

## **Child Justice Committees in the Philippines**

*In Cebu City, Child Justice Committees (CJCs) have been established as a mechanism for the barangay (village) council to administer restorative justice for child offenders. The programme, based on mediation and the principle of restorative justice, provides an alternative to the harsh criminal justice system through which most child offenders in the Philippines have routinely been processed. It builds on local governance structures and involves collaboration among barangay officials, professionals and community volunteers, including past child offenders as peer educators.*

*The primary function of the CJC is to work for the settlement, reconciliation and mediation of reported cases involving child offenders and recommend appropriate psychosocial interventions and other necessary assistance to diverted children. Through the mediation process, children are encouraged to feel remorseful, admit the offence and agree to undertake reparative actions. When this happens, the mediator speaks to the victim about the benefits of forgiveness and diversion and explains that the CJC will monitor the child through various diversion and reparative activities. A settlement is agreed upon between the parties, which may take the form of written apology, the rendering of community service, restoration of damaged property or reparation of property. The child offender promises in a settlement agreement not to commit the offence again or to perform particular actions as reparative measures specified and agreed upon by the victim during the negotiation.*

*Specially trained community volunteers and peer educators serve as 'front liners' in monitoring post-mediation rehabilitation and reintegration of diverted children.*

*The CJC are currently operating in 12 barangays in Cebu City, handling about 50 cases per year. In the first three years, more than 500 cases were handled by the CJCs, and only four boys re-offended by committing offenses that merited the filing of criminal cases in court. Based on this success, there are plans to expand the CJCs to 37 barangays by 2009.*