

I am Woman.



Stories of
Women's Empowerment
in the Philippines through
KALAHI-CIDSS

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Preface

Great strides have been made to bring women on equal footing with men on rights and opportunities. Yet the truth remains that more needs to be done in this field, as the essence of equality in opportunities and the freedom to exercise their universally recognized rights must be made more real for many, particularly for those living in poor communities.

Women often assume the role of primary caretakers of their families and of their home. For a growing number of them, the task of making ends meet through self-help or livelihood activities also fall in their hands. However, there is an insidious threat to the hard-earned freedoms women have fought hard to achieve – that of persistent discrimination and marginalization in decision making and in opportunities to better themselves so that they can become more effective members of society.

It is said that the struggles of women from the rural poor areas are twice as hard as their counterpart from the urban and more well-to do areas, as perceptions and traditions that negate their growth are far more entrenched. The choices they make can be a matter of life and death. They have to ensure that there is always food on the table and that their families are happy, healthy, and in school.

All of these would have been easy, if not for the fact that these women and their families are slumped in poverty, and they have to do what they can stretch what meagre budget there is for the family.

Many of them are prevented from doing, either because of explicit rules that keep them away from the domain of paid work and in taking on leadership roles because of constraints brought about by lack of education and skills or because of limited opportunities on account of their gender.

This compendium of women stories documents the second wave of successes won by women and KALAH-CIDSS in directly addressing the cause of women's marginalization in decision-making and economic activities in communities.

The Millennium Challenge Corporation, through the Millennium Challenge Account-Philippines, has been instrumental in helping KALAH-CIDSS create models of projects that break down the barriers to women's full enjoyment of their right to be heard, to develop themselves, to earn, and to become productive citizens who contribute to shape the future of their families and communities. In 2014, projects proposed for and by women were funded through the KC-MCC Gender Incentive Grant, a facility that supports initiatives that aim to remove barriers to women's participation to project activities and address gender-based issues.

The stories in "I Am Woman" are of volunteers and reveal the many facets of empowerment as they happen in the course of their participation in KALAH-CIDSS. These are testimonies to the strength of CDD to impact on the lives of poor and marginalized sectors of the community and the inherent courage and tenacity of women to rise above their situation and win the battle against poverty and disempowerment.

I Am Woman

*I am a volunteer.
I am a daughter.
I am a wife.
I am a mother.
I am a grandmother.
I am a teacher.
I am a laborer.
I am a nurturer.
I am an earner.
I am a fighter.*

I Am Woman.



Message

from the Secretary and National Program Director, KALAH-CIDSS

Kofi Anan, the great icon of democracy and human rights, said, *"There is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women."*

Why that statement should resonate so strongly across time, continents, and societies is not surprising. Mr. Anan has given name to the key to address the roots of inequalities that keep many families and communities poor. Women make up over half of our population and are already responsible for a great many roles in the family and in their communities. They hold the key to ending hunger and poverty.

What does empowerment mean for a program like KALAH-CIDSS, which aims to help communities have access to better services and to participate in more inclusive local planning, budgeting and implementation?

In KALAH-CIDSS, activities are designed to create and widen the spaces for women to become active leaders and participants in defining and addressing issues that impede their development.

The empowerment of women takes many forms but can come about by investing in building their capacities whether to become better citizens who are aware and able to take action on their problems, or citizens who are technically competent to build and manage their community projects or are motivated and able to take important leadership positions. Empowerment is also about transforming the way they view themselves and their relationships vis-à-vis men. It is also about seizing opportunities to gain employment or increase their income. Empowerment is also about breaking free from abuse or exploitation.

These changes do not happen overnight. But we keep our vision in KALAH-CIDSS trained towards a future where great transformations will finally end inequalities between men and women. By now there is significant progress in achieving the Project's key gender indicators. As of June 2014, the participation rate of women in barangay assemblies, the venue for decision-making in communities, has increased from a baseline of 49% in 2010 to 62%. There are now more women occupying leadership positions in volunteer committees (60% from 50%), and leadership in committees to 52% from the baseline of 35%. Women share in paid labor during sub-project construction has likewise increased to 12% (from the 2010 5% baseline).

In this compendium, we read about how ordinary citizens inspire other members of their barangay to work together to solve a problem that has affected their ability to realize their agenda for gender-responsive development. Some of these stories are about women who triumphed over their difficult family backgrounds, to claim their place as better mothers, wives or leaders. They say that KALAH-CIDSS helps them discover that they are not passive recipients of what fate throws at them, but rather individuals who can actively take control over their lives to help their communities, their families, and themselves.

In the end, it is these stories of empowerment that really matter. It is our duty to encourage more women to shape their own stories. DSWD is proud to help tell them to the world!


CORAZON JULIANO-SOLIMAN

Message

*from the Undersecretary for Policy and Plans Group
and Chair of the DSWD National Gender Technical Working Group*



In many communities, a woman, particularly if she is poor, wages a daily battle in order to be recognized for her worth. She needs to shake off perceptions that she is weak, dependent on others, prone to indecision, and could not be trusted with the work that men normally do.

How does a woman convince others her voice is as important as those of men if people are not used to doing so in the first place? How will she be able to persuade them so that they would help actively promote gender equality? More so, how could an uneducated woman, who barely knows how to read and write, prove to that she can contribute to her community?

A DSWD Program, KALAHI-CIDSS (now called KC-NCDDP), is providing a platform for women and members of the community to become more aware that the task of building better families and communities is a shared responsibility. Through affirmative actions to encourage women participation women are provided with spaces to speak out in meetings, to assume leadership positions, to be trained for non-traditional trades and finally to have a choice to work and earn money during the construction of community projects. And our very commitment to gather and mainstream this aspiration is our chance to keep our actions thriving. We must then continue to look forward to having our women lead us in a meaningful journey of development.

This book illustrates how women are redefining their roles in the home and in the development of their communities. Thousands of them are writing their own stories of “empowerment” and these stories speak about their amazing talents, perseverance and strength in their conviction that women can and make a difference if they are given the opportunity to find their own worth.

It is my pleasure to invite you to celebrate these victories of our courageous women and the journey that is bringing us closer to a society that is more inclusive and sensitive to their needs and the barriers that we must all help dismantle so that true empowerment may happen.

I thank KALAHI-CIDSS for being an instrument that discovered these women, and in turn, for helping these women re-discover themselves.

Florita R. Villar
FLORITA R. VILLAR



Message

*from the Director IV and National Project Manager
KALAHI CIDSS - NCDDP*

A year ago, KALAHI-CIDSS released the first compendium of stories titled “Bridging the Gender Divide”, which documented the stories of our women volunteers and partners from Torrijos, Marinduque and Madalag, Aklan, the pilot sites for the Gender Toolkit. The book showed us how enhancing some activities in

the Community Empowerment Activity Cycle, or CEAC, can dramatically change the way citizens interact and support initiatives to break the gender divide.

Other KALAHI-CIDSS areas have since begun their expansion of avenues for communities to examine the conditions of both women and men and take concrete steps to solve gender inequities, and their stories are covered in this new compendium.

Some of these talk about personal enlightenment, while others about reconfiguring relationships at home and pushing the boundaries of women’s role in paid work. Still others are simply about people breaking free of misconceptions about who they are and what they can do.

These are the new heroes of KALAHI-CIDSS, who belong to communities that take inspiration and pride in the bold steps that these women are taking.

Allow us to share with you these different vibrant lives, including that of a couple in the mountainous province of Abra and a jubilant 60-year old grandmother who found a new calling as a volunteer that got her dubbed as “Murag Engineer” (like an engineer) in North Cotabato. Let’s also revisit what became of our pilot sites in Torrijos and Madalag to find out how the lives of the people have been further transformed with the help of our gender mainstreaming efforts.

Join us as we celebrate the bold steps of women who, by their stories, reveal the key to making the processes and fruits of community development more inclusive and sustainable.

Benilda E. Redaja
BENILDA E. REDAJA



Message

*A Joint Message of MCC and MCA-P
for the Compendium of KC Development Stories*



We congratulate the Department of Social and Welfare and Development (DSWD) for once more documenting the empowering journeys of community-based women, whose active participation in development is considered a fundamental cornerstone to achieving meaningful economic growth.

This compilation of stories relates how women in KALAH-CIDSS communities are transformed from being unassuming individuals often overlooked in the development process into well-rounded and empowered members of the community. Their roles are no longer confined to being non-engaged stay-at-home wives or mothers but have expanded to being significant leaders and participants in community development. Their notable experiences, captured in these pages, will certainly provide great inspiration and insight to other women as well as to men who are striving to make their lives and their communities better.

We continue to be proud partners of KALAH-CIDSS and it gives us great pleasure to again be a part of this laudable undertaking which highlights these inspirational stories. In behalf of Millennium Challenge Account Philippines (MCA-P) and Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), we would like to extend our sincerest appreciation to all those who have contributed to making this compendium of stories a reality. It is truly rewarding to witness how our collective resources and efforts are facilitating real improvement in the lives of so many Filipinos, specifically the lives of the women in our partner communities.

While we all should celebrate the many positive results so far, much remains to be done and the challenges are great. MCA-P and MCC remain committed to integrating women's empowerment and gender equality in all of our economic development endeavors.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marivic E. Añonuevo".

MARIVIC E. AÑONUEVO
Managing Director & CEO

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John A. Polk".

JOHN A. POLK
MCC Resident Country Director

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A Second Look:

**Changes in the original
two gender pilot sites**



DSWD's convergence strategy helps resolve women's livelihood problems in Aklan

Poverty is a complicated enough problem even without gender concerns further muddying the waters. These two issues are prevalent in the rural areas in the country, where gender discrimination is experienced by women on a daily basis, even as they are forced to deal with destitution, struggling to ensure that their families' needs are provided for.

It is this situation that women in Madalag have to contend with day in and day out. With a 63.3% poverty incidence based on the 2009 Small Area Estimates of the National Statistical Coordination Board, it is the second poorest municipality in the province of Aklan.



Ivy Colas, the Kalahi-CIDSS Area Coordinator, led her team and the Municipal Action Team in the implementation of the Gender Incentive Grant in Madalag, Aklan



Archie Porquez is the Municipal Link of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program



Rovie Gonzales committed the Sustainable Livelihood Program's support to help sustain the results of GIG in Madalag

The residents, usually the men, primarily rely on farming for their livelihood. Those who did not make their living in the fields took on odd jobs that earned minimal income; such as habal-habal drivers, electricians, or construction workers. While some women helped out in farming, several were simple housewives who watched over their homes and their children, as they believed that it was solely men's responsibility to provide for their families. As Herminia Nacuspag, 53 years old, a council member in Barangay San Jose, said, "*Ang mga babae nasa bahay lang, walang kita* [Women just stay at home and do not earn money]".

