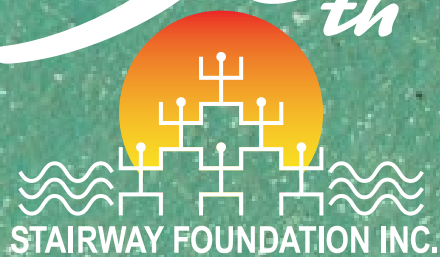


A seashell with brown and white stripes is positioned in the upper left quadrant of the cover, resting on a green, textured background that resembles sand or a coarse fabric. A piece of light-colored, irregularly shaped material is visible in the top left corner.

30th



Annual Report 2020

Message

Dear friends,

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected every aspect of our lives in 2020. Like any disaster, natural or manmade, it has exacerbated existing inequalities. It has also spelled out how we are all interconnected as one global community and stressed the fragility of human existence. How much we will learn from this crisis and how we will respond as a global community will be indicative for our collective resolve dealing with other existential threats, like climate change and the rapid decrease in the biodiversity on our planet. Threats that are likely to become more acute and detrimental to our children than the Corona virus is to us today. The major difference is that there will be no vaccine to save the day.

Scaling down the perspective to Stairway, 2020 was a challenging year. It started out with a volcanic eruption within eyesight of our main center, and it ended with three destructive typhoons. In between came Covid-19, which unfortunately is not a crisis of the past. With disaster and crisis come heightened need for child protection interventions, and as the following pages will document, we were in a good position to respond effectively at every level, locally, nationally and internationally. Our investment over the past 6 years into developing an e-learning platform for child protection enabled us to reach more partners and children in 2020 than in any previous year. Our solar power kept us running steadily throughout the frequent power cuts, and our farm in the mountains kept us well supplied with fresh vegetables. Since we were not too pressured or stressed with our own survival, we could take a step back and make the necessary changes of plans in response to the restrictions imposed by the pandemic and to the acute needs of our community. In the process, we aimed to find opportunity in the situation and to address immediate needs with interventions in support of long-term sustainable development.

The following pages are a summary of some of the challenges, learnings, and accomplishments of 2020, which marked 30 years of Stairway Foundation. We value and appreciate your partnership throughout our journey, and with your continued support, we look forward to continue to develop and take on more child protection issues in the coming years. Together we make a difference!

Sincerely,
Lars C. Jorgensen

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List of Acronyms

BCPC	Barangay Council for the Protection of Children
BE-LCP	Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan
BTS	Break the Silence
BTS NN	Break the Silence National Network
BCD	Bureau of Curriculum Development
BLD	Bureau of Learning Delivery
BLR	Bureau of Learning Resources
BMZ	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
CAMANA	Caloocan, Malabon, Navotas
CAP	Community Assistance Program
CAPIN	Child Abuse Prevention and Intervention Networks
CHEC	Children Health Educational Center
CIP	Compassion International Philippines
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CPN	Child Protection Network
CPP	Child Protection Policies
CSAP	Child Sexual Abuse Prevention
CSAEP	Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Prevention
CRN	Children's Rights Network
CRVS	Civil Registration and Vital Statistics
CWC SACSEC	Council for the Welfare of Children Sub-Committee against Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children
DepEd	Department of Education
DSWD	Department of Social Welfare and Development
EACY	Environmental Awareness for Children and Youth
FDS	Family Development Sessions
FHP	Family Home Program
GAD	Gender and Development
IACACP	Inter-Agency Council against Child Pornography
IMMAP	Internet and Mobile Marketing Association of the Philippines
IP	Indigenous People
KNH	Kindernothilfe
LCPC	Local Council for the Protection of Children
LGU	Local Government Unit
LSP	Learning Service Provider
MAB	Man and Biosphere
MCPC	Municipal Council for the Protection of Children
MELC	Most Essential Learning Competencies
MENRO	Municipal Environment and Natural Resource Office
MRF	Material Recovery Facility
MSWDO	Municipal Social Welfare and Development Office
NPMO	National Project Management Office
NEAP	National Educators Academy of the Philippines
NCR	National Capital Region

NCRTC	National Capital Region Training Center
NGO	Non Government Organization
NPTI	National Police Training Institute
OULA	Office of Undersecretary for Legal Affairs
OUPHRODFO	Office of the Undersecretary for Planning, Human Resource and Organizational Development, and Field Operations
OSAEC	Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children
4Ps	Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program
PCR	Philippine Community Relations
PLCPD	Philippine Legislators Committee on Population and Development
PPSC	Philippine Public Safety College
PNP	Philippine National Police
PRC	Professional Regulation Commission
RPMO	Regional Project Management Office
RIACAT-VAWC	Regional Inter-agency against Child Trafficking-Violence against Women and Children
RJJWC	Regional Juvenile Justice Welfare Council
RSCWC	Regional Sub-Committee Council for the Welfare of Children
RTC	Regional Training Centre
SLM	Self-Learning Modules
SEC	Security and Exchange Commission
SM-ZOTO	Samahan ng Mamamayan - Zone One Tondo Organization
TOT	Training of Trainers
WHI	World Hope International
WCPD	Women and Children Protection Desks
WCPC	Women and Children Protection Center
YDS	Youth Development Sessions

Advocacy and Capacity-Building Program

Stairway E-learning

Back in 2014, Stairway made a decision to transition our training materials and methodologies to an online platform. As it turns out, it could probably be one of the most significant strategic decisions in the 30-year history of the foundation.

After 5 years of development and extensive testing by a broad specter of users, we were ready to launch a first edition of the e-learning in 2019. It was well received, but to change habitual behavior and approaches to something as rudimentary as training and education does not happen overnight. Unless, the whole world is turned upside down by a global pandemic.

Throughout a year dictated by the threat and the devastating effects of the Corona virus, our e-learning platform became an asset of immense value for our child protection work in the Philippines and beyond. Nationally, we reached more people with our trainings in 2020 than ever before (more than half a million), and at the same time we laid the ground work for localizing and utilizing the e-learning in several other countries starting 2021. In collaboration with our long-time partner, Kindernothilfe, we are currently running pilot sessions in Sri Lanka and Kenya, and together we have worked on a Global Program, which will initially include partners in Nepal and Indonesia.

The extended use and the international promotion of the e-learning have been supported by continuous creative and technical development of the platform. In 2020, we have created several new modules, and the animation film “A Good Boy” from 2005 underwent a full restoration into 4K and compatibility to any mobile device.

As we are aware that there are still many places where delivery of the e-learning is not possible due to unstable or not yet existing internet connection, we have also concluded the creation of an off-line version of most of the training platform. While the concept of reaching every child directly through stable internet connections may still be ahead of our time, we can already reach a vast majority of educators, who work directly with children. In pursuing that goal, our collaboration with the Philippine Department of Education expanded to an entirely new level in 2020.



Partnership with Government Agencies

Department of Education

We have been working closely with the Philippine Department of Education for several years in relation to children's rights and child protection. Owing to our e-learning platform, this collaboration took on new dimensions in 2020, as the pandemic caused a moratorium on face-to-face education.

Throughout 2020, we continued to reach thousands of students in local partner schools of the BTS Network with CyberSafe sessions using the Manuals developed by SFI and the DepEd. We supported the DepEd in developing a national social media policy for schools and formulating a national policy on minimum standards of school personnel's code of conduct, which will be disseminated to all schools nationwide.

Back in 2018, we started lobbying within the DepEd for conduct of a national training program on cybersafety to cover all regions, instead of pursuing school-to-school training of teachers. The approach was training DepEd trainers to cascade the CyberSafe training in order to integrate cybersafe education in schools. DepEd agreed to the proposal, setting up a national CyberSafe training program in late 2018, which ran for the whole 2019 until early 2020, when the pandemic hit. The CyberSafe Training of Trainers (ToT) covers all regions in the Philippines, training representatives from the division level via a three day ToT. Originally, the plan was to complete the ToTs by end of June 2020, reaching 11 regions. This was supposed to translate to 220 division offices provided with trainings with a total of 742 division level trainers.



With the COVID-19 pandemic, we had to recalibrate this plan. The remaining ToTs should have been completed within the year, but the pandemic put a stop to face to face trainings. The CyberSafe division/school level ToTs were put on hold, as was the cascading of the actual CyberSafe lessons in schools.

While waiting for the situation to “normalize”, we took steps to further promote Cyber-Safety in schools via:

1. Having the CyberSafe E-learning courses integrated in the DepEd Commons, the online learning resource platform of DepEd, which was set up as a result of the pandemic. There are currently more than seven million registered users in the DepEd Commons.
2. Working together with DepEd to set up a specialized child protection training course for teachers via online learning and coming out with CSAP/CyberSafe learning resources, which are adjusted to DepEd’s multi-modal learning delivery (online, face to face with limited interaction and home based modular learning); and
3. By setting up a series of short refresher webinars with the trained DepEd CyberSafe trainers.

By the second half of 2020, there were more major developments. The DepEd Office of the Undersecretary for Legal Affairs organized an asynchronous CyberSafe ToT for four regions. The course was organized via Google Classroom, but utilizing the Stairway Child Protection e-learning courses. The trainings are scheduled to run first quarter 2021.

For institutionalization of CSAP and CyberSafety education into the education system, CyberSafe was included in the curriculum and in more regular training programs for DepEd personnel. Some of our e-learning courses were elaborated on to facilitate discussions on both offline and online abuse.

The enhanced collaboration with the DepEd led to a recommendation for Stairway to apply as a licensed Learning Service Provider (LSP) with the National Educators Academy of the Philippines – a DepEd unit handling the professional development needs of DepEd personnel. By being an accredited LSP, Stairway will be able to apply for Program Accreditation for the E-learning courses, which enables DepEd personnel attending the trainings to gain professional development points, as well as establish the e-learning courses as regular training programs under the department. After a 5 months application process, we are now licensed as an official Learning Service Provider of DepEd. We are currently in the process of applying for Program/Training accreditation. With this accreditation, we hope to do the first batch of fully DepEd accredited trainings of great numbers of teachers using our e-learning platform by March of 2021.

In terms of curriculum integration, we managed to elaborate Self Learning Modules (SLMs) on Child Sexual Abuse Prevention (CSAP) and CyberSafety for Grades 1-3, 4-6 and 7-10. These SLMs are currently the major learning delivery modalities. As a major development towards inclusion in the curriculum, the Self Learning Modules were submitted to the Bureau of Curriculum Development for content review and curriculum tagging.

