



A Passion for Restoring the Creek of Light

Mercy Tuico

Core Participant

DILG – Leadership Development
Program

The booming population of Metro Manila has brought with it, among other things, overflowing garbage. And too much of it, sadly.

In the Philippines' capital, plastic bags, juice foil packs, candy wrappers, and even human waste mindlessly thrown away end up in the city's canals and creeks. Tons of refuse block the city's sewage system, so much so that the slightest rain gives rise to massive flooding which then causes major traffic jams throughout the metropolis.

This was also the situation in Barangay (village) San Miguel, where Sapang Liwanag (Creek of Light) repeatedly overflowed and flooded residents' homes.

So I focused all my resolve and creativity to addressing this problem through a solution that can be implemented at the barangay level. After all, I often deal with barangay leaders and even create monikers to make it easier for village residents to remember them. Because of me, for example, Barangay Chair Olly Benito is known in the village as “Bida” (the protagonist).

I worked closely with local government officials and corporations to clean up Sapang Liwanag. First, I first came up with a call to action: "Barangay at Industriya sa Daluyang tubig, Aksyon na (Village and corporations by the flowing water, let's act)!" or BIDA for short. That way, residents can also associate the initiative with the Barangay Chair. My mission was to get the entire village to believe that cleaning Sapang Liwanag was our shared responsibility.

But the road to cleaning the creek is laden with an incredibly tangled web of red tape and bureaucracy. People were afraid of losing face or offending others, and there were also too many opinions on how to proceed with the clean-up. Citizens wanted the local government to primarily lead the clean-up, but the latter could not proceed with neither approval nor budget from the national government. Even if we already had volunteers, it was not clear where the supplies to clean the creek would come from.

With no money but with a limitless and infectious passion for mobilising the community, I came up with supplies which led to the formation of a village clean-up crew.

I appealed to companies situated near Sapang Liwanag such as Super Globe and Grand Oro, and they were able to commit volunteers, cleaning tools, boots—basically everything needed to clean up the creek. Prior to this, some volunteers picked up the garbage with their bare

hands and waded in the creek with no protective gear. They were practically putting their lives at risk, but now, they can accomplish more with the right equipment.

I never heard any of the volunteers complain. They just came and did their job for a minimal fee of Php 250 (A\$7.30), and this was even before they had any equipment. They came in once a week to take part in the clean-up, and they continue to do so to this day. I think they do it out of concern for the people in the village, for their own families who are also living near the creek. These people are our silent heroes.

Today, there is even a vegetable garden beside Sapang Liwanag. Now that the creek has been restored, it can finally live up to its name and inspire the people of Barangay San Miguel.