It took the convergence of the three poverty alleviation programs of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) – Kapit-Bisig Laban sa Kahirapan-Comprehensive and Integrated Delivery of Social Services (Kalahi-CIDSS), Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (Pantawid Pamilya), and the Sustainable Livelihood Program (SLP) – to help these women realize that they also had the capacity to earn and provide support for their families.

Gender as key

The gender issues in the municipality provided the chance for the women to improve their families' condition. Through Kalahi-CIDSS, the Gender Incentive Grant (GIG) from the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) through the Millennium Challenge Account-Philippines (MCA-P) was provided to Madalag as added support to respond gender issues.

In Kalahi-CIDSS, field workers, called the Area Coordinating Team (ACT), are assigned at the municipal and barangay levels and tasked with gathering residents together so they can discuss prevalent problems within their respective communities, as well as the solutions for these concerns. This is part of the community-driven development (CDD) strategy of the Project, wherein the citizens are put at the forefront of local development.

Kalahi-CIDSS staff facilitate the process; the residents themselves take the lead in solving these issues by working together. By building the citizens' capacities by providing trainings and assistance to them, the Project hopes that the people will be empowered to actively participate in local governance and in their community's poverty reduction efforts.

Through barangay assemblies, Madalag's ACT, led by Ivy Colas, the Area Coordinator, as well as the Municipal Coordinating Team (MCT), their municipal counterpart, were able to process that the most prevalent gender concern of Madalag is the lack of economic opportunities for women. The traditional mindset of the residents prevented them from having their own livelihoods. As such, they have zero or little contribution to the family income, a serious concern considering that several of the households within the municipality already struggle to make ends meet.

Even women who were interested in working could not find employment, as they were not skilled in industries. As Colas said, "*Kulang sila sa skills, hindi employable* [They did not have skills, so they were not employable]".

Identification of the problem was the first step in resolving the issue, but there was still a long way to go in order to aid these poverty-afflicted families. That was when Ms. Colas worked in tandem with her counterparts in Pantawid Pamilya and SLP to help them out.

Convergence of efforts

Knowing that a holistic approach is needed to resolve poverty, DSWD utilizes its convergence strategy to help poor families in the country transition from survival level to self-sufficiency. Pantawid Pamilya invests in human capital by providing conditional cash transfers to families to help them support their children. SLP opens the opportunity for income generation through employment and loans so they can start their businesses. Kalahi-CIDSS builds on social capital by working closely with poor communities to mobilize them to pursue local development.

Critical to the convergence strategy of the DSWD is the field staff of the three programs because they work at the grassroots level. This is the reason why they are formed into a single group called the Municipal Action Team (MAT), so they can closely coordinate and collaborate with each other in terms of the interventions being provided by their respective programs. MATs conduct regular meetings to discuss the status of their program implementation and to see which areas they can work in.

It was in a MAT meeting conducted last January 2013 that Colas, who also serves as the MAT Leader, presented details on the GIG to Archie Kent Porquez, the Municipal Link (ML) of Pantawid Pamilya and Rovi Christine Gonzalez, the Project Development Officer (PDO) of SLP.

It was also in this meeting that they discussed and realized the possibility of collaborating together to ensure that they meet their target of helping reduce poverty in Madalag, especially since all three of them drew the same conclusion based on the information they had, generated from Kalahi-CIDSS' Participatory Situational Analysis (PSA), Pantawid Pamilya's Social Welfare Indicators (SWI), and SLP's Participatory Livelihood Issues Analysis (PLIA): that the lack of livelihood opportunities for women was a factor that made them remain poor.

Gonzalez had this to say about their collaboration: *"If hindi pa kami mag-uusap, paano natin ma-so-solve ang problema? Kailangan talaga mag-complement iyong programs [If we do not talk with each other, how will we solve the problem? The programs really need to complement each other]"*.

She added, *"Isa lang ang goal namin: improved well-being, na i-angat ang survival-level families [We only have one goal: to improve their well-being and to raise the status of survival-level families]"*.

This was agreed upon by Colas, who emphasized the importance of collaboration, particularly in the context of fighting against poverty. She said, *"Akin iyong responsibilidad na taga-DSWD ka at kasama ka sa anti-poverty program. Dapat i-embrace mo na responsibilidad mo iyon. Hindi ibig sabihin na taga-Kalahi-CIDSS ka, iyon lang ang i-i-implement mo. Isipin mo na tatlo"*

kayong nagtutulungan kung papaano mapapababa ang poverty sa munisipyo [This is our responsibility as part of the DSWD, particularly an anti-poverty program. You need to embrace that responsibility. Just because you are part of Kalahi-CIDSS does not mean that it is the only program you will be implementing. It is the three of you working together to lower the poverty incidence within the municipality]”.

Part of the tasks of the SLP PDO is to identify potential livelihood or economic enterprises for beneficiaries. As such, Gonzalez knew that several communities, particularly the upland barangays, were involved in abaca production. However, most only did kigi, or the stripping of fibers from the abaca plants. The provision of handicrafts trainings to women will increase the likelihood of generating income, since the raw material are readily available. Further, since the abaca will be processed there will be value-addition. The women will be able to fetch better prices for their products, as opposed to simply selling the fibers.

In terms of abaca handicrafts from home; even mothers who had small children will be able to take care of them even as they engage in production and earn.

In response to the Madalag women’s clamor to be trained in non-traditional industries, the MAT worked with the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) to provide plumbing and welding trainings to interested individuals.

Kalahi-CIDSS and SLP also sought out employment and marketing avenues for the trainees so that they have guaranteed sources of income upon graduation.

Given that the GIG funds were limited, the survival-level Pantawid Pamilya partner beneficiaries were prioritized in both the traditional and non-traditional trainings. However, SLP committed to also train interested residents, in succeeding batches.

Working together was not a new experience for Colas, Porquez, and Gonzalez. Convergence was a conscious effort on the part of the three, because they knew that this was the strategic effort being utilized by the DSWD. When SLP first came to Madalag in 2012, Gonzalez introduced the program through the barangay assemblies organized by the Kalahi-CIDSS ACT. Porquez also talked about Kalahi-CIDSS and SLP during Family Development Sessions (FDS), which were conducted monthly and required of Pantawid Pamilya partner beneficiaries. They also ensured that they had updates on the programs they were not handling, as they might be asked about these when they interacted with the locals.

As Gonzalez said, *“Nakakahiya kung tinanong kami ng barangay at hindi namin alam ang status ng project, kasi hindi naman nila kami nakikita na limitado lang sa programa namin, nakikita kami na DSWD* [It would be embarrassing if the

barangays asked us about the project status and we could not give information about this. They do not see us as being limited to the program that we are part of; they see us as staff from DSWD]”.

Difficulties

Although the MAT consciously took steps to ensure convergence of their efforts, and even with Madalag residents themselves identifying that they needed skills training, it still proved difficult for the field staff to get people to participate in these trainings.

Part of this was due to the initial lack of interest of the residents in joining the trainings. In the past, certain organizations provided trainings in Madalag, but none of these were followed through despite promises of employment and providing them with a steady market for their products, making the locals feel abandoned.

Furthermore, gender issues cropped up once again when trainees were sought for plumbing and welding. According to one of the community facilitators, *“Madaming handicrafts trainees, pero konti lang sa plumbing and welding, kasi tinatanong nila, ‘Kaya ba namin ito?’* [There were a lot of handicrafts trainees, but few signed up for plumbing and welding trainings, because they asked themselves, ‘Can we really do this?’”]

There were also cases wherein the women were not allowed to join the trainings by their spouses, either because they believed that they would not be able to perform their responsibilities at home, or because they thought that these industries were solely for men.

Even so, both the MAT and those who were interested in the trainings persevered. In the end, 60 were trained in handicrafts and 19 in plumbing, and 23 in welding. As of September 2013, the plumbing and welding graduates are being linked with Public Employment Service Office (PESO). Prospective buyers, which includes Piña Mantra, the organization that provided the training, have also expressed interest in the products of the handicrafts trainees.

“Matagal ko nang hinihintay ang training na ito [We have been waiting for these trainings for a long time]”, said the trainees.

Even those who declined or backed out from training have expressed their interest in taking part in the next wave of trainings, having seen for themselves future opportunities.

According to Manuelito Recasa, one of the Kalahi-CIDSS Community Facilitators, a lot of the residents have approached him to express their thanks for the opportunity given to them. He said, *“Hindi naman nila inisip na makaka-training sila, lalo na iyong may asawa na. at hindi na sila nakapag-college* [They never thought they could have this training, especially since they are already married and they did not go to college]”.

Recasa also noted the impact that the plumbing and welding trainings had on the women; positive impact on their self-esteem. He said, *“Akala nila dati plumbing at welding pang-lalaki lang. Nung nakapag-training, nalaman nila na kaya rin pala. Andami daw nila natutunan sa training. Kaya naman pala nila ang trabahong pang-lalaki* [They thought that plumbing and welding were just for men. When they went through the training, they learned that that was not the case. They learned a lot from the training, including the fact that these are not solely a men’s profession]”.

Genie Nanson, one of the welding trainees, confirmed this, saying, *“Nagpapasalamat ako sa Kalahi-CIDSS. Nalaman namin dito ang sa gender at kung paano mag-welding* [We are thankful to Kalahi-CIDSS. We learned about gender issues and how to weld]”.

Progression

The gender issues of Madalag may have set back the progress of the residents, particularly the women, but it was also through these that they have been given the opportunity to raise their status. As Colas said, “The issues of women actually put together these three anti-poverty programs to really converge and to set the goal to respond to these issues”.

However, Colas admitted that although the MAT members worked closely together, they would not have collaborated to this extent had not the beneficiaries themselves identified that they needed skills training. She said, *“Kapag hindi lumabas iyong problema sa income, baka hindi rin kami nag-usap ng ganito. Kung infrastructure ito, hindi ito mangyayari* [If the issue on income had not risen, we probably would not have worked as closely as this. If the community chose an infrastructure sub-project instead, this would not have happened]”.

This was echoed by Gonzalez, who said, “It is through the GIG that made it clear [to us] how convergence can work”.