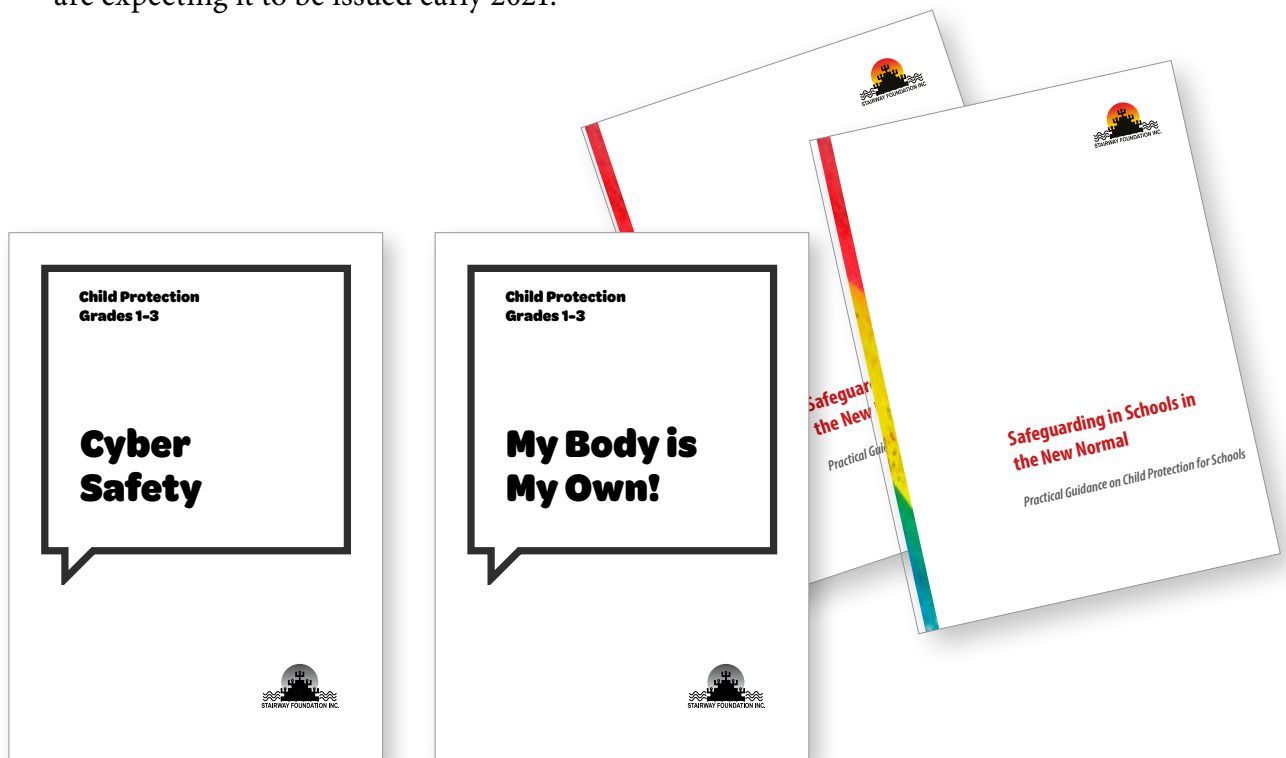
On lobbying of policies, SFI and DepEd determined that the social media policy, the minimum standards on code of conduct, and the improved case management systems to handle online concerns, should all be integrated into one policy – the child safeguarding standards in schools. Instead of targeting national level policy lobbying, we opted to start

with a pilot via the National Capital Region, the largest DepEd regional office. A series of trainings, write-shops and consultation sessions involving principals, guidance counselors, legal officers, teachers, teacher union reps, parents and students, resulted to having a draft child safeguarding policy, which covered all three aspects of the policy targets.

After a year of working closely with DepEd NCR on their regional child safeguarding standards, they finally managed to issue RM-NCR-238-S.-2020, otherwise known as the Regional Safeguarding Standards during Online Interaction with Learners. The policy put into place child protection measures to ensure that children are safe and protected regardless of the learning delivery modality in the current basic education learning continuity plan. This is the first policy of its kind to be issued within DepEd.

After coming up with the draft, the initiative was coordinated with the DepEd Central Office and discussions started to adopt this at the national level, following the same implementation model we used with DepEd NCR. In order to improve the social media component, we reignited our collaboration with Facebook Philippines, as we developed and submitted to them a database of online jargons on grooming and Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation to facilitate easier detection of online abuse in chats.

At the national level, Stairway assisted the DepEd Office of the Undersecretary for Legal Affairs to conduct a series of national consultation sessions on the elaboration of a supplemental policy to the DepEd Child Protection Policy. Working as part of the Technical Working Group, Stairway assisted in facilitating the consultation sessions, as well as directly providing inputs to the draft policy. Under the supplemental policy to the DepEd Child Protection Policy, Stairway has managed to include sections dealing with Social Media Safeguarding, Code of Conduct, as well as Case Management Systems to address online abuse of children. As of now, the draft policy is under final review of DepEd, and we are expecting it to be issued early 2021.



During the last quarter of 2019, we started a 3-year CyberSafe Schools Project supported by KNH and the BMZ. Stairway is leading the project with a consortium of three members of the Break the Silence National Network. The project aims to achieve the following:

- 40 project schools have established effective protection committees that actively combat internet related abuse and exploitation of children, and they have a functioning case management system.
- 400 teachers have qualified to take preventive measures against sexual abuse and are able to respond to suspicions of sexual abuse / exploitation of children through the internet, and
- 60,000 children have the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to better protect themselves from Internet abuse and exploitation.

The project strategies and approaches had to be modified to respond to the challenges of the emergency health crisis. On March 16, 2020, just a week after the Consortium formally met and finalized the plan for the implementation of the project, the Philippine Government declared a State of Health Crisis in the country and put on hold all face-to-face education and training. Classes abruptly ended while offices started to implement work from home arrangements. It altered the way students learn from face-to-face learning to blended learning – using TV, Radio or online learning coupled with self-directed learning modules. It was an unprecedented situation and there was no template for response available.

By 19 June 2020, the Department of Education issued DepEd Order No. 12, s.2020 or the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP) for School Year 2020-2021. The document provides clear guidance on how education will continue despite the pandemic. The guide included identification of the Most Essential Learning Competency (MELC) and different learning delivery modalities in the new normal. However, the BE-LCP did not provide enough guidance on how to implement child protection policy in the new normal. As an immediate response to the limitation of the BE-LCP, Stairway intensified its support and assistance to the DepEd Office of the Undersecretary for Legal Affairs in the development of the Supplemental Child Protection Policy in the New Normal. The new policy is expected to be issued early 2021.



The BE-LCP remains to be the most important guide on how to steer the CyberSafe Schools Project forward in the new normal. Following the BE-LCP, the Project Management Team needed to work on additional outputs, which were not identified pre-pandemic. These include development of SFI Child Protection Online Course; Supplemental Learning Resource material on Child Sexual Abuse Prevention (CSAP) and CyberSafety; and the Child Protection Learning Action Cell implementation guide.

The processes required to complete the needed changes allowed the Project Management Team to engage with more offices in the Department of Education on issues concerning child protection. Initially, our work was with the Office of the Undersecretary for Legal Affairs, the Office of the Undersecretary for Planning Services, and the Bureau of Human Resource and Organizational Development and Field Operations. With the additional necessary outputs, we needed to engage the Bureau of Curriculum Development (BCD) and the Bureau of Learning Resources (BLR), as well as the National Educators Academy of the Philippines (NEAP) under the Office of the Secretary. The engagement with the BCD and BLR brought us one-step closer to reaching our goal to integrate child protection in the curriculum, while engagement with the NEAP enlists the SFI Child Protection Online course as an external training aligned to the Professional Development Plan of the members of the NEAP. All the above developments go towards sustainability of CSAP and Cybersafe themes within the education system.

The cards are arranged in a 2x3 grid. Each card has the Stairway Foundation Inc. logo in the top right corner and the website www.elearning.stairwayfoundation.org at the bottom.

- Card 1 (Top Left):** "What are you wearing?" - Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children (OSAEC). Text: "Maaari kang magsabi ng 'HINDI' o 'NO' sakaling makaramdam ka ng hindi komportable sa isang usapan online. Hindi lahat ng hindi mo kakilala ay may masamang intensyon ngunit mas ligtas kung makipag-uusap lamang tayo sa mga taong kilala natin sa totoong buhay."
- Card 2 (Top Middle):** "OMG we won! FTW!" - Online Gaming Addiction. Text: "Kailangang maintindihan na ito ay problema. Tumayo, lumayo muna sa PC o sa phone. Makipag-ugnayan ulit sa pamilya at kaibigan sa totoong buhay offline. Masaya mag-gaming, pero huwag hahayaan na ito na lang ang maging sentro ng buhay natin! Kung hindi mo matulungan ang sarili, humingi ng tulong sa iba!"
- Card 3 (Top Right):** "What a Loser" - CyberBullying. Text: "Ang bullying na ginagawa online ay tinatawag na Cyberbullying. Ito ang paggamit ng Internet upang magpost ng Masasakit, masasama, peke, nagbabanta o negatibong mensahe o content tungkol sa ibang tao."
- Card 4 (Bottom Left):** "No one likes U" - CyberBullying. Text: "Ang Cyberbullying ay maaring mangyari sa mga chatrooms, emails, text messages, mga pictures online, websites, blogs and social media. Maaring magkaroon din ng sexual na usapan, pagpapalitan ng mga hubad na larawan o pagpapasa ng mga hubad na larawan ng mga bata."
- Card 5 (Bottom Middle):** "Hi I'm Mel, C2C" - Online Interactions. Text: "Hindi lahat ng online strangers ay may masang intensyon, pero kung nakakaramdam tayo na hindi ligtas, nakakalito o hindi na tayo komportable pag kausap natin sila, ibig sabihin, hindi na ok makipag-usap sa kanila! Huwag magpapakita ng pribadong parte ng katawan o hahayaan na ipakita nila ito sa iyo. Magtiwala sa nararamdaman. Magsabi sa isang nakakatandang pinagkakatiwalaan. Iblock at ireport ang mga ganitong tao!"
- Card 6 (Bottom Right):** "Send a PIC please?" - Ang Ating Personal na Impormasyon. Text: "Ang pag-share ng private personal information tulad ng pictures ng ating private body parts ay maaring maging viral, at maaring maging nasa Internet na forever. Pero hindi pa ito katapusan ng mundo. Makaka-move on ka din dito! Think before posting."



