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## Databanking and research for popular education

### 1. GENERAL INFORMATION

#### *1.1 Title of practice or experience*

IBON: Databanking and research for popular education

#### *1.2 Category of practice/experience and brief description*

Documented here is the experience of IBON, a private institution in the Philippines which has established innovative methods of making use of data and information to help empower people. The institution's databank and incisive analyses have helped serve the information needs of grassroots organizations, teachers, students and professionals, including policy-makers such as legislators.

#### *1.3 Name of person or institution responsible for the practice or experience*

IBON Foundation, Inc., Databank and Research Center

#### *1.4 Name and position of key or relevant persons or officials involved*

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### *1.6 Name of person and/or institution conducting the research*

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## **2. THE PROBLEM OR SITUATION BEING ADDRESSED BY THE PRACTICE/INNOVATIVE EXPERIENCE**

The idea of establishing a databank was born out of necessity. The databank was set up because of the dearth of information under the late ex-president Ferdinand Marcos' martial law regime (September 1972 to February 1986). During that period, information flow had been controlled by the regime and the public felt the need for more objective data and information on what was really happening and what the social and economic trends were in the country.

Throughout the martial law period, people's organizations, religious groups, workers, farmers, students, professionals and other sectors were seeking ways to understand and help ease the prevailing social conditions. But they needed informed judgment on issues such as the rising foreign debt, widespread poverty, heavy military spending, how much of the national budget was going to social services, unemployment and the like. They needed data and information to help educate, organize and mobilize people in relation to the excesses of martial rule. They needed a databank or a research group. This urgency led to the birth of IBON Foundation, which was known then as IBON Databank. (Note: In the succeeding parts of this research, the Foundation is referred to as "IBON" for short.)

From a borrowed space in a counseling office of a Catholic Sisters' convent, **IBON** Databank's pioneer staff labored. They pored over and thumbed through government data from government agencies and from the government-controlled newspapers. Using a borrowed typewriter and a borrowed mimeographing machine, IBON came out with its first published issue called *IBON Facts & Figures* in August 1978.

The publication, at first, was a mere collage of data. But it later evolved into an alternative way of presenting issues, from what the IBON founders call the “people’s perspective”. IBON Databank did not only present issues from another angle; it also presented alternatives or some way out of the problems martial rule created.

*ZBON Facts & Figures* became a hit among “cause-oriented groups” (as the various people’s and sectoral organizations opposing martial law were called then). Focusing on socio-economic issues, the publication became the basis and reference for group discussions on the country’s economic status, labor and farmers’ concerns, foreign debt and the like. Its main purpose, therefore, was to service the information needs of people’s organizations.

If these people’s organizations used the information to help arouse, mobilize and organize people, then this was so because, as IBON had envisioned it, information can be a tool for enlightenment and social transformation. The martial law regime tried to curtail the public’s right to be informed. IBON Databank was among those institutions which tried their best to help people from being kept in the dark.

From its early days, IBON established its distinctive competence. *ZBON Facts & Figures* became known as a concise and handy twice-monthly, eight-page fact sheet which made economic concepts and developments understandable to non-economists. A few months after its first publication, *ZBON Facts & Figures* was succeeded by two local-language editions. This was followed by *IBON Industry Primers* on mining, garments, fishing, oil, industrial estates, commercial banks, footwear, beverages and drugs, among others.

These publications had a common goal: to help empower the grassroots by disseminating in popular terms information on and analyses of socio-economic realities.

Having established its reputation in interpreting and analyzing economic trends and developments, IBON in summer 1980 launched its Seminars Project. Coordinated with the Education Forum, another non-governmental organization (NGO) servicing the academe, the project involved two main programs – IBON’s Socio-economic Seminar and Philippine History Seminar. The *IBON Socio-Economics Workbook* and the *IBON Teachers’ Manual on Philippine History* first served as seminar aids. But teachers later adopted these as supplementary material for their social-science classes. Getting the teachers involved in popular socio-economics under IBON’s guidance was crucial as they could reach out to the student population.

