

# The Economic and Artistic Flows of Gawad Kalinga

By Raymund B. Habaradas

Business Management Department

De La Salle University

[rbhabaradas@yahoo.com](mailto:rbhabaradas@yahoo.com); [raymund.habaradas@dlsu.edu.ph](mailto:raymund.habaradas@dlsu.edu.ph)

## Abstract

*In this paper, we make sense of the Gawad Kalinga (GK) phenomenon by examining both its economic and artistic flows. According to Davis and McIntosh (2005), economic flow is “rooted in science and technology” and on the straightforward notion that organizations utilize resources to fulfill desires. It presumes that people look for products and services that are “better, faster, cheaper, and safer.” Artistic flow, however, is rooted in the humanities. It addresses the other desires of human beings, who seek “beauty, enjoyment, excitement, and meaning” in their lives.*

*GK workers, volunteers, partners, and beneficiaries (kapitbahayan) are driven by a compelling vision, i.e., to bring the Philippines out of the Third World by 2024 “by raising five million families living in extreme poverty out of landlessness, homelessness and hunger.” Over the years, those that have become part of this movement of hope have been inspired by imaginative indigenous concepts, such as kalinga politics, bayanihan economics, and padugo. In short, GK goes beyond the economics and logistics of building houses and physical structures. It has raised the tasks of community building and poverty alleviation into an art, lifting the spirits of those who behold and experience the GK Way.*

## Introduction

In 1991, Peter Drucker lamented how government “has proved incompetent at solving social problems” even as he credited not-for-profit organizations (nonprofits) for “virtually every success we have scored.” According to him, great advances in health and longevity “have been sponsored, directed, and in large part financed by such nonprofits as the American Heart Association and the American Mental Health Association,” while results in the rehabilitation of addicts are largely due to the efforts of Alcoholics Anonymous, the Salvation Army, and the Samaritans. During that time, there were already some 900,000 nonprofits in America, with some 90 million Americans—one out of every two adults—working as “volunteers” for an average of three hours a week. This prompted Drucker to declare that nonprofits “have the potential to become America’s social sector—equal in importance to the public sector of government and the private sector of business.”

Drucker’s declaration resonates almost two decades later in America’s former colony, the Philippines. Amidst the landscape of poverty, corruption, and both natural and man-made disasters, nonprofits have shown the way. One of these nonprofits is Gawad Kalinga (GK), the achievements of which are remarkable, to say the least. Just 15 years after it started in 1995, GK has built close to 200,000 houses in more than 2,000 GK villages in poor communities all over the country for a fraction of the cost of government’s own subsidized and low-cost housing programs. Development experts have, in fact, estimated the total development generated by Gawad Kalinga at more than P8 billion in just over eight years (P3 billion for houses, P0.5 billion for schools, clinics, and other infrastructure, P2 billion for land and site development, P2.5 billion for social

preparations, donated professional services, and volunteerism, programs for health, education, and livelihood).<sup>1</sup>

In this paper, we argue that the success of Gawad Kalinga is largely a result of its ability to manage not only the economic flow but also the artistic flow of its work. In a nutshell, the artistic flow of an organization begins with intangible inputs such as “imagination, emotion, intelligence, and experience,” which are transformed into finished work through the artistic processes of “creating, producing and connecting.” Finally, the artistic outputs of these processes satisfy the end-users’ desires for “beauty, excitement, enjoyment, and meaning” (Davis & McIntosh, 2005). As GK founder Antonio “Tony” Meloto himself said in his book *Builder of Dreams* (2009): “Gawad Kalinga is a work of art and a labor of love. It seeks to restore the beauty of the land by harnessing the immense creativity and generosity of its people.”

We proceed by providing a brief history of Gawad Kalinga, and by describing its key programs. We then describe the economic and artistic flows of GK by examining some of its major initiatives over the years, and by recounting some of the stories of its leaders, workers, partners, beneficiaries, and volunteers.

### **The movement that is Gawad Kalinga**

Gawad Kalinga (literally “to give care”) is a community development model that begins at the grassroots level. It is “fueled by a massive army of volunteers who are working together in *bayanihan* (cooperation) to bring about change and to restore the dignity of the poorest of the poor.” It engages all sectors of society, i.e., business, government, academe, religious, non-government organizations, and private citizens in “building a first-class Philippines one community at a time” (Gawad Kalinga, 2009).

Gawad Kalinga’s beginnings can be traced back to 1995 when Couples for Christ (CFC) in the Philippines organized a youth camp in Bagong Silang, Caloocan City, one of the biggest slum areas in Metro Manila. In the next few years, efforts to reach out to families of gang members and to beautify community areas slowly bore fruit. This led to the building of the first GK community in Bagong Silang, which included the ANGKOP Livelihood Center and the Chapel of the Forgiven. The very first GK house was built for the Adduru family.

In 2000, 12 teams pioneered the first GK villages outside of Bagong Silang. This was made possible through the network of Youth for Christ. These 12 sites participated in the Gawad Kalinga Awards, a nationwide competition launched the previous year to recognize the best practices in the various GK programs (i.e. shelter, education, and community empowerment) in these communities. Also this year, GK built 80 homes for 400 victims of the big flood that killed thousands and almost wiped out the entire city of Ormoc. In November 2000, ANCOP USA was founded.