Madalag's Women Warriors

Madalag, Aklan -- When women gather together, it is traditionally interpreted that they are gossiping about theirs or other lives. Indeed, this has become such a typical Philippine scenario that this is commonly portrayed in local films and sitcoms, usually exaggerated to showcase what is seen as the Filipino women's propensity for chatter.

A group, composed of women in their late 20s to their mid-50s, certainly love to chat, if their conversation was any indication.

Their discussion was animated, even bordering on being festive at times. Their voices rose and fell at certain times, occasionally rising when the speakers became impassioned in their statements, and falling when they brought up topics that they considered as taboo.

However, these women did not gather to gossip, instead, they came together for a common purpose: to serve as the Gender and Development (GAD) Council of this town.

Chosen



Rhea Katimpo

Princess Molas

Dolores Novial

Herminia Nacuspag

Besides their gender, it did not seem that these women had much in common.

Rhea Katimpo, 29, is a day care worker who is highly active in her church.

Princess Molas, 32, is a barangay councilor who also volunteers in a non-government organization in their village.

Stephanie Macalandang, 36, while working as a Supplementary Feeding Coordinator.

Herminia Nacuspag, 53, is a member of the barangay council and also serves as a Family Development Sessions (FDS) instructor of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (Pantawid Pamilya) of DSWD.

Dolores Novial, 56, is a housewife who happily takes care of her three-year-old grandchild.

Remedios Igo-Igo, 58, describes herself as a “simple mother and housewife”. She is a high school graduate but has managed to have six out of her eight children finish college. The other two are currently studying to get their degrees, through her and her husband’s combined efforts in farming.

Despite their different backgrounds, they, along with 19 other women, gathered together to become part of the GAD Council.

They initiated the format of GAD Council to access the Gender Incentive Grant (GIG) under the Kapit-Bisig Laban sa Kahirapan-Comprehensive and Integrated Delivery of Social Services (Kalahi-CIDSS), with assistance from Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) and the Millennium Challenge Account-Philippines (MCA-P).

The implementation of the GIG is the second time a GAD project was implemented by Kalahi-CIDSS and MCC in Madalag.

Previously, the municipality was also chosen as one of the two gender mainstreaming pilot sites, alongside Torrijos, Marinduque. GIG is the continuation of the pilot, in which the funds will be utilized to address gender-related issues within the municipality.

One issue identified was the lack of employment and livelihood opportunities for women.

Katimpo said, “*Wala pong trabaho ang babae. Nakikita talaga na ang lalaki lang ang naghahanap-buhay* (Women have no jobs. Only the men have work).”

This aggravated the financial problems of their families, since they only relied on the males to earn money for the entire household.

Being chosen as a Kalahi-CIDSS area meant that Madalag is one of the poorest municipalities in the country.

Women are not seen as capable of having their own professions or livelihoods, they are unable to earn money to help support their families. The GIG implementation seeks to help remedy that situation.

Macalandang said that the GIG provided the opportunity to help the women and their families.

She shared, “*Makakatulong ito kung paano magkakaroon ng additional na income ang pamilya para iyong mga kababaihan magkaroon din ng income para maayos ang pamumuhay nila. Kung ano ang kaya ng lalaki, kaya din ng babae* (This will help provide families with additional income, through the women who will be able to earn to help improve the lives of their households. What men can do, women can as well)”.

Igo-igo added that the GIG will be able to provide “*additional na tulong sa pamilya kung saan mahina ang income* (additional support for families that

have little income).”

The lack of economic opportunities also posed self-esteem issues for some of the women, as they believed themselves incapable of being productive.

Nacuspag said, “*Andoon ang pride sa sarili mo kapag may kita ka* [You will have pride in yourself if you get to earn money]”.

As a program that uses the community-driven development (CDD) approach to promote local development, Kalahi-CIDSS focuses on empowering and building the capacity of common citizens so they can become active agents of change in their respective villages. This strategy meant that the implementation of the GIG would need the participation of volunteers from the different barangays in Madalag, some of whom would form part of the GAD Council.

Nacuspag, who used to be a GAD focal person in her village for one of the programs of the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), volunteered to be part of the GAD Council. She shared that no one else in her barangay wanted to be part of.

She bluntly said, “*Kung walang sweldo, walang mag-vo-volunteer. Madaming sinasabing mag-GAD volunteer, pero ayaw nila. ‘Ay, ang dami ko nang ginagawa’. Sabi ko, kung ayaw niyo mag-GAD volunteer, ako na lang* (If there is no salary involved, no one will want to volunteer for it. There were a lot of people who were identified as potential GAD volunteers, but they did not want to be part of it. ‘I am already doing a lot of things’. I told them, if they did not want to volunteer, then I will).”

Nacuspag, however, was the only one who volunteered for this. The other women were designated by either their fellow villagers or their local officials.

Some had ambivalent feelings about their new position when it was foisted on them.

Igo-igo shared that she was hesitant because she was unsure if she would be able to live up to the responsibility. According to her, she felt self-doubt when she was told that she would represent her village, Barangay Pang-Itan, in the GAD Council.

She found herself thinking, “*Bakit ako? Baka hindi ko makaya kasi high school graduate lang ako* (Why me? I might not be able cope this because I am just a high school graduate).”

Molas, on the other hand, had a more positive outlook when she found out that she would represent Barangay Cabilawan in the GAD Council, even though she confessed she did not know what her role will be.

She narrated how she felt when she found out about the assignment. “*Ako iyong GAD focal person? Sige. Ano ang gagaawin ng GAD focal person?* (I’m the GAD focal person? Alright. What does a GAD focal person do?).”

Empowering the empowerers

Despite their varied reactions, these women, who represented their respective barangay, stepped up to the task of being part of the GAD Council. They all saw the importance of what their roles will bring to their community.

While they knew that the opportunity will help the Madalag women earn money and develop their self-esteem, they did not expect that being part of the GAD Council will also become empowered in the process.

According to Igo-igo, they learned that men and women are equal. *“Kaya pala ng babae ang trabaho ng lalaki. (Women can do what men can).”*

Her reflection came from her personal experience in volunteering to help provide physical labor for the construction of their infrastructure sub-project in Kalahi-CIDSS.

“Nagbuhat ako ng bato sa aming barangay. Dati hindi ko ginagawa iyon. Wala naman talaga kami ginagawa diyan, kasi sabi namin hindi namin kaya iyon. Dito sa Kalahi-CIDSS, natutunan namin na kayang gawin iyon. (I lifted rocks for our barangay. I didn’t used to do that. We women did not do things like that because we did not think we were capable of doing so. In Kalahi-CIDSS, we learned that we could)”.

She added with a smile, *“Pinakita rin namin ang aming galing (We showed off our abilities)”*.

Women empowerment was also one of the things Katimpo learned.

She shared, *“Hindi lang utus-utusan ang babae. Kailangan naming gampanan na hindi kami basta babae lang, asawa lang, taga-alaga ng bata lang (Women are not just errand girls. We need to show that just because we are women does not mean that we are confined to acting as wives and taking care of children).”*

This reflection is telling for Katimpo, who revealed that her husband abandoned her shortly after getting married.

She shared, *“Ang asawa ko hindi ako sinaktan, pero ang lahat ng mga masasakit na salita narinig ko (My husband did not beat me, but I heard just about every hurtful word from him).”*

She added that her experience made her all the more motivated to help other women in her community.

She said, *“Ayokong mangyari iyon sa iba (I do not want the same thing to happen to others).”*

Katimpo added that it was not enough for women to be contented with the status quo.

She said, “*Kailangan naming mag-level up, maghanap ng pagkakakitaan, mag-develop ng skills bukod sa mga gawain namin* (We need to level up (by) looking for ways to earn money and develop skills other than what we are expected to learn).”

Convergence in action

The first major hurdle they had to overcome as a team was the development of the GIG proposal for Madalag. They were assisted through the process by the field and municipal staff, the Area Coordinating Team (ACT) and the Municipal Coordinating Team (MCT), respectively, which in turn worked with the other members of the Municipal Action Team (MAT), which were the Pantawid Pamilya Municipal Link, and the Sustainable Livelihood Program (SLP) Program Development Officer.

It is one of the main goals of the DSWD to help Pantawid Pamilya partner beneficiary families become self-sufficient and have improved well-being, and the way to do that is through convergence of the department’s different programs. All DSWD staff, from the MAT to the regional office, know this, and they saw the GIG implementation as an avenue to it.

They all knew that one of the biggest gender issues in the town was the lack of livelihood and employment opportunities for women, so they had to brainstorm how to help solve this.

It was through this group that they hit upon the solution which is to provide capacity-building trainings for both traditional and non-traditional crafts, specifically abaca handicrafts, plumbing, and welding, to Pantawid Pamilya women beneficiaries. The initial trainees can then train the other residents in these areas through the Sustainable Livelihood Program (SLP), the third poverty alleviation program of the DSWD.

The idea was all set. It was now up to the GAD Council to present it to the rest of the municipality residents to see if they would be amenable to the idea.

Their presentation in the Municipal Inter-Barangay Forum (MIBF) was the most memorable thing that happened for the women as members of the GAD Council. Not only because it gave them the opportunity to bond together when they brainstormed on what they will be doing in the activity, but also because of the bigger challenge that the approval or disapproval of their proposed community project hinges on their performance.

As Katimpo explained, “*Kailangan naming magawa ng maayos para ma-impress mga tao para maboto ang project para sa gender* (We had to do this well to impress the people so they will approve of our proposed gender project).”

For their presentation, they all agreed that what they will need to do is to show to the rest of the people the reality of the situation. They enacted a skit to portray the life of typical Madalag women, particularly their struggles in terms of livelihood.

Some questions were raised after the presentation. For example, someone asked why the priority was the Pantawid Pamilya beneficiaries; they replied that though they were prioritized, but the others will also eventually be given the opportunity to undergo training.

There were others who took offense that the proposal exclusively involved the women.

As Novial narrated, *“May nagtatanong, ‘Kung gender ito, bakit hindi kasama ang lalaki?’ Sagot namin, lalaki kasi may pinagkakakitaan* (Some asked, ‘If this is a gender project, how come the men are not included in this?’ Our response is that men actually have a source of livelihood). “

When the questions were satisfactorily answered, the proposal was subsequently approved.

Molas shared how happy the GAD Council members were when the proposal was approved. *“Iyong tuwa naming hindi masukat, kasi kahit hindi kami mga beneficiaries doon, tuwang-tuwa kami kasi may mga taga-barangay na makaka-avail doon. Makakatulong kami* (Our joy could not be measured, because even if we were not the beneficiaries of the project, we were very happy because the barangay residents will be able to take part in this. We were able to help them),”

However, the approval of their proposal was only one hurdle that the GAD Council had to go through. Even though it was the residents who approved the proposal, they were hesitant to actually be part of it, particularly for the non-traditional crafts training, plumbing and welding.

