



Activist Journalism on Behalf of Self-Government

By Red Batario

About two years ago, the Center for Community Journalism and Development (CCJD), a non-profit, non-government organization working for better communities through better journalism, was invited by the Philippine Press Institute (PPI) and the Coca Cola Export Corporation to a meeting.

There on the table was a sumptuous lunch, and a journalism framework that the CCJD had been espousing within the community press: a fresh and invigorating way of practicing the craft that engages both journalists and the public in the coverage and reportage of the news. It redefines the role of the media in democracy and attempts to bring political discussions away from centers of power and into people's living rooms through community conversations. It makes people care about the issues that affect their lives and nowhere does this ring truer than in the local areas where the news impacts greatly on the social and economic fabric of the community.

It is called public journalism, a wave of activist and involved journalism (sometimes referred to as civic journalism) that took shape through the projects of CCJD in several provincial cities around the Philippines in the mid-90s. It was a time when local areas were trying to make sense of their media environment in the face of rapid social, political and economic changes. The emerging discussion was how to make journalism better serve its purpose of making democratic self-government possible.

The luncheon meeting was indicative of the trailblazing nature of this kind of journalism: pan seared salmon with potato confits and dollops of discussions on why a soft beverage company should be involved in a project for media; ice cold Coke and ruminations on where current journalism is taking all of us; pumpkin soup with sidings of workshop designs; salad Nicoisie with a lengthy discourse on why the project should be implemented in the first place; and a dessert finale of sherbet flambé with a dash of agreements that the Philippine Press Institute, the Center for Community Journalism and Development and the Coca Cola Export Corporation would jointly embark on a journey called "Building Better Communities through Civic Journalism."

It is one project that the CCJD resonates with given its main function as a facility for journalists working with citizens, communities and institutions for social change and its flagship public journalism program. Today the effects of the project have been felt, and are being felt still, in many community papers from Legazpi to Leyte, Davao to Dagupan, Batangas to Baguio, Bacolod to Cagayan de Oro.

The two-day workshops comprising the first phase of the five-year project provided discussions on the principles and tools of public (or civic) journalism, values and ethics, and changing paradigms. The follow-through tutorials enabled selected newspapers to put theory into practice and some of the prime examples were *Sun Star Cebu* and *Mindanao Times* in Davao.

The CCJD views the project as an important complementation to its current initiatives by providing added building blocks upon which to widen opportunities for media-community engagements to occur. Its partnership with the Philippine Press Institute and the Coca Cola Export Corporation illustrates the critical importance of corporate involvement in community development through bold initiatives in the realm of media and journalism.

One NGO worker told CCJD in a forum: “If more companies will take on the challenges of media and community development, the battle for social, political and economic reforms will be half won...we need this kind of thinking...of all of us being part of the larger community as members and stakeholders.”

***Red Batario** is the Executive Director of the **Center for Community Journalism and Development**. He developed the public journalism framework for the Philippine community press and conducts regular public journalism workshops locally and in the South and South East Asian regions. He is also a freelance journalist contributing to various local and international publications and is Regional Coordinator for Asia of the International News Safety Institute, a coalition of international media organizations working for the protection of journalists everywhere. This article was excerpted from a story published by the Philippine Press Institute (PPI) in its website in July 2004.*