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Tubig Para Sa Baryo

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IT ALL BEGAN WITH A CASUAL CHAT. THE TOPIC was money looking for a project. The setting was PCIB in Makati last July 11. The parties to the conversation were Rafael Buenaventura, speaking on behalf of Eagle HS '55 Foundation Inc., and Boy Morales and myself for PRRM.

The Eagle HS '55 Foundation, an organization founded by the high school classmates of President Joseph Estrada, had been itching to do something for the Erap administration but had no clear idea as to what to do and how. It had money, plenty of it for the asking. At least that's the sense I got from Raffy Buenaventura. They had some specs—a project for the poor that's tangible, with high visibility and immediate impact much in the mold of "Liberty Wells" of President Magsaysay in the 1950s.

Piece of cake for PRRM or so Boy and I thought. The micro-hydro in Ifugao instantly came to mind. So we took the offer and initiated negotiations. We set up a team in PRRM to work on the proposal and schedule of presentations to

the Board of the Foundation. Soon enough we had a deal.

So now we have this ***Tubig Para sa Baryo*** project for formal signing in today's celebration of PRRM's 46th anniversary.

There are two things we should keep in mind about this project: (1) it responds to a very basic need of the poor; and (2) it is also about cooperation for the common good.

What could be more basic than water? Ninoy survived a 40-day fast without food, but not without water. Recently an Indian yogi was reported to have lasted more than 100 days taking in nothing solid. He's still alive because of water.

Water, a vital resource that can dissolve anything, is not easily accessible to the poor. The rich of course take it for granted, for they have more than enough to regularly refill their bathtubs and swimming pools.

Today, water is either too little or too much. El Niño causes it to disappear in many places, La Niña brings it back in excessive quantities. Either way we're dead.

Tomorrow, conflicts and wars within and between communities and nations will revolve as much around oil as water.

Needless to rub in, we need to take care of water for our own sake. But beyond simply conserving it, let us make water poor-friendly. I must hasten to add women friendly, for the burden of water gathering usually falls on the back of poor women, not to mention girls, and children of poor families.

In short, this project is about water and its many uses—for drinking, irrigation, power generation. It's about doing good for the poor and our much-abused living environment.

It is also about cooperation. It's about the coming and working together around a common cause for the NGO, the government and the business sector. PRRM believes this is the way to go.

From the beginning, 46 years ago, PRRM has been striving to put an end to poverty, ignorance, disease and civic inertia. All this time, it has been PRRM's obsession to reconstruct and rebuild our degraded community and habitat. From experience, it had realized early on that no organization can do it alone.



There is no individual way out of our present predicament. The crisis in our society, of our economy and environment cannot be solved by destructive competition. We have to learn to work together or go down and perish together.

The project has three objectives: (1) increase of access by the poor to water resources; (2) promotion of sustainable use and management of water resources; and (3) improvement of the quality of life of the poor. Its expected benefits must show in terms of increased productivity and income, improved health, community participation, less burden for women and children, and environmental conservation.

It has two major components. One is development of potable water supply. The other is micro-hydro power. Both have been piloted in some areas of PRRM and need to be replicated in many others.

Using a community-based approach, the Project will feature the following: participatory resource assessment and planning; capacity building for the beneficiary communities, covering the areas of education, technical assistance, organization, management, and public advocacy and promotion.

Our *Tubig Para sa Baryo* project will test how far an NGO, a corporate foundation and the Erap government can work together. It is our anniversary offering for the poor, for the environment, and for our common future.





About the author

Isagani R. Serrano is Senior Vice President and Board Member of the Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement (PRRM). He's written for CIVICUS the following: *Civil Society in the Asia-Pacific*, 1994; *Humanity In Trouble But Hopeful* in CITIZENS, 1995; *Profile: Philippines* for CIVIC INDEX, 1997; *Coming Apart, Coming Together* in Civil Society at the Turn of the Millennium, 1999; *A Global Citizens' Commitment*, 1999. A community organizer, educator, writer, guitarist, 'farmer', and political prisoner for seven years during martial law in the Philippines. Trained in education and literature, community organization and development management. Holds a Master of Science in Environment & Development Education (MSc in EE/DE) from the South Bank University-London.



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