From a simple databank with a twice-a-month publication, IBON has expanded its services in the field of popularizing socio-economics. These services and the needs served are further discussed below.

### 3. DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE/INNOVATIVE EXPERIENCE AND ITS MAIN FEATURES

IBON Databank started off simply. It employed a simple documentation and filing technique or system called OASIS. Under the system, each file was labeled under a key code or key word. These files were then categorized by subjects or themes such as “agrarian”, “labor”, “debt”, “economy” and so on. Sub-themes were also provided if necessary. Under each category, the files were alphabetically arranged in shelves or boxes. Corresponding labels and codes and abstracts were also entered in index cards for easy accessing.

The system employed the basic techniques of a library. The only difference was that IBON’s files mainly comprised current newspaper clippings, journals, and documents from agencies such as the government’s National Statistics Office, National Economic Development Authority, and others.

Going hand in hand with the documentation and filing system was IBON’s publication. Through *ZBON Facts & Figures*, now published twice a month, accumulated data and information were processed. The eight-page, 8.5-inch-by-11-inch publication had a fixed format. The first spread stated the basic facts and figures; the second, the nature of the problem; and the third, analysis and alternatives. The publication states, explains and discusses in layperson’s terms socio-economic issues and developments.

In the late 1980s, IBON went high-tech. It computerized its systems. It innovated a filing and indexing system which it called IDEA or IBON Index Data Easy Access. A bit more complex than OASIS but user-friendly, IDEA employs “cross-indexing” where an article or document does not only fall under one index. For instance, a key code or entry on “Farmers and GATT” is also indexed under other key codes such as “Poverty” and “Trade”. Thus, a user or researcher can trace the relation, for example, of farmers’ problems, such as landlessness, to poverty. The key code on “Trade” can also have information on how GATT affects farmers.

For easy access, each key code is assigned a number. So, in accessing data, a user can just type the key code number, and all he/she needs appears on the computer screen. The computerized key code numbers are also the same index numbers of the manually-filed hard copies of newspaper clippings, manuals, documents and other literature. Thus, the user or researcher can easily retrieve the hard copies if he/she so wishes to get further details.

Copyrighted by IBON, IDEA has five major features: retrieval, maintenance, subscription list, thesaurus and data sources. Its retrieval system is multi-coded, employing “cross-indexing” as explained above. To maintain its bank of data, all incoming materials are listed in indices. All subscriptions to

outside publications, including their expirations, are also properly listed. Its thesaurus of properly-coded key words is an important guide to users. Through a key word and its code, a user can easily retrieve his/her needed data or information. Data sources are also properly inventoried. IBON has to employ ten “thinking” regular staff to maintain the databank on a daily basis. Once the databank is neglected, if even for a week, the whole set-up collapses.

Side by side with the computerized system is the use of Master Cards. Under each Master Card, all important indicators are arranged chronologically. The chronological arrangement is most helpful to the paper chaser who wishes to establish the historical development of an issue.

Aside from its *ZBON Facts & Figures*, IBON has also devised other services through which utilization of its wealth of data and information can be maximized. It experimented with a telephone service called “Dial a Data”. This service enables users to request for data over the phone for a fee. IBON later evolved what it calls a Datasavers program which provides institutions, organizations and offices immediate access to information by telephone, fax or modem. The program includes regular monitoring of issues according to what datasavers specify.

The main clients of IBON Foundation are from the grassroots, such as organized farmers, fisherfolk, laborers, indigenous peoples, women and church workers. Its clientele expanded later to include students, professionals and even policy-makers such as legislators. A senator, for example, requested for IBON’s data and analysis on the issue of oil deregulation. Several congressmen and some cabinet officials also subscribe to *ZBON Facts & Figures*.

Because of its rich information warehouse, IBON has gone into publishing English and Filipino editions of *ZBON Facts & Figures* for gradeschoolers and secondary school students. These magazines are used for social-science and economics subjects. It also publishes what is called *Econokomiks*, which explains complex economic trends and issues in simple, comic form. Written in the vernacular, this comic-type publication is intended for grassroots folk. Both the school magazines and *Econokomiks* are aimed at popularizing or simplifying economic facts and figures.

