

Rotary Club of Honolulu



17-21 March 2025

Sibonga Central Elementary School

In Partnership With:



Nan Inc



Project Summary

The building of three (3) classroom at the Sibonga Central Elementary School was a collaborative project that addressed the needs identified - the lack of classrooms for a public elementary school located in the Municipality of Sibonga, a 3rd class municipality of the province of Cebu, Philippines. Sibonga is about 50kms (~31 miles) from the Mactan International Airport of Cebu, Philippines.

The school has a population of 1,600 students being taught in 28 classrooms - ~42 students per classroom. The Philippine Department of Education has deemed of the classrooms to be un-safe and the school has been instructed to stop teaching at most of the classrooms. The project was to increase the number of classrooms thereby improving the student to classroom ratio. The classrooms to be built is also to include an inside lavatory for the students' health and safety. The three classrooms with lavatory have a budgeted cost of \$50,000 USD.

Project objective is to improve the students to classroom ratio thereby improving the students learning experience.

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Facts and Figures

	Items	Amount in PhP
1	Wall-to-wall construction of 3 classrooms - 7m x 9m per classroom	1,338,730
2	Electrical for 3 classrooms - 7m x 9m per classroom	79,040
3	Plumbing and painting of 3 classrooms - 7m x 9m per classroom	111,120
4	Hand tools needed	72,605
5	Wages and salaries for 11 StrikeForce workers for 18 weeks	844,200
6	Meals for 11 StrikeForce workers for 18 weeks	399,200
		2,844,895
	Converted to USD @ PhP56/USD\$	\$50,802
	Auxiliary	
	YMCA Participants Sponsorships	5,000

Table 1 -
Summary of
Proposed
Budget for 3
classrooms and
Auxiliary Cost

Table 2 -
Summary of
Project
Participants

3	Nan, Inc
15	YMCA Honolulu
7	Rotary Club of Honolulu
4	Family & Friends of the Rotary Club of Honolulu
1	YMCA Cebu
11	StrikeForce

1	Washington, USA
1	Sydney, Australia
12	Central Visayas, Philippines
27	Hawai'i, USA

Table 3 - Regional Representation



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Background and Justification



YMCA Cebu, a long-time partner of the Rotary Club of Honolulu, identified Sibonga Central Elementary School as 2025 Spring International Service Above Self Project recipient.

Though the other candidates were just as worthy, Sibonga was chosen for its geographic location. Sibonga is only 31kms outside of the Cebu International Airport that has easy connection flights from Honolulu.



With an approved construction budget of USD50,000, StrikeForce, our long-time partner, broke ground under the leadership of Danny Laurente in February 2025. Completion and turnover are scheduled no later than mid-week April 2025.



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There are numerous motivations on why the project of improving the student to classroom ratio is important. For example, we aim for students to get **more individual attention**. When there are fewer students per classroom, teachers can spend more time with each student with more tailored instruction, faster identification of learning issues and more opportunities for student participation.

It also allows **better classroom management**. Smaller classes tend to have fewer behavior issues because teachers can keep better track of student behavior making it easier to build stronger teacher-student relationships. In turn it makes students more likely to stay engaged.

The improvement of student to classroom ratio also **improved academic performance**. Research shows that students in smaller classes often perform better on standardized tests, show improved reading and math skills, especially in the early grades, and develop better critical thinking skills through more interactive discussions.

Teacher satisfaction and effectiveness also improves. Lower ratios can also lead to less teacher burnout, more time for planning and feedback and a more dynamic and responsive teaching style.



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Lower ratios also build a **stronger classroom community**. With fewer students, there's more room for collaboration and peer interaction. Students often feel more comfortable participating and asking questions. Teachers can also better foster a positive learning environment.

What are the problem(s) that the project seeks to solve?

Learning Gaps

Problem: In large classes, students who struggle may go unnoticed and fall behind.

Solution: With fewer students, teachers can spot when someone's not getting it and provide extra help or adjust instruction as needed.

Poor Student Engagement

Problem: Students tune out when they feel invisible or overlooked in a big class.

Solution: In smaller classes, students get more opportunities to speak, ask questions, and be part of the lesson—keeping them more engaged and interested.

Overworked Teachers

Problem: Teachers with large classes often struggle with grading, planning, and managing behavior.