In 2002, some 2,000 volunteers from Singles for Christ built in three days 16 GK homes in Dumaguete City, Negros Oriental. Impressed by what she witnessed, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo challenged GK to build 1,000 homes with P30 million from her

---

<sup>1</sup> From the article “After Edsa I, Gawad Kalinga Filipinos’ next gift to the world,” retrieved from <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/inquirerheadlines/nation/view/20070128-460...>

presidential fund. In spite of its lack of experience in building at such a scale back then, GK succeeded in building the houses in 70 sites throughout the country within a year.

President Arroyo's highly-publicized initiative served as a major boost for GK, which began to attract leaders from both sides of the political fence, including opposition leader Sen. Aquilino Pimentel Jr., who provided P40 million from his Countryside Development Fund for schools, livelihood centers, sewage and pathwalks. Support also came from Sen. Manuel Villar, Sen. Francis Pangilinan, and other senators. Hundreds of governors and mayors have since joined the bandwagon.

In the next few years, GK collaborated closely with several cabinet secretaries, including Vice President Noli de Castro, Defense Secretary Avelino Cruz, Agriculture Secretary Luis Lorenzo, Environment Secretary Elisea Gozun, Social Services Secretary Dinky Soliman, Health Secretary Manual Dayrit, Agrarian Reform Secretary Rene de Villa, Budget Secretary Emilia Boncodin, Trade and Industry Secretary Johnny Santos, and Housing Secretary Mike Defensor. Through their support, according to Meloto (2009), "whole communities with houses, schools, water systems and farms were built for typhoon and fire victims, urban informal settlers, rebel returnees, soldiers, and other marginalized sectors of society."

The growing support it had been receiving from various sectors emboldened GK to launch GK777 in 2003 during the first GK Expo in Fort Bonifacio, Taguig. GK777 is "a global movement to build the homes of 700,000 families in 7,000 communities in seven years. Also during that year, former President Corazon Aquino declared that "GK is People Power."

In 2005, GK partnered with the National Disaster Coordinating Council (NDCC), the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), and 200 LGUs to give care to typhoon victims. Through Kalinga Luzon and Kalinga Leyte, GK pioneered a template for rescue and rehabilitation of communities built by volunteers – GK Isang Milyong Bayani (GK1MB) was born. Also that year, the 1st GK Highway of Peace began and the first Muslim GK village was built in Datu Paglas, Maguindanao.

In 2006, Gawad Kalinga received numerous awards from various groups. These included the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Community Leadership, the first Haydee Yorac Award, the first Jose P. Laurel Award, the Manuel Luis Quezon Award, the Philippine Daily Inquirer's Filipino of the Year citation, the Philippine Star's People of the Year, the Philippine Tatler award, Rotary's Paul Harris award, the TOFIL award, and the American Field Service award. By that time, GK had become a true nation-building movement. Local government units (LGUs), civic organizations, politicians, overseas Filipino workers (OFWs), academe, and even rival corporations (e.g. Globe and Smart, Jollibee and McDonalds, Unilever, Procter & Gamble, and Nestle) embraced GK's vision of a slum-free Philippines. Key GK programs were also introduced in 2006, namely GK Bayan-anihan, a food sufficiency program, and GK Mabuhay, which transformed GK communities into tourist destinations.

In 2007, GK made its presence more strongly felt overseas, following earlier ventures in Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. Singapore President S.R. Nathan launched their feeding program on February 14 at GK Baseco in Tondo, Manila. GK turned over to its local residents the GK Rafaella village in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Meanwhile, the

Canadian government continued to provide financial support to build more GK villages. British Minister of State Dr. Kim Howells, who visited GK Pinagsama, said that the world was seeing “a new renaissance of the Filipino.”

In 2008, the Gawad Kalinga Builders Institute (GKBI), the think tank, training arm, and learning center of GK, was established at the Ateneo de Manila University. African nationals visited the Philippines with the intention of adopting GK in South Africa, even as GK advocates Dylan Wilk and Nathan Mari, along with their families, drove 22,000 miles across America to spread the work of GK.

In 2009, Gawad Kalinga unveiled to the world the emerging Asian model for development at the first GK Global Summit in Boston. It also launched GK2024, a 21-year vision that provides the roadmap towards a First World Philippines” (Gawad Kalinga, 2009).

### Gawad Kalinga programs

According to Edgar Chua, country chairman of Shell companies in the Philippines and member of GK’s board of consultants: “what differentiates GK from others is that it has taken steps to ensure the sustainability of the communities it builds” (Meloto, 2009). Its holistic approach, which includes values formation training, education, health care, environmental awareness, food sufficiency, and livelihood training to beneficiaries, is what attracts sponsors (individual and corporate) and volunteers alike. Summarized in Figure 1 are the various programs of GK.