This was partly due to the fact that the majority of the residents still believe that women should be confined to their homes instead of working. Even though they see the value in providing capacity building trainings to women, they were not too keen on participating in these training programs themselves. As such, the GAD Council members found themselves having to play the part of salespeople and actually convince women to join these trainings.

There were even instances wherein some women would sign up for the trainings, only to back out after a few days. Stephanie recalled her frustration, *“Pinag-hirapan ko mag-attend ng meeting para diyang, kaya sinasabihan ko ‘Huwag kayong a-absent diyang. Sayang ang budget. Kung ayaw niyo, magsabi na kayo agad. Ako nga nag-e-effort, e hindi naman para sa akin iyan’* [I worked hard to attend these meetings for them, so I told them, ‘Do not be absent in

these trainings or you will waste the budget. If you are not interested, then let us know early on. I put in a lot of effort, and I do not even benefit from this’]”.

She also shared an instance wherein one of the trainees from her barangay almost pulled out of the training because her husband did not want her to participate. Stephanie said that in that instance, she had to play the role of an intervener to convince the husband to let his wife continue.

She narrated, “*Sinabihan ko, ‘Dong, hindi naman ito para sa amin. Para sa pamilya mo iyan* [I told him, ‘Sir, this is not for us, but for your family]”. When the man continued to express his dissent, saying that his wife was always at training and not at home, Stephanie responded, “*E wala rin naman siyang ginagawa diyan e. Kung lagi lang kayo andiyan na nagtitinginan, walang mangyayari sa inyo* [She is not doing anything at home anyway. If you are just going to stare at each other, nothing will happen in your lives]”.

Eventually, she managed to convince the man to allow his wife to join the training. Although she admitted that she was scared about confronting him at first because she was afraid that he might hit her because he was very angry at the time.

Rhea, on the other hand, took the livelihood trainings as an opportunity to learn new things. She asked the handicrafts trainees to teach her in how to make abaca products such as placemats as she herself wanted to learn new ways in order to earn money.

Beyond GIG

While they served as councilors of the trainees, the women also went beyond their roles in GIG. Consciously or not, they did not limit their tasks as GAD Council members in the implementation of the GIG. By virtue of their position, they found themselves taking on additional responsibilities, because they were now seen as harbingers of gender and development in their communities.

The GAD Council members take their advocacy tasks seriously. Whenever they are given the chance, they try to share what they have learned to the other residents in their barangays to educate them. These initiatives, coupled with the trainings already provided through GIG, have already shown some effects in the residents.

Herminia talked about an instance wherein she had a man jailed for battering his wife. “*Kitang-kita ang latid ng lubid sa likod* [You can see the weals caused on her back for being whipped by a rope]”, she shared, shaking her head.

Another example Dolores gave was that the women no longer gamble as much as they used to. She said, “*Dati madalas sila mag-tong-its*. Ngayon hindi na [They used to like to gamble by playing cards. Now, not so much]”.

Another bad habit that disappeared was the tendency for the men to drink.

According to Herminia, *“Mga lalaki hindi na umiinom. Parang natuhan na. Umuuwi na ng maaga. Kapag umaalis ang asawa nila, pang taong-bahay na sila, ginagampanan na ang trabaho sa bahay* [The men no longer drink. They sobered up. They go home early now. In times when their wives go out, the husbands do the housework]”. This was in contrast to the past, wherein the men completely relied on their spouses to do all of the domestic chores.

The GAD Council expressed happiness that their efforts were appreciated by the people. As Princess shared, *“May mga iba rin na pilosopo, pero meron rin iyong iba na nakikinig. Kahit papaano na-a-appreciate nila ang effort mo* [There are those who try to act smart, but others do listen. They are at least able to show appreciation for your efforts]”.

While some of their fellow residents expressed support for and thank their efforts, others were not as appreciative. According to Herminia, she was labeled as a busybody by some barangay residents because of her advocacy work. She said, *“Kapag nakikita nila ako, sasabihin nila, ‘Andiyan na si GAD, andiyan na si pakialamera’* [When they see me, they say, ‘GAD is coming, the busybody is here’]”.

One of the instances wherein this reaction was provoked was when she advocated for family planning. She said, *“Mahirap kumbinsihin ang mga mag-a-asawa sa barangay na mag-family planning. Sinasabi nila, ‘O ba’t ititigil ang panganganak? E hindi naman kayo ang nag-aalaga, hindi naman kayo ang nagpapakain?* [It is hard to convince couples in the barangay to do family planning. They would say, ‘Why should we stop giving birth? It’s not like you’re the one taking care of the baby, and you’re not the one feeding them’]”.

While these reactions hurt at first, Herminia has since grown used to these and learned to ignore these. She said, *“Kung minsan nakakasakit sa loob, pero iniisip ko gagawin ko ang tama. Masaya na ako doon. Pasok na lang sa isang tenga at labas sa kabila* [At times, it hurts, but then I tell myself that I am doing the right thing. I am happy with that. I would just let those things enter one ear and out the other]”.

There were instances wherein they came in direct conflict with their families due to their active participation in the GAD Council. Stephanie shared that her husband complained about the number of meetings she had to attend. Her response was simple: *“Bakit? Kung walang meeting, wala ring mapupuntahan ang mga tao dito* [Why are you complaining? If the meetings are not conducted, then the people here will amount to nothing]”.

Adding to the problem were the other gender issues in Madalag. While lack of livelihood opportunities for women was the biggest gender-related concern in the municipality, there were also other gender issues. Cases of rape, incest, and domestic violence were discussed in hushed voices in the municipality.

There were not actually brought up due to the fact that these were taboo topics.

One of the areas that the GAD Council members felt strongly was the issue on domestic violence, which was prevalent in Madalag. As Rhea said, *“Responsibilidad ng GAD focal na lumaban sa pambubugbog. May alam ka e, kaya hindi dapat ginagawa ang mga iyan* [It is the responsibility of the GAD focal person to fight against domestic abuse. You know what is right, that these things should not be done]”.

These issues have impressed upon the women the need to continue to uphold the GAD Council, even beyond the GIG implementation. However, they do have a caveat: to receive capacity building trainings themselves so they will be able to take on their roles as GAD advocates more effectively. Furthermore, they said that the Council has to have an official overseeing it.

As Rhea said, *“Hindi rin namin magagawa ito kung walang mag-ga-guide sa amin* [We will not be able to do this if there is no one to guide us]”.

This was seconded by Dolores and Princess, who said that someone with clout has to oversee things to ensure that the residents will pay attention. As Dolores said, *“Mas maganda ituloy ang pag-me-mentor* [It is better if someone continues to mentor us]”.

At the time of the interview, they are also lobbying to have their positions as GAD focal persons formalized. The municipal local government of Madalag released an ordinance about the formation of the GAD Council, but the members’ designation has not been made official at the barangay level. With the official documentation, they said that they will be able to perform their roles without fear that they will be ignored.

They unanimously agree that one of the first steps they will need to take is to create awareness. As Princess shared, *“Kailangang mulat ang tao, kaya information dissemination sa tao kailangan tutukan* [The people have to be aware of the situation, which is why we need massive information dissemination]”.

One thing is for sure: they have no plans of letting go of their responsibilities just like that. As Herminia said, *“Kung iiwanan mo iyan, babalik iyong problema. ‘Pag andiyan ka, matatakot ang mga tao. ‘Andiyan na si GAD, baka magsumbong* [If you abandon this, the problem will just come back. If you are there, at least the people will be dissuaded from doing these things. They will say, ‘GAD is here, she might tell on us]”.

Hope Flows Once Again for Women of Aklan

“May nakita kaming leak doon [We noticed a leak there]”, the 19-year-old said with a big smile, pointing in the direction of one of the restrooms of the barangay hall.

“May problema doon sa water supply [There is a problem with its water supply]”, another said, with an equally wide grin.

Bathroom leaks may not be the first thing that you would imagine would make people happy, let alone smiles to anyone’s faces. For these young women, however, the situation is different, because identifying the problem in the barangay hall’s water supply is an indication of their accomplishments. They are the first batch of women plumbers trained through the Gender Incentive Grant (GIG) provided by the Kapit-Bisig Laban sa Kahirapan-Comprehensive and Integrated Delivery of Social Services (Kalahi-CIDSS), in its partnership with the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), the Millennium Challenge Account-Philippines, and the municipality of Madalag in Aklan.



Women of Madalag are able to undergo plumbing training under the Gender Incentive Grant of Kalahi-CIDSS and MCC

“Walang alam”

Plumbing training, which was conducted by the Technical Education Skills and Development Authority [TESDA] of Aklan, was chosen by the residents of Madalag themselves as one of the areas that will be funded by the GIG. The other trainings provided under this are welding and handicrafts.

According to Ivy Colas, the Kalahi-CIDSS Area Coordinator of Madalag, the villagers identified the lack of livelihood opportunities as one of the factors that contributed to the poverty situation in the municipality in one of their barangay assemblies. According to them, this issue is more difficult for the Madalag women, most of whom only stay at home, as the men were seen as the only ones capable of earning.

Lorelyn Nedie, the 27-year-old woman who earlier said that the problem was with the water supply, is a stay-at-home mother of two. Cris Marie Yayong,



From L-R Cris, Leny, and Lorelyn are 3 of the 17 women who underwent through plumbing training through the Gender Incentive Grant of Kalahi-CIDSS

the ebullient 19-year-old who made the announcement about the bathroom's leak, did odd jobs around the house. Leny Viray, trainee, at 18 years old, has just recently gotten married and was pregnant at the time of the interview.

Their replies to questions posed on them were simple, even naïve, but always with a touch of playfulness and mixed with boisterous laughter. When asked how they were prior to the training, Lorelyn promptly replied while laughing, *"Walang alam [We did not know anything]!"*

Their laughter belied their situation. As members of households covered by the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (Pantawid Pamilya), their families are some of the poorest in Madalag, which has a poverty incidence of 63.3% based on the 2009 Small Area Estimates of the National Statistical Coordination Board.

Lorelyn, Cris, and Leny were not able to reach college.

"Hindi kaya akong ipagpaaral ng ate ko ng college, kaya sumali na lang ako sa training [My elder sister could not support my college education, so I joined the training]", was Cris's artless reply when asked why she took part in the plumbing training. She shared that both their parents were dead, and she was living with the family of her older sister.

