

CARABAOS, TV SETS, AND BRILLIANT FACES

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Ladies and Gentlemen, Good afternoon.

Oftentimes, I have been asked why I work hard to achieve the vision of Knowledge Channel Foundation. My answer is simple. It is because I can. And it is because I should.

I have lived in the Philippines all my life. And, although initially somewhat detached, I've continuously been exposed to the poverty around me. But, it wasn't until 1999 that I resolutely took action and harnessed resources from within my family's businesses, specifically the broadcast network and the cable TV network, to use as leverage in addressing poverty on a massive scale.

Given my family's passion for public service and education, I zeroed in on the public educational system and researched on it. What I discovered was staggering and mind-blowing. Where just 4 decades ago, the Philippines was admired for its excellent education system, there was now a dearth of everything. Classrooms built for 40 were used by 80. Books were shared by as many as 7. In a school of 150 students, you would find 1 teacher. Average scores of elementary and high school students in national achievement tests were in the 30% to 50% range. International tests ranked the Philippines in the bottom 10%. Quality education had become unreachable.

It was an educational system in crisis!

And when one thinks about it....How can a government, saddled with an external debt of \$60B and external debt servicing of more than 30% of the annual national budget, and a high population growth rate of 2.3%...how can it effectively manage 42,000

elementary and high schools in thousands of islands and properly educate 18 million poor Filipino youth on an annual budget of \$2B?... translating to US\$130 per student as compared to that of Singapore of US\$4000 and of the US at \$2000.

The answer is MASS MEDIA

And at the heart of educational mass media in the Philippines today is a non-government organization, the KNOWLEDGE CHANNEL FOUNDATION.

Established in 1999, the Knowledge Channel (KCh) is the only all-educational TV channel with 14 hours of curriculum-based programs bringing elementary and high school subjects of math, science, English, and civics to life in the classroom.

It streams in TV programs that provide the teacher with audio-visual materials with which to explain subject matter better.

Harnessing cable TV and satellite technology, the Knowledge Channel reaches schools in the northern and southernmost municipalities of the country.

Where there is no electricity, renewable sources of energy like solar panels are installed on the roofs of these schools.

Today, the channel has a reach of over 2.7 million students in 1,650 public schools and over 6 million home viewers.

This is our response to the millennium development goal of providing universal access to primary education.

Studies have shown that the programs on the Knowledge Channel have increased retention and comprehension levels by as much as 25%. In one remote island school the principal reported that its national achievement test scores increased by 107%.

But our success goes beyond statistical figures.

Anecdotal data tells us how Knowledge Channel can be a viable instrument of peace in areas where arms are the only means known to resolve conflicts.

A student from one of our mountain schools narrated how she and her parents would go back to the school early every evening to watch the programs on Knowledge Channel.

The parents of this particular child are members of an armed political rebel group hiding in the mountains.

More than a result of my family's passion and support for social progress, the success of Knowledge Channel lies in its partnerships: with our Department of Education, principals and teachers, the community and local school boards, the public and private organizations and individuals, and the international donor community. They allow us to continue to reach more and teach more.

Let me tell you about Hilmarie.

She lives in uplands that are very remote and insurgency infested. She comes from a family with few material possessions...no radio, no TV, no access to mass media. She walks to school an hour everyday with a cup of boiled rice and 1 peso or 2 US cents in her pocket with which to buy her viand of pork rind or chips to go with her rice. At her school, educational infrastructure is substandard. With teachers coming and going, there was no permanence in lesson plans, and much of Hilmarie's curriculum was left untaught. So curtailed was her education that by the time of her final math exams, an entire section on percentages was not discussed. Luckily she remembered watching an episode on that particular topic on Knowledge Channel in her school. This exam won for Hilmarie the highest honors in her graduating elementary class. Hilmarie will someday break the chains of poverty.

Today we are also in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao where poverty levels are highest and where educational levels are lowest and where graffiti in school walls say, "guns are my toys, war is my game." We are grateful for a grant given by the USAID that we may serve our fellow Filipinos in the region. That even at risk to life and security, we travel around the area to bring the channel to the public school children who need it most. And we are welcomed with open arms both for the intervention itself and for the hope it brings. A hope for equal opportunities, a hope for a better life.

Over the course of our work, we have had to employ even carabaos to deliver TV sets and satellite dishes to schools without roads. We have had to carry our equipment on outrigger boats through pirate infested waters. But as we see the brilliant faces of the children watching educational TV for the first time, as we hear the laughter and the singing of those born into conflict, as we note the improving test scores; we know this is work that we can and should do.

We mobilize our business resources to provide mass media technology that liberates and enables our people.

The job is far from finished, but kindled in our hearts and minds, is the desire and passion to succeed against all odds because the future of our country is now seriously at risk.

I call on the United Nations, all its affiliate organizations, the many donor institutions worldwide. Please take a look at what we are doing in the Philippines. Although a small and poverty-stricken nation of 84 million people, we are by no means negligible.

Recognize how the Filipino is playing a role in this family of nations. Already, Filipino fathers and mothers serve many of you, your organizations, and your families. We are sharing with the world our most precious resource, our people.

When you invest in them, you invest in your own future, for you have become the recipients of the education our people receive from our homes and schools.

We hope you shall share with us as fully and completely as we do. Our success is your success.

I THANK YOU