

HEROINES IN KALINGA: THE CHICO RIVER DAM

Estefania Wangdali-Kollin

Since I opted to single-handedly raise my family of three children (then 5,3 and 1 year old) and live separately from their father, I have been treated differently from the mainstream woman and mother. My children too have suffered some kind of discrimination in their school and in the community. They were called children of a broken home by their classmates who learned of this term “broken home” from either their teachers or from their social science books.

On my part, my being estranged from the father of my children had disqualified me from seeking for titles credited for promotion in rank, like “Outstanding” or “model teacher” because such title included in the selection criteria good “moral” character or “morally upright”. These terms are always equated with criminal offenses or interpreted as such. Moreover, whenever authorities or people learned of me as a separated wife, manifestations of distrust were immediately observed which ultimately ended in my exclusion from any favor.

In the past, whenever I filed my income tax return and ticked the box (legally) separated as my marital status, I was asked to produce a document of legal separation which I never did because I would just tick the “married” box. At

another time, I was required by the BIR to produce a certification that my estranged husband did not include our three children in his claim for personal exemption. I was required to produce this document before I could claim my three children in my personal exemptions. It took me sometime before I could convince him that the children have always been with me and that they did not receive any financial assistance from their father. I had to produce receipts of their tuition and enrollment documents before I was allowed to include them in my personal exemptions.

I have always been confronted with similar problems whenever I fill out forms that require me to indicate my marital status. I always got stuck in this section of the form because I had to weigh first the legal and social implications of being either “married” or “separated”.

Then I joined the Women's Studies Association of the Philippines and trained in women, society, and culture at NURSIA through the generosity and invitation of Sister Mary John Mananzan. As a result, I became empowered, enlightened, and more confident in my being a woman and the head of a family of a fatherless home. From then on, I have resolved to be involved in women's health research and promote the cause of women. In my own little way, I have come to the aid of some women in distress and defended their cause whenever I could. I have preached the gospel of women's rights as human rights to my students and to the academic community. I have learned to be assertive and defend with confidence myself and my classification as a woman and family head of a home that has never been broken. My children have loved me very much and they have always looked up to their father whom they also love and respect.

One of my small contributions to the women's cause is the paper entitled, *Kalinga Heroines: The Chico River Dam*. This is a direct translation of their stories during the protest against the construction of the Chico River dam. HAIL TO THEM!

Catalina Bongaoen
76 years old
Retired elementary school teacher
Tanglag, Lubuagan
Kalinga

I was a nursing mother when the protest against the Chico River dam started. I was then an elementary school teacher while my husband was my head teacher. Despite the difficulty of life in our far flung barrio which can be reached by hiking mountains or crossing the Chico River and hiking its steep banks for almost three to four hours, my family and I stayed put in the place and established our home. Life then was secure and peaceful.

However, when the military, the National Power Corporation, and the PANAMIN came to our province to supposedly construct the Chico River dam, our peaceful life was threatened. The military abused the Kalinga hospitality and wreaked havoc among our people. They came to divide us so that they could construct the hydroelectric dam that would submerge the ancestral lands bequeathed to us by our ancestors. They promised us lucrative relocation conditions to lure us into conformity with their deceit. They even conducted medical relief missions so they could bribe us with medicines and canned goods but we spurned all these. We forged an agreement among us not to accept any material offer from the promoters of the dam construction including

the government. Some signed this agreement using their own blood as thumb mark.

Unlike the other women, I did not actually go out there in the dam site to wrestle with the military guards. But together with my husband, I had to attend to my classes and explained to the young what the troubles they were learning and facing were about and the consequences of these to their future. I also kept track of the development of the protest through my husband who was actively involved in the planning, strategizing and implementing the agreements inked by the people from the affected barangays. He kept me informed of all these when he came home from the meetings.

One day, the military came to our school and told us to attend a meeting in the town hall 10 kilometers from our remote barangay. The soldiers required us to attend but my husband persuaded the soldiers to leave some of us behind to take over the classes. So my husband and two other teachers as well as all those identified by the military to attend, including my younger sister Feliza went with the soldiers. However, the meeting they expected was a ploy to haul them to the Provincial Headquarters in Bulanao, Tabuk and detain them there.