Lorelyn's response was similar. *"Masaya ako na napili ako sa training kasi natupad ko ang pangarap ko na makatapos, maski vocational man [I am happy that I was part of this training because I was able to achieve my dream of finishing my education, even if it is just in vocational training]."*



Cris Yayong proudly shared how she knew more about plumbing than her brother thanks to the training



Leny Yayong was one of the plumbing trainees

Issues in training

The road to reaching their dream, however, was far from easy. As all of the trainees had no prior knowledge and experience in plumbing, they struggled at the beginning. As Cris described, *“May mga iba nga sa simula na hindi pa marunong humawak ng lagari [There were those who did not know how to hold a saw at the start]”*, as she mimed holding the implement on the blade instead of the handle.

Mr. Edwin Barrameda, the plumbing trainer of TESDA shared his experience of working with the Madalag women. *“The first 10 days, you really needed to inspire them. Sila mismo ang nagsasabi na hindi nila kaya [They were the ones who said that they would not be able to do it]”*.

According to the trainees, this was largely to their fear that they, as women, would not be able to work in plumbing. In fact, even before the training, there were already some who backed out because they felt that they would not be able to handle it.

As Cris shared, *“Ayaw sumali nung mga iba sa barangay kasi pang-lalaki daw. Iyong isa, nag-back out. Ako lang ang tumuloy [The others did not want to join because they said it was men’s work. One backed out. I was the only one from our barangay who continued with the training]”*.

Lorelyn herself almost did not join the training because her husband did not want her to take part in it. *“May question mark ang asawa ko. Bakit daw babae sa plumbing, e para lang sa lalaki daw iyon. Hindi daw namin kakayanin. Sabi ko i-try ko lang. Nakumbinsi ko rin siya [My husband asked me why women should undergo plumbing training when it is a man’s job. He said we will not be able to handle it. I told him I just want to try it. I was able to convince him]”*.

Their own personal fears were compounded by the fact that some accidents happened during training.

Leny shared, *“May mga iba na nahulugan ng tubo [Some had pipes accidentally fall on them]”*.

“May mga hindi sanay, kaya tuloy-tuloy iyong pag-lagari. ‘Ay!’ [Those who were not used to the work sawed until ‘Ay!’]”, Cris shared, miming accidentally cutting the self with the saw.

Their lack of confidence in their skills reached all the way to the time prior to their assessment, which would determine whether or not they will be certified plumbers.

“Schedule na ng assessment sabi nila hindi pa sila ready [They said they were still not ready even when it was already near the date of their assessment]”, said Mr. Barrameda. He tried to coach them to prepare them for the assessment, but there were still hesitations on their part.

It was only when he showed tough love that they were able to step up to the challenge. He said, *“Sinabihan ko ang mga estudyante ko, ‘Kung hindi madami ang makakapasa sa assessment, mahihiya akong pumunta sa graduation nin-yo’ [I told my students, ‘If there are a lot of you who would not be able to pass the assessment, I will be embarrassed to show up during your graduation’]”*.

The result? Sixteen of the 19 trainees were able to pass the assessment. Mr. Barrameda smiled as he shared how his students hugged and thanked him at the end of the testing after finding out the results of their assessment.

Application

The trainees who passed the assessment are currently being linked with Public Employment Service Office (PESO) by the Sustainable Livelihood Program (SLP) of the DSWD to help them find jobs. Even now, however, they themselves said that they have already begun to use their knowledge in their lives.

“Nakita ko na may diperensya na ngayon sa akin. Na-a-apply ko natutunan ko sa personal na buhay [I noticed a difference in myself. I am now able to apply what I learned in my personal life]”, said Leny.

Lorelyn shared about how she fixed a leak in their home by checking to see if their faucet has a gasket and installing one.

Cris talked about how she and her brother-in-law worked together to install a faucet inside their house. While they were discussing how to do it, her brother asked them what they were doing. Cris laughed as she shared how she and her brother-in-law reacted to the interruption. *“Manahimik ka na lang! Wala ka nang makialam, hindi mo alam ito [Be quiet! Do not get involved, you do not know anything about this!]”*

At the end of the day, however, these women want to use their newfound skills to find employment. As Lorelyn said, *“Pagkatapos ng training, gusto ko magtrabaho [I want to have a job after the training]”*.

Aside from being linked with PESO, the women trainees will also undergo on-the-job training in Kalahi-CIDSS sub-projects requiring plumbing work so they will have hands-on experience. All three women are excited about this.

Their confidence in themselves is now a far cry from how they were at the beginning, back when they thought that as women, they would not be able to handle the job. Now, they have high hopes that they will be able to use the skills they learned in order to find a better future for themselves and for their families.

When asked about the difference if they had gone through manicure and pedicure training instead of plumbing, Lorelyn had this answer: *“Ma’am, kasi, kung manicure at pedicure, karaniwan na iyon e. Pero kapag plumbing at welding, iba ang dating [Ma’am, doing manicure and pedicure is common. There is a different appeal in plumbing and welding]”*.

Women Find Worth in Welding

In the international scene, more women are finding themselves in the welding profession. In fact, some companies say that they prefer women welders, as they have good hand-eye coordination and show more patience while working. Even so, there are still very few of them who choose this route, since welding still remains largely a man's profession, even here in the Philippines.

In a lot of rural areas, it was even unheard of for females to enter professions traditionally seen as male-dominated. In fact, there are still those who believe in the notion that only men should work, as it was the woman's duty to stay at home.

This was the situation that 25 women in Madalag were faced with. However, they did not become discouraged. They grabbed the opportunity when they were offered to take part in the welding training through the Gender Incentive Grant (GIG) from the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) through the Millennium Challenge Account-Philippines (MCA-P), and which was implemented through the Kapit-Bisig Laban sa Kahirapan-Comprehensive and Integrated Delivery of Social Services (Kalahi-CIDSS), one of the main poverty alleviation programs of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). They used the negative perception against women welders as motivation to work hard to prove to others – and themselves – that they had the capacity to rise to the challenge.

In the process, they were able to find self-worth.

Woman, wife, welder

"Dati akong taga [I used to be taga]", Sherlina Hungay, 33 years old, of Barangay Antipolo, said. When prompted what she meant by *"taga"*, she said with a huge smile on her face and her eyes twinkling, *"Taga-saing, taga-laba, taga-luto [I cook rice, I wash clothes, I cook]!"*

Her tone sobering, she shared how she was one of the first women named by the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (Pantawid Pamilya) Parent Leader (PL) in her barangay, who was responsible for identifying who will be part of the trainings, which will be provided by the Technical Education Skills and Development Authority [TESDA].

"Sabi ni PL ako na lang ang isali at desidido ako para sa aking pamilya [The PL said that I should join because I was set on working for my family]", she said, wiping tears from her eyes.

When she was asked by the Parent Leader, *"Kaya mo ba talaga [Do you really think you can do it]?"* Her response was, *"Kakayanin ko ito para sa pamilya ko [I will do this for my family]"*.

The question posed to her was valid, as Sherlina had no prior experience in working, being a housewife who took care of her three children. She even

considered the possibility of working as a domestic helper [DH] abroad to earn money for her family, as she and her husband struggle daily to make ends meet. Her spouse works as a job order construction worker for the municipal hall.

Despite her motivation to work, Sherlina initially found the training challenging. It did not help that other people told her that she would not be able to work as a welder. The difficulty was compounded by her husband, who bet that she would not be able to complete the course, as he himself previously tried to go through the same welding training but was unable to complete it because of the physical demands it required.

Instead of allowing this to dishearten her, Sherlina took up the challenge. Her husband even bet that she would not be able to complete even just a week of training. If she lost, she would have to promise that she would never try to be a welder again.

She said, recalling, "*Sinabi ko tatanggapin ko ang pustahang ito para ipakita ko na kakayanin ko* [I told myself I would accept this bet so I can show to them that I can do this]".

She was able to hurdle and complete the training. She was still not home free. The next stage is to pass the assessment to become a certified welder. She recalled how anxious she felt when she was waiting for the results. "*Sobra ang nerbiyos ko sa assessment baka hindi ako makapasa. Nakakahiya sa asawa ko* [I was so nervous during the assessment because I might not pass. I would be so ashamed to face my husband]".

Her fears were founded: she passed the assessment without any problem.

Her joy in passing the assessment was such that she immediately texted her husband when she got the results. Her message was short and sweet. "*Pa, nakapasa ako* [I passed]!"

In fact, her euphoria lasted even after her assessment, and she shared her joy by way of giving her testimony during the graduation ceremony that was given by Kalahi-CIDSS to the women students of both the traditional and non-traditional trainings.

With a wide smile on her face, she shared how she boasted during her testimony, "*Kung ano ang kaya ng asawa ko, kaya ko rin* [I can do whatever my husband can]!"

Far from being offended, Sherlina shared how her spouse was exceedingly pleased with her accomplishment, even though he could not resist teasing her, "*Aba, proud pa* [Aren't you proud?]"

Sherlina shared that her response to her husband was short and simple, "*Oo, proud talaga ako sa sarili ko na nakayanan ko ito* [Yes, I am proud of myself, because I was able to accomplish this]".

The multiple roles of trainers for women

Welding is not the easiest subject to teach. More so if most, if not all of your students are first-timers in the area you will train them in. And even more so if there are other issues that may come into play, such as decorum and propriety, which may add to the challenge in the process.

This was the situation that Engr. Nelson Zapanza, the welding trainer of the TESDA branch in Kalibo, Aklan, found himself in.

While it was not new for Engr. Zapanza to train women in welding, it was his first time to hold classes where there were a lot of them, as his previous trainings only had one or two at the most. What was more, it was novel for him to teach a group who were there for the purpose of affirmative action.

Still, he stepped up to the challenge – even though he encountered even more unexpected bumps along the way.

One of these issues is his fear of being misunderstood by his students. As he said it, welding requires literal hands-on training, as the instructor will sometimes need to grip the hands of the trainees to show them how to do the job properly.

In connection with that, he also had to deal with the possibility that his female students may end up getting harassed or bullied in class. The ___-persons were not the sole students in the welding training. They were mixed with other trainees, who were all men. As such, while the trainings provided opportunities for the women, it also opened other windows for them to be put at risk to discrimination.

Thankfully, this front was covered by Ms. Nora Tolentino, the guidance counselor of TESDA-Kalibo. She explained, “*Walang bullying kasi may orientation from the beginning. Nire-respect nila ang mga babae* [There is no bullying here because we orient them from the beginning. They respect the women]”.

