



Enfants du Mékong



Batang Mekong, Philippines

□ The project in brief.

For more than 20 years, Batang (Children in Visaya) Mekong operates in the Inayawan garbage dump area (and by extension in the San Pio relocation area in Talisay City, the adjacent town) where a majority of the inhabitants still work as ragpickers, sorting waste in the storage warehouses that dot the area. The objective of the project is to accompany the families towards a better life. Batang Mekong acts at different levels to give families the means to move forward with the care and education of young children in preschools and the professional and spiritual training of parents.

In 2022, all preschools were reopened after the COVID crisis, and have returned to their normal pre-crisis functioning.

□ Important Points

- ✓ Ate Helen, a local leader who has been dedicated to the cause of families since the program's inception,
- ✓ A training plan for childminders and parents,
- ✓ Access to education from an early age in daycare centers.



Location
Cebu city, district Inayawan
and San Pio at Talisay City
Philippines



Beneficiaries
8 preschools, 106 children and 19 mothers
trained as Maternity Assistants



Gross Budget
65 996, 05€

To go further

Context and need

Inayawan is the area of Cebu City that houses the city's largest landfill. A few years ago, the mountain of waste was replaced by sorting warehouses. Most of the inhabitants survive thanks to it despite very difficult living and working conditions. The ragpickers sort and sell the waste inside warehouses belonging to the Barangay (= neighborhood) or to private owners. The selling price, which constitutes the income of the ragpickers, is thus fixed by the one who buys the sorted waste and it does not always allow to satisfy the basic needs of the families.

The job of a ragpicker is difficult. The salary is about 170 pesos per day, which is less than 3 euros. In addition to this financial precariousness, the working conditions are deplorable: unhealthy environment, risks of diseases, etc. The life of a ragpicker is also accompanied by its share of bad practices which constitute as many sanitary challenges, in particular the recovery of food found in the waste to consume it or to resell it. Many parents in the neighborhood still work as ragpickers, often in combination with another job, as the former is not sufficient. For example, ragpicker during the day and fish seller at the market at night, or ragpicker during the day and masseur at night...

In 2000, Sister Hélène, a French nun, decided to open preschools, the "Batang Mekong", to respond to essential needs: health, hygiene and safety of the very young children of the neighborhood. The initial observation that pushed Sister Hélène and her comrades-in-arms to launch this fight was the following: the children were left to their own devices, in the polluted alleys of the slum, while their parents were sorting out the waste on the dump. This is how the first preschool was born, from the meeting of an alarming observation and an iron will. The genius of this project was to choose, within the community, volunteer moms to look after the children during the day while their parents are working. These volunteer moms, who are trained as full-fledged Child Development Workers (CDWs), take care of a dozen children in their homes in exchange for an allowance (a little over 3€ per day). The project has been a success and the preschools, now numbering 8 (soon to be 9 in January 2022), are safe places where the children are well fed, clean, and awake thanks to the teaching provided by the mothers/Maternal Assistants.

The preschools are not disconnected from the life of the community, they welcome children every day but it is in fact the whole family that you are helping by allowing the parents to go to work with peace of mind.

The Local Manager

A conductor coordinates all these initiatives: **Ate Helen** (Ate is a title to show respect when addressing one's elder sister, it literally means "big sister"). Trained as a social worker and originally from the neighborhood, she expertly leads

all the projects related to Inayawan (sponsorship program, nurserie, parent training, ...).

Different actors are also working to coordinate all these projects. In particular, **Mrs. Teresita Manguerra** (called Mam Terry) who is the legal representative of EDM in the Philippines and who is directly involved in the Batang Mekong project as the administrative and financial manager of the preschools; and Ate Jessa, a social worker trained by Ate Helen who also manages part of the activities. Not to mention the Nursery Assistants, the drivers, the cooks...!



Ate Helen inside a nurserie Inayawan during lunch



Ate Helen, Mam Terry (left seat) with 2 maternal assisants (Tata et Fanny) et child of one of nurserie of San Pio at Talisay City

Proposed solutions

The Batang Mekong project is a combination of several complementary actions, all of which are aimed at raising the community:

- family **preschools**, which are expected to serve approximately 106 children by 2023, 5 days a week, Monday through Friday,
- **parent training**, whether it be professional formation or more educational and spiritual formation.

These actions combine to make Inayawan a dynamic community, an actor of its own success.