The series of arrests and detention started in January 1976 and ended in December of the next year. Those arrested and detained from our small barangay of Tanglag totaled 31. Of these, there were 10 women who had very young children then. Some of them were widows. Some were brought to Camp Olivas until late the next year 1977.

The arrests were done with deceit that was why the people were not prepared for it. Since the assembly meetings called for in the barangays were boycotted, the military had to re-

sort to this deceitful way of inviting the identified leaders to a meeting, only to detain them.

On April 1977, I drafted a letter seeking assistance from the Free Legal Assistance Group. I sent this through our NGO sympathizers and workers in the area. I pictured to this group how the military are arresting and detaining our people. It did not take very long when then Senator Diokno worked and negotiated for the release of those detained both in Tabuk and in Camp Olivas, notwithstanding the risks he could encounter. May God bless his soul!

Whenever I recall those days now that I am retired and a grandmother of three, I always pray to thank the Lord for helping us in our fight for our human rights during those days. I believe that the courage of the people before, particularly the women who fought along with the men and even became the frontliners was a legacy they have left to our children and our children's children.

Angelita Cawilan

60 years old

Tanglag, Lubuagan, Kalinga

Two-term President, Women's Club of Tanglag

Current Adviser of the Women's Club of Tanglag

1976. I was a very busy mother of six (3 girls; 3 boys) growing children attending to both my family's needs and the farms where our livelihood depends so much. My husband died in 1972 leaving me the sole responsibility of caring for our family. Because my children were still young then, their assistance was limited. Besides, they were still studying. I wanted them to improve their life through formal education.

All of a sudden I heard that people have come to our very remote barangay to talk about a dam that can generate elec-

tricity. Although I have reached second year high school, I could not imagine what a dam really looked like. From what I heard, however, some 20 barangays would be submerged and the people in these barangays would be relocated some place. "What will happen to the land that is the source of our livelihood?" "What will be left of our human rights to live a decent life?" These were the questions that I kept asking but were not satisfactorily answered.

When the barangay folks were asked to assemble and meet with the military men and the PANAMIN personnel about the relocation, I joined the boycott of the meetings. As such, I was identified as one of the active protesters against the dam. Like the rest, I was listed in one of the groups of women who would go to the dam site as scheduled and as needed to uproot and destroy the tents of the military men guarding the survey. I tried dumping the construction materials (for the bunk houses) back to the dump trucks that delivered these, if not throwing these elsewhere. Some of the soldiers pulled us away from the place once they caught up with us; some pointed their guns at us to threaten us. These were carried out night or day for weeks and months. When the military and the National Power Corporation along with the PANAMIN felt they could not stop us, they arrested and detained those they caught. The detention was made at the Provincial Headquarters of the military more or less 40 kilometers from the dam site. Some of the detained were arrested in the classrooms and in the ricefields and brought to the military barracks without any provisions.

On my part, I, along with some of our women leaders was invited by the military allegedly for a meeting in town. Because we had to protect our men from being arrested, we heeded the invitation. I brought my youngest child as he was

too young to be left behind. Her siblings were in the school then. When we reached the town hall, we did not see a soul there to meet with us so our military escorts who were playing innocent suggested we would go to Bulanao, Tabuk where the military headquarters is situated, more or less 50 kilometers from Lubuagan where we were then. We had no choice but to heed more stable faster suggestion again. However, when we reached the headquarters, we were told that we were not allowed to leave. There was no meeting. We were deceived. We had no provisions then: no clothes nor food.

I tried to talk to the battalion commander, the provincial commander and even to the PANAMIN major to no avail. I told them of my family responsibility and the number of children that I have to take care of as they were yet very young to fend for themselves but my pleadings landed on deaf ears. To make things worse, I was included in the group of men and women who were brought to Camp Olivas to be detained for a number of months. But thanks to God, He sent to us Senator Diokno who risked his life to deliver us out of Camp Olivas by negotiating for our release.

