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Power women of Nueva Ecija...

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zo of San Isidro, Nueva Ecija and former Cabiao Mayor Gloria "Baby" Crespo Congo.

From Boston on their way back to the Philippines, the two charismatic women went to the Los Angeles office of the *Asian Journal* for an exclusive interview. They shared their experiences and vision for the future, using the Gawad Kalinga model to eradicate poverty and bring about positive change in the Philippines.

"I was a fourth generation mayor in Cabiao, starting from my great-grandfather, grandfather, father and me," said Baby who served the town for 12 years, with her third term ending last 2007. "I saw my grandfather and father help the poor in our town. But after four generations, the poor remained poor. That's because they were simply given "Band-aid" solutions. *May namatayan, may nagkasakit, may na-aksidente -lalapit sa tatay ko na mayor, bibigyan sila ng tulong.* When I became mayor, I did my best to serve Cabiao, but it was not until I partnered with Gawad Ka-

linga and adapted the GK Way in township development that true change came about. When two GK villages were built and 100 families were given houses, which they themselves helped build, transformation resulted. *Nabigyan ng dignidad ang mga tao, nabigyan ng pag-asa, nagkaroon ng kinabukasan at hanapbuhay.* Before, the men used to drink and gamble to forget their poverty. Now, they are busy farming, fishing and working for their livelihood. The women are taught crafts such as wig-making, which help bring in money for the household. The children are now attending school in the village and excelling in their studies. Through value formation classes in the villages, they realized that God loves them and want them to prosper," explained Baby.

Besides being the first woman mayor of Cabiao, Baby Congo was also the youngest elected mayor of the town. She was recognized as an Outstanding Mayor by the Office of the President of the Philippines. Congo was the first GK advocate in Nueva Ecija to champion her local gov-

ernment unit into becoming a partner of GK in its work of nation building. Now serving full time as the Executive Director of GK Builders Institute in Ateneo, Baby Congo travels throughout the country, persuading other mayors and governors to adopt the GK Way for good governance.

In San Isidro, Nueva Ecija, the GK template has likewise been fully embraced by its people, led by Mayor Sonia Lorenzo. Mayor Sonia has adopted the GK approach of providing development programs which seek to empower citizens to participate in enhancing the service delivery of her local government unit. With her effective participatory governance platform, Lorenzo has been recognized by various institutions for the outstanding work she has done in San Isidro. She received the Presidential Award for Best Performing Local Government Units Against Illegal Drugs, the Award of Excellence for the Municipality of San Isidro, Tanging Alay sa Tanging Anak ng Nueva Ecija Award, and a Certificate of Appreciation for

▶ **PAGE A5**



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