. The BFT is in need of more competent auditors and bookkeepers to manage its records and daily sales. "Maybe, if we undergo book-keeping and management seminar then we would improve our records better. Most of our members do not

understand the basics of bookkeeping so I wish that all of us undergo workshops for transparency purposes," she said.

Since the high cost of transportation expenses is eating their daily sales, the BFT look forward for additional cash capital so that they could increase their purchase from Bulanao and from the farmers to cut cost on transportation expenses.

At present, the BFT has its facilities like freezer, coffee grinder, weighing scales, meat grinder, refrigerator, styrophone boxes and display tables to accommodate fresh and processed food products. One store keeper is voluntarily helping Auntie Linda to manage the BFT.

Malin-awa BFT may not be as outstanding as the leading BFT's in CAR but it has affirmed its social responsibility with its role as local outlet for affordable, healthy and service-oriented establishment in a place bounded by the curse of nature that needs it most for survival. However, their efforts have already proven that they are outstanding in their own ways.

Ref.: http://car.da.gov.ph/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=79:surpassing-the-challenge-of-the-chico-river-through-the-bft&catid=43:2011-news-archive&Itemid=13

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