

Bayanihan in Caloocan: Discovering the bayani in everyone



Tanique Creek was swimming with litter. It smelled of urban decay. It was dead, but occasionally rises to life engulfing communities with flood water and debris.

This was the cycle of a dead creek haunting. It comes back to life with swollen waters and gets back at people. And the communities along Tanique Creek in Caloocan City have had enough.

For Atty. Vedasto Bassi, city director of DILG-Caloocan, there's got to be a way out of this complex issue. *Lilinis natin ang Tanique Creek, hindi dahil utos ito ng kataas-taasang Korte Suprema, kundi dahil ito ay para sa ikagaganda ng ating kapiligaran, ikabubutin ating kalusugan, at lalung-lalo na sa kaligtasan ng ating mga mahal sa buhay mula sa pinsalang dala ng baha,* the city director exhorted.

Atty. Bassi recognized immediately that resurrecting the creek meant restoring the community spirit of the barangays it traversed. The situation compelled barangay officials, residents, and various stakeholders to own the social challenge and commit to a Tanique Clean-up project.

DILG was faced with a leadership challenge: to win the hearts and minds of the community leaders and residents to revive Tanique Creek. The city director and his team brought together five barangays, the Caloocan City Government, the MMDA, the military, DPWH and DILG in a revival of community spirit. It was *bayanihan*, Caloocan style.

The community agreed to implement Project URGENT, short for Unite, Rehabilitate, Guard, and Ensure the Naturalism of Tanique Waterway. The project mobilized community resources and built local capacities to rehabilitate the creek. CD Vedasto quipped, we appealed to their sense of community and alliances have been built among the City Government of Caloocan through the Environmental Sanitation Services (ESS), Archdiocese of Kalookan, MMDA, TWG-Inter-Coastal Management Team (MBCRP), and concerned *Punong Barangays*.



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The result was an outpouring of commitments from local stakeholders covering human services, supplies, tools and equipment for the clean-up drive, shared CD Vedasto. The group moved from one barangay to another holding assemblies to communicate with community residents and enlist their support.

To ensure sustainability, Barangay Creek Team Members were organized comprising at least ten members per barangay. They acted as environmental police and were trained by MMDA Resource Persons. Soon, they will be deputized as 'creek guards or guardians' by the MMDA to oversee community discipline and commitment to keep the creek clean.

Asked what the achievements of the community are so far, PD Vedasto quickly pointed out the institutional approach, community collaboration, efficient communication to generate common understanding, and harmonious relationships among the residents and barangay officials.

All stakeholders are now cooperating under the *bayanihan* system. There was no time for fault-finding, he added, as there was much to be done.

That's the heart of unleashing the *bayani* in everyone in Caloocan.



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PHOTOGRAPHY