Human Rights at the Grassroots: Ideals, Realities, Prospects

MA. OLIVA Z. DOMINGO*

The establishment of the Barangay Human Rights Action Center (BHRAC), which started out as a social action program in the early 1990s, was envisioned to empower human rights advocates at the community level to promote and uphold human rights themselves. All barangays, through the Department of Interior and Local Government, are enjoined to establish BHRACs to undertake functions related to human rights protection and promotion such as complaints processing, information and advocacy, and coordination center on human rights issues at the barangay level. This study assesses the effectivity and functionality of the BHRAC as the flagship program of the Commission on Human Rights in bringing the Commission's services to the grassroots. Focusing on BHRAC and the performance of the Barangay Human Rights Action Officers (BHRAOs), the assessment covered 24 barangays around the Philippines. The study devices a framework that identifies the functionality and sustainability mechanisms of the BHRAC/BHRAO for the promotion and protection of human rights. The study adopts a qualitative research method utilizing the case study approach to identify performance gaps, problem areas, and factors that affect the performance of BHRACs and BHRAOs of their functions.

Introduction

In the publication entitled, *Barangay Human Rights Action Center Program: Legal Bases* (BHRAC National Secretariat, n.d.), Leila M. De Lima, then Chairperson of the Commission on Human Rights (CHR), stated: "The Commission must have a presence at [the barangay level], at the grassroots level, advocating for the protection and promotion of the human rights of all people."

We need to make human rights real to the Filipino people, and the Barangay Human Rights Action Center (BHRAC) is one of the most

*Professor, National College of Public Administration and Governance, University of the Philippines Diliman.