"Whatever is happening in the country; whatever challenges we are facing, education must continue. Education cannot wait; our learners cannot wait. We continue with the process so we can give hope and continuity, and contribute to the normalization of activities in the country."

Leonor Magtolis Briones

Secretary
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Along with UNICEF and Save the Children, Stairway was listed as one of the partners of the Department of Education's second National Summit on the Rights of the Child in Education. Stairway delivered a message for the Summit, facilitated session on protection from Online Sexual Exploitation of Children (OSEC), and the artwork in the digital program was provided by Stairway. The online Summit was attended by several thousands of teachers nationwide. Click link to see the [Summit Program](#).

Department of Social Welfare and Development

The engagement with the Department of Social Welfare and Development entailed the expansion of Child Sexual Abuse Prevention (CSAP) in the Family Development Sessions (FDS) of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program in three new regions; the integration of online child sexual abuse prevention advocacy in the FDS; and strengthening Pantawid response mechanisms to include online and offline child sexual abuse and exploitation cases among beneficiaries.

The MIMAROPA Region Program Management Office is the newest partner region following the signing of a partnership agreement in May 2020. It was the first region where we modified delivery approaches to ensure efficiency during the pandemic. We had a series of consultative meetings with the MIMAROPA office arriving at an implementation plan covering not only CSAP but also CyberSafe. We agreed to develop and simplify knowledge materials for the use of the regional staff and City/Municipal Links in their roll-out sessions to parents through the FDS and to children through the Youth Development Sessions (YDS). We did preparatory work in consultation with provincial and municipal staff at the latter part of 2020, including RPMO orientation on the Break the Silence Campaign and the conceptualization of the module content.

Following the shift to Electronic Family Development Session (E-FDS) by the NPMO at the onset of the pandemic, we adjusted the conceptualization of the CyberSafe and Digital Literacy modules in FDS. Under this scheme, we developed infographics, which were published via the Official Social Media channel page of DSWD Pantawid (Facebook). Two sets of social media cards were developed containing information on child online protection/online sexual abuse and exploitation prevention: 1st set for parents and 2nd set for children and youth. As a result of close coordination, CyberSafe and Digital Literacy were part of the Pantawid session topics for the month of December 2020. Facebook extended ad credits to reach more online users.

For the response mechanism, the Pantawid Program, through its Gender and Development arm, enhanced their internal case management process to ensure effective management of gender-based violence cases. In the previous years, Stairway Foundation endorsed its recommendations on the implementing guidelines on CSAP in FDS, incorporating measures of handling CSAE disclosures and cases within Pantawid.



With DSWD, RPMO, MIMAROPA and Provincial Staff during partnership meetings and the Break the Silence Orientation for the RPMO and Selected Provincial Staff

Philippine National Police

After many years of Stairway delivering training on prevention of child sexual abuse and exploitation to basically every single police recruit in the country, we saw a need to develop a logistically and financially less taxing approach to working with the national police. Step one was utilizing our partners in the Break the Silence National Network, training them to work with the National Police Training Institutes (NPTI), with the Women and Children Protection Centers and the Public Community Relations Divisions in their respective regions. Aside from significantly reducing air travel and expenses, we established and strengthened local partnerships that are strategic in order to sustain the BTS Campaign.

We have experienced challenges in our collaboration with the National Police since 2019, when the management and authority of the NPTI was transferred from the Philippine Public Safety College (PPSC) to the PNP. The change in management caused a setback in coordination and continuity of our partnership with the law enforcement, and the onslaught of the pandemic became another obstacle. As the police plays a significant role in the government's pandemic response, institutionalizing child protection into the police training schools' curriculum was down prioritized.

Despite obstacles and delays, there are also some very positive developments. Stairway started promoting development of a Child Protection Policy within the law enforcement a couple of years back. The efforts have finally borne fruit, as the PNP has started consultations with other organizations. Stairway's contribution to this initiative of policy development has been recognized. We are seen as a source of inspiration and guidance, and we have continuously been tapped for technical assistance.

Furthermore, we have had fruitful discussions with the academic department of the police training schools, with the key officers from the PNP-Women and Children Protection Center (WCPC) and with the Police Community Relations (PCR) pertaining to the approach in our continued collaboration. With the successful development of the Stairway e-learning platform, we have explored the development of a tailor designed online curriculum on child protection, specifically designed for the Philippine National Police. In the midst of challenges in leadership and management transitions, along with the high level of bureaucracy inherent of national government organizations, we are optimistic that the coming years will show a break through with a new effective strategy on educating the relevant institutions within the PNP on children's rights and prevention of child sexual abuse and exploitation.

Over the past two years, Stairway has distributed more than 500 anatomical dolls to Women and Children Protection Centers around the country. Through the Break the Silence National Network member Justice for Peace and Integrity of Creation-Integrated Development Center, Inc. (JPIC-IDC), we extended the distribution to the Tagna-an Municipal Police Station and Surigao Del Norte Police Provincial Office (SDNPPO). The dolls are effective in the investigation of child sexual abuse cases for young children.



The Break the Silence Consolidation Project

With support from DANIDA, Stairway initiated the establishment and capacity building of the Break the Silence Network back in 2008. Currently, the network is present in 13 of the 17 regions with 45 active members nationwide. The Break the Silence Consolidation Project is geared towards strengthening the Break the Silence National Network (BTSNN); strengthening partnerships between SFI and government partners; and strengthening SFI's capacity for training and advocacy, as well as developing new training materials and methods.

The Break the Silence National Network

The network expanded its membership despite of the pandemic. BTSNN welcomed 10 new members in 2020, and total number of active members went back up to 45, after 10 members were relegated to a passive membership status, as they failed to meet the network's constitutional requirements in terms of activities over the past year. Two (2) international organizations with operations in the Philippines are among the new members – World Hope International (WHI) and Compassion International Philippines (CIP). CIP has a huge national network among children, youth and faith-based organizations. WHI, meanwhile, is very strong in research and capacity building of partner organizations. All the active BTS NN members formalized their network membership renewal based on the approved guidelines and requirements.

In 2019, we generated baseline data information among BTSNN members, which we used for direction setting. The online Jotform platform has been tested in 2020, but we experienced a set-back in this process, as our colleague in charge passed away after just a few days of illness. Still, there will be trainings and roll-out next year to get all members acquainted with the new online database platform.



On February 12, 2020, the new set of BTS NN Officers was elected by ballot. They will serve for a term of two years, half of which is already spent during the pandemic. Prior to elections, the former board reported to the GA.

Despite the pandemic, regular network activities were implemented, including the annual general assembly and capacity-building interventions for partners. The network's annual general assembly was held on February 12, 2020. The highlight was the first election of the BTSNN Board of Trustees. Despite the following pandemic induced lockdown, the board members were able to meet regularly online, as necessary for overall governance. The network's Articles of Incorporation, Constitution and By-laws were reviewed, finalized and ratified by the General Assembly.

Traditionally, the BTSNN holds its annual conference every February in observance of the National Child Sexual Abuse Awareness Week and the Global Safer Internet Day, for which Stairway is the National Convener.

Instead of having a conference in 2020, we organized upgrading sessions among the existing network members, specifically training and consulting them on the revised Break the Silence Modules. There were two batches of sessions and in between was the conduct of the network's Annual General Assembly. The upgrading sessions were accredited by the Philippines Professional Regulation Commission (PRC). Furthermore, members also participated in trainings and webinars initiated by various partners, such as paralegal trainings, child protection during a pandemic, Psychological First Aid, digital thumbprint, deep dive discussion on Facebook Child Safety Policy, among others. Consultations and meetings were also conducted to assess and manage the impact of the pandemic to the BTSNN advocacy work. A webinar series was launched for the network members entitled "Enhancing the Capacities of Break the Silence National Network Members to Cope and Innovate During the Pandemic". Some of these training/capacity building activities were done or tied up with partners for a wider participation, such as trainings provided by Facebook, Globe Telecom, UNICEF, and other partners. Aside from BTSNN Members and partners numbering about 100, external participants reached more than a thousand.

The BTSNN has been very active in national legislative advocacy and relevant capacity-building activities through the membership of the Child Rights Network (CRN) and has established partnerships with other organizations like UNICEF, Child Rights Coalition Asia, PETA Arts, etc. The BTSNN has been recognized as a potent NGO in advocacy work, having partnered with these organizations in the conduct of capacity building activities. BTSNN is active in national legislative advocacy on the bills on:

- inclusive education
- increasing the age for statutory rape (from 12 years to 16 years),
- Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS), Positive Discipline,
- Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children (OSAEC),
- oversight of child protection laws,
- early child marriage, teenage pregnancy prevention,
- prohibition of tobacco and E-cigarettes to those below 21,
- human trafficking prevention education program for the youth,
- strengthening the Anti-trafficking in Persons Law,
- administrative adoption, and
- Magna Carta of Children.

RESOURCE PERSONS / SPEAKERS

ATTY. MARIE MICHELLE QUEZON
Child Protection Officer
UNICEF Philippines

MS. REANN C. MANTILLA
Project Manager
Justice, Peace, & Integrity of Creation (JPIC) –
Integrated Development Center, Inc.

MS. JEANETTE LAUREL-AMOG
BTSNN Vice Chairman & Executive Director
Talikala, Inc.

ATTY. ANTONI PAULINE P. PASCUAL
State Counsel, Office of Cybercrimes
Department of Justice (DoJ)

“Beating Human Trafficking and Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children (OSAEC)”

A Sharing of Regional Experiences in the Visayas & Mindanao”

Webinar on Child Protection in COVID – 19 Pandemic

A capacity building webinar jointly conducted by CRN, UNICEF & BTSNN in commemoration of the World Day Against Trafficking 2020

WHEN: 28th day of July 2020
TIME: 9:00-11:00 AM

PRE-REGISTER HERE:
https://unicef.zoom.us/join/egister/WN_VmsFrvzSY-qR4qjcALdtA

Poster for the Webinar in observance of the World Day Against Trafficking in July 2020 in partnership with CRN and UNICEF.