**Figure 1. Gawad Kalinga’s key programs and their goals**

Program	Description	Goals
Community Infrastructure Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Building beautiful and brightly painted homes and other infrastructure (e.g. multi-purpose halls, Sibol schools, clinics) in clean and green environments through sweat equity of the <i>kapitbahayan</i> (GK residents) with assistance from volunteers in a spirit of <i>bayanihan</i> (teamwork and cooperation)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To restore the dignity of the poorest of the poor by providing them with a stable foundation where they can begin their lives anew</li> <li>To inspire families, especially their children to dream of a beautiful future</li> </ul>
Child and Youth Development Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>SIBOL</b>, which means “to grow”, provides values-based education to pre-school children from 3 to 6 years old.</li> <li><b>SAGIP</b>, which means “to save a life”, is a support program for children aged 7 to 13. Children receive free academic tutorials, sports and creative workshops, and values formation classes.</li> <li><b>SIGA</b>, which means “to light”, prepares the youth (teens) to become productive citizens through sports and creative activities and mentoring sessions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To develop the skills and talents of the kids and youth of GK communities by inculcating values and providing opportunities that bring out their fullest potential</li> </ul>
Gawad Kalusugan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Careful monitoring of health profiles of GK families through the assistance of volunteer doctors, nurses, and medical practitioners.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To empower the poor to take care of their communities: “health in the hands of the people”</li> </ul>

Program	Description	Goals
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Health awareness and training workshops for local leaders (neighborhood and government) in health programs and practices that will benefit the whole community such proper nutrition, sanitation, disease prevention and first aid.</li> <li>Partnerships with medical schools and associations to provide basic medical and dental services (e.g. free consultation, immunization, minor surgical procedures, and nutrition programs).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To provide quality of life for the poorest of the poor who have been previously deprived of quality health care</li> </ul>
Green Kalinga	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Environment advocacy through seminars and workshops</li> <li>Use of environment-friendly materials into GK infrastructure</li> <li>Use of renewable energy sources in communities</li> <li>Creating environment-friendly projects such as solid waste management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To inculcate love and care for the environment among community residents</li> </ul>
GK Bayan-anihan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>GK's food sufficiency program – empowering the communities to produce their food through their own GK farms</li> <li>Launching of model farms in partnership with corporations – Selecta, Globe, Shell, Wyeth</li> <li>Training and assisting GK residents to care for their farms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To provide sufficient food for families in the GK communities</li> <li>To eradicate hunger in the Philippines by establishing sustainable food sufficiency programs through multi-sectoral partnerships</li> <li>To transform lives towards a hunger-free nation</li> </ul>
GK Mabuhay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>GK sites as tourist destinations and cultural attractions – GK villagers welcome visitors with warmth and hospitality brought about by a renewed sense of hope.</li> <li>Training <i>Mabuhay</i> ladies to be effective tour guides with good communication skills.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To showcase and preserve Philippine culture and values in GK communities</li> </ul>
Community Empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organization of GK community members under the Kapitbahayan Neighborhood Association, where strong values formation is translated into concrete guidelines for community living, which are agreed upon and lived out by every member.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To help GK villages become self-sustaining communities</li> <li>To inculcate stewardship</li> <li>To ensure unity, cooperation, and accountability</li> <li>To make model GK villages agents of change and transformation in their larger communities</li> </ul>

### **The economic and artistic flows of Gawad Kalinga**

We look into the operations of Gawad Kalinga by examining its inputs-processes-outputs (I-P-O). This classic economic tool is useful in measuring the productivity (i.e. total

output over total inputs) of businesses and other types of organizations, including nonprofits.

In the case of GK, we simply measure how many houses can be produced (output) within a period of time given the amount of land, labor, equipment, construction materials, and money (inputs) expended. Productivity can be improved in various ways: (a) reduce the cost of inputs by using cheaper raw materials or by paying construction workers lower wages; (b) increase output by reducing waste materials or by bringing down the idle time of workers; and (c) use any combination that will boost output to a greater degree given an increase in input, e.g. investing on the training of workers or utilizing machines to speed up the house-building process.

Using these measures, we can say that the estimated cost of building one GK house, which ranges from P30,000 to P50,000, is grossly understated. This is because the cost estimate excludes the time and effort contributed by the *kapitbahayan* and the GK volunteers in actually building the houses, and the time spent by the GK leaders and caretaker teams to organize the building activity. If we were to accurately quantify these inputs and assign equivalent peso values to them, we can conclude that the cost of building each house will approximate (or even exceed) the unit cost if skilled labor and professional expertise were utilized and paid for at market rates.

However, we miss the point entirely if we look at GK from a purely economic perspective, for its success lies not in terms of organizational efficiency but in terms of intangibles that inspire people and that ignite heroic action. GK is not about building houses. It is about building dreams.

At this point, it would be helpful to understand the concepts of economic flow and artistic flow, and to uncover the assumptions underlying each.

In the world of business, the economic flow is well-known. It is merely converting resources (e.g. manpower, materials, machines, and money) into products and services that people buy to fulfill their needs and wants. The conversion or transformation process typically involves purchasing, manufacturing, distribution, marketing, and, sometimes, research and development (R&D). When the economic flow is managed well, businesses are able to come up with products and services more efficiently.

While managing the economic flow keeps both business organizations and nonprofits viable, it is the successful management of artistic flow that lifts organizations to much greater heights. While economic flow enables organizations to come up with products and services that are “better, faster, cheaper, and safer,” artistic flow addresses the other desires of human beings who seek “beauty, excitement, enjoyment, and meaning” in their lives.

The elements of artistic flow, according to Davis and McIntosh (2005) are as follows:

- artistic inputs (i.e. imagination, emotion, intelligence, and experience),
- artistic processes (i.e. create, produce, and connect), and
- artistic outputs (i.e. beauty, excitement, enjoyment, and meaning).