Solution: Fewer students means teachers can spend more time giving quality feedback, plan more interactive lessons and experience less stress and burnout.

Behavioral Issues

Problem: It's harder to manage discipline and classroom dynamics with a large group.

Solution: Smaller classes are easier to control, and students are more likely to behave when they feel seen and valued.



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Lack of Personalization

Problem: Not all students learn the same way or at the same pace.

Solution: With fewer kids, teachers can differentiate instruction, try more hands-on activities and give personalized support.

Lower Academic Achievement in Early Grades

Problem: Kids in early grades need more direct support to build foundational skills.

Solution: Research shows small class sizes in early learning are linked to long-term gains in literacy and math.

Were there any previous attempts to tackle it?

Despite repeated appeals from the teachers, parents and community to the government for support in reducing student to classroom ratio, progress has been hindered by bureaucratic delays and political favoritism, resulting in slow approval of necessary reforms.

What is the motivation of your organization and team members to do this project and offer a solution?

The Rotary Club of Honolulu is driven by a deep commitment to the principle of "Service Above Self." This project reflects our dedication to creating lasting, positive change in education by addressing one of the most pressing challenges facing students and teachers today: overcrowded classrooms.

We believe that every student deserves access to quality, personalized education—something that is often compromised when classrooms are too full. By working together as a team, we bring diverse skills, shared passion, and a unified purpose to develop and implement solutions that reduce the student-to-classroom ratio.

Our motivation goes beyond numbers. It's about ensuring every child has a chance to be seen, heard, and supported. It's about empowering teachers to teach more effectively, and creating learning environments where curiosity thrives. This project is



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not just a task—it's a mission rooted in service, equity, and the belief that education is a right, not a privilege.

Building Classrooms Narrative



And we have arrived! (Workcampers with the school principal.)
Workcampers included: Rotary Club of Honolulu (11), Nan, Inc (3), YMCA Honolulu (15), YMCA Cebu (1) and StrikeForce (11).



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After a weekend of airport transfers, we finally became one. Our mid-morning arrival at the work site was filled with warm welcome and hospitality.



And so on the 17th of March 2025, workcampers arrived in Sibonga Central Elementary School with a shared goal: to improve learning conditions by reducing the student-to-classroom ratio in a community long burdened by overcrowded schools.

With hearts full of purpose and a "Service Above Self" mindset, volunteers from Hawai'i, Washington and Sydney arrived into the area – not to sit in meetings, but to get their hands dirty. From the moment they arrived, it was all action. Sleeves rolled up, boots on the ground, and no job too small or too tough.



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The work wasn't glamorous. It was grit and grind. Teams dug trenches for sewage systems under the sun, mixed gravel, rocks, and cement with bare hands and makeshift tools, and hauled buckets across uneven ground. We laid foundations, filed down rough surfaces, plastered walls, and made sure every corner of each new classroom was strong, safe, and ready for learning.



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There were no shortcuts. Everyone pitched in – working side by side as we passed buckets of cement mix to StrikeForce, our skilled masons. Each task, whether it was mixing cement or smoothing plaster, was done with care and pride, knowing that every action brought the project one step closer to giving students the space and dignity they deserved.



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What began as separate groups quickly became one unified force. The laughter, teamwork, and after dinner entertainment and reflections around shared meals reminded everyone that this wasn't just construction – it was transformation.

By the end of the week, 3 classrooms were near completion and the workcampers smiled proudly as learned what's possible when



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compassion meets collaboration. It wasn't just a building – it was a future, shaped by many hands and one shared heart.

We left the worksite on the 22nd March, leaving the StrikeForce to complete the project.

Logistics



Even before the start of the project, our fearless leader, Dave Shanahan, has been busy.

Coming in early ensuring that everything is as it should be.

Seen here – signing those gazillion certificates.

Coordinating the arrival of team members from different groups proved to be challenging. Flights arrived at varying dates and times, with some volunteers landing in the middle of the night and others facing delays or last-minute cancellations. Organizing airport pickups quickly turned into a complex, around-the-clock task, requiring flexible scheduling and a whole lot of patience. Despite the unpredictability, every volunteer



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was eventually welcomed and transported safely to YMCA Cebu.