The network also took part in relevant child protection observance and celebrations. The observance of the World Day against Trafficking in July 2020 ushered a partnership with CRN and UNICEF for BTSNN to conduct a national webinar attended by more than 1,000 participants. Two of the four resource persons were BTSNN members, while the other two were from UNICEF and the Philippine Department of Justice Office of Cybercrime. There were also mobilizations for children to attend arts workshops and activities that increased their knowledge on their rights and awareness on child sexual abuse. This in recognition of more children becoming more vulnerable during the lockdown.

Stairway continued to provide capacity building for the BTSNN, particularly on CSAEP, and increasingly BTSNN members are being tapped as resources on child protection concerns in their respective areas.

The Break the Silence Campaign with SM ZOTO Project

The Break the Silence (BTS) Campaign with Samahan ng Mamamayan Zone One Tondo, Inc. (SM-ZOTO) Project has aimed to protect children in the cities of Caloocan, Malabon and Navotas (CAMANA) from offline and online child sexual abuse and exploitation. With support from the British Embassy, the project has been instrumental in intensifying child protection initiatives in these three cities in the National Capital Region (NCR), with a total population of approximately 2,3 million people, particularly in addressing child sexual abuse and exploitation.

Primarily, the project followed the core strategies of capacity-building, network building, massive awareness-raising and advocacy focusing at the local level with the communities and the local government units (LGUs). In spite of the challenges due to the COVID19 Pandemic, the project managed to sustain its interventions with modifications in implementation approach to fit the “new normal” situation. Changes were thoroughly discussed and planned out with partners to secure compliance with safety and pandemic protocols. Our e-learning platform has been the key feature of the “new normal” approach. Content, learning methodology and materials have been updated to make them more appropriate for the online platform. Even with the challenging transition process from a pre-pandemic approach to the new normal setting, the project has achieved gains way beyond its targets.

For year 2020, initiatives were focused on strengthening prevention and response mechanisms of the CAMANA local governments’ Local Councils for the Protection of Children (LCPC). By law, the LCPCs are the mandated formal child protection structures in the country. Aside from the LCPCs, we also reached other child protection structures and service providers at the local level, including community organizations tied to SM ZOTO.

Capacity-building

The capacity-building interventions paved the way to transfer knowledge and develop skills on facilitating sessions on Child Sexual Abuse Prevention (CSAP) and Cyber Safety. Trained partners were able to organize and facilitate BTS sessions among different sectors, supporting the aim of the project to hone local technical resource on CSAP and Cyber Safety. Upgrading sessions on the revised Break the Silence training packages were provided, aiming primarily at supporting partners to be able to still conduct sessions in the context of the pandemic. The Barangay Councils for the Protection of Children (BCPC) were intentionally targeted for valuable reasons – (1) being the local community counterpart of the LCPCs, (2) being the community structure mandated to render immediate assistance and support services on child protection cases, especially during the pandemic and (3) the barangay being the most identified local authority for community people to report child sexual abuse and exploitation cases. The third reason is based on the results of a Baseline Study on the Landscape of Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation in CAMANA, which was also undertaken under this project.

The project also accounted for school settings, as they are integral in the totality of the BTS Campaign. Some of the schools had been selected as partners for another Stairway project, the CyberSafe Schools Project (CSP) supported by KNH and the BMZ, German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. All efforts were geared towards strengthening school-based mechanism to address online and offline CSAE.

Network Strengthening

The established partnerships between the LGUs and SM ZOTO makes for a strengthened network of actors for child sexual abuse and exploitation prevention in CAMANA. Indicators were: (1) meaningful representation of the Break the Silence Campaign in the LCPCs, particularly in Navotas and Malabon Cities, and (2) forging of formal partnership with the Barangay 176, Caloocan City, which is the largest barangay in the Philippines. To date, BTS advocacy components were approved for inclusion in the Navotas City LCPC plan with corresponding funding from the LGU. Provisions on the BTS Campaign were also recommended for inclusion in the Malabon City Local Code for Children.

Massive Advocacy

Community advocacy sessions have served as a platform to increase awareness on CSAP and CyberSafety. They also served the trained partners to continuously strengthen their facilitation skills. In addition, there were separate sessions initiated by partners. Throughout 2020, direct reach was documented at 100 (36 male and 64 female) children and 108 (25 male and 83 female) adults who participated in community sessions. Generally, there was also an increase in knowledge on CSAP and CyberSafe as measured by monitoring tests. In addition, there were 115 (38 male and 77 female) barangay officials for CSAP and CyberSafe roll-out sessions. Accomplishments exceeded the target, as there were additional sessions conducted in collaboration with partners.



Pre-pandemic Community Sessions among Adults and Children on Child Sexual Abuse Prevention and Cybersafety

Relief and Advocacy Materials Distribution

The project extended relief support to more than a thousand families affected by the COVID19 Pandemic across CAMANA communities. Along with the food supplies, we distributed Cyber-Safe Advocacy Booklets, which were created by the BTS CAMANA children and youth. The booklets were a response to the fact that children became even more vulnerable to abuse under the lockdown, and they included cards for use in cases of safety concerns. There were also distributions of CyberSafe Booklets and updated CSAP and Cyber Safe tarpaulins to the LGU partners and barangays to increase visibility of key messages in the BTS Campaign Advocacy.

The entire process of the 3-year project has been highly participatory, which has resulted in cost-efficient sustainability, as the accomplished changes are now embedded in institutional and community practices. This is supported by a 2020 external project review commissioned by the British Embassy Manila. To cite, the BTS advocacy has been included in the LCPC plan of Navotas City and considered in the updating of the Local Code of Children of Malabon City, as previously mentioned. At the community level, one notable impact is on how the campaign has influenced SM ZOTO and its community leaders to be more engaged in responding to and preventing child sexual abuse and exploitation (e.g., being able to assist in the referral of CSAE cases and being able to facilitate sessions or share key messages).

At the organizational level, both SFI and SM ZOTO have actively taken part in the cities' child rights programming through representation in the LCPCs having acquired accreditation as Civil Society Organization partners. Components of the BTS campaign have been put forward in the agenda for children. Moreover, SM ZOTO is now a member of the Break the Silence National Network, allowing for more partnership opportunities with organizations that could also be beneficial in CAMANA areas.

As mentioned above, Stairway's CyberSafe Schools Project also operates in CAMANA areas, reaching priority schools in the communities identified by SM ZOTO, which form part of the overall continuity strategy towards strengthening safety nets for children, including a multi-stakeholder approach in addressing child sexual abuse and exploitation.



Planning Meeting of Community Leaders on the COVID19 Relief Operation and Distribution of Break the Silence Advocacy Materials

Family Home Program

Despite the pandemic and the lockdown, the 13 boys within the Program remained inside Stairway's residential facilities enjoying a creative, peaceful and protective environment. It was possible to continue daily activities thanks to the presence of volunteers, friends, and the house parents, who all decided to remain inside Stairway during the lockdown. Their presence and work made up for the impossibility of our regular colleagues to access Stairway during the lockdown. The variety of skills among the international volunteers - a doctor, a software engineer, a photographer – opened up for some quality opportunities in terms of creative and educational activities, and the children benefit to the fullest with classes in English, Arts, Science, Geography, Photography, Computer, Baking and Reading. Thanks to the specific competencies of the volunteers, the boys were going more into depth learning about the human body, and their extensive classes in photography lead to the production of a collection and an online exhibition of their creative works. We submitted the collection of photos to a Covid-19 Politics in Arts competition under the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, and the children earned a certificate of honor. We later decided to print a book with the collection of the photos. The cover photo of this report is the cover photo of the book. It is taken by Philip, 13 years old. [Around Stairway](#)



Left down the certificate of honor received by all the children, and right down, another photo from the book by Carlo 13 years old.

Theatre always plays a key role in the transformation process to modify the boys' attitudes, behaviour and actions. It is an essential component of the rehabilitation process. Throughout the year, the theater workshops were intensified with tailor designed drama sessions and theater rehearsals, despite the fact that there were no audience from the outside to perform for. Regardless, the lessons were still plenty rewarding, as they helped the boys develop ways to express their feelings, interact with others, improve their self-esteem, and develop self-discipline and team work.

Although access to the beach was limited for months during the Enhanced Community Quarantine, the premises of Stairway offered plenty of opportunity for exercising and outdoor physical activities. Soccer and basketball training with games between the boys and the adult volunteers and staff were regular activities on the program, so that the recreational and physical side of play was coupled with educational value. The boys also enjoyed chess lessons, both the game itself and the etiquette. They learned more about mental concentration, strategizing, discipline, time management, risk-taking, and thinking ahead. We organized a tournament including all the boys, which ended with an awarding ceremony. Each of the boys received an award and recognition for their improvements and achievements. Not so much in the game itself, but in the development of each child's capacities and in the respect and care for others. Chess continued to be a major activity throughout the year, and it still is.



Starting and growing a vegetable garden also became a major focus, and many of the boys are very enthusiastic and show great promise in the field. They have all had the benefit of visiting our farm in the mountains, where they have received lessons on the basic principles in organic gardening. Their garden interest extends into their understanding of the benefits of a healthy plant based menu, which is manifested in their own growth and weight gain. In average they have grown 5 to 7 centimeters and gained between 6 to 8 kilos in weight over the year.

In terms of academic development, all the boys have shown measurable progress in literacy and numeracy proficiency. To ensure our teaching methodologies comply with the DepEd standards, we follow an established progress report. Using DepEd's Blended Learning modality, four boys are enrolled in a local school at the primary and secondary levels. Nine are enrolled in the Alternative Learning System (ALS). All of them are studying safely inside Stairway, equipped with computers, tablets, and access to our library and teaching staff.

In February, before the lock-down, we conducted home visits for six of the boys. This is a part of establishing each boy's profile and assess their individual families, which makes a basis for recommendations for their plans after leaving Stairway, i.e. reunification or referral to other child-care facilities. In March, we could furnish all the boys with their birth certificates from the Philippine Statistics Authority. We also started the process to identify who among the boys would qualify for national and international adoption, and by the end of the year five children had received their certification.