Imagination is “the ability to see possibilities, to see what’s not there yet.” Emotion is “the gift not just of feeling but of anticipating feelings in others.” Intelligence is “the

knack for reading between the lines and recognizing connections,” while experience is “the skill of accumulating insights from what you’ve seen and from what other people have done.” When these artistic inputs are added to the classical factors of production (land, labor, and capital), we achieve extraordinary results. These results, according to Davis and McIntosh, take the form of artistic outputs. Beauty “elicits admiration and delight for itself, without any consideration of its usefulness,” while excitement stirs up emotion in people. Enjoyment is taking pleasure or satisfaction in an experience or possession, while meaning “comes from the psychological significance attached to something more than from the thing itself.”

The elements of artistic flow are evident in GK’s various initiatives and programs. They are, likewise, found in the stories of its beneficiaries and benefactors alike.

Let us begin with the artistic inputs of GK.

***Imagination.*** Gawad Kalinga began as a personal journey of faith for its founder Tony Meloto. In Bagong Silang, he “started to dream for those who were helpless to dream, to hope for those who had given up, to handhold those who were too weak to stand on their own feet.” Back when Bagong Silang was one of the most dangerous slums in the country, inhabited by addicts, alcoholics, prostitutes, and criminals, Meloto cultivated the heart of a radical optimist, which he described as “one that could see beauty beyond the ugliness, light beyond the doom and gloom.” To him, an ugly slum could become a beautiful and peaceful community, and every delinquent had the potential to be a good citizen. “I had to consciously seek the innate goodness in every human heart,” he said, “and discover the potential of the mind to build and not to destroy life” (Meloto, 2005).

More than a decade after, with GK’s solid accomplishments and the various recognition it has received, Meloto’s optimism has not waned, and he combines it with unbridled imagination. Here are among the initiatives thought out by Meloto and Team GK that serve to inspire not only because of their audacious nature but because they paint an optimistic future of the Philippines and the Filipino:

- **GK777.** Launched in 2003, GK777 is the vision to build 700,000 homes in 7,000 communities in seven years. The goal of the campaign is to “un-squat the poorest of the poor, heal their woundedness, regain their trust, build their confidence, make them think and act as a community and to share the joy of a country rising from poverty.” When former President Corazon Aquino expressed her apprehension to Meloto about what seemed like an overly ambitious target, he explained that adopting targets that border on the impossible was needed “if Gawad Kalinga were to become a major counterforce to the fear and lack of confidence of the Filipino people, specially the poor and the marginalized.” With just a few months left before the seven-year timeline ends, GK has yet to reach its initial target, but it has succeeded in building the confidence of the Filipino, and has triggered the process of addressing social injustice in the country.
- **GK1MB.** Launched in 2005, GK1MB or Isang Milyong Bayani (One Million Heroes) in the Philippines (called One Million Builders in other countries) seeks to raise one million volunteers not only from the Philippines but also all over the world. The idea is for volunteers to provide their talents, skills and time, at least four hours a month to assist in GK communities. Professionals in various fields

are also given the opportunity to share their skills and expertise for six months to two years of full-time service in GK communities.

- **GK2024.** Gawad Kalinga seeks to uplift five million Filipinos out of extreme poverty by the year 2024. The first phase of the journey (from the year 2003 to 2010) aims to achieve Social Justice, and is captured in GK777. The second phase (from 2011 to 2017) is the stewardship phase called Social Artistry, and aims to empower GK communities for self-governance, self-reliance, and self-sufficiency through community-based programs for health, education, environment, and productivity. The final phase (from 2018 to 2024) is envisioned as a time of Social Progress, and “seeks to achieve scale and sustainability by developing the grassroots economy and expanding the reach and influence of GK to five million families with support from key sectors of society in the Philippines and partners abroad” (Gawad Kalinga, 2009).

The beauty of these dreams is that those who choose to take part are bound to reap within their lifetimes the fruits of their labor and love. The 21-year journey that is GK2024, in particular, “represents one generation of Filipinos who will journey from poverty to prosperity, from neglect to respect, from shame to honor, from third-world to first-world, from second-class to first-class citizen of the world.”

**Emotion.** For the roughly 9 million Filipinos abroad, there is longing to connect with the homeland, and GK has struck a chord in the hearts of many of our *kababayans*.

For Rose Cabrera, joining GK meant leaving a promising law career in America in 2004. A graduate of a top US school, she was practicing as a successful young lawyer in Los Angeles, earning a six-figure income representing big corporations, and driving a Mercedes Benz. However, she and her husband Bong decided that there is more to living the American dream. Rose left her job to work full-time for GK as executive director of its ANCOP Foundation (USA), Inc., and the couple sold their Mercedes Benz to simplify their lives. They also decided to sponsor the first GK village outside of the Philippines. The Rafaella GK Village in Phnom Phen, Cambodia is now home to 20 families who used to be scavengers. They named the village Rafaella, a name they were reserving for the baby they had long been praying for. Ten years after their marriage, they were finally blessed with a son they named Rafael Mateo, whose first birthday they planned to celebrate in his GK village with his Cambodian brothers and sisters.<sup>2</sup>

For Primo Andres and the doctors belonging to the University of Santo Tomas Medical Alumni Association in America (USTMAAA), their involvement in GK resulted into a showcase village in Towerville, San Juan del Monte, Bulacan, which is visited by their alumni whenever they went home to the Philippines. Now there are 11 such villages and a medical clinic / dormitory in Towerville put up by individual alumni, classes, fraternity, and group of friends.

