

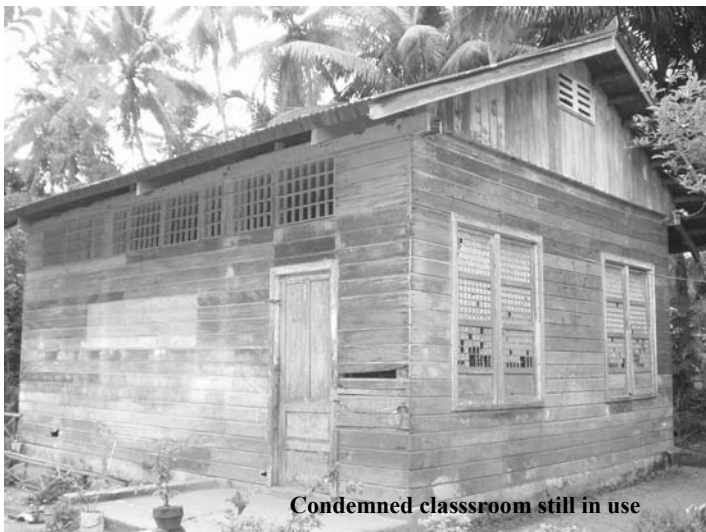


Balud School Project: Contributing to UN Millenium Development Goals

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(Young British Student Leads the Project)

Alex is a seven year old boy who walks for an hour to reach his school. When it rains he hastily plucks a huge banana leaf to cover him from the drops. He has with him his school books and materials and a decent lunch tucked under his arm. He reaches school and sits with his classmates in old creaky desks. Luckily, he does not get wet from the leaks of the roof of the seemingly condemned and rotting school building. This is the reality that school children in a rural community in Samar experience. This is a real barrio in Basey which is one of the poorest towns in this beautiful island by the Pacific.



Condemned classroom still in use

Balud Elementary School is a small school which provides elementary education to the school children of the community. In every grade level from Grade I to VI, there are almost 20 to 30 children who mostly come from farming families of the lowest income group in the Philippines. Balud is the name of the community. They just recently got connected to roads five years ago. They used to take motorized boats to bring their meager produce to the nearest town. Electricity came into the community almost in the same period. Yet electric power do not come regularly.



Teaching and learning

This is the scenario that prompted the launching of the Balud School Project—a holistic approach to rural community development. The project is geared towards contributing to the achievement of the UN Millenium Development Goals. It focuses on understanding the needs of a specific community and acting upon them in partnership with various stakeholders at the local and international levels.

In this community, the school is the focal point of convergence. It is situated in the center where parents bring their children when they go to school. It becomes the center of socialization where community leaders and school teachers meet together with the locales during school or community activities and major events like all government-sanctioned elections, fiestas and parents-teachers meetings. This is one other reason that the centerpiece project is the development of the elementary school.

The Balud School Project touches on all the eight UN development goals. The improvement of the school in both infrastructure and management will address the need to achieve universal primary education. A new school building will be built together with a library, sports and playground and multi-functional facilities. A nutrition programme for the children will add to the eradication of hunger. Micro-enterprise activities specially with the involvement of women will address extreme poverty and promote gender

equality and empower women. The health component of the project will help improve maternal health and combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. The pristine and untouched environment of Balud and its surrounding areas will be guarded by continuing an EU-funded environmental sustainability project.

All of these will be realized through a sincere global partnership with donors and friends from abroad who are true advocates of development. Foreign volunteers will be encouraged to be partners in the project. It is no surprise that a young and brilliant high school student from the United Kingdom took on the challenge of leading the school project. Steven Chambers who hails from Hull took on the task of providing a good example of how young people like him can help make a difference in this world. He was designated as the Youth Development Ambassador of the project who acts as the voice of this endeavor. He will be the spokesperson who will talk on behalf of the school children and the community in the international level bringing the wisdom to the world that poverty can be eradicated if we all believe in it contribute in our own little ways.

Steve as he is fondly called enjoys challenges. For any given formidable task he says that "I always throw everything I have got at it, even if I do not conquer it, I feel satisfied that I have developed as a result of the experience". He looks forward to a career in Mathematics which speaks of the young genius. As a young person, he has a grasp of how to develop himself as a person. He is involved in many activities like speaking competitions and student government where he sits as Student Representative on the College Corporation and Executive. "I am currently setting up a work-group of bright students that I will mentor. I am comfortable in a leadership role and these activities helped me hone my skills by teaching myself the need for diplomacy and respect for the views of others", Steve quips.

In autumn of last year he won a sponsorship from Imperial College to present a research paper that he wrote for the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair (ISEF) in Phoenix, Arizona USA in May 2005. After arguing the case for a Raymond-Smith thermodynamic system in the galaxy NGC 6240, he compared, observed and projected energy levels and spectral data, citing the existence of interacting super massive black holes. He discussed his ideas with Prof. Jocelyn Bell which inspired him to write his next paper on neutrino technologies. Mathematics motivates him to explain how can the most 'fundamentally' natural elements be described by wonderfully innovative numerical systems.

His interest in international development and reaching out to others has been shown by his work experience with Kevin McNamara MP at the House of Commons in the summer of 2003. He was a Scout for many years; enjoying traversing rock faces and canoeing.

With Steve's leadership and vision and with the help of an international board of advisers, the Balud Project will be fully realized. By November

2005, the project website will be launched and the project will be presented to the Philippine Ambassador to the United Kingdom late this year. The project has tapped a partnership programme between young people in UK and the USA. One of the major challenges is raising of funds which will come in various ways. Sustainability, transparency and project ownership are major issues considered. It is foreseen that the project will eventually empower the locales who will charter their own development in the long run. Accountability specially to donors is embodied in the program of action. To instill project ownership among the community members, participatory approach is emphasized.



Proj. Ambassador Steven Chambers

Just like the name of the community "Balud" which is a Waray-Waray term for 'wave', the project may come smooth sailing given good wind conditions. Given a good leader and a supportive environment, the project is deemed towards the upliftment of the people and to contribute to the betterment of the world we live in.