IBON also comes out from time to time with a *Special Release*, which dissects and analyzes current issues such as globalized free trade, oil deregulation, privatization of government-controlled corporations and the like. Aside from popularizing economic terms and trends, the *Special Release* clarifies **issues** and presents or explores alternative options.

IBON has come a long way. It also now publishes journals, primers, textbooks and supplementary publications such as *Maya Komiks*, *Sibikomiks*, *Philippine Currents*, *Asian Currents*, *World Currents* and *Education for Development Quarterly*.

Published occasionally, IBON's *ZPE* (Institute of Political Economy) *Primer Series* is a simplified but comprehensive analysis of socio-political issues. Published as the need arises, the 20-page *Primer Series* helps give a theoretical framework to political activists, community leaders and advocacy groups.

The 40-page *ZPE Journals* extensively look into the impact of development policies and programs at the national and global levels. The 24-page *Education for Development Quarterly* caters to faculty members and school administrators. It analyzes issues and trends pertaining to the educational system.

IBON's textbooks for gradeschoolers are mostly on social studies and culture. It also has an *IBON Environment Workbook Level I*, also for grade school.

For high school, IBON has textbooks on Philippine history, Asian civilization, world history, economics and also an environment workbook.

Through its databank and various publications, IBON has blazed the trail in the field of popular education, popularizing socio-economic issues and making economics easy to grasp even for non-economists.

#### **4. DESCRIPTION OF THE INSTITUTION RESPONSIBLE AND ITS ORGANIZATIONAL ASPECTS**

IBON Foundation is a research-education development institution. It studies socio-economic issues confronting contemporary Philippine society and seeks to bring this knowledge and information to the greatest number of Filipinos. In this way, according to IBON's Mission Statement, more Filipinos will be able to effectively participate in building "a self-reliant, progressive, sovereign and democratic Philippines".

From its simple beginnings in 1978, IBON has developed into a multi-program institution now strongly present in the formal education sector. Besides its original databanking, research and publications program, it now provides non-formal education and training to people's organizations, conducts in-depth research for and offers information services to all sectors of society, and services the mainstream mass media via its weekly news and features dispatches.

In recent years, IBON has expanded its reach through branch offices in the Visayan islands in central Philippines and in Mindanao island in southern Philippines.

Its main programs are:

- (a) IBON Databank and Research Center

- (b) IBON Partnership in Education for Development
- (c) IBON Popular Education Program
- (d) IBON Media Services Program
- (e) IBON Environment Desk
- (f) Institute of Political Economy**

**(a) IBON Databank and Research Center**

One of the original programs of IBON, the Databank and Research Center, as discussed above, provides up-to-date information on various socio-economic issues for advocacy, education, policy-making, development planning and implementation for non-governmental organizations, people's organizations, academic institutions, government agencies, media practitioners, business enterprises and individuals.

Through its databank, IBON maintains a large, specialized library that allows quick and easy computerized retrieval and is open to the public. The databank gives quick access to data inquiries. A Datasavers program for institutions, organizations and offices provides immediate access to information by telephone, fax or modem, and regular monitoring of issues according to the specification of the datasaver, among other services. IBON also has a continuing research program which provides the base for its information systems and publications. The Research Center accepts commissioned researches and surveys on various relevant issues specific *to* industries, sectors, regions, etc.

As stated earlier, the Databank and Research Center's final fruit of its labor is its publications. Under the Databank and Research Center program, IBON also provides databanking and library training and consultancy. It also trains interested individuals in research, writing and desktop publishing skills.

Still another sub-program is the Sectoral Research Desks. Sectoral desks have been set up to give focused, specialized services. The Workers' Desk conducts researches on labor and industry issues and gives research consultancy for financial statement analysis for CBA (collective bargaining agreement) negotiations.