Dr. Andres and his wife Sylvia have also donated GK villages in both Panabo, Davao del Norte and in Cordon, Isabela. Andres’ testimony probably captures the sentiments of thousands of Filipinos abroad who have also been inspired by GK: “We have achieved

---

<sup>2</sup> From “No More Tears,” written by Rose Cabrera, and published in Tony Meloto’s *Builder of Dreams*, pp. 273-275.

our dreams in our adopted country, the USA. Now it is time for us to look back at the country we left behind but have never forgotten nor ceased to love.”<sup>3</sup>

**Intelligence.** While imagination is the skill of seeing possibilities, intelligence is the keen awareness that allows one to manipulate those possibilities in one’s head. In the artistic flow, intelligence is the ability to connect the dots between what one sees and what one imagines (Davis & McIntosh, 2005). Meloto has brought this skill into GK, especially during its early years.

An interesting story is when Meloto declined a generous donation from a rich and influential but very low-key couple in February 1996. The husband, who was then CEO of Johnson and Johnson, handed Meloto a check for a huge amount as his and his wife’s donation to GK’s community rehabilitation program. The couple was moved by the inspiring transformation of the Bagong Silang boys, and expressed their sincere desire to help. Meloto profusely thanked the couple for their gesture, but carefully explained that it was not yet time for programs that required big funding since the initial focus was on building relationships with the residents. Nevertheless, the couple promised to make themselves available when they were needed, including the amount that they had offered.<sup>4</sup>

Back then, Meloto already saw that people will give to a good cause, that “there is no absence of caring and generosity in the world,” and that “if you go for the heart, the pocket will follow.” We, of course, now know that the fountain of generosity has not stopped flowing, and that hundreds of thousands of individuals all over the world continue to contribute their “time, talent, and treasure” in support of the GK vision.

Another manifestation of how intelligence is recognized as a valuable input is the setting up of the Gawad Kalinga Builders Institute (GKBI). GKBI is fashioned as “a partnership undertaken with the school partners of GK,” and serves as a think tank and learning institution for GK teams, volunteers, and partners.

As a think tank, GKBI develops templates and models for Gawad Kalinga through community and school-based research. It encourages schools and universities to engage GK communities in documenting best practices, and in introducing new approaches and technologies. Other initiatives include integrating the GK way in the curriculum, research, and internship programs; and developing, offering, and implementing GK knowledge products (i.e. courses and programs) that will impact not only GK communities but also other sectors (i.e. corporations, civic groups, and government) that are becoming more involved in community building and social transformation. As a learning institution, GKBI is engaged in capacity building. It designs and implements relevant training programs for GK teams, the *kapitbahayan*, caretaker teams, management boards, volunteers, and partners (Gawad Kalinga, 2009).

**Experience.** Over the past 15 years, GK has learned from both the best practices and the missteps of earlier years. Just like other pioneers, Meloto had to learn everything the hard way “because no one in the country at that point could show me that there was a better way.” Aside from the insights he gained from Bagong Silang, Meloto also learned a great

---

<sup>3</sup> From “The ‘Hearts’ of GK,” written by Dr. Primo Andres, and published in *Builder of Dreams*, pp. 271-273.

<sup>4</sup> From Tony Meloto’s *Builder of Dreams*, p. 55

deal from GK's experience in its early communities in Magsungay, Bacolod City; in Bagsak, Calinan, Davao; and in Eversley Sanitarium, Cebu.

In Magsungay, GK encountered problems, especially when dubious claims to what was clearly government land cropped up. This prevented GK from expanding because it did not want to get into a legal battle, and it did not get concrete support from the local government. Because of this, GK has always made sure that it only built homes on areas where there is clear legal ownership by the beneficiary or long-term land use of at least 50 years. Today, GK has secured enough land, on which 550,000 houses could be built.

Another important lesson Meloto learned from the Magsungay experience "is that development is a long process of dealing with mistakes, overcoming frustrations and not giving up, continuing to discover better practices and partnering with those who could do things better or had the competencies we did not have."<sup>5</sup>

In Bagsak, GK encountered problems in sustainable food production and livelihood. Hunger was a major challenge it had to confront. The lesson learned is the need to get more land for food sufficiency and entrepreneurship. This is probably the inspiration for the GK Bayan-anihan program, a partnership of GK and the Department of Agriculture (DA). Bayan-anihan's three-year (from 2009 to 2011) goal is to build 2,500 farms that will feed 500,000 people for life.<sup>6</sup>

In Eversley, GK recognized the need to go for institutional partnership with government, schools, and business corporations in order to sustain the work. Meloto acknowledges that "development cannot be sustained purely through volunteerism and doles." And even if he was cautioned by friends against working with politicians, he realized that "it would be difficult to achieve scale and help more people if we did not deal with government." The important thing, he said, is for GK to be clear about its position: GK must not judge politicians or beg for their help, but must support them so that they can become effective as public servants. Today, GK's work has expanded rapidly thanks to the support of mayors and governors in hundreds of local government units (LGUs) throughout the country.<sup>7</sup>

GK has also succeeded in tapping the experience of individuals coming from different fields and disciplines, and in integrating their ideas into its development model. Among these individuals are former DENR Secretary Elisea "Bebet" Gozun, who is now the GK champion for Green Kalinga; Department of Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap, who brought with him DA's programs, expertise, and funds to support GK Bayan-anihan; Tourism Secretary Ace Durano and former tourism secretary Tony Gonzales, who both support GK Mabuhay; and business leaders Manny Pangilinan, Gerardo Ablaza Jr., Edgar Chua, and Washington SyCip, all of whom are members of GK's board of consultants.

