

MASBATE SCHOLARSHIPS

A Chance at Life

“MY CHILDHOOD WAS DIFFICULT, JUGGLING BETWEEN THE REQUIREMENTS OF SCHOOL AND EARNING A LIVING. I HAD TO LIVE IN ANOTHER TOWN WITH MY GRANDMOTHER SO I COULD GO TO SCHOOL. I SOLD CANDIES, SNACKS, AND EVEN DID LAUNDRY FOR OTHERS TO SURVIVE. EVERY DAY WAS A PAINFUL STRUGGLE.”

Hannibal Tamayo, aged 26, is a scholarship program beneficiary of Barangay Puro, one of the eight impact communities of the Masbate Mine. His life was turned around in April 2009. “I had reached a point where I wanted to just give up... but the Scholarship Program saved me and gave me another chance at life.”

The Masbate Gold Project (MGP) Scholarship Program started with 56 students in 2009. It has now grown to 432 students in 2018. Cumulatively to date, the program has had an intake of 1,135 college students and 1,867 high school students – with 357 and 289 graduates respectively to date.

Of the college graduates, 183 are currently working professionals with 11 employed by the Masbate Mine; 60 are qualified teachers, educational instructors and aides; 12 work for local government units; the remaining are either employed by non-government organizations or are self-employed.

Gilbert Pusing, aged 25, came from a family supported by artisanal mining. His parents had always wanted him to become an engineer, and he was urged to study hard and steer clear of the perils of artisanal mining. He graduated from high school as class valedictorian – an achievement which earned him a place in the MGP Scholarship Program and enabled him to study Civil Engineering in Masbate City. “My life became easier. I didn’t have to worry about my tuition fees and monthly allowance. It helped me focus on my goals.” In 2014, Pusing passed the board exam and he fulfilled his father’s dream; he is now an engineer with the Department of Public Works and Highways.

While a percentage of scholarship beneficiaries migrate outside of Masbate, most remain to teach in their schools as Tamayo had done – taking pride in their achievement and giving back to their communities through their dedicated profession. “I am the first member of my clan to earn a college degree. As the family bread winner, I have sent two of my siblings to college... My parents are now the owners of a small convenience store in our village.”

DEVELOPMENT OF FEKOLA'S COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PLAN A PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

In 2018, B2Gold and local stakeholders developed a Community Development Plan (CDP) for the 10 communities surrounding the Fekola Mine. A working group of 46 people was created to guide the process with representation from local communities, local and regional officials, technical officers, women, youth, artisanal miners, in-migrants, and the elderly. A full socio-economic survey was conducted in the surrounding villages to establish a baseline for tracking changes in socio-economic indicators over time. The participatory process for discussing, defining, measuring and analyzing community well-being was based on the Beyond Zero Harm framework, developed by the Devonshire Initiative.

The Working Group came to an understanding of the current state of health, education, livelihoods, infrastructure and other factors, and developed objectives and targets. A smaller committee is responsible for identifying, selecting and overseeing community projects that align with the above. The results of these activities were formalized in an approved Community Development Plan, which will be implemented in 2019.

The process is ongoing and will eventually be led by community leaders themselves. A shared vision of community development has been established, putting community stakeholders in the driver’s seat of their own development outcomes.