Accommodations were humble but functional. We started off at eh YMCA, a hostel type accommodation, prior to driving to the project site. With the heart of the project focused on service, comfort took a back seat.

Workcampers stayed on the project site. Our worksite accommodation was a converted school facility. We slept on sleeping on cots in a classroom-style setup. Though, it became a place of camaraderie – where stories were exchanged, goals were aligned, and a shared sense of purpose was renewed each day. And while far from luxurious, each room included a private bathroom – a small but appreciated comfort after long, exhausting days of physical labor.

Through limited amenities, we pressed forward with determination, reminding each other that the mission was bigger than the discomfort – and the impact would be lasting. One thing we quickly learned: no one went hungry on this project. Meals were simple and shared communally. They were lovingly cooked on-site by local volunteers and families, and the food was nothing short of incredible. Each bursting with flavor, every bite was a celebration of community and culture. And the snacks? They were endless. Between tasks, there was always something to munch on—sweet, savory, or somewhere in between. If you came on a diet, this definitely wasn't the place to be! But with the amount of physical work being done, every bite felt well-earned.



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The food didn't just keep us going – it brought us together. Mealtimes became moments of laughter, storytelling, and connection, reminding us that nourishment comes in many forms.

I definitely gained more than experience during this project!

Evenings of Cultural Exchange and Entertainment

After a long day of hard, physical work, the community gave back in the most meaningful way—not with words, but with spirit. Each evening, parents, teachers, students, and local residents came together to host performances that brought their culture to life. Through music, dance, storytelling, and shared meals, they opened their hearts and traditions to us, helping us understand the rhythm, resilience, and richness of their daily lives.



These weren't just performances – they were powerful lessons in identity, pride, and unity. Watching traditional dances and hearing ancestral songs gave us a deeper appreciation for the soul of the community we came to serve.



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In return, we had the honor of “owning” one special night – Aloha Night. The goal is to bring a taste of Hawaiian culture and joy to the community.



With laughter, song and dance, we shared stories from our home and celebrated the beautiful connection between our worlds. For a few hours, we weren't volunteers and hosts – we were one, learning from one another, dancing under the same sky.

Project Turn-Over Ceremony



We may have left after a week but the work continued on. We know that our departure was bittersweet to the StrikeForce; sorrow that we are going to be missed and joy as they now can continue to work unhinged.



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Finally, on the 10th of April, the classrooms were opened. As customary, the structure was solemnly blessed by the local parish priest and attended by the community.



On the right, are chairs that were bought from the extra funds that the workcampers pulled together to benefit the school.



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The proud recipients.



Making our mark.



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The 3 classrooms as it looks today.



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The article as written by the school's newsletter.

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THE BLAZE



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SCES BAGS MEDALS AT DISTRICT PRESSCON 2025

by: Clarisse V. Redoble



District Press Conference 2025 happened last January 22, 2025, at Sibonga National High School. The participants were campus journalists from elementary to secondary, both private and public, along with their coaches and some supportive parents. The activity started with an opening program in which designated venues were assigned per category. Sibonga Central Elementary School proudly joined in this highly anticipated competition, our proud journalists achieved success guided by their supportive coaches. *continue on page 3...*

BUILDING DREAMS TOGETHER: YMCA AND SIBONGA STUDENTS CREATED LASTING MEMORIES

by: Lee Uriel J. Galolo



Photo by: Gazelle Breanna Blanco

A week of unity, generosity, and cultural celebration unfolded at Sibonga Central Elementary School (SCES) as the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), along with 30 guests from Hawaii, arrived for a special visit. The delegation was warmly welcomed on March 17 at 7:30 AM, with the SCES band playing lively music and students waving their flags in excitement. *continue on page 8...*

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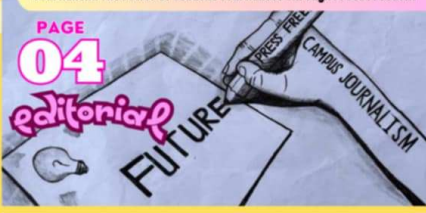
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Building Dreams Together: How YMCA and Sibonga Students Created Lasting Memories

by: Lee Uriel J. Galolo



Photos by: Gazelle Breanna Blanco

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This visit was more than just a diplomatic exchange—it was a meaningful act of support for education. As part of their commitment to community development, YMCA donated three brand-new classrooms to accommodate the growing student population in Sibonga. These new facilities will help improve learning conditions and ease congestion in existing classrooms.