Action n°1 : preschools

Today Batang Mekong has **8 preschools** (6 in Inayawan district and 2 in the neighboring city, Talisay City, in San Pio Village, where some families have been relocated). **A 9th one is going to open very soon, as of this month of February 2023 on the site of landfill.** The crèche was supposed to open in San Pio but because of conflicts in the community, the new nurserie will be opened on the site of landfill.

San Pio village: this neighborhood offers a healthy and qualitative environment for the poorest people. It is under the direction of Justice and Peace, Integrity. Corporation (JPIC) an NGO created by European countries. The NGO bought the land from the government precisely in order to house families coming mainly from the vicinity of the landfill in order to improve their living conditions.

The objective is that the families pay a small amount each month, in order to become owners after a few years. It is a pleasant neighborhood that functions like a housing estate.

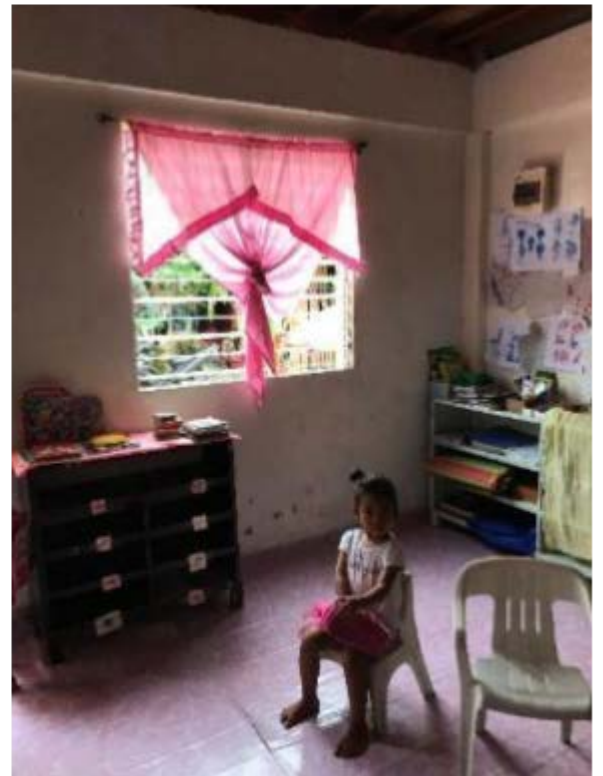
This neighborhood includes houses for families but also other structures and services: 2 preschools for 25 children of the Batang Mekong project, a building where training for parents takes place, a chapel, outdoor games for children, drainage system, water pumps, gate and concrete barriers at the entrance, basketball court, playground and running water system... a very pleasant environment, clean, safe and very planted.

Today, there are about 200 families living in this neighborhood. To be able to live there, in addition to the poverty criterion, it is normally necessary to be married (in the Church) and to have children.

In 2023, 106 young children (from 1.5 to 5 years old on average) will be taken care of by 19 volunteer mothers.



che de l'extérieur



Some photographs of 2 existing nurseries at San Pio

The concept of the preschool is the following: the children are welcomed in the house of the volunteer mothers (like the 6 of Inayawan) or in dedicated houses (like the 2 preschools of San Pio). These places are equipped to welcome the children (colored walls, posters on the walls, mats (floor mats) for naps, small furniture adapted to the children...). The volunteer moms have the role of CDW (Child Development Workers), a special status, equivalent in France to "assistantes Maternelles" (childminders), allowing them to take care of the children and to benefit from adapted professional training. Many of them wanted to take charge of the 9th daycare. The most difficult thing was to select only 2 of them.

The goal of the project is first and foremost to enable children to develop in good conditions by providing them with an environment conducive to a healthy daily life. These good developmental conditions cover several aspects of the children's lives.



Food first, the children receive the necessary nutrients for their growth every day. In 2019, Batang Mekong takes care of their lunch (initially provided by their parents) in order to ensure them a balanced meal: porridge, meat, eggs, vegetables, fruits, ...in addition to their daily rice ration. The youngest children also receive milk, which would be impossible without the preschool, given the price. A special treatment is also reserved for malnourished children so that they can leave this state as soon as possible.

Another advantage of the project is that the children spend the day **in a safe and clean place**. The organization follows the same pattern in the different pre school: the children are welcomed by a tandem composed of two volunteer mothers, one of whom often owns the house. The morning is dedicated to games and educational activities. Then after lunch, it's nap time for everyone! The children are washed at the end of the day, before going home, which allows us to ensure that the children will have received a toilet at least once during the day and to teach them hygiene.





