

Youth Rave: 'talk to us about our rights but let us have our say, too'

by Lina Sagara Reyes

CAGAYAN DE ORO CITY—Because they know least about their rights, the young adults here want to know about these intrinsic rights more. And, yes, they will listen to in-depth discussions on youth rights over the airplanes, on their favorite FM stations with their favorite disc jockeys as hosts.

They want the discussions to be interactive, with themselves as participants. Through phone calls and text messages from their mobile phones, they will give their ten cents' worth of opinions as well as ask questions.

But mind, dear parents, please don't steal the scene. No parents, please. Or at least, not their own parents as resource persons.

These insights into the consciousness of the middle-class educated teenagers in the highly-urbanized city of Cagayan de Oro (pop.500,000) were culled from a focused group discussion (FGD) of a peer group here as sponsored recently by the media organization, Women's Feature Service (WFS), at the Tribu Café.

After monitoring the local radio scene for two months and thinking out strategies to influence local radio programming towards rights-based information for the young, the Women's Feature Service-Mindanao Bureau invited some representatives of the generation. These youths, products of local Catholic schools, grew up in the city and belong to families of middle-class incomes.

The discussion was aimed primarily to test the waters before creating a set of public service announcements (PSA)

targeted to urbanized young adults, who are also the niche audience of FM radio. Six of 10 listeners of FM radio here are aged between 16-25.

The FGD is part of Project MediaLinks, a two-year tri-media campaign spearheaded by the media organization and geared toward promoting the rights of women, including those of the girl-child.

Already, there is an ongoing year-old PSA aired over several AM stations on domestic battery and other forms of violence. Sponsored by several women's groups and the Kapisanan ng mga Brodkasters (the national radio self-regulatory body), the 15-second plug "To suf-



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One of those many funny moments at the FGD

fer is not our destiny” tells women victims that domestic violence is not their destiny and that there is a way out, then lists institutions a victim can seek help from.

The WFS Bureau, involved in the production of the PSA for AM stations, thought of something similar but for the younger generation.

Unexpected Results

But instead, WFS listened to a mouthful of comments that suggest a rethink. It also looks like FM stations, parents and the pervasive Roman Catholic Church must also lend a listening ear.

One of the misconceptions is that the young prefer the quick soundbites common in television, MTV and FM stations. But instead of mere 15-second radio plugs, the participants said they prefer an informative talk show that will discuss matters close to the young that they don't really know much about.

They would like to know the legal, medical and spiritual aspects of issues such as sexual harassment on campus and date rape. They suggest that experts like lawyers, doctors and the religious be resource speakers or discussants.

The youth group expressed their desire to know

more about their rights, how to fend off sexual harassment on campus, acts of lasciviousness and date rape. “So we will not be abused and we will know what to do if it happens to us or to a friend who might need our help,” they reasoned.

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These teenagers are saying they can go longer, in-depth and serious. “Someone talks about the topic, just a short intro, and then [accommodate] comments, questions and reactions from the listeners,” they described of their ideal talk show.

They further suggested that someone phone in a question and from there, callers phone in their answers and/or send text messages through their phones. The host, who would be someone their age or at least about that young, facilitates the phone-in discussion.

Such a format has also been going on in regional AM stations for a generally

mature audience. These forums are co-sponsored by WFS with partner organizations, and piggyback on regular public affairs programs on weekends. It is geared to an audience belonging to the B, C and D income brackets.

At the FGD, two out of the city's eight FM radio stations were the popular choices of the group: Sandy 101.5 and Killer Bee. According to the participants, they like these stations for their music: alternative and R&B (rhythms and blues).

One quipped that she liked Sandy 101.5 because the “DJs speak real good English, their accents are like real natives (American or British).”

They didn't like the other stations which played mushy love songs. “So *baduy!*” one exclaimed.

One participant defined *baduy* (tacky) as something to which the house

helpers listen, or a song that is a classic standard like “Till There Was You” but sang by local matinee idol Piolo Pascual.

According to Imma Rae Dagapioso-Gatuslao, the facilitator, a communication professor at Xavier University, the FGD participants went through a process of prioritizing the issues they wanted to learn more about. The sense of an issue's importance was based on how badly they needed to know about the issue. The question posed was: Which among the cluster (of issues) would you like your favorite FM station to carry first, second, then next?

Other issues that surfaced as their priorities, aside from youth rights, were: environmental concerns, their role in nation-building, relationships, dealing with their changing bodies, and spirituality.

Sports and showbiz chitchat, the fare of most multi-media in the country, were also mentioned but when clustered and valued, these were placed at the lowest rung of the young women's priority list.