In summary, our Family Home Program was largely spared from disruption brought about by two dramatic external events, the Taal Volcano eruption and the Covid-19 pandemic. However, almost all planned Youth for Change Camps (YFC) were canceled and so were the scheduled visit of various program partners. Only one YFC activity pushed through right before the lockdown. Students from Harvard University had a memorable experience together with our boys early February.





“What I have learned in planting is about giving love. It is hard to take good care of something without giving it importance. It makes me happy whenever I see my plants grow. I have learned to wait patiently. I have also learned to know what a plant can give and its importance in our lives.” - Symon (16)





Harvesting oyster mushrooms and petchay .

Community Assistance Program and Baclayan Community Development

Feeding Program

Food security became a real threat to the communities of Puerto Galera during the lockdown, as many people lost their livelihood and the food supply-chain to and from the island was disrupted. Initially, IP communities in Baclayan were affected the most by the pandemic, or more precisely, they were hit by the pandemic of fake news spread via social media and subsequently mouth to mouth. As a result, many fled to the mountains to seek refuge from the dreaded contagion.

Over several years, we have monitored the Baclayan children's health condition to assess the need and the impact of our feeding initiative. We put the kids on a scale towards the end of the school year, following 10 months of school feeding, and we repeat the measure after the summer break, following a couple of months of no feeding program. The conclusion is sadly clear. A large number of children lose too much weight during the time without the safety net of two set meals a day, and too many fall into the category of being malnourished or even severely malnourished. It has not been hard to imagine the impact from a pandemic and an extended lockdown on those most vulnerable children. The community quarantine has not only kept them from attending school and access to regular meals. It has also had detrimental effect on their families' chance to properly feed them and the rest of their households. With this in mind, we tried to obtain permission from our local government to open up an emergency feeding activity at an early stage of the enhanced community quarantine, but we were not granted permission.



Along with our friend and volunteer doctor, Francis, we could still do sporadic interventions with food distribution and medical house to house visits, but it was only upon the re-opening of classes (home based) early October that we could roll out with a solid feeding program. To widen our reach, we established two additional feeding stations in sitios at a distance from the Centro/school based kitchen. To support our assumption of the need for a feeding program, despite the fact that no child goes to school, we did a Body Mass Index check on 105 elementary students in March, as they had just finished face to face classes, and again as classes reopened in October, after 7 months of no access to free daily meals. The charts below present the results.

Table 1. BMI results of student beneficiaries in March, at the early stage of the pandemic lockdown.

Out of the 176 target children for the March check (those regularly attending class) only 105 were possible to locate. Many of the remaining children were with their families hiding deep into the mountains.

BMI Levels	Count	% of Total
Severely Malnourished	0	0%
Malnourished	0	0%
Normal	105	100%
Overweight	0	0%
Obese	0	0%
Total	105	100%

Table 2. BMI results of student beneficiaries in October/November.

Please note that the sample group is twice the size of the March check.

BMI Levels	Count	% of Total
Severely Malnourished	16	7.55%
Malnourished	17	8.02%
Normal	164	77.36%
Overweight	9	4.25%
Obese	6	2.83%
Total	212	100%

Table 1 and Table 2:

The March BMI check is on the background of the children attending school and benefitting from the feeding program for the past school year. The October/November check is after the children have been kept at home for 7 months during enhanced community quarantine, where children were under complete lockdown. We attempted to intervene much earlier, but we were prevented from running the feeding or the clinic for several months due to non-negotiable restrictions from our LGU.

The addition of two feeding stations in Sitio Manggahan and Baloc-Baloc was a challenge turned into opportunity for the parents and families in Baclayan. Faced with government-mandated movement-restrictions, they initiated the idea of decentralizing meal preparation and distribution. It was an inspiring demonstration of a community, particularly a group of women, coming forward with initiatives to shape their own situation and that of their community. This initiative, along with others, support the fact that 10 years of community development intervention has left an impact beyond the children, who are our primary target group. More inspiring examples follow below.

Stairway provided the materials and rocket stoves, while the community people did the construction work. Both feeding stations have been fully run by parent volunteers since the start of operations early October. In order to enhance nutritional value, taste and variety in the meals, two skilled cooks from the Stairway Family Home Center started a training program for the parent volunteers. The main kitchen in Centro is still supervised by two SFI staff from the community. Since we have resumed feeding, we have served an average of nearly 300 children a day. Upon request from the parents, we now keep the feeding running on irregular holidays too.



In order to follow the safety protocols, it is mostly the parents, who pick up the meals in order to keep their children at home. Children below 15 are not allowed to leave home.





Ten Years of Feeding

It has been 10 years since we started the feeding program for indigenous children in Baclayan, and we see tangible results. School attendance has improved immensely. More children than ever have completed primary education, and a record high number have moved on to secondary school. Dropout rates in high school are at an all-time low and so is the number of early pregnancies and marriage. Many IP students in high school earn honours and qualify for the “Star Section”. The basis for stigmatization and stereotyping IP children as less intelligent has been eliminated, which has been an ultimate goal since the inception of the program.

We are fully aware that we are nowhere near a situation where we can conclude our mission accomplished, but the outlook for a sustainable community assistance program is bright. Over the coming five years we will invest more into skills development and livelihood programs, so we will be able to transition away from feeding without leaving children hungry and out of school.

COVID-19 Inspired Strategies and Interventions Food Security

Since the onslaught of the Covid 19 pandemic, food security has been a priority intervention in our local community. This has to be seen on the background of Puerto Galera's economy being overwhelmingly dependent on tourism, which has been non-existing since the beginning of the year. It is estimated that 80-90% of families in our municipality are directly or indirectly dependent on the tourism industry.

Organic Gardening in the Baclayan Community

It was an obvious decision to make Baclayan a pilot in promoting and supporting the spread of organic community gardens around the municipality of Puerto Galera. Since February, we have been working with a group of 10 members of the community, who decided to form communal gardens and hold weekly capacity-building sessions covering not only organic farming essentials, but also general life skills.

Throughout the year, the group has attended a number of sessions on natural farming principles, herbal medicine, mushroom production, free-range chicken, enterprise development and general life skills, including decision-making, resourcefulness and resilience. In the best interest of efficiency and scaling, we linked up with our local network, including the Department of Agriculture, Engaging and Empowering Nation Builders in Learning, Research and Social Entrepreneurship (ENABLRS, Inc), Teach for Philippines, and Department of Trade and Industry.

In addition to food production, the group also organized a medicinal herbal garden center. The indigenous community has a long tradition of using herbal medicine, but nowadays people are increasingly dependent on commercialized medicines. The herbal garden center aims to influence the community to recognize the value of their traditions and utilize medicinal plants as appropriate in treating common illnesses, as practiced in the past. So far, the group has planted blue ternate, mint, serpentina, basil, mayanna, snake grass, stevia, insulin plants, lemon grass, lemon balm, acapulco, and more. The Philippine Department of Health officially accredits plants for their effective medicinal properties. The herbal garden center is built near to CHEC, inside the premises of Stairway's land.

Baclayan Organic Farm as a Resource Center amidst a Local Economy in Crisis

The farm proved to be indispensable during the early stage of the lockdown, because it was a reliable source of healthy food for the Stairway center and the FHP kids. Moreover, it has increasingly taken on a role as a Learning and Resource center for our local community.

In partnership with the regional Agricultural Training Institute (ATI), we conducted various trainings to open new avenues for production and livelihood. From September to October, we held sessions on Mushroom Production, Raising Organic Free Range Chickens, and Sloping Agricultural Land Technology (SALT).

The Mushroom Production Training had 24 participants from the community, the farm-workers, and SFI kitchen staff. The participants learned how to prepare, grow, and harvest oyster mushrooms. We purchased over 120 fruiting bags of mushrooms for continuous propagation, and we have started to harvest. Subsequently, we have passed the skills and techniques for mushroom farming on to the Stairway boys during their recent visit to the farm.

In October, we held a one-day Free Range Chicken Raising Training with 18 participants from the community, the farm and some Stairway staff. They learned how to raise organic free-range chickens for the production of eggs, meat, and chicks. We have purchased a hundred Rhode Island Sasso chicks that have moved into a newly renovated chicken house. Prior to purchasing the chicks, we started to grow azolla, trichantera, and other greens for food. By next February, we are expecting our first organic eggs. Some will be incubated and hatched as chicks to be distributed to community gardeners for individual and collective production.

Despite the incessant rains and inclement weather conditions brought on by consecutive typhoons, the training on Sloping Agriculture Land Technology (SALT) pushed through with 15 participants from the farm team and IP elders from the Bignayan community in Aninuan.



Training on growing mushrooms and happy chickens.

The SALT approach is very useful and practical in our area, where many IP's are still utilizing the destructive slash-and-burn method of farming, the kaingin. SALT aims to prevent soil erosion and help develop and produce more nutrients to the soil by growing fruit trees and nitrogen-fixing shrubs in hedgerows with traditional crops and vegetables grown in between. By promoting and sponsoring the Bignayan IPs to grow fruit-bearing trees within their gardens, we hope and expect to prevent the seasonal burning of entire hillsides in preparation for the next planting season. We are using the SALT method in our Baclayan farm.

After the SALT training, we opened the farm to a two-week internship program for five members of the Organic Gardening towards Food Security Project. The internship aims to comprehensively equip the participants with the basic knowledge and skills in organic gardening, including producing organic concoctions, vermicomposting, intercropping, and other organic gardening methods and principles. Aside from gaining new knowledge and skills, the interns are also receiving financial compensation for the work they render on the farm. Upon going back to their respective barangays, they will apply what they learned in their individual and community gardens and share their knowledge with fellow members of their community project.



Interns at the Baclayan farm.



We have planted a total of 1,769 fruit tree seedlings, comprised of a variety of fruits like rambutan, lanzones, durian, cacao, mango, guyabano, dragon fruit, grapes, kiatkiat, pomelo, langka, paminta, lemon, coco dwarf, coconut macapuno, and mangosteen.

Construction and Renovation

Aside from continuous training and internships, we carried out several other projects with the purpose to enhance the farm and create employment opportunities for people in our community. We installed additional fences to prevent stray animals, like goats, cows, pigs, horses and carabaos from entering the farm and eating our crops. We also renovated the workers' quarters, as well as the kitchen and dining/training hall, as preparation to host more farm trainings, internships, youth camps, and other similar activities. The largest project was the construction of a new kitchen and dining area at the school. We designed this building with the long term goal of transforming it into a sort of a "Makers' Space" or Livelihood Training Facility, once we have reached the right time to phase out the feeding program. The target time frame is within five years.