The equipment and materials also contribute to the well-being of the children. Each nursery is equipped with toilets, which is not always the case in the neighborhood houses.

In addition, in terms **of equipment, toys and educational materials**, the pre school regularly receive donations. These toys are used by the CDWs to develop the children's creativity and liveliness.



The Batang Mekong project goes far beyond the supervision of the children, the goal is also to allow them to develop intellectually and emotionally. To do this, a **real educational program** has been elaborated by Sister Hélène, the nun at the origin of the project. Different activities correspond to the children's abilities to be acquired. The results are more than satisfactory, at the end of their nursery years, when they enter kindergarten at age 5, the children know how to adapt to an environment with other children, have a basic knowledge of numbers and letters, and are more alert and receptive. Parents are often amazed at their children's progress, they find



that they are more involved at home, with household chores, etc. This educational work relies entirely on the CDWs, a real challenge on a daily basis!

The CDWs are also provided with various training that touch on different aspects of their work. The **training of CDWs** is now one of the main areas of development for Batang Mekong. In particular, they receive a week-long training every summer, based on the Waldorf pedagogy. Previously, these trainings were in partnership with the NGO Kid's life Foundation, but the partnership was not renewed in September. The CDWs found this partnership too demanding; they had to report regularly, do weekly study groups, collect statistics, etc. Most of them did not have the time to do this. Most of them had no formal education, so this was not easy for most of them. But a teacher continues to follow them, with the same Waldorf pedagogy, which proves to be very beneficial for the children. The Waldorf method aims to leave more room for children's creativity and imagination. In addition, emphasis is placed on the importance of learning by example in the education of young children. There is also an environmental aspect, all toys are made by the CDWs themselves, there are no plastic toys. It is also a method based on repetition, on didacticism; for example, the CDWs sing all the instructions.



Daily rhythm

8h30-9h : time of arrival
 9h-9h45 : free play indoors
 9h45-10h45 : time in a circle for playing and singing / prayer / presence (this can be done indoors or outdoors)
 10h15-10h30 : snack around a table
 10h30-11h30 : cleanliness lessons
 11h30-12h : lunch around a table (with learning to use a spoon)
 12h-12h30 : dishes (outdoors)

12h30-13h30 : nap (indoors, lying on mats or sometimes small hammocks!)
 13h30-13h45 : preparation of the material for the activity
 13h45-14h15 : art and workshop (outdoors or indoors) : gardening, coloring, watercolor, painting, cooking, baking, art...
 14h15-15h05 : outdoor time
 15h05-15h20 : snack
 15h20-15h40 : rangement, nettoyage
 15h40-16h : reading time (a SDW tells a story, the same one for 1 month)
 16h : back to home

pre school project 2023

- ❖ February 2023 : opening of the 9th nursery at the Inayawan landfill

Action n°2 : Parents training

The strength of the Inayawan program lies in its community spirit. This spirit is not only endemic to the neighborhood, but Ate Helen's drive and pugnacity have a lot to do with it. As you walk with her through the winding streets of the neighborhood, everywhere Ate Helen is asked for, welcomed, and thanked. She relies on training to move her community forward. In addition to her work as the head of the EDM sponsorship program, which enables many young people to complete their studies, she has launched two important initiatives in terms of adult education. The first one is very concrete in **providing parents with job skills** that they can use in paid work to supplement their meager income. The second focuses more on **parenting and spiritual growth** for mothers and, more rarely in the Philippines, fathers as well!

Professional training

Since 2015, the program has offered reflexology (foot massage) training for parents who want it. 32 people participated in 2022, the training was free. After the training, the participants all received a tool kit (mineral oil and disinfectant). Also, since 2017 a massage training (Hilot Wellness body massage) completes the panel. 50 people participated in the training for "body massage" in 2022.



These diploma courses were conducted by a specialized government agency, TESDA (Technical Education skills Development Authority). The TESDA assessment (oral exam, live demonstration and written exam) allows each candidate to obtain their National II certificate which allows them to apply for a job. This year, all of them have successfully completed their certificate.

Thus, several promotions of masseurs can now exercise this profession which constitutes a substitute or a complement to their job as ragmen or Sikad driver for example (bicycle equipped with an extension which can carry passengers). Some parents already work in massage parlors or have developed their own clientele, thus ensuring an interesting additional salary. Another successful initiative of Ate Helen was to get the Barangay captain(Mayor) to allow the reflexologists to practice on the esplanade in front of the Barangay offices(City Hall). This location provides the team with visibility and regular clients and is proving to be a real success.