The Peasant and Women's Desks also conduct specialized researches.

**(b) IBON Partnership in Education for Development**

The IBON Partnership in Education for Development (IPED) consolidates IBON's long-standing program support for the formal education sector. After IPED was formed, IBON publications have been well-received by the schools. These publications have become much-sought-after references for

students and teachers. Through IPED, teachers have also sought out IBON's seminars. IPED is a full program that includes the development of textbooks, supplementary publications, teacher training, and several other services needed by schools in realizing what IBON calls "transformative education". Transformative education is oriented towards helping transform or change society for the good of the greatest number of people.

Other related services include educators' fora, audio-visual-aid development and library enrichment. IPED conducts fora on various issues to help update teachers and educators on current developments. IBON is on call to its partner schools, when they wish to hold symposia and other fora. It also offers specialized seminars for staff and institutional development.

Part of the IPED program is the *Education for Development Quarterly*, a journal that dissects various urgent issues in the formal education sector.

IPED also develops various kinds of audio-visual aids for classroom and other use for subject areas such as social studies, environment, economics and history. These materials include videos, slide shows, acetate folios and flip charts.

For its library enrichment program, IPED coordinates with schools in coming out with reference books and publications for school libraries. It also offers school library staff training in computerization, databanking and electronic hook-up.

### **(c) IBON Popular Education Program**

IBON's Popular Education Program or PEP develops education modules for people's organizations and NGOs on socio-economic topics. Regular Seminar Modules provide popular but substantial discussion on topics such as the Philippine economy and globalization, among others. Special Seminar Modules tackle specific issues like oil deregulation, devaluation, liberalization and privatization.

PEP also provides audio-visual aids for popular education like videos and acetate folios on the environment, the economic history of the Philippines, the national situation and globalization. It also offers consultancy services and specific sectoral seminars which help in the popular education of trade unions and people's organizations.

### **(d) IBON Media Services Program**

The IBON Media Services Program has three main services. It services mainstream and alternative media (note: alternative media, as differentiated from its mainstream counterpart, refers to those independent media outfits

which are free from the control of big business interests) through databank and research **support**. It also has a news and features service which publishes a weekly dispatch for the mainstream newspapers, as well as a broadcast features service particularly designed for radio listeners.

**(e) IBON Environment Desk**

The IBON Environment Desk is a full program that includes a specialized environment databank with a separate database from IBON Databank. It acts as the secretariat of the Philippine Environment Databank Network. It undertakes researches on environment issues and has an active education program that includes the publication of workbooks, primers and video programs on the environment.

**(f) The Institute of Political Economy**

The Institute of Political Economy was established to respond to the clamor for more in-depth studies and education modules about the national and global economy, and economic theory. IPE studies are published in monographs and books and through the *ZPE Journals* distributed through a mailing list and through bookshops and book sales. IPE also responds to the need to arm social activists in clarifying urgent issues to grassroots folk via the *ZPE Primer*, a primer distributed free to grassroots users.

IBON Foundation Inc. has a Board of Directors as its policy-making body. The Board is composed of a chairperson, a vice-chairperson, a secretary, a treasurer and eight directors. Its programs are implemented by committed staffers assigned to the Foundation's six major programs. An Executive Director oversees the whole implementation of the various programs.

In its campaign to help clarify the issues behind globalized free trade, IBON has established networks overseas. Among these overseas networks are IFAG or International Forum Against Globalization and some international alliances of groups against globalization.

**5. PROBLEMS OR OBSTACLES ENCOUNTERED AND HOW THEY WERE OVERCOME**

Like many other NGOs, IBON had relied on foreign funds for its operations. **So**, when major funders in 1995–1996 stopped their support, the Foundation faced a crisis. As a remedial measure, IBON downscaled its staff. The hardest part was when IBON had to downscale even its committed staff. But

IBON did its best to redeploy the terminated staff to other NGOs and people's organizations. At the same time, it pushed its self-reliance program by aggressively marketing its publications in various schools across the country. The goal for at least 70% self-reliance was achieved.