School officials and teachers expressed deep gratitude for this generous contribution, recognizing that these classrooms are more than just structures; they represent hope, progress, and a brighter future for the youth of Sibonga.

A Legacy of Friendship and Support

This visit was not just about the donation of classrooms—it was a celebration of unity, education, and shared aspirations. It served as a reminder that when communities and organizations work together, they can create meaningful and lasting change.

With a strengthened sense of gratitude and unity, the people of Sibonga now look forward to a brighter future. Thanks to YMCA's generosity and commitment, students have more opportunities to learn, grow, and build a successful tomorrow.

As YMCA volunteers and their Hawaiian guests bid farewell, they left behind not just new classrooms, but a lasting legacy of goodwill, cultural appreciation, and an unwavering dedication to education and progress.

Post-Project

As tradition, we all went to visit sites of interest on our way back to the city/airport.



Monastery of the Holy Eucharist (Simala, Cebu)

- is a famous of a castle-like church that feels like a slice of Europe in the Philippines.

A few of us got lucky to get the Head Abbot give his blessings unto us.

The **Moalboal Sardine Run (Moalboal, Cebu)** is a breathtaking underwater spectacle. Snorkelers and divers can immerse themselves in swirling schools of over a million sardines - weather permitting. Unfortunately for our group, it was raining that day.



After an overnight, or two, of stay in Cebu City, we parted - to go to our next destination - home in Honolulu or Sydney, or visit Bangkok or Hanoi.



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Bangkok, Thailand



Whether enjoying the city lights of Bangkok or engaging with the elephants, food abounds!



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Hanoi, Vietnam

Six workcampers (Rotarians) travelled for a weeklong fun to Hanoi, Vietnam's capital and second-most populous city of Vietnam. Staying in the Old Quarters where colonial architecture is present, we soaked ourselves in the bustling city of shops facing the river.

Travelling in an overnight train was sort of comical - with locks and double decker beds. The hike to and from Sapa and Ta Van Village were an experience in itself.



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Surprisingly, my favorite part of Hanoi was not the shopping, nor the food.

The climb of Nanh Binh, 500 steps to the sky, was perfectly awesome.

Of course, a trip is never complete without a massage. And what best way to end the day than to be waited on by a group of masseuse, ready to ease those muscles from all that hiking and climbing.



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Review & Assessment: A Lesson in Service and Shared Humanity

This project began with a clear mission: to reduce the student-to-classroom ratio by building and improving educational spaces. But as the work unfolded, it became clear that the success of this "Service Above Self" initiative would be measured in far more than bricks and cement.

Despite non-luxurious accommodations—classroom-style living spaces with cots and only the basics—volunteers remained committed, adaptable, and driven. Nights were hot, sometimes noisy, and far from what many were used to. Yet, comfort was replaced by community. Shared rooms turned into bonding spaces, and every cold shower or creaky bed reminded us of the simplicity we often take for granted.



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We worked with **minimal tools** and local resources—mixing cement by hand, digging trenches with shovels, and improvising when needed. But through creativity, teamwork, and sheer determination, we pushed through every challenge. What we lacked in equipment, we made up for in spirit.

The classrooms we helped build now stand as tangible results of our labor. They will provide students with smaller, more manageable learning environments—where teachers can give more personalized attention and students can thrive. These new spaces are a step toward equitable education, and a testament to what can be done when people come together for a common good.

But perhaps the **greatest success of this project** wasn't what we built, but what we were taught—by the very children and community we came to serve. Many had so little, yet they gave so much. Snacks were shared without hesitation. Smiles were given freely. When we were tired, they lifted our spirits with laughter and song. When we thought we came to give, we found ourselves receiving just as much—if not more.

In their kindness, in their generosity, and in the way they welcomed us with open hearts, we were reminded that true richness lies not in what we have, but in how we give.

In conclusion, this project was a success not just because classrooms were built, but because walls came down—between cultures, between people, and between expectations and reality. With minimal resources but maximum heart, we came together, learned together, and left forever changed. The mission to reduce the student-to-classroom ratio was accomplished, but the deeper mission—to serve humbly, connect deeply, and learn generously—was what made this project unforgettable.



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