1998, I am still a farmer. For now, I serve as the surrogate mother of one of my younger grandchildren because the mother, my daughter-in-law, has to go back to school to finish her course. Life is now very safe in our place because there are no more soldiers to threaten us with their riffles and abuse our customary hospitality of which we are known for as Kalingas. The dam no longer threatens our life. I feel victorious. The risks the Kalinga women had to take to save and preserve their land and culture were worth it.

Laureana Awing Pasudag
Tomangan, Tabuk, Kalinga
40 years old

I am fifth of six children among whom only one was a boy. I was not able to finish high school like our eldest. The third girl in the brood was able to finish her elementary education. We, however, resolved that our youngest (girl) and the only boy should finish something. The girl was able to finish commerce (major in accounting) and the boy, secretarial.

Our father died when we were very young. Young as we were then, we had to help our mother earn our living. The older ones helped in tending the fields. I learned this type of work only when I got married. My chores now as a wife include gathering firewood, pounding rice, cleaning the house and attending to the other household chores. My husband helps only when he sees I am tired and prefer to be silent out of exhaustion. My older sisters and my only brother advised me to marry this husband of mine when I was 17 years old.

Although I do not consider my participation in aborting the construction of the Chico River dam very significant, I can still vividly recall those chilling moments. I was about 15 years old when word spread around that a dam that would displace us all would be constructed in our barangay. I had no idea what a dam is but I heard from the adults in the community that our barangay would be submerged together with more than twenty barangays. I thought this was so unfair so when the men and the women told us to help them in dismantling the tents and bunk houses the NPC and the military were supposed to put up, I heeded to their call. I also joined in uprooting and hauling back the military tents to the trucks that delivered them. The military guards pulled

me and my companions away from the place. This did not prevent us from going back to do the same. One time, when one soldier could not pull me away from the place, another one would help him. The last time, the soldiers helped each other in throwing me and my companions into the dump truck just like the lumber materials that they threw down the ground. The next thing I knew some of my companions and I were in a hospital, with contusions, bruises and wounded feelings. From then on, our group (teen-age girls) was not allowed to go to the dam site anymore. The only task my group did after the hospitalization was to cook and bring the food of those on vigil in the dam site. This went on until the cancellation of the dam construction.

Leticia Bula-at

(Alyas Tining)

Dupag, Tabuk, Kalinga

50 years old

Founder of Inabuyog (Federation of Kalinga Women's Organizations)

Currently Provincial Chairperson, Innabuyog

Adviser, Dupag Riverside Women's Organization

I was only 14 years old when I got married to the man to whom my parents had betrothed me. In 1972, my husband died when the second of my two children was only five months old. My parents then had to help me rear the children until they finished their college education. The boy is a commerce graduate and the girl was an elementary education graduate. The latter, however, died in her first childbirth. Her child was born dead the day after and she expired too the day after giving birth.

In 1974, the National Power Corporation, escorted by the military came to our place and announced the construc-

tion of the Chico River dam, as agreed upon with then Congressman Duyan (He died in the process of negotiating with his people, the Kalingas, about the Chico River dam. It is claimed that he assured his people of the best relocation when it is pushed through). The announcement was so abrupt that the people in the more or less 20 barangays claimed to be submerged by the dam were taken off-guard. Hordes of soldiers, armed civilians (Manda Elizalde's bodyguards), PANAMIN staff and workers trooped to our place and conducted dam promotions and campaigns. The people counteracted these by boycotting the meetings called by the NPC, PANAMIN and the military. They also conducted meetings to plan and set the strategies to manifest their protests.