She shared how she emphasized to the women participants the importance of proper behavior so they would not invite untoward advances toward them.

She also explained how TESDA set up rules on conduct, such as showing of mutual respect and disallowing courtships among participants during training, which was also impressed by the ACT. The attention of those who violate these rules would be called, with appropriate consequences.

Despite these measures, there were still some trainees who expressed their doubt about the capacity of the women in welding.

As Engr. Zapanza shared, “*May mga nagsasabi sa mga babae na lalaking estudyante, ‘Kaya ba ng babae iyan? Mahina ang mga iyan e’* [Can the women do this? They are weak]”.

To this, he would always reply, “*Ang mga babae ang gusto kunin abroad [Women welders are preferred abroad]”,* citing they do their jobs more neatly and carefully. “*Mas pino magtrabaho* [They do finer work]”, he added by way of explanation.

He also found himself saying the same thing to the women trainees themselves.

“*Noong una, sabi nila hindi nila kaya. Sinabihan ko sa kanila madaming babae ang nag-welding sa Canada, sa Japan, sa California. Hinahanap ang mga babae na structural welder kasi mas pino magtrabaho* [In the beginning, the trainees said they could not do it. I told them that there are a lot of women welders in Canada, Japan, and California. They prefer women structural welders because they do finer work]”, he said.

The multiple roles trainers for women (cont'd)

He and the other TESDA staff found themselves acting the part of the cheerleader for these women, helping them boost their self-confidence.

Engr. Zapanza shared that this was because they felt compassion for these women. “Naaawa talaga kami sa mga estudyante. Wala silang pera, wala silang pagkain [We pitied the students. They neither had money nor food]”, he said, adding that sometimes, e and Mr. Edwin Barrameda, the plumbing trainer who also worked with some of the Madalag women, gave them food and lent them small amounts of cash for their fare to go back home.

Engr. Zapanza shared how one of his students hitched a ride with him to go home. He said, “*Nakita ko ang bahay nila. Kawawa talaga* [I saw how her house looked like. It was really pitiful]”.

Mr. Barrameda also noted an instance when he was chatting with his students. “*Tinanong ko ang mga estudyante, ‘Anong pangarap mo sa buhay?’ Sabi nila mag-asawa lang* [I asked the students, ‘What is your dream for yourself?’ They said it was just to get married]”, he shared, shaking his head.

Both trainers were delighted that their students passed assessment, and they, along with Ms. Tolentino, were in attendance during the graduation ceremony, looking at their students proudly.

When asked if he would attend the first day of the on-the-job training of his students if he was invited, Engr. Zapanza grined and said, “*Kahit hindi niyo ako i-invite pupunta ako* [I will still go there even if you do not invite me]”.

In addressing Kalahi-CIDSS, Ms. Tolentino said, “*Nagpapasalamat kami sa inyo. Nakikita mo na talagang poor ang tinutulungan ninyo* [We want to thank you. You could see that you are helping those who are really poor]”.

Kalahi-CIDSS seeks to empower and capacitate citizens so they will be able to help themselves lift themselves out of poverty.

She continued, “How many years *na kami mag-asawa, ngayon lang nung training na naramdaman na mataas ang tingin niya sa akin, at ako sa sarili ko. Masarap sabihin sa sarili na napakita ko na kaya ko* [We have been married for several years, but it was only when I was going through training that I felt that he had high respect for me, and even I for myself. It feels good that I was able to prove to myself that I could do this]”.

While Sherlina is still considering the possibility of working abroad, she said, her tone filled with pride, “*Kung mag-a-abroad ako, hindi na ako DH, welder ako. May skills na ako na natutunan* [Should I work abroad, I will no longer serve as a DH. I will be a welder, because I now have skills].”

From being the *tagaluto*, the *tagalaba*, and *tagaluto*, Sherlina now has this to say about herself, her tone proud: “*Taga-welding ako* [I am a welder]!”



Welding may traditionally be a man's profession, but that didn't stop the women of Madalag from going through it



Sherlina Hungay did not allow her neighbors to discourage her from pursuing training

“Just watch me!”

Like Sherlina, 27-year-old Genie Nanson of Barangay San Jose also has a family of her own, a husband and two children.

Unlike Sherlina, Genie's spouse was supportive of her joining the training. Though she admitted that her husband would have preferred that she joined the plumbing classes instead, as he was worried about her safety. Still, he acquiesced when she told him her preference was welding because that was what she really wanted to do. In fact, she shared that he would always give her money for fare just so she could attend the trainings.

Genie's problem was definitely not her husband. Unfortunately, she had contenders of her own – in the form of her neighbors.

According to her, right from the time when they learned that she would be joining the welding training, they already began mocking her that she would not finish the program. They even bet against her that she would only be able to last for two days and quit.

Genie, however, did not allow them to get to her, even though there were times that their comments were already offensive. Instead, she used this to motivate her.

As she shared, she remembered thinking at the time, *“Ipapakita ko sa kanila na kaya ko [I will show them that I can do this]”*.

The start of the training was far from easy for Genie. She shared how she accidentally burned herself in one of the sessions, and how it took some time

Behind the welding mask is a Madalag woman fighting for the betterment of her family



before she got used to the driver, because it was difficult to carry because of its weight.

Still, she persevered, and like Sherlina, passed the assessment without any problem.

As Genie put it, *“Pursigido lahat kami kasi alam naming na kayang-kaya namin ang assessment [We worked hard because we knew we would be able to pass the assessment without any difficulty]”*.

It was this same persistence that pushed her to seek on-the-job training from the Kalahi-CIDSS Area Coordinating Team (ACT).

She shared, *“Parati kong kinukulit ang ACT para isali ako [I persistently ask the ACT to include me]”*, with a sheepish grin, referring to the invitation given to the trainees to have their training during the construction of the Kalahi-CIDSS sub-projects in or near Madalag. This statement was affirmed by Madalag Area Coordinator Ivy Colas, who said that Genie would always go up to different members of the team to request to be given the opportunity to use her welding skills in one of the different sub-projects that will be implemented in the municipality through the project.

Genie’s persistence eventually paid off. Two Kalahi-CIDSS infrastructure sub-projects, a school building and a bridge, were scheduled for construction, and she was tapped as one of the welders.

Even so, passing the assessment and being given the assurance that she will be able to apply her skills did not exempt her from being mocked by her neighbors, and this led to a volley of exchanges between them, with Genie using her newfound confidence in her skill as her shield.

When they loudly talked about her not completing the training, she replied, *“Anong ginawa ko sa TESDA kung hindi ko nakaya [What did I do in TESDA if I was not able to handle it]?”*

When they mocked her that the only thing that she would be able to make would be stoves because she was just a woman, her response was, *“Sige. Bibilhin mo [Sure. Are you buying it]?”*

She did not even back down when they threatened to watch her first day on the job as a welder to see her fail. *“Sinabihan ako ng kapitbahay, ‘Sige, papanoorin ka naming kung kakayanin mo. Tingnan natin kung makapag-welding ka na. Sagot ko, ‘E ‘di panoorin niyo ako! [My neighbors told me, ‘We’ll watch you while you weld to see if you can actually do it. Let’s see if you really do know how to weld. I told them, ‘Just watch me!’]”*

Her bravura is not just at the surface level. According to the Area Coordinating Team and Engr. Nelson Zapanza, the TESDA instructor who trained her and the other women in welding, Genie is a very skilled welder.

When she herself realized this, Genie developed confidence in herself, and she is grateful to Kalahi-CIDSS for this. As she said, *“Nagpapasalamat ako sa Kalahi-CIDSS. Nalaman dito namin kung paano mag-welding. Kahit may TESDA naman, wala naman kami financial para sumali [I want to thank Kalahi-CIDSS because we learned how to weld through it. Even if TESDA is just here, we would not have been able to afford it because we do not have financial means]”*.

Above all, Genie is thankful for the lessons and the break she was given. She said, *“May oportunidad na kami para maiangat ang sarili namin, para matuto kami [We now have the opportunity to learn and to improve ourselves]”*.

Age is no barrier

When you see Lovely Tello and Marian Cadevida, you would assume that they are fresh-faced youths who are still in school. It would not even cross your mind that they have no experience in working, given their age and their appearance.

This assumption would be wrong, because even though they are young, being both at 18 years of age, they are both qualified welders, having gone through the same training as Sherlina and Genie.

It is not just their youth that Lovely and Marian have in common. Both joined the training because their families could not afford to send them to college. Both signed up for the welding classes because they just stayed at home, occasionally helping out in household tasks.

As Lovely shared, *“Gusto ko makapag-aral kahit vocational lang [I want to be able to study, even if it is just a vocational course]”*.

Meek and quiet, she had an air of innocence, which was only heightened when she shared the extent of support given to her by her family in her decision to join the welding trainings.

She said with a shy smile, *“Hinahanda nga ni nanay ang mga gamit ko [My mother prepares my things]”*, describing how her typical morning routine before she went to training.

Marian, meanwhile, said, “*Hindi ako nakatapak ng college. Sumali na lang ako sa welding training kesa nasa bahay lang ako. At least may matutunan* [I was not able to go to college. I joined the welding training instead of just staying at home. At least I would be able to learn something]”.

Like Lovely, she receives good support from her mother and her siblings. However, while the former projects an aura of meekness, Marian’s is that of mischievousness, especially as she was quick to laugh and share her hijinks during training, although she admitted that she felt nervous before the actual welding. She even shared that she was unsure about her own abilities in the past. It was only when she was able to experience welding firsthand that she began to have faith in herself.

She narrated, “*Akala ko nung una hindi ko kaya. Kaya ko pala maski babae ako. Nalaman ko na kaya ko noong actual na* [I thought at first that I would not be able to. I found out that I actually could, even if I am a woman, but I only learned this when I was actually welding already]”.

Marian and Lovely not only could do welding, they were able to keep up with the other trainers, which include men and older women, proving that neither gender nor age are barriers in skills building.

Women in welding

There may only be a few women who joined the welding training through this project, but through these classes, these participants not only learned a new skill, they were also able to develop confidence in themselves.

Admittedly, these women still have a long way to go after the training. Even so, it is a good first step. According to Engr. Zapanza, welding is a profession that can suit both men and women, it is just that people have become used to associating it with the former. What matters in the workplace is not gender, but rather skill and talent, and the trainees have a lot of that going for them.