Most of these renovation and construction projects were launched following nearly four months of enhanced community quarantine at a time, where many families were desperate to have an income. Spread over all the projects we have run since the start of the pandemic, we have supported 40 families with employment, varying between one to eight months.



The new kitchen and dining hall at the Baclayan Elementary School.

Rocket Stoves

Stairway's mechanic and SAS captain successfully developed prototypes of a rocket stove that can be replicated for household use. The cost of materials and the time spent for building add up to around 4,000 pesos. We are making a sort of market analysis to determine, if we can sell these stoves in our community. The benefits are significant and obvious, but there is limited buying power amongst a vast majority of people. If we can see a market, we will train local crafts people to run the rocket stove production and business. We will need a sort of a lending scheme to get this started, and we may need a community financing scheme to see this product enter into a large number of homes.

With the prototype of the rocket stove as a model, two bigger stationary stoves were constructed for the newly renovated dining and kitchen hall at the farm. These big stationary stoves have proven heat and fuel efficient, and they give off minimal smoke emission inside the kitchen. With these new stoves installed in the school feeding kitchens, we can save a lot on the consumption of firewood and emit less toxic smoke.





Soap and Shampoo Production

There is still a persistent gap in the access of economic opportunities for men and women in Baclayan. Women are largely bound to do housework and farming activities. Providing the younger women with opportunities to contribute to the family economy serves as a strategy to spur productivity and empowerment among women, which we have a solid basis to assume will trigger multiple developmental progress within families and community. One initiative identified to help Baclayan women towards economic stability is soap and shampoo production, and over the past year, we have trained five women. They have shown great interest and been very productive, and they have already managed to sell products worth a couple of thousand pesos. As we see a good potential in soap production, we engaged other women from 13 barangays in Puerto Galera in this livelihood project. We compliment the skills training with basic knowledge on finance management and business development hoping to see some or all of these women more self-reliant and empowered.

Bracelet Production

As an emergency assistance to disadvantaged families during the pandemic, we ordered weaved bracelets from 83 women in the community. All of them had lost their source of income with the lockdown. Many of them are single mothers and have many dependent children. Each woman earned between 1000 to 1,600 pesos from the initiative. The bracelets are sold in Europe through friends and supporters, mainly our partner schools in Denmark. We were hoping for bulk sales via social media, since it could make a huge difference for a large number of families. Unfortunately, we are still waiting for the product or the concept to go viral.

Health Care and Misinformation

Dissemination of fake news and lack of access to facts caused major problems at the very early stages of the pandemic, where many indigenous people fled deep into the mountains to escape a virus that they thought extremely deadly. In order to provide factual information, we decided to produce and distribute COVID-19 Information Education Materials (IEC) with strong focus on virus transmission and prevention to Baclayan and the other 12 barangays of Puerto Galera. As soon as we had the permission from the LGU, we complemented the intervention in Baclayan with weekly medical and health services in the Children Health and Education Center (CHEC). A resident volunteer doctor and two (2) registered midwives led the campaign.

Sanitation Station Project

From years of providing medical and health services in Baclayan, we have learned that a majority of the illnesses experienced by the community, such as diarrhea, abdominal pain and skin diseases, are associated with poor hand hygiene. As a response, we started a partnership with community members to build sanitation stations a couple of years back. We provided the materials, while the community did the construction. At present, four sanitation stations have been completed in two different areas, and there are two more under construction. Each sanitation station has 2 to 3 toilets and a washing area connected to running water.



Education of Baclayan children during the pandemic.

Computer Class and Reading Camp for IP Beneficiaries

Despite the community quarantine, we managed to facilitate computer literacy sessions for 19 incoming grade 7 students. This recurring summer program teaches the students basic computer skills, so they are better equipped, as they enter high school. Pre-pandemic, we would do follow up sessions and invite the grade 7 students to use our computer room for assignments and research. This will also be the practice post-pandemic.

Along with the computer sessions, the students joined in reading and comprehension activities combined with life skills sessions through play. Young college volunteers from town helped in facilitating the activities.

Creative Learning Activities (CLA) through Storytelling and Play

We organized and trained students from our weekend tutorials to become storytellers in their villages and named the initiative Baclayan Educators and Storytellers (BESt). The group is composed of nine (9) high school and two (2) elementary school students. The BESt organized five CLA sessions for 49 children last July in their respective communities. Due to stricter COVID-19 guidelines from the LGU, we were forced to give up the sessions, but three mothers decided to continue the activity in their sitio. They saw the importance of academic learning for children, keeping them busy during the pandemic and preparing them for the coming school year. So, these three mothers have gathered learners from nursery level to Grade 12 on weekdays for basic numeracy and literacy lessons. Thirty-eight (38) young learners meet in and around a small hut, they call 'Aral-Kubo'. One of the mothers is currently doing an education course, and she acts as the primary teacher. The other two assist and support in the classroom management. This is another showcase of people/women empowerment in Baclayan that would have been unthinkable 10 years ago!

Some BESt members and Stairway staff have visited the Aral-Kubo regularly in support of the parent volunteer initiative. BESt facilitates storytelling sessions and comprehension activities. We support the initiative by providing meals Monday through Friday.

As more community members saw the value and impact of the Aral-Kubo initiative on their children, they decided to expand the hut to accommodate more learners and provide a more conducive place for learning. The parents contributed with both materials and labor to build an annex hut. Stairway supported by providing other construction needs/materials.

Let the Children Play Sessions

Let the Children Play is another creative learning activity. It is a catch up program that encourages students to come to school, increases class participation and promotes physical, mental and emotional health. These sessions are conducted three times a week. Due to social distancing guidelines, there are limited games and sports the children can play. During the CLA, we do activities through art and fine motor activities. Playing helps the children in their communication skills, critical thinking and self-confidence. A total of 144 students from the high school and elementary level, seven teachers and ten members of the Baclayan Food Security Program have participated in the playing program.



Adult Literacy

The adult literacy sessions for our farm workers and other interested members of the community continue, and they are highly appreciated by the students. Participation and frequency of the sessions have been affected by the pandemic restrictions, as well as the temporary absence of our foreign volunteer professional educator, whom we are trying to get back into the country. Still, we hold classes every Wednesday and Friday. A community college scholar is teaching the beginners classes.

Farm Training Scholarship for IP Youth

We have established a partnership with “The Mary Help of Christian School” in Calapan, where four boys/young men from Baclayan have received a scholarship for an Agriculture Course certified by the University of the Philippines and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA). Their internship will run for a year, and we hope to place more young people into this skills training program next year.

Organizing Parent Leaders

The Parents Leaders Group (PLG) is an organized group of parents, teachers, barangay officials and other members in the community, whose goal is to ensure children’s protection, participation and right to education. The PLG’s functions include:

1. Support and co-facilitate developmental activities for children, parents and other members of the community (creative learning activities, playing and sports, gardening, life skills, livelihood activities, etc.)
2. Mobilize parents and other members in the community to participate in awareness raising and capacity building sessions, like mindful parenting, positive discipline, health and hygiene, Covid-19 response, life skills, organic farming, technical vocational skills, etc.
3. Support and participate in school, barangay, and SFI activities that promote the welfare of children and families.

The goal is for the PLG to be empowered, to be resilient and self-reliant and to be able to inspire and lead action that brings change.

The PLG will undergo a series of education and training workshops to equip them with necessary knowledge and skills to achieve their goals.

As part of our plan to stimulate and increase women’s participation in Baclayan, we are applying for a grant under a COVID-19 Response Fund, with the purpose to support women towards their potential in community building and development by providing opportunities that can support their advancement and empowerment.

Engagement with the Teach for the Philippines (TFP)

Our partners from Teach for the Philippines (TFP) support the Aral Kubo by providing school supplies and learning materials for the children. They also conducted training on Marungko Approach for SFI staff, BEST, young volunteers from Puerto Galera and volunteer parents from Sitio Managan and Manggahan. Trained parents now facilitate the reading intervention of the children at home. The program of the TFP complements the objectives of the CLA Project. With this, we reach more children and empower more parents to participate in their children's learning and education.



Educational Assistance Initiative (EAI)

Stairway's Educational Assistance Initiative aims to support children's right to quality education through financial augmentation, academic support, and youth empowerment activities. The pandemic has sparked increased need and demand for our intervention, as a great number of families have lost their source of income. Through collaboration with schools and communities, we identified an additional 159 beneficiaries for this school year. Each elementary and high school student received Php 500.00 monthly allowance.

Prior to the school opening in October, Stairway promoted the organic backyard and community gardening among our EAI beneficiaries to address pandemic-related economic loss of income and to secure food on the tables. The gardening projects are explained in more detail further down.

Aside from the usual education assistance activities, we partnered with the local government unit of Puerto Galera for the distribution of learning kits to all enrolled public school students of PG. Overall, Stairway has provided 47,000 pieces of Break the Silence (BTS) Advocacy notebooks, 214, 000 pieces of pencils and 18,422 pieces of ballpens, while the LGU has provided crayons, portfolios, pad papers and other school supplies. The BTS notebooks contain useful information about the COVID-19 and the touching rules, along with contact information for local helplines.

In addition to school supplies, we also gave every child a copy of the "Ako ay Bata" (I am a Child) booklet, detailing children's rights in Filipino language. This is to send a message to every household about protecting and empowering children in the midst of the pandemic, while they are confined to their homes. We have received some very sad statistics about a steep increase in sexual violations of children in Puerto Galera between March and October. It has been reported that a total of 14 children have been sexually violated in this period of time, which is a number much higher than we have ever witnessed.



The "I am a Child" book was adopted by the DepEd National Office and used in the souvenir program for their Second National Summit for Children's Rights in Education. The beautiful illustrations also ended up in the 2021 calendar they have made and sent out to all partners.

Child Protection During Covid-19 Quarantine

Over the past three decades, Stairway has conceptualized and implemented a number of child protection initiatives, most of them with special focus on offline and online child sexual abuse and exploitation (CSAE). Ironically, we have concentrated more on the national and the international scene through the Break the Silence (BTS) campaign, focused on creating awareness on the issue of CSAE and building strong networks to address this multifaceted problem. For years, we have recognized that our gap was in terms of our limited involvement with our hometown LGU. This has changed, and it is now evident that Stairway has become a respected and recognized resource in child protection within our local municipality.

