

Sta. Maria's Caravan of Services, a Convergence Initiative in Central Luzon

"Sa pag-unlad ng bayan, 'di dapat naiiwan ang mamamayan." (The growth of the town should be its people's, as well). This is more than a sentence but rather a principle to Vice Mayor Quirino Buenaventura, of Sta. Maria, Bulacan, a former long-term barangay captain of Pulong Buhangin, one of the first barangays covered by the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps), year 2011, under set three (3).

He, along with his running mate Mayor Russell Pleyton, and five (5) allied councilors won the 2016 election over the previous administration.

Last June 30, 2016, the Municipal Action Team (MAT) of Sta. Maria made a courtesy call to the newly elected officials. On that meeting, the new administration expressed their disappointment to 4Ps, for they believe that it was used during the election period, and so added that they are against the program.

Struggling to build a rapport, the MAT conducted an orientation on DSWD programs along with the presentation of the Social Welfare and Development Indicators (SWDI) results, during a *Sangguniang Bayan* (SB) session, last July 19, 2016. The orientation won over the full support of the new administration for they have seen the amount of investment of DSWD Field Office (FO) and the accomplishment of the MAT to address the SWDI gaps.

What caught the LGU's concern is the alarming figures of the total of 1,328 beneficiaries who do not possess occupational skills (or has work experience of less than two months), and 2,403 beneficiaries who possess occupational skills but not

recognized by appropriate authorities (or has work experience of less than 2-5 months; and the 90 households who did not avail at all the health services offered in the barangay for the past six (6) months. These then became the entry point of the invention of the LGU and MAT of Sta. Maria.

Vice Mayor Buenaventura then made it known that the local government unit (LGU) is willing to fund the programs and services that are bound to improve the socio-economic status of the 4Ps beneficiaries. Since most of the DSWD's programs are similar to the social protection programs of the LGU, they decided to streamline them for 4Ps and provide fund augmentation to address the SWDI gaps. The commitment was formalized with the release of the Executive Order (EO) No. 2016-021 or the creation of the Municipal Action Committee (MAC) and Municipal Grievance Redress Committee (MGRC), and SB Resolution No. 2016-065, which states to *"adapt the Municipal Action Plan (MAP) under Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program."*

With this endeavour, the LGU started to co-own the program and the MAT is always included in the municipal planning workshops/ sessions, annual investment planning, the compositions of the Executive Legislative Agenda (ELA), and the Comprehensive Development Plan (CDP) for 2016-2019 prioritizing the projects that will further address the SWDI gaps. The SWDI results is then always used and shared. The MAT then secured to provide all the municipal departments with proper data, for what the municipality had in hand is only data projections. Moreover, to further secure the efficiency of the delivery of 4Ps-related services in the municipality, the MAT was provided with a conducive working space to accommodate 14 Inter-Convergence Municipal Action Team (ICMAT) members and their clients. The municipality even provided them with four (4) LGU Links counterpart under cost of service funded through LGU. Aside from the salaries for the Local Links, the LGU also allotted additional P500, 000.00 financial aids for 4Ps in support of their social welfare and

development aims.

As the result of the convergence effort of the MAT and LGU, there are: 230 beneficiaries who underwent the Sugar Concentrate and Fermentation Training with additional 3 days training on Entrepreneurial Management; 40 beneficiaries who gained a *Negosyo* cart; 55 beneficiaries who acquired a *sari-sari* store, and 440 beneficiaries who underwent the social preparation for their Sustainable Livelihood Program (SLP), with the assistance of the municipal Public Employment Service Office (PESO), which was awarded last December 13, 2016 as the third best among all the PESOs in Region III; and 100 beneficiaries who have undergone a livelihood training on pudding and cheesecake making, sponsored by Polytechnic University of the Philippines (PUP) Sta. Maria. The SLP BULAC group in Sta. Maria, Bulacan was awarded as the Regional Best SLP group because of the success of their project.

A total of 175 parent leaders were oriented by the Social Security System (SSS) and introduced to its *Alkansya* program. Parent Leaders of the municipality are viewed as empowered men and women, for they were the first to conduct an Active Citizenship Forum on Institutionalization of Pantawid Pamilya, which was even attended by Congress Women Linabelle Villarica, 4th District Representative.

In addition, beneficiaries of Barangay Pulong Buhangin, Sta. Maria were taught of Financial Literacy last June 10, 2016 by Cebuana Lhuiller under its *Nego-Serye* project. Also, a total of 341 children together with their mothers were checked up and were able to receive free medicines, sponsored by Generika Drug Store. Sta. Maria was also visited by the National Program Management Office last September 1, 2016, to serve as the model for the additional gardening requirements of 4Ps conditionalities, for they had already established a bio-intensive gardening also known as the Food Always In The Home (FAITH) program, through the technical assistance and free seeds bestowed by the Municipal Agricultural Office (MAO).

Alongside with the FAITH program is the cooking demonstration during the Family Development Session (FDS) which aims to offer the 4Ps members innovative recipes of vegetables and affordable organic ingredients.

But among these convergence efforts, the most hailed upon by the target beneficiaries is the *Caravan of Services* which was celebrated last October 7, 2016; 20 employer/ private companies were invited, and 75% of the 600 beneficiaries who participated in the said event are now already employed. Also, during the event, the Generika Drug Store offered free consultation on breast problems, dental problems, minor surgery and major surgery of which all expenses are shouldered by the Local Government Unit, and the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation provided free services such as updating of Member's Data Record, Correction of Information and Registration to the program. About 4,882 4Ps families are currently served by PhilHealth. This *Caravan of Services* is now an annual project of the municipality; for 2017, it will be celebrated on April.

In addition, to cater these 4Ps families and provide them with accessible health care services, especially those who are in a far flung area and does not have a Rural Health Unit in their area, a mobile clinic was maintained by the LGU. This air-conditioned mobile clinic is equipped with necessary medicinal tool provides free health services such as X-ray, Blood Chemistry, Electrocardiogram (ECG), and Ultrasound. The mobile clinic resulted to an increase of 7% on health compliance, from 90% to 97%.

As for education-related concerns, the Department of Education (DepEd) personnel assigned in the municipality were further encouraged to combat illiteracy. The MAT also provided them with Supply Side Assessment (SSA) data. As a result of their combined effort, the compliance rate in education grew from 90% to 95%. Furthermore, a project called *Mobile Paaralan* which aims to visit every area of Sta. Maria and teach

children with basic knowledge on computer and improve their reading skills, is about to surface, within the year.

The strong ties between the LGU and the MAT resulted to sustainable and effective delivery of programs and services in Sta. Maria, Bulacan, which boils down to the slogan of the municipality, that is, *"Kaunlaran ng Sta. Maria, nasa mamayang nagkakaisa"* (*The success of Sta. Maria lies on its united people*).

Hence, the convergence initiatives of LGU and MAT then are services and programs that break the stereotype Philippine social system, for they are non-fragmented, coordinated, concise, and non-overlapping.

Up to date, according to Ms. Fortunata A. Lorenzo, the Municipal Planning Development Coordinator (MPDC), they are planning to conduct a Community-based Monitoring System (CBMS), or a house-to-house data gathering, this coming summer of 2017, and cross match it with the existing SWDI data, to identify what has been done and still needs to be done, for the betterment of the beneficiaries in Sta Maria, Bulacan. ###
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