

## **Red Schoolhouse**

### ***The Coca-Cola Foundation Does Its Share To Help Alleviate The Severe Classroom Shortage In The Philippines.***

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All her life, Zenaida Gahaton desired nothing more than to teach.

To her, as well as to other teachers who share her commitment, nothing makes her more happy and proud than being able to witness that singular yet familiar flicker of recognition in her students' eyes - a revelation that they have finally learned their lessons and that she has once more opened new minds to the wonders of knowledge.

As a result, because of Ms. Gahaton's dedication to teaching, a profession widely considered to be the noblest, it came as no surprise that she eventually became a principal of San Miguel Elementary School in La Carlota City in Negros Oriental.

But even though she has always relished that familiar sensation of helping open young minds to the wealth offered by learning year after year, she has nonetheless nourished the wish of being able to reach out to more children, of being able to teach them continuously, especially those living in huts out in the sugarcane fields of La Carlota City.

In her experience, she related to BusinessWorld, a considerable number of her pupils attended classes for only two to three times a week. Habitual absenteeism for these students, she said, was the order of the day because they lived in areas as far as five kilometers away from the barrio proper where the schoolhouse was located.

Since the roads were not developed - they were dusty in the summer and muddy in the rainy season - students, some as young as four and five years old, had no recourse but to walk the whole way. This difficulty was compounded by the fact that some of them haven't had any breakfast due to their families' poverty. The only other way to get to school was onboard a special trip on a tricycle, something that the students can never afford.

Because of this situation, going to school for most of the kids living outside the barrio proper was a tedious and time-consuming affair. Since they had to exert extra effort just to attend class, most of them preferred to stay at home, especially during the rainy season. As a result, not only were their class attendance drastically affected, their academic performance was also put at risk.

If their basic education was compromised, these children faced bleak futures since they would be unable to gain skills needed to allow them to compete in an already-tight labor market.

**But that was before the Coca-Cola Foundation Philippines, Inc. (CCFPI) came into the picture and changed the whole situation for the students as well as for the community members.**

**Working with the Department of Education, Culture and Sports (DECS), the foundation learned that there was a dire and desperate need for a schoolhouse right smack in the middle of sugarcane fields. So after a speedy assessment, CCFPI went right ahead and built one, in partnership with the Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP), which managed the construction and took care of community training.**

It did so as part of the foundation's vision of "an economically viable, ecologically sound nation carried forward by an enlightened, caring citizenry." As such, its mission "is to contribute to national development through programs that will provide the Filipino youth the opportunity to become self-reliant, creative, and productive citizens with initiative and the drive to excel."

**The schoolhouse construction is a part of CCFPI's Little Red Schoolhouse Project (LRSP), the foundation's response to the country's severe classroom shortage. With \$1.85 million funded by Coca-Cola Foundation Philippines and equally supported by the Coca-Cola Company Philippines Division and Coca-Cola Bottlers Philippines, Inc. and with an additional \$500,000 grant from the United States' Coca-Cola foundation, the LRSP intends to build and equip 50 three-classroom school buildings within a five-year period from 1998-2002.**

**Currently, some 13 schoolhouses have been erected all throughout the country since 1998 and seven more will be constructed.**

**Five new Little Red Schoolhouses will be officially turned over to the Philippine government today.** These schoolhouses are located at Siargao, Surigao del Norte; Buguey, Cagayan; Ponot and Sindangan North, Zamboanga del Norte; and in Butuan City.

**Among those attending the ceremonial turnover rites in the DECS headquarters in Pasig City will be Education Secretary Bro. Andrew**

**Gonzales, Undersecretary Andres Manhit, CCFPI president Cecille Alcantara, CCFPI chairman Jesus Celdran, and Carl Ware, the executive vice-president of the Global Public Affairs and Administration of the Coca-Cola Company.**

**Mr. Ware, who joined the company in 1974, arrived in the middle of this week as part of his Asian tour, which intends to introduce a shift in Coca-Cola's new global strategies, from "thinking globally and acting locally" to "thinking locally and acting locally."**

**"The importance of being a partner in the local community is as true in Nairobi as it is in New York," Mr. Ware said, "Our goal is to ensure that our business never loses sight of that fact wherever we operate, and to link ourselves more closely with the consumers and stakeholders we serve."**

**His assertion just about underscores the declaration of Douglas Daft, the new chairman and chief executive of the Coca-Cola Company.** In a recent speech, Mr. Daft explained that their new strategy does not just mean selling their product and marketing their brand. "Looking out there and looking outward means looking out and listening to thirsty people around the world. But not as amorphous masses or market segments. Not as units of per-capita consumption, but as people -- people who live in communities and make up societies."