Now let us look at the artistic outputs of GK.

**Beauty.** The beauty of Gawad Kalinga is not only seen in the brightly-painted houses built in beautifully-landscaped surroundings. It shines through in the welcoming smiles of

---

<sup>5</sup> From *Builder of Dreams*, pp. 124-125

<sup>6</sup> From *Builder of Dreams*, p. 126

<sup>7</sup> From *Builder of Dreams*, pp. 127-128

the *kapitbahayan*, in the songs of the youth group preparing for a performance, and in the laughter of the children at play. The true and lasting beauty of GK is found the people whose dignity has been restored, whose hearts have been touched, and whose lives have been renewed.

The story of Tony and Aya del Rosario is both beautiful and moving.<sup>8</sup> They designed their dream village in Paranaque with the help of family and friends from Singapore, Indonesia, Canada, and the U.S., and with the cooperation of Mayor Jun Bernabe. They also assisted in the values formation and other community programs through their Christian community Magis Deo. When Tony had a heart bypass in 2008, his family had difficulty sourcing blood from relatives and friends for his transfusion. But donors were found among the GK residents of the village he sponsored. The blood donors turned down the family's offer of money and food, proudly claiming that it was their turn to help.

Another beautiful, or shall we say delicious, story is how GK made Selecta Ice Cream number one.<sup>9</sup> The management of Unilever RFM Ice Cream, Inc. (URIC), led by its managing director John Concepcion, drove its employees hard, relentless in its pursuit of making Selecta number one. But this only succeeded in alienating their employees, who filed notices of strike, and became too legalistic in their negotiations with management. According to Concepcion, "people became wary of each other and nobody seemed willing to do more without asking for something monetary in return." The old happy-family atmosphere faded away and died.

While reflecting on where the company was headed, Concepcion encountered Gawad Kalinga in 2005. Several visits to an urban poor village in Cainta, where he saw "people living near tombs in a cemetery and a family of twenty squeezed into a one-room shanty," made him realize how blessed he was. "Other people were either living in a shoebox or living with the dead," he said.

This realization eventually led to the building of the GK-Selecta Village in Cainta, where 96 families now live. Concepcion was later joined in the development of the village by most of the employees who generously contributed their time and effort to help build homes for the poor. "And in the weeks, months, and years that followed, as they baked under the heat of the sun and sweated it out together to pour cement and plaster walls, that old family feeling came back to life." To cut the story short, participation in GK engendered renewed feelings of goodwill between management and the employees. This led to fresh ideas and strategies that emerged in quick succession. Among the brilliant ideas that came up in one of their brainstorming sessions is the Selecta 3-in-1 ice cream. The idea was a hit among Filipino families who wanted ice cream but could not afford to buy three different flavors. In 2006, with the appropriate innovation, advertising, and distribution strategies, Selecta became the country's leading ice cream brand, and has enjoyed double-digit growth rates since then. "We really became number one because of GK," Concepcion said. "We became a team."

***Excitement.*** Gawad Kalinga excites people. This is the reason why 18 youth volunteers from the Netherlands and 12 from Ireland chose to join an immersion program sponsored

---

<sup>8</sup> From *Builder of Dreams*, pp. 152-153

<sup>9</sup> From "Taking the High Road to Number 1," written by Tina Arceo-Dumlao for the Philippine Daily Inquirer on April 19, 2009, as published in *Builder of Dreams*, pp. 324-327.

by the Ramon Aboitiz Foundation Inc. (RAFI) to build houses for GK beneficiaries in Mandaue City, instead of spending the holidays on Cebu's beautiful beaches.<sup>10</sup> This is also probably the reason why the young ladies of an exclusive girls school decided to donate what their families would have spent for their graduation ball to build a GK village in Taguig.

Excitement is also what the youth of Bagong Silang experienced when they toured the country to perform "Bagong Silang: The Musical" to nearly 200,000 people over a period of three years starting 1996. Imagine the thrill felt by this all-amateur cast of mostly out-of-school juvenile delinquents and drug addicts whenever they performed onstage, and every time they received standing ovations from their audiences. On opening night, Meloto recounted, "tears flowed freely from the performers and the audience in a moment of pure joy, grateful just to be part of a social miracle."<sup>11</sup>

**Enjoyment.** GK makes it a point to make its various activities fun for its volunteers. During its Builders Camps, it engages volunteers through songs, cheers, and inspirational stories. Volunteers are also grouped together, asked to cook their own food and to share these with other groups and with their host families. They also plant trees in the community, and help build houses by carrying hollow blocks / bricks, mixing cement and gravel, and painting walls, etc. For many of the volunteers who come from privileged backgrounds, doing hard labor is a novel experience, something that they are not bound to forget. After one weekend, they gain new friends, bring home fun memories, and, hopefully, solidify their commitment as GK volunteers.

**Meaning.** GK means different things to different people. For Camsur Governor LRay Villafuerte Jr., GK is a new brand of politics; for former rebel Bai Linda Eman, GK was the means for healing her anger and working for peace; for Irish millionaire Dylan Wilk, it meant finding a new home in a faraway land. These are their stories.