Quiet Lovely Cadevida is thankful for the support her family gave her while she was going through the welding training course



Kalahi-CIDSS weaves a new chance in life for a single mother



Nalaman ko sa Kalahi-CIDSS na may silbi ako, says Joana Nabalde

Joana Nabalde, 27, of Brgy. Sta. Catalina in Madalag, Aklan, has had various problems in the past years. Despite her youth, has gone through more than women twice her age have: losing her child to an illness, abandoned by her husband, forcing her to take care of their two children on her own.

Joana admits that her experiences for the past couple of years almost broke her.

“Akala ko wala akong kakayahan makagawa [I thought I did not have the capacity to do anything]”, Joana said, teary-eyed, describing how her self-esteem crashed after being abandoned by her husband.

According to her, she would have been completely devastated if not for the arrival of Kapit-Bisig Laban sa Kahirapan-Comprehensive and Integrated Delivery of Social Services (Kalahi-CIDSS) in their town.

Kalahi-CIDSS is one of the poverty alleviation programs of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). As a community-driven development Project, it involves citizens in the development process by ensuring that they are active participants in identifying and solving issues local poverty issues.

In Madalag, Aklan, one of the selected sub-projects implemented in the town is the provision of abaca handicrafts trainings, in partnership with PIÑA MANTRA.

The handicrafts training was implemented as part of the Gender Incentive Grant (GIG) provided by the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) through the Millennium Challenge Account-Philippines (MCA-P) to Kalahi-CIDSS to help resolve gender issues that contribute to local poverty issues.

Aside from abaca handicrafts, the GIG also provided opportunities on plumbing and welding trainings to the Madalag women. Joana, with 59 other women, were able to join the handicrafts training.

Joana said her being part of the handicraft training and volunteering in the Project formed part of the first steps she took to move on with her life.

She recalls thinking, *“Ako na lang ang mag-aalaga sa anak ko [I will be the one to care for my children]”*.

Being a Kalahi-CIDSS volunteer, she became more active in her community, resulting in her barangay captain entrusting her with more responsibilities,



Joana Nabalde gets teary-eyed when she recalls the difficulties she has experienced the past two years

including serving as the barangay representative in the municipality, roles which she accepted, although she was reluctant at first.

Part of her reluctance stemmed from the fact that some people were lacking in confidence in her abilities. Joana said that some fellow villagers talked behind her back.

She narrated, *“Sinasabi ng mga tao, “Di naman iyan naka-graduate nang high school. Wala iyang alam, wala iyan kakayahan [People said,*

‘She was not even able to finish high school. She doesn’t know anything, she doesn’t have any skills]’. These comments, according to Joana, humiliated her at first.

“Minsan nahihiya na akong pumunta dito [sa munisipyo] kasi parati na lang ako sinasabihan ng mga tao [I get embarrassed sometimes to go to the municipality because of what people are saying]”.

Eventually, however, she was able to tune out these negative comments. Thanks in part to the support of her barangay captain and her increasing confidence through her volunteerism in Kalahi-CIDSS.

“Nawala na ang hiya ko [My shame went away]”, Joana said with a small smile. Completing the training is a source of great pride for her.

Joana said, *“Na-experience ko kung paano makatanggap ng diploma. Natakot ako, pero naging masaya din. Ganito pala ang graduation na tinatawag [I got to experience what it’s like to receive a diploma. I was scared, but it turned out well. So this is what they meant by graduation]”*, with a big grin.

She added, *“Sinasabihan kasi nila ako na ‘Wala iyang diploma’. Ayon, may diploma na ako [They keep telling me, ‘She doesn’t have a diploma’. Now I do]”.* As of the interview, Joana is preparing for working in handicrafts.

She shared, *“Excited na ako mag-trabaho. Nag-pa-practice ako mag-isa sa bahay [I am excited to work. I practice at home]”.*

When asked the most important lesson she learned in Kalahi-CIDSS, Joana had this to say: *“Mapapakita ko na sa ibang tao na kaya ko na. Kaya ko nang mabuhay na wala ang asawa ko. Noon, lagi lang ako umaasa sa asawa ko. Pero nung naranasan ko na ang hirap, kaya ko pala. Kapag may mga tao na sumusuporta sa iyo, kaya mo pala [I can show other people that I can stand on my own two feet. I can live without my husband. In the past, I always relied on him. However, when I went through hardships, I learned I can do things without him. You can make it when you have people supporting you]”.*

She concluded, *“Nalaman ko sa Kalahi-CIDSS na may silbi ako [I learned in Kalahi-CIDSS that I have value]”.*

DSWD weaves new strength for women in Aklan town

Abaca is known as one of, if not the strongest natural fiber in existence, as well as being one of the most versatile. It can be used to make delicate fabrics and ornamental pieces just as easily as it can be created for utilitarian purposes, such as rope.

It is these characteristics that allow the women of Madalag in Aklan, who learned to produce abaca, can be likened to the material, because their toughness and flexibility belie their seemingly common nature.

A mother's motivation

When the women from the abaca-producing barangays in Madalag were offered training on handicrafts making through the Gender Incentive Grant (GIG) under the Kapit-Bisig Laban sa Kahirapan-Comprehensive and Integrated Delivery of Social Services (Kalahi-CIDSS) through its partnership with the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) and the Millennium Challenge Account-Philippines (MCA-P), they were not that enthusiastic.



Women go through the abaca handicraft training

Their lack of enthusiasm for this activity was later revealed that in the past, there were several organizations, both government and non-government, that came to Madalag to provide them trainings, without any results. Even though their former trainers promised to give them support, this was not followed through. They were not able to profit from these, particularly those who trained in cottage industries, there was no market for their products.

As Ivy Colas, the Kalahi-CIDSS Area Coordinator, said, *“After trainings pinabayaan na sila, kaya hindi na sila masyado interesado”* [They were left on their own after the trainings, so they were not that interested (when they were offered this)]”.

Earning a profit was a sore point for Madalag women, as they, like the other residents in the municipality, were affected by poverty. In fact, Madalag is one of the poorest municipalities in the province of Aklan, with a poverty incidence of 63.35%, based on the 2009 Small Area Estimates (SAE) of the National Statistical Coordination Board (NSCB).

Majority of the population do not have a stable source of income, earn barely enough to support their families. Farmers do not make that much profit, owing to being mere tenants of the lands they cultivate. Others venture into casual employment, such as drivers, construction workers, and job-order tasks, none of which are stable sources of income.



*SOME HANDICRAFTS
TRINEES WITH INDIA DE
LA CRUZ-LEGASPI OF PIÑA
MANTRA*

Adding to the burden of the Madalag population is the cultural mindset that it is only men who should bear the responsibility of supporting their families. While there are some women who help out in farming, many still believe that their job is to stay at home and watch over their children.

Even those who are interested in earning money to help support their families have difficulty in doing so, simply because of the lack of opportunities available to them. Available jobs require certain educational attainment and skills which they do not have; most of them have not completed even grade school. Those who want to start their own businesses do not have the money for capital. Furthermore, mothers with small children also cannot leave their offspring while they work.

It is these problems that made 60 women dare to participate in the handicraft making training offered by Kalahi-CIDSS, despite their wariness that this would be another “ningas cogon” activity. The training was conducted in partnership with the local company called PIÑA MANTRA.

When asked why they signed up for this even though they were apprehensive about it, they were one in saying, “*Para makatulong po sa pamilya* [So we can help our family]”.

Challenging yet fulfilling

Despite their strong motivation, most of the women did not expect the challenges that came their way. While it seems that the plumbing and welding trainings, which were also provided to Madalag women through the GIG, seemed more challenging, those who undertook handicrafts trainings also experienced their own share of difficulties.

While they were faced with several challenges, they also found themselves using this as the opportunity to take a break from their problems.

The participants were comforted with their various challenges. As shared by Molina Rimón, 45, from Brgy. San Jose, “*Nawawala sa training ang problema dahil nakakapag-kuwentuhan kami* [Our problems disappear during training because we get to share our stories with each other]”.

Daizy Lozada, 42, of Brgy. Pang-Itan, meanwhile, used the training opportunity to learn all aspects of abaca handicrafts making.

She shared, “*Halos lahat ng training naki-sit in ako kahit wala akong pamasaha para lang makita ang trabaho nila* [I sat in almost all trainings even if I did not have money for transportation fare just so I can see what the other trainees are working on]”.

Their efforts eventually paid off: the women unanimously said that the graduation ceremony, wherein they received their certificates of training completion, was one of the best moments in their lives.

Nelsa Narce, 43, solemnly said, “*Katibayan ito na nag-aral ako, na nagsikap ako* [This is proof that I studied and worked hard]”.

Some of the other graduates, while as filled as pride and as fulfilled, are not as somber about their graduation as Nelsa.

“*First ever na diploma ko ito. Parang hindi ako tumatanda!* [This is my first diploma ever. I feel like I’m not growing any older!” Luz Donato, 51, said, shrieking with laughter.

Jennifer Francisco, 33, said with pride, “*Mas nauna pa kami. College, four years. Kami ilang araw lang* [We got to finish early. College takes four years. We completed ours within a few days]”. Like most of the women, Jennifer was unable to get her college degree. She only reached up to high school.

Christie Sailog, 35, said with a grin, “*Makakapag-yabang na ng konti* [We can boast even for just a little bit]”. She paused, and then repeated, laughing, “*Konti lang* [Just a little bit]”.

Weaving a new future

During the interview, the women who underwent the handicrafts trainings were optimistic that they would finally be able to earn additional income.

Herminia Nacuspag, 52, said, “*Andiyan na ang training. Kailangan na lang ng opportunity para magamit ito* [The training is already there. We just need the opportunity to use this]”.

Avenues are now being explored by the residents. They plan on serving as trainers for the other women who were not able to become part of the first round of trainings. From there, they plan on working together per barangay to produce handicrafts. The Sustainable Livelihood Program (SLP) of the DSWD will help in sustaining their business.

Daizy, like the other trainees, committed to teach the other women who have not been able to attend the trainings so they can also earn from this.

She said, “*Kahit ako matanda na, may mga apo na kailangan gampanan, kahit kailangan ako ng asawa ko na tulungan siya sa taniman, kung may matutunan ako, i-shi-share ko rin sa iba, lalo na sa mga ibang mga walang trabaho at interesado* [Even if I am old, have grandchildren to attend to, and need to help my husband take care of our crops, I will share what I learned to the other people, especially those who do not have jobs and are interested to learn]”.

Furthermore, PIÑA MANTRA, which provided the handicraft trainings to the Madalag women, committed to purchase abaca from the town, and is planning to conduct further trainings to the women. It also tapped the Non-Timber and Forest Products (NTFP), a non-government organization, to bring its business to the municipality to produce blue dye for one of its clients.