Thus, for all Coca-Cola companies, selling a product and marketing their brand is not the end in itself; a fact that they have recognized long before. **According to Mr. Daft, "a growing number of stakeholders play an increasingly important role in creating our success and our ability to share that success with the communities in which we operate."**

**Such a viewpoint serves to sustain Coca-Cola's overall global corporate philanthropy which, in one way or the other, has physically manifested in the school buildings they have helped to build all throughout the country.**

But for the CCFPI, erecting a classroom is just the beginning. The LRSP also supports the Philippine Multi-Grade Education Program, which is endorsed by the United Nations International Children's Educational Fund (UNICEF) by providing permanent school buildings and essential classroom equipment to public and under-served areas in the country.

The multi-grade system of teaching involves two or three grade levels being taught simultaneously in the same classroom and by the same teacher.

Moreover, since CCFPI, like the UNICEF, believes that this multi-grade system is the most efficient method of providing elementary education to as many children as possible, it has also sponsored and organized workshops on multi-grade teaching among public schoolteachers.

Just recently, Little Red Schoolhouse teachers from various regions of the country completed a five-day workshop on such a subject at the DECS Ecotech Center in Cebu City. Facilitated by workshop professionals from the Bureau of Elementary Education of the DECS, the workshop, the third of its kind sponsored by the CCFPI, was attended by 90 teachers from [around the country].

Among the topics discussed in the workshop included comprehensive sessions on "Planning for a Multi-grade Lesson," "The Multi-grade Teacher and Attitudinal Change," "Didactic Materials Preparation," and "Empowerment and the Multi-grade Teacher, School Head and Supervisor," etc.

"In recent years we have chosen to focus our resources on education, and this has been perhaps most visible in our schoolhouse construction projects," CCFPI's Ms. Alcantara explained. "What is less obvious, but of equal importance to us, is our insistence on providing opportunities for public schoolteachers to upgrade and enhance their own teaching skills."

Ms. Alcantara said that training teachers about the multi-grade system of education was just about the only way to reach the greatest number of pupils with the foundation's limited resources.

"Teachers have a 'multiplier effect' with their influence on students," she said.

Meanwhile, for the participants such as Edna Alona Dulaylungsod, a school principal of a Little Red Schoolhouse in Mauswagon, Misamis Occidental, the workshop was the best gesture for public schoolteachers like her who were directed to switch to the multi-grade system but had no such experience in the vastly different teaching method.

"When we were instructed to adopt the multi-grade system in our schools, we had no experience at all in the method," she said. "These workshops have been a great help."

Such has also been the reaction of Ms. Gahaton, herself a participant of previous workshops. When San Miguel Elementary School Extension in La Carlota City was erected in 1998, it was a dream come true not only to the students who lived within the area but especially to Ms. Gahaton, who considered the construction of the structure as a welcome surprise.

Now, as principal of both schools, she divides her time between the original schoolhouse in the barrio proper and the one in the sugarcane fields, which now has four other teachers.

But the schoolhouse's construction is only the beginning of what would seem a string of good news for the students, their families, and their teachers. Not only

have 21 graduated this summer from the San Miguel extension school, the latest academic assessment results reveal that those studying in the Little Red Schoolhouse in La Carlota City were performing much better than their counterparts in the barrio proper.

Of the 22 schools in the division, Ms. Gahaton reported that the San Miguel Elementary School Extension ranked 10th in Mathematics while their counterpart in the barrio proper ranked 16th. Moreover, in the district level, the extension school's first graders ranked first while their counterpart ranked eighth.

"Compared with the results of San Miguel Elementary School," Ms. Gahaton said, "the extension school's results were higher." This, she said, was made possible by the students' punctuality and the desire to learn in combination with their multi-grade system workshops.

"They come to school as early as possible and they recognize the fact that they are competing academically with their fellow students in the barrio proper," she said.

Although she said that they still lack supplies such as books, notebooks, pencils, and even a typewriter in the school -- whenever she writes a report, Ms. Gahaton does so by hand - the principal nonetheless feels grateful to Coke for quenching the children's thirst for knowledge.

**"It's really a blessing to have a schoolhouse in this place** because students will not have to walk that far anymore to attend classes."

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