- Camsur (Camarines Sur) is now recognized as a progressive province thanks to the leadership of its governor Luis "LRay" Villafuerte Jr., who has transformed his province into a leading tourist destination in the country. One of the innovations he introduced is the setting up of bed-and-breakfast facilities in the GK villages in Camsur.

According to Villafuerte, he learned about community building the GK way, i.e. "to share the best of Camsur with those who have the least, and to build self-sustaining communities we can be proud of." He knew that before setting up infrastructure and introducing livelihood programs in his province he had to work on the confidence of his province mates. He said: "Before I even thought of building roads that would interconnect the farthest and poorest barangay, I had to reach out to a vast majority who had long given up on development." To Villafuerte, GK served as an inspiration. "I have learned to invest in hope, and am encouraged to seek opportunity despite the odds and to be on the opposite side of traditional politics."<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> From the article "Dutch youth turns over GK houses to Mandaue", retrieved from <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/cebudailynews/community/view/20090804>

<sup>11</sup> From *Builder of Dreams*, pp. 79-81

<sup>12</sup> From "Architect of transformation," written by Luis Villafuerte Jr., as published in *Builder of Dreams*, pp. 254-255

- After high school, Bai Linda Eman became a commander of a Muslim rebel group, which she started serving as a messenger when she was only six years old. She grew up hating Christians, who she considered the cause of the suffering of her fellow Muslims. “But after years of fighting,” she said, “I was not happy. I was searching for the true purpose of Allah in my life.”

Realizing the importance of getting a good education to become an effective leader to her people, she decided to enrol in Notre Dame, a Catholic university. She came across the Catholic Bible and read it. “When I finished, I cried because I discovered that Muslim and Christian teachings were very similar – it became clear to me that the conflict was not about religion but about a lack of respect and understanding of each other’s faiths.”

This was a turning point for Bai Linda, who tried to convince her fellow Muslims to reach out to Christians and find common ground and to look for ways to live together in peace. But when an all-out war was declared in Mindanao, she took up arms once again, and lived in the mountains for more than four years.

When she finally went home to see her family, she came across Gawad Kalinga. During the groundbreaking of the GK Bangsamoro Village in Kidapawan, she met Issa Cuevas-Santos, a fulltime worker of GK, with whom she had “one of the most meaningful conversations of my life.” Less than two months after getting an invitation from Issa, Bai Linda moved to Manila to become one of the first Muslim fulltime workers of GK. To her shock, though, she learned that she was going to stay in the Couples of Christ mission house, where all the residents were Catholic.

“I cried to Allah and asked him why he had sent me to live in a place with a group I resented all my life.” Perhaps, Allah had a purpose, she said to herself. “At the onset, I interpreted it differently – I was there to find out the true intentions and a possible hidden agenda of Gawad Kalinga.” She eventually discovered, though, “that Gawad Kalinga was indeed genuine.... I saw true Christians living out their faith and following the path of sacrifice and selfless giving.” According to Bai Linda: “Gawad Kalinga showed me that love can be the most powerful force to bring peace. I understand now that Allah’s plan is for me to become a model not just to my fellow Muslims but even to Christians, to witness to all that we can live in peace.”<sup>13</sup>

- Dylan Wilk, one of the richest young people in the UK, wanted to send \$100,000 to support GK after seeing several sites during his brief visit to the Philippines. He felt guilty that his brand new BMW was the equivalent of 80 homes for 400 Filipinos. However, Meloto told Wilk: “Please don’t send your money. If you’re really interested in helping us, please come back and show us how you would like us to use that money.” What happened next is well-known to many GK insiders: Wilk sold his brand new BMW and returned to the Philippines in April 2003. He fell in love with GK, with the country, and with Anna, Meloto’s eldest daughter.

---

<sup>13</sup> From “From swords to ploughshares,” written by Bai Linda Eman, as published in *Builder of Dreams*, pp. 349-352

They got married and now have two daughters, Ariel and Chloe. Wilk is now a global GK advocate and a pioneer in social enterprises for poverty reduction and environmental protection.<sup>14</sup>

Now, let us examine the artistic processes of Gawad Kalinga.

According to Davis and McIntosh, the artistic processes involve creating something, producing and presenting it, and then connecting with the audience (i.e. **create, produce, connect**).

The creative process “begins with an initial hunch, followed by immersion in the idea or thing, a simmering as it comes into life, an inspirational moment when everything clicks, and then the exposition or execution of it all.” Most of these phases can be managed, just like production and consumption processes could. Creativity, says Davis and McIntosh, is *managed inspiration*.

Producing a work, getting it ready for the audience, is a matter of practice and rehearsal. The piece as well as the performer must be prepared. A salesman who makes an excellent sales pitch or a ballet dancer that nails down her pirouettes succeed because they put in a lot of hard work and careful preparation before they actually perform. Producing great performances takes *practiced presence*.

The final step of the artistic process is when the energy from the creator is matched by the energy from his audience, when they listen to each other, and play off each other. This is called *energy exchange*.

In Gawad Kalinga, the key processes do not involve the building of houses, although this is the most visible manifestation of its mission. The critical processes are building relationships and forging partnerships to help eradicate poverty, generating fresh ideas to strengthen GK communities and to sustain the gains they have achieved, and raising a new generation of patriotic Filipinos. Doing these well requires serious commitment, sacrifice, and hard work.

