

STF Europe goes to the Philippines to serve

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July 30, 2016



From the 4th until the 30th of July, STF Europe prepared to go to the Philippines to realize a project in collaboration with Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP)-Philippines. It was initiated by two STF participants from Sweden, Johannes N. and Johan J., and they were working and developing this project together with the help of Merly Barrete Barlaan. She is the head of the NGO WFWP-Philippines and previously worked at the United Nations in New York for more than 20 years. She decided to go back to her hometown of Montessunting, in Bohol, to change and help the people there.

In total, 13 volunteering students from Europe and America made the trip with the determination to create a better environment for people living in developing countries. Therefore, we all gave their time and energy for the people in the village in order to realize that project.



Before going to the Philippines, however, we had to raise funds for the trip, by fundraising in Switzerland for two weeks. We set an external goal at the beginning of this period, which they tried to achieve by the end of those two weeks. The goal was clear and the direction too. Our motto -- "Do it for the people in the

Philippines, live for the well-being of others, and be interested in every person I meet while fundraising.” Having this kind of approach always brought us to success and it helped us continue with a more positive attitude and mindset when the going got tough.

After those two weeks of fundraising, we returned to the STF headquarters in Gafrenz, Austria, and prepared for the coming project and adventure we would experience. No one knew what would happen, but we all knew it would be great.



The project consisted of building a playground and bringing school supplies from Germany to the children in this little province, which is called Montessunting in Carmen, on the island Bohol. We also plowed a grass field to help the people farm their own vegetables and things they need. More important was the intent behind the project, which WFP-Philippines was emphasizing and striving for -- realizing the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which it seeks to accomplish globally by 2030!

The third of those goals is “Good health and well-being,” which was the STF participants’ main focus during the trip. Specifically, we wanted to promote good health for the local children, hoping they would play on the playground, run around, exercise, move, and release their energy in a creative and enjoyable environment. The well-being of the villagers was also important, for example, in allowing the parents to see their children happily running around and playing. The playground that was built will give the children the necessary space to interact with each other and to be children without any borders or restrictions.

Through the gardening project, we could come closer to the second SDG -- “Zero Hunger.” The newly-plowed field gives locals the possibility of taking ownership of their crops and be responsible for each other and to create more food for the village.

The whole community, including the children, worked or got involved somehow in that project. We could see and feel the excitement and anticipation of the people for the new playground and field. Even though we worked and paid with sweat and blood to realize their plan, it was definitely worth it! First, because of the good feeling of having something accomplished and, secondly, because we could observe the beauty of the people and children smiling and being really happy about it when it was done.

The work was followed by a conclusion ceremony and honoring session for STF and for several other Foundations and NGOs that supported the project. There was a cultural evening with traditional singing and dancing performances to which the whole village came. It was a really wonderful experience!

I am glad that I could be part of that project because I had the possibility to see how we need to work on the grass-root level and in the communities, as the UN emphasizes so much in their panels and debates at the Human Rights Council Sessions. Only to talk or to discuss about how to change something doesn't help much, but to do some action and some work is more important and will bring us closer to realizing the SDGs and leaving no one in our world behind.

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Germany, 01.09.2016