

School Food Program

The Buyong Sponsorship Program, with the Philippine Relief Organization at the American School in Japan as its largest donor, started a food program at the Buyong Elementary School in 1986. Pompia Tohay, the Home Arts teacher, attended a seminar on nutrition and began preparing daily meals using UNICEF recipes for malnourished children. During the first years of the program the school saw daily attendance improve and a reduction in the number of malnourished students. Village parents were delighted with the school feeding.



A selected group of grade 5 and 6 students, along with parent volunteers, help prepare the daily meal. Mrs. Tohay shops for fresh vegetables, fruit and meat daily. Students start the meal preparation at 7:30 AM by building wooden fires in the outdoor cooking area. After washing, chopping and mixing all the ingredients in large cauldrons, the students return to their first period class. By 9:45 the food is ready to be served and the students deliver a large pot to each of the thirteen classrooms. The morning recess from 9:45 AM to 10:15 AM is feeding time. Each class has the responsibility for serving food and washing their bowls and utensils afterwards.



The menu varies, but usually includes either binignit (a hot fruit and vegetable dish that includes coconut, banana and camote), a stew with chicken, vegetables and rice, or noodles with vegetables. For many students this is their most nourishing meal of the day. Buyong Elementary School is the only school in the Philippines to offer a free, daily lunch to every student. The Philippine Department of Education and Congresswoman Nerissa Soon-Ruiz have recognized this as a model program.



Three Buyong teachers, Liliosa Soliano (Grade 5), Evelyn Cabanisas (Grade 2) and Pompia Tohay (Home Arts) have volunteered their time to ensure the success of the program. Since its inception in 1986, more than two and a half million meals have been served. The cost of feeding 650 students is approximately sixteen dollars a day.