***Engaging partners and volunteers – ‘managed inspiration’ at work.*** Over the years, GK has come up with innovative approaches to addressing the issue of poverty, drawing largely from the ideas and initiatives of individuals, groups, and organizations (both from the public and private sectors) that wanted to participate in GK’s mission. GK brings these people into the communities to see for themselves what has been done and what else could be done. GK then taps the expertise of these individuals and the competencies and resources of these organizations, and then tries out ideas on a small scale in one GK village or two. This is where the “simmering” takes place. This is when the ideas are refined as they are implemented. Later on, the successful practices are replicated in GK communities all throughout the country. Among these inspired ideas are Bayan-anihan, the Mabuhay Ladies, and various Green Kalinga initiatives, which are now regular features in many GK communities.

---

<sup>14</sup> From “More precious than a BMW,” written by Dylan Wilk, as published in *Builder of Dreams*, pp. 176-181

***Kapitbahayan and caretaker teams – ‘practiced presence’ in action.*** The sustainability of programs introduced in GK villages depends largely on the commitment of its caretaker teams and the members of the community themselves. Following the early example of GK founder Tony Meloto, caretaker teams immerse themselves in the lives of the participating families. Aside from organizing volunteers to assist in the education, health, and livelihood programs, the caretaker team establishes a regular presence in the community, gaining the trust and confidence of the *kapitbahayan*. The *kapitbahayan* is a self-governing neighborhood association, through which the residents become stewards of their own communities. The *kapitbahayan*, through the help of the caretaker team, consistently follow community rules for daily living, including desisting from drinking, smoking, and gambling.

More than improving the physical environment of the village, it is a continuing challenge to transform the values and behavior of the people living in it. Sometimes, old habits are difficult to break, but GK has shown that this could be done, with an empowered *kapitbahayan* and with the constant presence of the caretaker team. “It is necessary to do social engineering to build peaceful communities,” says Meloto, but this could be done “only within the context of interpersonal relationships – kinship and friendship – that seek to empower the weak and make them productive citizens, and have everyone working together to achieved shared goals.”<sup>15</sup>

***‘Energy exchange’ through bayanihan and padugo.*** With relationships built on the foundation of trust, it becomes easier to get people to work together in a spirit of cooperation (*bayanihan*) and sacrifice (*padugo*). This is evident among the community members themselves who contribute sweat equity in building the houses in the GK village. The work done by the *kapitbahayan* and the progress they achieve in terms of reducing crime and keeping peace within the village encouraged nearby communities to emulate their example, thus expanding the reach of GK. This happened in Bagong Silang, and has happened too in many communities throughout the country.

The success of the early GK communities, which were achieved largely through the hard work and sacrifice of the *kapitbahayan* and the dedication of the pioneering volunteers, led to the exponential growth of GK. Gawad Kalinga has now become a true nation-building movement and also a viable template for development for the rest of the developing world. Today, local government executives from across the political spectrum have brought in GK into their provinces, cities, municipalities, and barangays; corporate donors (even competitors such as Globe and Smart, Nestle and Unilever, Shell and Petron, etc.) have poured in millions of pesos to build entire villages and to support the various programs of GK; and hundreds and thousands of volunteers (i.e., students, professionals, Filipino expatriates, and even foreigners) have contributed their time, talent, and treasure to support the GK mission.

According to former Globe Telecom President Gerardo Ablaza Jr., who is also a member of the GK board of consultants, “no one company, group or organization has the resources or the capacity to match the scale of the GK ambition.”<sup>16</sup>” But with the multitude of donors, volunteers, full-time workers, and the *kapitbahayan* feeding on each others’

---

<sup>15</sup> From *Builder of Dreams*, p. 44

<sup>16</sup> From *Builder of Dreams*, p. 227

energies, the Filipino people have become more optimistic about the prospects of winning the fight against poverty.

The above examples show that these artistic processes reinforce each other. In the case of Gawad Kalinga, we can say that *practiced presence* has led to a veritable *energy exchange*, which continues to spur *managed inspiration* among those who have chosen to be part of this movement.

### **Conclusion**

Whether or not the people involved in Gawad Kalinga are conscious of it, they have been engaged in an artistic enterprise that have brought “beauty, enjoyment, excitement, and meaning” in the lives of many Filipinos and foreigners alike. “GK Enterprise” has grown by leaps and bounds because it did not only utilize scarce economic resources but also tapped underutilized artistic resources (i.e., the emotions, experience, imagination, and intelligence of people), which are abundant in this country. By remaining true to the spirit of *bayanihan economics*, *kalinga politics*, and *padugo*, GK is able to mobilize its army of full-time workers, donors, and volunteers towards its audacious goal of bringing the Philippines out of the Third World by 2024. Indeed, GK has raised the tasks of community building and poverty alleviation into an art, lifting the spirits of those who behold and experience the GK Way.

### **References**

- Davis, S. and McIntosh, D. (2005). *The art of business: make all your work a work of art*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.
- Drucker, P. (1995). *Managing in a time of great change*. New York: Truman Talley Books / Plume.
- Gawad Kalinga (2009). [www.gk1world.com](http://www.gk1world.com).
- Meloto, A. (2009). *Builder of dreams*. Mandaluyong City: Gawad Kalinga Development Foundation, Inc.