As a result of staff reduction, IBON faced some backlogs in its databanking as at the time of writing of this report. However, it has taken the crisis as a challenge. IBON is determined to be fully self-reliant in the few years ahead through a marketing strategy that can support the Foundation's operations while remaining committed to achieving its mission and role.

This episode has shown that the most valuable asset of the organization is the high quality and public commitment of IBON's staffers. Those who remained through the crisis period were determined to keep IBON going and moreover to see it progress in new activities under more self-reliant conditions.

## 6. EFFECTS OF THE PRACTICE/INNOVATIVE EXPERIENCE

IBON's databank and publications have served and continue to serve the educational needs of grassroots and sectoral organizations as well as the public. Various organizations and the academe often refer to IBON's publications during forums on socio-economic issues. IBON continues to provide timely information and analysis to illuminate public debates on controversial issues such as oil price hikes or long-standing problems such as the country's agrarian question, foreign and domestic debt, and the impact of globalization.

Workers' organizations also use IBON's data on consumers' average daily food basket and poverty thresholds as bases for demanding wage increases from their employers. Through the use of data based on official and independent studies, IBON can compute the average daily food consumption of the average Filipino family and the current poverty threshold based on the current inflation rate and the buying power of the Philippine currency.

## 7. SUITABILITY AND POSSIBILITY FOR UPSCALING

IBON continues to diversify its initiatives. It continues to publish not only *IBON Facts & Figures*, but also **books** on socio-economics which schools, from gradeschool to college level, can use as reference material. Through its news agency, IBON Features, IBON's wealth of information and analyses of socio-economic trends and issues are disseminated to the public via the mainstream media.

## **8. SIGNIFICANCE FOR (AND IMPACT ON) POLICY-MAKING**

That legislator-subscribers refer to IBON for their legislation is one way by which IBON helps influence policies. IBON's well-researched publications on certain issues also help form public opinion, thus helping to indirectly shape policies.

In 1997, a senator who subscribes to IBON, for example, used IBON's data in filing a Senate resolution urging the Supreme Court to probe the legality of the proposed oil price hike the oil companies were seeking. The Supreme Court responded favorably, issuing a restraining order on the companies' petition for a price increase. In its study, IBON showed how the oil companies had profited from an earlier increase the companies sought while the price of oil in the world market dipped, and showed why the proposed new round of oil price hikes was unnecessary.

## **9. POSSIBILITY AND SCOPE OF TRANSFERRING TO OTHER COMMUNITIES OR COUNTRIES**

Any institution or non-governmental group that has an interest in improving its databanking, research and publication can easily adopt IBON's technology, which makes use of a wealth of information and data, which can help influence policies or in conceptualizing programs based on concrete needs.

Basic baseline data on rural outmigration, for example, can give both government agencies and non-governmental development organizations some inputs on how to approach rural development. Basic data on major agricultural or agro-business landholdings can also help in instituting policies on how to address agrarian issues such as landlessness, unfair crop-sharing patterns, or low farm wages.

The possibilities inherent in deciding on what data to study, process and analyze are endless. Given an enormous amount of data, a community databank outfit can be overwhelmed with information. But as IBON has shown, any databank center can succeed if it knows how to organize the data and information in selective ways and to focus on the topic studied.

## **10. OTHER COMMENTS**

IBON has shown how to use data for advocacy, for helping shape or change policies, and for popular education of grassroots organizations. It has also shown that socio-economics need not be the exclusive domain of economic

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## 6. EFFECTS OF THE PRACTICE/IDNNOVATIVE EXPERIENCE

IBON's databank and publications have served and continue to serve the educational needs of grassroots and sectoral organizations as well as the public. Various organizations and the academe often refer to IBON's publications during forums on socio-economic issues. IBON continues to provide timely information and analysis to illuminate public debates on controversial issues such as oil price hikes or long-standing problems such as the country's agrarian question, foreign and domestic debt, and the impact of globalization.

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