From the start, I participated in these meetings despite the fact that I had two children in the elementary grades. During the first meetings, the people from the different barangays agreed that they be grouped by batches (composed of men and women) as watchers, detractors, and dismantlers of the tents and bunk houses. The agreement made was signed with bloodied thumbmarks particularly our agreement not to accept any dole outs from the government. During the first attempts, the women observed that the military guards were more hostile to our men than to us women. We therefore decided that the women batches should be the ones to uproot the tents of the soldiers being built in the dam site. The men acted as detractors to the military guarding the dam site. These activities lasted for weeks, night and day. The men and women alike caught by the soldiers were hauled to the provincial headquarters thereby depleting our human resources. Also, in the process, some of the women and men were wounded when they struggled against the military which forced them and threw them like logs in the dump trucks. One time, three women were wounded and hospitalized.

Then, the soldiers announced a meeting at the Provincial headquarters in Bulanao for us to attend. Some of our men and women went, only to be detained at the barracks for months. This further depleted our human resources in the dam site and added tasks to those left behind who had to bring food to our people detained in the PC barracks, which is more or less 40 kilometers away from the dam site.

The last time we dismantled the tents, we carried the tents, cot beds, petromax, shovels and other light construction equipment to the Provincial headquarters on foot. Upon reaching the barangay where the headquarters is situated, we marched along (300 men and women) the road because we were not allowed to enter the headquarters. Only the so-called leaders were allowed to enter the grounds of the military headquarters.

This, however, did not stop the military men from continuously arresting and detaining those whom they suspected as leading the protests. One time, one of the soldiers assigned in our barrio apprehended me saying I was being sought by the military. But I countered saying, "why am I still here then in the barrio?". At another time, when I came across some soldiers who were Kalinga themselves, I scolded them for working with those favoring the construction of the dam which will submerge our ancestral lands. Some months after, then President Marcos cancelled the construction of the Chico River dam.

Thereafter, a big change in the way the community regarded the women in our place took shape. Majority, if not all of the members elected to the barangay council were women, including the chair in the election that came after the cancellation of the dam construction.

Feliza Bayugao Tacalic
66 years old
Tanglag, Lubuagan, Kalinga

To reach my barangay from the provincial road accessible to motor vehicles, I have to hike two mountains or if the water in the Chico River is at low level, I can hike the steep riverbank for three hours. Another way is one across the river but similar climb on a mountain and a swim across the Chico.

I was in the prime of my life as a mother of two boys and a housewife when military men and PANAMIN personnel came to our barangay. They wanted to meet with us and talk to us about the construction of a dam that would submerge our barangay and some 19 others. When I heard about this, I initiated a boycott of that meeting. I called for the cooperation of the women and the men not to attend the meeting. So every time a meeting of the barrio folks was called for by the intruders, all I did was to shout “boycott the meeting” and no meeting was held because the people would not go.

When the people in the neighboring barangays called for an assembly to plan and strategize the protest against the dam construction, I was one of my barangay's representatives. I helped organize the women in the barangay and went by the schedule set in the dismantling operations and in blocking more deliveries of the construction materials for the bunkhouses and military tents. I witnessed, with horror, how the soldiers threatened us with their guns when they caught us uprooting and destroying the tents in the dam site. At one time, one of the women fainted because a soldier pointed his rifle at her. The women's groups were scheduled alternately to do the dismantling of the tents while the men watched in the evening for the surreptitious delivery of the

construction materials by the NPC. These activities were conducted by batch because at the time, harvesting of palay and coffee beans had to be made.

Meanwhile, the military roamed around from barangay to barangay and arrested the men and detained them at the military headquarters some 40 kilometers from the dam site. The military did not only arrest our men; they also ransacked houses for anything they wanted to get and shoot at our domestic animals for their food.

Then we were deceived by the military men. They told us to go to Bulanao and meet with the PANAMIN. But when we reached the place, the vehicles we were riding roared straight to the military barracks and dumped us there. We, the so-called group leaders, were detained. That time I brought with me my youngest child. He became the youngest detainee in the barracks that time. After three months, I and some others (men and women) were transferred to Camp Olivas. We were made to ride on a dump truck with military guards as if we were criminals. While we were not treated badly at Camp Olivas, being detained overwhelmed me. The anxieties and fears for the life of those left behind were too much to handle. Thanks to the intercession of Senator Diokno who braved the life threatening odds to negotiate for our release after almost a year of detention.