This year, we embarked on a five years memorandum of agreement (MOA 2020-2024) with the local government of Puerto Galera and the Department of Education on child protection. The MOA refers to a detailed plan to create a protective environment for children using a two-pronged (prevention and response) multi-stakeholder approach in addressing the issue of child sexual abuse and exploitation. In addition to capacity building of partner organizations, we also provide direct interventions to children referred to us by the community.

When quarantine was enforced due to the pandemic, children were forced to stay home, which magnified their vulnerabilities. On several occasions, we received cases of child abuse directly from the community. Recently, three child physical abuse and three child sexual abuse cases were reported directly to SFI, before they were reported to the authorities. Lack of trust, fear of safety and discretion, and limited capacity within the local authorities in responding to child sexual abuse and exploitation are some of the reasons, why people prefer to report cases to SFI first. This situation supports the need for the capacity building collaboration with the LGU we have now embarked on.



Our professional relationship with the local authorities is very positive, and we have been able to establish an open communication and close collaboration, even when it comes to responding to cases of child abuse. The local Women and Children Protection Desk (WCPD) Officers, the community council members, and local government social workers do not hesitate to consult with us, when they encounter difficult cases of child abuse. We are also providing mentoring and coaching sessions to two new government social workers, specifically on filing cases, facilitating medico-legal certificates, assisting children in court, provision of counseling, and networking with stakeholders.

There is also evidence that children perceive Stairway as an advocate and protector of their rights. On one occasion, a group of eight children brought an abused child to the house of our senior social-/caseworker for assistance. There have also been instances, where children use Stairway's name to protect themselves.

Child Protection Project with LGU

The onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic has naturally complicated the course of this intervention. At the same time, it seems to have inspired heightened interest and motivation from our local stakeholders to learn, to understand, and to improve on systems for child protection in our municipality. Our current activities cover all child protection mandated groups and councils, from the municipal hall and into the barrio councils, as well as the schools. The feedback we are getting from all entities have been overwhelmingly positive. It seems that time is ripe for positive change.

Baseline of Child Protection Systems in Puerto Galera

In order to reach a level where children of Puerto Galera are free from violence and communities have zero tolerance of any form of child abuse, it is important to understand the present context – what drives these child protection issues and what is the level of functionality of the existing local systems. Hence, we started with the development of a research study, which will be the basis for evidence-based planning and programming of the LGU and local DepEd.

Due to the pandemic, the conduct of the study, along with other planned activities, was delayed. However, despite restrictions and health risk, our team was determined to continue the study, because of a lockdown's anticipated effects on child protection. We expanded the scope of the study in order to capture the impact of the pandemic on children, families and communities in relation to child protection. All preparations and identification of active participants took place during the enhanced community quarantine, where nobody was allowed out. As soon as the quarantine restrictions eased, the team proceeded with the baseline study, now supported by 42 mobilized enumerators from our locality. As expected, the initial results showed major gaps in awareness and skills amongst duty bearers at all levels.

Capacity Development of Implementers

Recognizing the gap, the following planned activities are centered on capacitating all local implementers with a mandate to protect children from abuse and violence. The primary target groups are the Municipal- and Barangay Councils for the Protection of Children (M/BCPC), School Child Protection Committees, and Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) teachers.

So far, the series of training have resulted in: 1) strong alliance with local partners, 2) partners recognizing the urgency to address various child protection issues, 3) partners acknowledging the need to upgrade their skills, especially in child's rights programming, 4) partners appreciating their roles to influence and educate children, parents and other community stakeholders in dealing with different offline and online risks, 5) localized school child protection policies, 6) creation of action plans.

Advocacy

Aside from the LGU and DepEd partners, SFI recognized that it is crucial to directly target parents and guardians in this pandemic period. The team took steps in raising the awareness of parents and learners on how to cope and adapt with the demands of the current education set-up through the dissemination of Patnubayan ang Malupet material, included in the notebooks we distributed to all students of public schools in Puerto Galera. It is an instruction guide for parents and learners listing concrete steps in creating a safe environment for learners at home. This is part of the prevention strategy we came up with early on in the pandemic, along with the distribution of "Ako ay Bata" (I am a Child) booklets, detailing children's rights in a colorful and creative display.

The team did not only distribute the materials, they also conducted rollout sessions to parents in six barangays. These sessions became a venue for parents and guardians to give honest feedback on their experiences with the new learning methods. We documented, collated and shared the feedback with the DepEd Division Office of Puerto Galera. They took the feedback and suggestions from the parents and Stairway constructively, and they expressed their openness to a more regular and open discussion with parents. They recognize that one of their major gaps in this new mode of educating children is time to receive and act on feedback from parents.



Early December we received a Plaque of Recognition from the DepEd Regional Office for our role in providing child protection advocacy and training to local stakeholders.

Environmental Awareness for Children and Youth (EACY)

Only time will show, if this most extraordinary year of 2020 will provoke reflection leading to a change in direction, away from a path of mass extinction, exhausting natural resources and destroying our environment. Taken from our experience so far, there is hope. We see our partners in the local community increasingly receptive to our initiatives towards sustainability. We are in a time of forced change. We try to take the opportunity to inspire to transition into a time of desired change. We use the momentum to lobby for a different and more sustainable form for tourism in the future. The story of Boracay can be an inspiration.

Sea Adventure School

Due to corona related government restrictions, we were only able to push through with twenty-seven (27) Sea Adventure School (SAS) trips covering 621 participants for the whole year. Before the pandemic lockdown, we covered Grade 9 and Grade 12 students from Puerto Galera National High School, Puerto Galera Academy, students and parents from Acacia Waldorf School, and friends from Kaibigan Foundation. Also visiting and learning from the floating classroom are international partners from Kindernothilfe Foundation, Harvard University, and graduate school students from the Institute for Geography from Germany.



We have collected a total of 339.87 kilos of mixed plastic waste from the Minolo Mangrove and Haligi Beach area.



Number	Date	Participants	Pax	Garbage Collected (kg)
1	January 11	Harvard ●	29	29
2	January 15	PGNHS - Main G12	27	24
3	January 17	PGNHS - Main G12	26	25
4	January 21	PGNHS - Main G12	28	11
5	January 22	PGNHS - Main G12	28	10
6	January 23	PGNHS - Main G12	28	8
7	January 24	PGNHS - Main G12	26	11
8	January 28	PGNHS - Main G12	26	10
9	January 30	Kaibigan Foundation ●	16	-
10	January 31	PGNHS - San Isidro Extension	29	11
11	February 04	PGNHS - San Isidro Extension	30	15
12	February 05	PGNHS - San Isidro Extension	31	14
13	February 06	PGNHS - Main G9	20	11
14	February 07	PGNHS - Main G9	21	35
15	February 11	PGNHS - Main G9	23	18
16	February 12	PGNHS - Main G9	24	10
17	February 27	Institut fur Geographie, Germany ●	23	25
18	February 28	PGA - G12	30	6
19	March 02	PGA - G12	29	14
20	March 03	KNH and Dutch Team	13	5
21	March 09	Acacia Waldorf School ●	19	-
22	July 14	Aninuan Fisherfolks	22	-
23	August 26	Balatero Fisherfolks	10	-
24	September 02	Sto. Nino and Poblacion Fisherfolks	16	-
25	September 09	Balatero Barangay Officials	17	-
26	September 19	MENRO, PG LGU, DENR-ERDB	17	21
27	November 25	Aninuan Youth Leaders and Volunteers	13	27
		TOTAL	621	340

Note: In orange highlights are trips paid by guests.

Although we could not sail with students during the community quarantine, Berge Apo did not stay idle. Through our partnership with the Fisheries Department of the Municipal Agriculture Office (MAO) and the Municipal Environment Natural Resource Office (MENRO), the boat continued its mission as a floating classroom and advocate for environmental protection. MAO reported having caught 60 fishermen for violating various fishing regulations, so there was a good reason to work on a higher level of awareness amongst this particular target group. Thus, we ended up offering SAS trips for fisher folks from Barangay Aninuan, Balatero, Santo Nino, and Poblacion.

The MAO Fisheries Officer facilitated the discussions with the fisher folks. Along with the regular lessons taught in the SAS, local fisheries laws and regulations were discussed. Following their SAS exposure, the fisherfolk group from Aninuan organized a beach cleanup and snorkeling activity in their barangay. Women participants from the trip initiated regular cleanup within their community in Bignayan, and they agreed to the idea of influencing their community to promote sustainable fishing methods. Most significantly, after years of lobbying and months of meetings, the Bignayan folks were willing to cooperate in establishing a Marine Protected Area (MPA) across their village.



During the International Coastal Clean-Up last September, visitors from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources Ecosystem Research and Development Bureau joined SAS. This was another demonstration that our government is now recognizing the value of our floating classroom as a platform for education and advocacy for environmental sustainability.

During the three major typhoons hitting Mindoro in September and October, we secured Berge Apo by extending rope into the mangrove. Our SAS crew did a magnificent job, and she was one of the few boats in the bay left unscathed after the wrath of the storms. The only related damage was that rats did not waste any time using the rope connecting the mangrove to the boat as a pathway to get onboard. Since then, we have caught the rats and order has been restored onboard. The boat is regularly maintained through weekly engine checks, cleaning, and some minor repairs. We have just received a donation of special marine paint from Jotun, so next year we will dry dock and repaint the hull.



Top: Harvard students enjoyed their SAS trip the day before the eruption of Mount Taal. Below: With the help of the community volunteers, we renovated the makeshift bridge leading to the mangrove forest where Berge Apo is moored and where our SAS activities usually start.

New Environmental Education Initiatives

As we were not able to engage in SAS trips with the local high school students, we had a consultation with Grade 9 teachers and SAS trip educators last July to come up with an agreement to merge the SAS curriculum into the modular format of Grade 9 Science lessons. Each Grade 9 student has now received a copy of the SAS Learners' Guide as an additional input to their lessons on marine ecosystems and conservation. Along with the SAS guide, we developed a booklet with facts and "easy to do" tips on Household Waste Management, Composting, and Tree Growing. All three exercises are part of the grade 9 curriculum and will weigh in the students' grading.