The facilitator, a specialist on the technology of participation (ToP) technique used in the FGD, noted in her report that “the

participants expressed their thoughts without qualms or fear that their ideas would be laughed at.”

They know what they want and are open about these, as when they described their favorite disc jockeys.

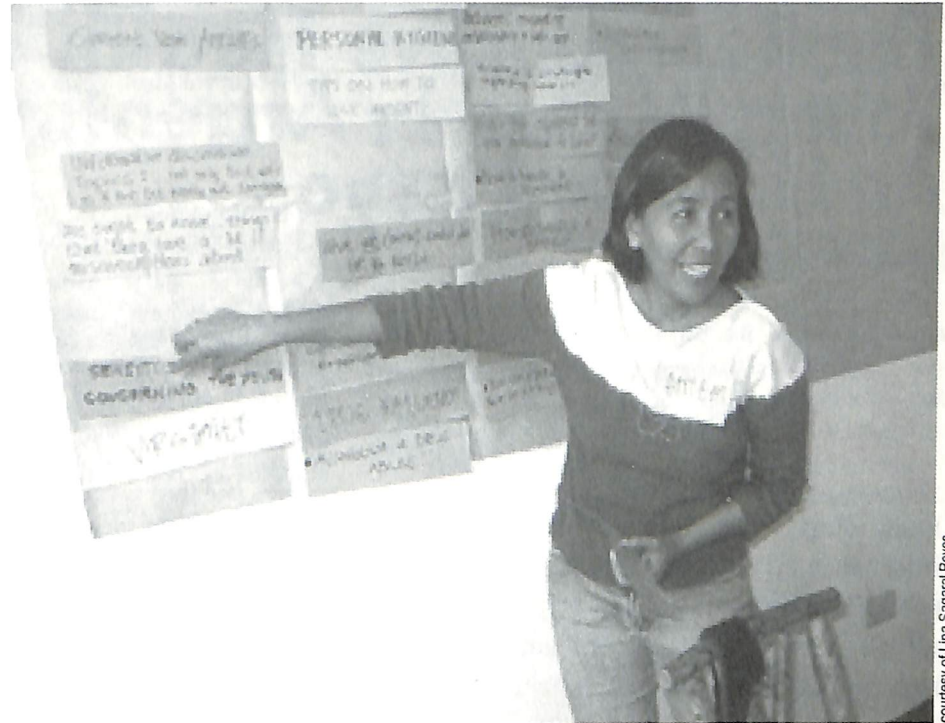
“This is a standard which, I think, the implementers of the radio project would do well to consider. This will have a lot of bearing when the project [identifies its] sources, talents, speakers [and] messengers,” she suggested.

Problem Areas

In a province where 87 percent are Catholic, the shadow of Christian religion looms over the young too. The tension between the values of the conservative Church and a more liberated and progressive society were dramatized by one participant who said she should know more about women’s rights but “feel[s] guilty if I don’t put God first. The Church taught us to put God first always. My parents also told me that. Even the school teaches that.”

Most shared her indecision. They all felt uncomfortable about putting God a priority topic, admitting that the youth wouldn’t want to hear about it from the FM station.

But the impasse was bridged. “The listeners



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Imma Rae Dagapioso, the facilitator of the FGD, is a communication professor at the Xavier University in Cagayan de Oro, Philippines

would shift the dial (to another station!) if we talk about God,” they chorused, followed by guffaws.

The idea of having to listen to their own parents talk on air brought grunts of dismay. “Oh, no, not on radio. Isn’t it enough to listen to mom’s sermon every morning? Why will I want her voice amplified on radio!”

Basic sex education is including in the high school and college curricula, there are at least two non-government organizations offering reproductive services for the young generation in the city. But the participants’ knowledge and understanding of sexuality and gender violence is below average. “In

some cases, most of them don’t even know that some acts already violate a person’s right. They can hardly define or give a name to such violation. However, their interest level vis-à-vis the topic is very high,” Dagapiopo further noted.

During the FGD, the participants identified reproductive health and sexuality-related matters as sensitive, except for prostitution which they classified under “Youth of the Nation” together with alcoholism and peer pressure.

The insights, however reflective of youthful enthusiasm, are not yet comprehensive, the sponsors admitted.

More FGDs should be conducted with heterogeneous groups so that WFS will also get a larger picture of the young city slickers’ mindset, and how FM stations can effectively relay messages on youth rights.

In two or three months, says WFS-Mindanao, the teenagers will meet their favorite disc jockeys and together they could chart the path to take as the youth move from mere listeners to shapers of the substance and stuff of which their favorite airplanes are made. ♡

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