At the end of 2019, a **bakery/pastry training** was launched but unfortunately stopped with the covid crisis as of March 2020 and has not yet resumed. Participants have already received their kit (an electric oven and tools for baking). The objective is to realize a new training of this type as soon as it is possible; it is a project for this year 2023.

In addition to the opportunity to work, the training also **provides parents with an opportunity to gain dignity and self-esteem by doing meaningful work, while strengthening community ties.**

For example, parents who have taken the masseur training have decided to join together to create two solidarity funds: one to provide for exceptional health expenses and the other to organize collective events.

Each member has to pay P100 (about 2€) per month for each fund. At the end of the year, if the money in the health fund has not been used, it is redistributed to the members, thus ensuring a small savings.

Another project of Ate Helen is to launch training to become a "Prayer leader". Indeed, the rite in the Philippines after a death is to watch over the dead for 9 days, and a person, the "prayer leader" guides the prayers during these 9 days. It so happens that the prayer leaders are currently in great demand, it was previously assured by the elderly, and the young people do not want to take over. The demand being high, the salary is now 2000 pesos for a novena, which is considerable. Ate Helen is still trying to convince some people, there are some who are motivated in the community. With 4 or 5 people interested, she will start a training course.

Training of fathers

One of the most remarkable and brilliant aspects of the Inayawan community is the involvement of the fathers. Through quarterly trainings and almost daily solicitations, Ate Helen has succeeded in making several fathers pillars of the community: various repairs in the preschool, delivery of supplies, driving the EDM vehicle, distribution of meals during the pandemic, organization and facilitation of events, fathers are at the heart of the life of the program!



Les « community pantry » (distribution alimentaire) s'organisent chaque dimanche en cette période de pandémie permettant d'aider les plus démunis (150 familles).

The training, given today by a nun belonging to the community of the Cenacolo sisters, allows, once again, to reinforce the dignity of these fathers, who are often undermined by their thankless work as ragpickers. It is very moving to see these men, who often left school at a very young age, make the effort to return to a classroom to talk about parenthood, life as a couple and to develop their interior life!



Fathers group with Ate Helen (on the right on the picture, with the checked top) and the sister Sœur (at top with white teeshirt)

Through these training, **parents gain competence and confidence, and also become more involved in the community.** Some parents have become true leaders in the community, able to take responsibility.

After the COVID crisis, which did not allow any gathering of the fathers' group, the "value's formation" is held every 3 months, that is to say 4 times a year. At the beginning, fathers with a sponsored child were obliged to come, otherwise their child would not receive the sponsorship. But today all the fathers come by themselves. Also, to give them dignity, their names are written on the envelopes of the invitations to the training. This is a small detail that is quite important for them, that makes them realize their importance.

All of these fathers who have one of their children as an EDM godchild in the Inayawan program or in one of the Inayawan preschool (balay bantayan), were present at the Inayawan Christmas Party.

Net budget in local currency

Below is the project estimate:

Détails	Coût total
Salaires	1 922 640 PHP
Distribution de produits alimentaires et produits d'hygiène	688 176 PHP
Médicaments	34 992 PHP
Frais fixes et variables (loyer, maintenance, eau, électricité, téléphone, internet)	174 400 PHP
Travaux de rénovation et d'aménagement des crèches	-
Formations, uniformes (CDW et parents)	41 440 PHP
Frais administratif	45 000 PHP
Matériel	79 984 PHP
Sorties	34 992 PHP
Marge de sécurité du budget 10%	302 162,4 PHP
Total du budget en monnaie locale	3 323 786 PHP

Gross budget

		en €
Total du budget net en €		56 096, 64
Taux de change	1€ = 59,25 PHP	
Frais de recherche et de traitement des fonds: 9% du budget brut		5 939, 64
Frais de fonctionnement de l'association: 6% du budget brut		3 959, 73
Total Budget Brut		65 996, 05

*« Margin of safety of the forecast "specifying" planned to cover bank charges, inflation, exchange rate variation between the validation of the project by EDM and its implementation.

NB: If all funds have not been used by the end of the project (exchange rate variance, falling prices in the field, etc.), the remainder will be allocated to a similar project in the same country of action.



Thanks for
your support and help