We distributed a total of 860 SAS Learners' guide along with 2507 calamansi (a local citrus fruit) seedlings, in order to further support the learning objectives and the students' active engagement in environmental sustainable development. Each student received three seedlings to plant and take care of. Teachers are conducting regular home visits to check how they are doing and further explain the importance of the activity. Planting all 2507 seedlings is equivalent to planting calamansi in three hectares of land.



Grade nine high school students are to plant and nurture 2507 citrus trees in their home areas. Their success will be reflected in their grades, as the project is part of their science curriculum.

Organic Gardening towards Food Security Project

We have started up with two barangays as pilot areas for the trial of the community gardens project, Aninuan and Baclayan. The parent leaders and scholars under the Educational Assistance Initiative (EAI) as well as EACY Club members are the core movers of the community garden initiatives. EACY Club members initiated the first community garden in barangay Aninuan during the early weeks of the community lockdown, before parents and other children under the EAI joined in their project. They did very well until October, when three consecutive typhoons created havoc and totally damaged their anticipated harvests. They realized the area they had been using was flood-prone, so they went on to find another vacant lot with better conditions. Their garden project has now been relocated and revived.

Throughout the first six months of the project, we have held several capacity building activities for the pilot groups in partnership with the Municipal Agriculture Office (MAO). Our Baclayan farm team leader conducted garden assessments and gave practical recommendations for the improvement of the pilot community gardens. The Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) and Stairway provided gardening tools and materials to the pilot groups, including shovels, hoes, mattocks, garden hose, sprinklers, seedling trays, compost soil, organic fertilizer rice hull, and various vegetable seeds.

The pilot groups recently held an evaluation of their community gardens. In summary, they are grateful that their gardens augmented food for their families' needs, and they really appreciate how their community garden became a venue for their cooperation in these trying times. They appreciate the active participation of their group members as well as the active support of the barangay officials and the Municipal Agriculture Office. They learned a lot from the capacity building sessions, and they have come up with a request for further training, supported by a comprehensive capacity-building plan.



Parents and children at community garden.



Baclayan medicinal garden.

Solid Waste Management Campaign in the Schools and Communities

We have standardized and expanded the solid waste management system among SFI's Educational Assistance Initiative (EAI) to include the participation of parent leaders in the campaign and the monitoring of 608 educational program beneficiaries. All households will be monitored and guided on proper garbage segregation, no burning of garbage, and composting of organic waste.

In collaboration with two LGU offices, we managed to gather a crowd of 110 parent leaders, barangay officials, and teachers to review and discuss proper solid waste management principles and standard monitoring systems. This was a large crowd, considering that quarantine protocols were still in place, but the large venue made it possible for the participants to practice social distancing.

The barangay officials understood the need to craft localized barangay ordinances on Solid Waste Management to “give teeth” to stricter and effective implementation of the Solid Waste Management Law the national government enacted back in 2001. Some barangay officials and teachers also committed to go with parent leaders in the house-to-house monitoring of garbage segregation. Some barangay officials even committed to adopting the monitoring system among their other constituents, outside of the EAI beneficiaries circle. Based on this expanded community engagement, we expect a significant increase in the number of households practicing proper garbage segregation and composting, and a significant drop in the number of people burning garbage.

Recently, we got in touch with Rethink Plastic Philippines (RPP) - a non-profit organization dedicated to understand the world's plastic addiction, offer and promote new material innovations, and act against plastic waste. According to the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives, three million diapers are thrown away every day in the Philippines, which usually means dropped in landfills or leaked to the sea. In collaboration with RPP, we aim to provide reusable cloth diaper sets to around 300 current and expectant mothers, who have already been identified and agreed to join the project. Disposable diapers are not only bad for our environment, they are also expensive, so this is a good time to launch this initiative. Based on feedback, we hope to spread this all around our municipality and beyond.



Bignayan Community Intervention

We have taken significant steps in raising environmental awareness and mobilization of the IP community of Bignayan towards more sustainable means of livelihood. Many people in Bignayan still practice slash and burn farming and fish with fine masked net right on the reef, causing evident damage in both areas.

After a series of talks, some strong video documentation and a SAS trip, the community elders called a meeting that resulted in a consensus to protect and declare a portion of the reef across the community as a spawning area and no-fish zone. About a hundred individuals from the village participated in this gathering, which we organized in coordination with the fisheries department of the Municipal Agriculture Office (MAO) and marine protection consultants from the private sector. The consensus formed is an important part of the legislation of a municipal fisheries ordinance. The tedious and drawn out process we underwent with the IP community to educate and inform them towards their decision on protecting endangered marine resources will hopefully prove sustainable. The long process has been in stark contrast to the usual top-down approach, where municipal leaders craft and impose ordinances that constituents are not aware of and do not understand. They usually end up poorly enforced.

We are pleased with this result, but the area and the scope of protection is still not matching our goal to see the entire bay declared a Marine Protected Area. We will continue to seek the necessary technical assistance from scientific organizations and the academe to ascertain the right scope and level of protection for this area.



Community meeting in Bignayan.



The community dispersed five collection bins in various locations to enable them to easily collect residual wastes from the households and sell the recyclables. EACY Club members and volunteers painted and marked these bins as “Residual”.



All plastic and other waste from the Bignayan community used to wash directly into the sea. After eight months of grass root advocacy with children, women and elders, things have changed. A women’s group initiate and organize regular community cleanups during weekends, assisted by the children, who are in the Creative Learning Activities.

Slash-and-Burn/Kaingin

We have pursued focused-group discussions to seek sustainable alternatives to the destructive aspects of the slash-and-burn method of farming, locally called “kaingin”. Through the technical training from the region’s Agricultural Training Institute, four IP elders joined the Sloping Agricultural Land Technology Training (SALT) held at our Baclayan Farm. The SALT method aims to prevent soil erosion and helps develop and produce more nutrients to the soil by growing fruit trees and nitrogen-fixing shrubs in hedgerows together with traditional crops and vegetables grown in between.

The knowledge and skills the elders acquired in the SALT training, they now share with their fellow-villagers to transform their kaingins into more sustainable food production areas.

Initially, we have identified a pilot group of 30 people (25% of the target 120 beneficiary families), to whom we have provided fruit seedlings, vegetable seeds and farming tools. They will all try the SALT method, and we expect that the effectiveness of this method will attract their fellow villagers to emulate and try in their kaingins.

As quarantine restrictions eased, the environmental education and Creative Learning Activity (initiated by EACY Club members) are now continuing in Bignayan. Children ages 7-12 years old are the target participants, hoping to enhance their creative thinking with activities such as storytelling, plays, and hands-on activities in exploring the natural environment through clean-ups in their vicinity, basic household solid waste management, composting, and organic gardening. We have made sure that COVID-19 virus has been explained in simple terms, and the children were taught and made to practice the minimum health protocols, such as mask-wearing, social distancing, proper handwashing, and eating healthy foods.

New Partnerships Forged

Two of EACY’s staff joined Al Gore’s Climate Reality Project, a global movement of over 21,000 individuals trained to educate the public about the causes and solutions to the climate crisis. The lockdowns during pandemic did not stop the expansion of the movement as it went online with a week-long training last July. Following the training, our EACY team has so far reached out to 62 individuals, mainly teachers from local high schools. The climate presentations added to the high school teachers’ climate literacy, inspired action, and elicited simple and concrete steps on how to help solve the climate crisis in their way. They committed to help in the Solid Waste Management campaign by taking part in educating local households on proper garbage segregation, composting, and reduction of plastic waste. They will do this by carrying out the monitoring during their house-to-house visits among their students. One school went as far as to explore the possibility of planting mangroves on the beach near their school.

The Climate reality project also opened the doors to a wide network of climate activists and individuals for resources as well as projects related to the climate campaign. The Philippine branch of the Climate Reality Project is campaigning among the private business sector and the government legislators to expand investments and installation of green energy sources in the country. Stairway’s practice can be shared as a model within our community, as we cover between 70 to 90% of our energy consumption from solar power.

Along with the Climate Reality Project, we also forged new partnerships with other organizations on a common environmental agenda. Mentioned earlier is our collaboration with Rethink Plastic Philippines to do away with the use of disposable diapers.

Lastly, we got in contact with the local government and the Locsin Foundation to explore the possibility of developing the Minolo mangrove area as a sustainable ecotourism site. This is the mangrove area where we usually start our Sea Adventure School sessions. It is owned by the Locsin family. We already had initial talks with representatives of the Locsin Foundation and the Mayor of Puerto Galera. Both are very keen on the proposal, which is a step in the direction of promoting a different and more sustainable form of tourism in Puerto Galera.

Navigating Through the “New Normal”

Like everybody else, we had our share of roadblocks in pushing through and adjusting our planned activities in the context of the limitations set by the pandemic. Along the way, we also found some new opportunities.

One way to reach children during the lockdown was through social media. We created a Facebook group for our Organic Gardening towards Food Security Project, where we share contents and materials with EACY Club members and EAI beneficiaries to help them develop their individual and community gardens. The Facebook group is also a platform for free discussion as they share both their successes and challenges in gardening with their peers and the Stairway team.

During World Ocean’s Day last June 8, we posted a 360 online virtual tour around Stairway’s nearby beach. This included some interesting facts and information about the ocean and how the reader can help in marine conservation. Unlike the previous celebrations, we were not able to gather hundreds of children and partners for the activity, but we made sure that we spread the message online.



EACY Dive

Since we started EACY Dive, it has been in a constant positive development, and we ended 2019 on a very high note. 2020 also started out with great promise, even though the Taal volcano was already putting a dark cloud over tourism and travel to Mindoro. We still had dives almost every day in January and were looking forward to a great season based on the number of inquiries and interest in our unique concept and approach.

Travel and tourism is one of the industries hit the hardest by the covid-19 pandemic and the dive business came to a complete halt. We had to close down EACY Dive during the lock down and have kept activities at a minimum ever since. The dive center is supposed to generate income for the EACY program, so we needed to evaluate the possibilities to survive the pandemic and recover without compromising the basic idea. We have successfully negotiated with the resort owner to lower our rent to a minimum, and we have canceled our PADI membership for the coming year. With the earned revenue from the start of the year, we can stay in business without loss for some time. Our costs are now at a minimum, and we will be ready to re-engage once people return to the island. We are aiming and hoping for a higher demand for sustainable tourism, as the travel and dive industry will need an updated approach past the pandemic.



