

Awareness Raising on Child Rights Issues by Children and Youth

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The Philippines is the 31st country to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in July 1990.

However, one of the major challenges in realizing and protecting the rights of the child is the lack of awareness among children themselves and duty bearers such as parents, teachers and government. This contributes to the violation and non-fulfillment of children's rights among which results to:

- Low birth registration among the Indigenous People (IPs), Muslim and Children in Need of Special Protection (CNSPs) due to the following: far distance to the registration center especially among the Indigenous Peoples, lack of resources for information dissemination, registration logistics, manpower support and other needs, high cost for late registration, lack of awareness on the importance and procedures of birth registration and the recent administrative orders for registering Muslims and Indigenous Peoples.
- Increasing cases of child rights violations such as: child trafficking, physical and sexual abuse. It was reported from the research conducted by the Child Protection Unit-Philippine General Hospital, that there were around 10, 045 cases of children physically and sexually abused and neglected
- Poor participation of children and youth in community affairs & decision making in many provinces
- Poor access and delivery of social services such as education and health.

Due to this alarming situation, Children and youth in the Philippines, since the mid 1990s, began the active involvement in raising awareness on child rights issues using various strategies and techniques such as:

- *Formation of community based children & youth association.*

This started by informal meeting/consultation among the children; visiting and orienting other children on our basic rights & responsibilities; defining our vision and mission which primarily to build Child Friendly Communities where our rights are respected and protected.

- *Formation of federations or coalitions* with other children's organizations to widen our scope in awareness raising and advocacy, for example:

- National Coalition of Children's Associations in the Philippines (NaCCAP)- a coalition of children's associations representing the three islands of the country; Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao. The purpose is to raise children's agenda and issues at the national level like the National Anti-Poverty Commission through the Children Basic Sector
- National Anti-Poverty Commission Children Basic Sector (NAPC-CBS)- a council made up of children which is a part of the policy-making body under the Office of the President. The council represents the concerns and issues of children and monitor the implementation of programs for children.

These are some pictures of our former Sectoral representative presenting children's agenda with the government.

- *Community Based Theater*

Children and youth who had the interest were trained on theater production , where we learn basic and advance script writing, production and performance. Through play and drama, they portrayed messages on child right issues. This strategy is very popular as it is not only a medium for awareness raising, but at the same time, children gained confidence and discover the talents. Parents feel proud and improve relationship with their children.

- *Children's Radio Program*

Children and youth are also engaged in radio program, for example: "Bidang Bulilit" from San Jose, Occidental Mindoro- interested children/youth were trained on preparing radio program where they produce their own script related to children's rights and issues faced by children. The airing is done regularly through a local radio network. It is a forum where children also invite and interview resource persons, adults and children, related to children's issues. Their views are asked on the issues, solutions and how they contribute in addressing such issues. The Radio program is intended to raise awareness of the public on child rights issues, as radio in the Philippines is widely used to reach a large number of people especially in remote places.

- *Family Day*

This is popularly implemented by children in Plan covered areas where children and family members together with community volunteers and leaders gather on a regular basis to share development activities and problems in the communities. Children leaders trained on facilitation lead structured games and mini-orientations on rights of the child and birth registration. Mascots, posters, flyers, bookmarks prepared by children are used as information education campaign materials.

- *Children's Congresses*

These events are conducted at the village, municipal, provincial and national levels especially in celebration of the October Children's Month. Children and youth are trained as facilitators, resource persons and documentors. During the event, several activities take place such as: issue identification, preparations and presentations of resolutions or declarations to key decision makers like the head of agencies in the gov't., NGOs and private sectors. Examples of issues: need for quality education and health services, need for free birth registration fees and need for the representation of children in the government development councils.

During congresses, press con with media and head of offices is one of the forum for children and youth to present the issues and solicit support. As a result, children's potentials and representation in government council were recognized like in the barangay (village)/municipal/provincial and regional council for the protection of children. Children themselves are able to speak up the issues in behalf of other children.

- *Summer Camps*

These are conducted during long school vacation, where children are available to join the event. Children and youth are trained to facilitate games and orientations on rights and responsibilities of children. In this occasion, we also invite resource person both youth and adult, on topics like rights of the child: like right to a name and a nationality, prevention of HIV AIDS, child labor, child abuse, and environment protection. From here, children learn new information that we share at home, in school and also practice the new learnings.

- *Street rally and March*

Children and youth marched around strategic public areas with posters, mascots, streamers, printed t-shirts with messages intended to bring public awareness on child rights and protection against abuse and exploitation such as domestic child workers in hazardous working conditions.

This attracts attention of both the public and the media where they become curious and joins voluntarily as a sign of support to the issue being advocated.

- *Universal Birth Registration Jingle*

Through the assistance of a musician, children and youth produced the melody and the core message of the jingle which is to register all children using the national language.

As sample of the song goes this way:

REFRAIN:

IPAREHISTRO, IPAREHISTRO

(Let's register them, let's register them)

ANG LAHAT NG ISINILANG IREHISTRO

(Let us record all the children who are born)

IPAREHISTRO, IPAREHISTRO

(Let's register them, let's register them)

ANG HINDI PA NAREHISTRO IREHISTRO

(Let's give birth certificate to every children) (Repeat refrain)

This is popularly aired over radio stations nationwide during events for children like February Birth Registration month and October Children's month as well as played during local events like town fiestas or festivals .

Overall, these awareness raising strategies have significant result and impact to the following:

For Children & youth

- Increased awareness- children and youth are now able to articulate their rights and responsibilities at home, school and community; increased number of children and youth reporting cases of child abuses and awareness of children's programs in the community and involvement in actual birth registration campaign with positive support from parents
- Developed the potentials as resource persons and facilitators in child-led activities
- Gained acceptance and recognition in the membership in local and national councils by representing the issues and agenda as well as in development planning sessions for children

- Developed confidence, skills and proper values among youth and children, for example: radio broadcasting and public speaking
- Participation in regional and international conferences on children and youth concerns such as: UNGASS (UN general assembly special session for children) and UN study on violence against children

For Parents and guardians

- Increased awareness and appreciation of the rights of children and the importance of birth registration as their responsibility
- Improved parenting skills and relationship with their kids because of more open communication
- More open and supportive in allowing their children to join and participate in community child-led activities

For Teachers/Administrators

- Increased awareness on ROC and their responsibility to nurture and ensure safe and child-friendly school environment through improved teaching methodologies and involvement of children in school affairs such as in Parent Teachers and Community association and Student Governments.
- Integration of ROC in school subjects particularly in Values Formation
- Supportive in allowing their student to participate in child- led activities outside the school

For Government /private sector

- Increased reported cases of child abuses as result of improved monitoring of the implementation of children's laws
- Passage and implementation of local ordinances for the protection of children's rights
- Recognition and allowing views of children/youth during regular session in government councils and increased allocation of budget for children's welfare and children's events in particular like congresses and celebration of Children's month.

- Open in making dialogues with children/youth issues and agenda and provide concrete actions
- Support participation of children/youth in decision making bodies

In conclusion,

While the children & youth had made and showed significant achievements in raising awareness on children's issues and protection of our rights, particularly ensuring timely registration of birth for all children, there are still enormous challenges to be faced ahead.

Everyday, we continue to read, hear and see the faces of children whose rights are violated.

To all delegates, on behalf of the children and youth, we urge you to support us and guide us in our journey towards building "A Child-Friendly Community and country where every child enjoys his/her right...and

NO CHILD IS LEFT UNREGISTERED!

Thank You and Good Day!