These external opportunities, however, do not compare with the internal growth and empowerment these women have experienced as a result of the training. No longer do they feel useless; today, they now have greater hope for the future.

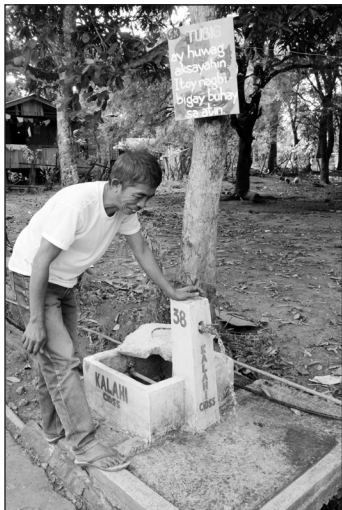
Daizy said, “*May kabuhayan pagka-graduate sa Pantawid Pamilya* [We will have livelihood after we graduate from the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program]”, referring to the conditional cash transfer program of the DSWD that helps support the health and education of children of the poorest households in the country. Given that the program only runs for a limited number of years, the handicrafts training provided them with the opportunity to help support their families by earning supplementary income.

With the handicrafts training under their belts, along with the support of the different DSWD programs, the women of Madalag now have hope that they can weave new lives for themselves and their families.

Women Empowerment: A Male Leader's Perspective

The prevailing notion of women being the weaker sex has changed over the years. From being viewed as vulnerable and needing protection, women have now developed a stronger persona compared to their image in the past.

The transformation of women's image may be slower in rural areas, particularly the more isolated ones; nonetheless, this change in perception is an indication that gender equality is slowly taking place.



The level II water system in Brgy. Matuyatuya is the fruit of labor of volunteers who worked hard to address their need for a clean supply of water.

One of the most important ingredients in the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment is for males themselves to have a change in mindset in terms of how they see their opposite sex. Thankfully, there are men who are willing to champion the gender equality cause.

Leandro Montevirgen of Barangay Matuyatuya in Torrijos, Marinduque is one of these champions.

According to Leandro, the situation in Torrijos was similar to many rural communities in the Philippines; men were viewed as responsible for earning for their families while the women stayed at home to attend to the needs of their spouses and their children. It was only when the Kapit-Bisig Laban sa Kahirapan-Comprehensive and Integrated Delivery of Social Services (Kalahi-CIDSS) began implementation did the people begin to have a change in mindset.

As a *kagawad* member, Leandro is interested in local development, which was why he became interested in Kalahi-CIDSS when it came to Torrijos. He took a liking to the Project because of its ability to engage people in the development process, as it seeks to reduce poverty and improve local governance. He took an active role in rallying the people so they will attend the barangay assemblies. He recalled that he visited every home in their barangay in order to meet the 80% minimum household participation rate required by Kalahi-CIDSS.

"Mahirap ang pinagdaanan namin noon, kasi talagang pinuntahan pa naming isa-isa ang mga bahay para lang pumunta ang mga tao [What we went through was difficult. We had to visit each house one by one just to make sure

that people would attend the barangay assembly]”, said Leandro.

Thankfully, he only needed to do this at the start, since the interest of people in Kalahi-CIDSS led them to take the initiative to go on their own whenever there is a scheduled barangay assembly. He interpreted this as a sign that the residents wanted change to happen in the community, and that they saw Kalahi-CIDSS as the vehicle for this.

What added to Leandro’s interest in Kalahi-CIDSSs was the fact that people underwent several trainings on matters of finance, procurement, and engineering. He said that this opportunity is quite rare and that the people in the barangay are happy that they are given such.

“Bilang kagawad, sinasabi ko sa mga tao na bihira lang ang mga proyektong ganito tulad ng Kalahi-CIDSS, kaya mas inaalalayan ko sila [As a kagawad member, I tell the people that projects like Kalahi-CIDSS are rare, which is why I support them in its implementation]”, Leandro said.

For Leandro, however, the most striking lesson he picked up from Kalahi-CIDSS is gender equality. He admitted that he had little knowledge on the topic. Like the rest of his barangay, he believed that men were more powerful than women, and that the latter is primarily based at home while the former were responsible for earning for the family’s living.

“[Natutunan ko] iyong pinagkaiba ng gender equity sa gender equality, nalaman ko, pati iyong mga batas na pumapaloob sa gender and development (GAD). Maganda iyon na maibahagi sa mga tao [I learned the difference between gender equity and gender equality, as well as the laws involving GAD. It would be good if this can be shared with other people]”, Leandro said. Kalahi-CIDSS also taught that the law on Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC).

As with other aspects of Kalahi-CIDSS, he made sure that his fellow villagers will be able to understand what GAD is about, even if this was new to him as well.

“Andoon pa rin ang pag-aalalay sa kanila. Kahit hindi na bago ang konseptong ito, marami pa din ang hindi nakakaalam ng kahalagahan nito [My assistance for them is still there. Even if the concept is not new anymore, there are still a lot of the people who do not understand the value of this]”, said Leandro.

It was through Kalahi-CIDSS that they also learned that men and women have different needs within the community.

Leandro said, *“Nakita namin na sa barangay hindi lang lagi ang mga lalaki ang makikinabang. Lalong higit ang mga babae dahil meron din silang ibang pangangailangan. Doon ko nalaman iyon sa Participatory Situational Analysis (PSA) na isinagawa namin sa barangay [We saw that men should not just be the one to benefit in the community; women should also, benefit but their needs*

are different. We learned this in the PSA, which is conducted at the barangay level]”. The PSA is one of the initial activities done in Kalahi-CIDSS, wherein villagers gather together to discuss the current status of their community, including the problems they are facing.

Eventually, the villagers began to appreciate the importance of GAD through their involvement and exposure in Kalahi-CIDSS.

Leandro said, *“Dati na-o-overpower ng mga lalaki ang mga babae sa bahay. Pero ngayon dahil sa VAWC, unti-unting nabago ang kanilang pananaw [In the past, the men overpowered the women inside the home. Because we were taught about VAWC, this perception has slowly changed]”*.

Leandro began noticing that the lessons the villagers learned on GAD did not just get banked as head knowledge; they began to integrate these in their daily lives, starting with their involvement in Kalahi-CIDSS and then trickling to other aspects.

Leandro said that little by little, the regard for women has become higher, especially because both men and women took what they have learned from the GAD activities seriously. Men became more open to the idea that women also have a stake in development, and that they should be given the same set of opportunities as men.

When the construction of the barangay sub-project started, the tasks were divided among men and women. Leandro was glad that there are women who expressed interest in serving part of the physical labor force.

“Dati marami ang kumi-kwestiyon sa kakayahan ng babae sa construction work, pero noong nakita nila na kaya din na makipagsabayan ng babae sa paghahakot ng buhangin, wala nang nagsalita [At first, there were a lot who questioned the women’s abilities in terms of construction work. But they stopped making side comments when they saw that the women were able to match the men’s ability to haul sand]”, Leandro said.

In fact, having good relationships with each other became advantageous for the Matuyatuya women, as this enabled them to work closely as a unit because of their friendship.

“Masisigasig sila kasi marami silang magkakakilala [They have a lot of energy for work because a lot of them know each other]”, said one of the residents.

As a result, the work done by women was fast, and was noted to be of good quality.

The women themselves enjoyed working in construction work, not only because the experience was new to them, but also because they learned that what they originally perceived to be a man’s job can also be done by them.

Aside from hauling sand, they were able to pack and bag cement, tasks which they never thought they would do.

“Halos parehas lang ng pagod sa bahay at dito sa project site, pero masaya naman [Our level of tiredness here in the project site is almost similar to the work we do at home, but it’s fun]”, one of the women volunteers said.

They also made money through the experience, as they were able to earn the same amount as the men in construction work. This was new for the women as well, as a lot of them have never had the opportunity to generate income before.

The women’s abilities slowly began to surface when Kalahi-CIDSS started its implementation in the community. Their skills, as well as the men’s, now have the opportunity to further develop, as Kalahi-CIDSS will begin its implementation of the Gender Incentive Grant from the Millennium Challenge Corporation through the Millennium Challenge Account-Philippines.

Leandro, together with the other residents of Brgy. Matuyatuya, is excited to start the construction of their chosen sub-project, public toilets for men and women. The women in particular, are eager to start, as they will again be given the chance to work and earn, an opportunity which was previously not available to them.

Through the entire Kalahi-CIDSS experience, Brgy. Matuyatuya is testament that change the Project brings is not only on tangible things as infrastructure; such as e.g. tap stands that lie along the streets. It also brings change from within. In Brgy. Matuyatuya, this was seen in the change in perspective in terms of gender, with men shedding their conventional perceptions on women and the women being given the opportunity to work and earn.

Fearless woman transforms into a leader



Carmelina proudly shares her experience on the CDD project. She applies the lessons she learned in Kalahi-CIDSS to her current post in the barangay as a councilor

“Gusto ko kasi ipakita sa mga tao na ako ay may halaga, na mas marami pa akong magagawa.”

Determination fills every word of Carmelina Monterey, a local of Brgy. Kayduke in Torrijos, Marinduque, when asked what she can contribute to the barangay council upon election last May. Her determination is deeply rooted from her belief that as a woman, she is capable of doing much more.

Already known as a woman with strong personality, Carmelina proved that she has what it takes to be a leader and volunteer when she was chosen as the Barangay Representation Team (BRT)

leader of Kalahi-CIDSS. Kalahi-CIDSS is an anti-poverty program of the DSWD that seeks to empower citizens to actively participate in local governance in order to address local poverty issues collectively.

Carmelina took an active role in doing her job as a BRT leader, however, much to her and fellow residents' dismay, their barangay did not get to be prioritized during the 1st cycle. As such, a few of the residents accounted the non-prioritization to the women volunteers of the Project. Carmelina shared that although she is disheartened by the fact that their sub-project was not funded, what hurts more was the fact that people continue to see less of them because of what happened.

In Brgy. Kayduke, women are belittled due to the conservative and patriarchal nature of the community. Women are consigned into their homes, attending to the needs of the family and doing household chores, while men are out in the field to work.

This hampered the participation of women in barangay activities. Yet this gradually changed when Kalahi-CIDSS mainstreamed gender into the activities of the Community Empowerment Activity Cycle (CEAC).

Many of the volunteers of the Project are women. They were encouraged to join and participate actively, as they saw this as an opportunity where they can work outside their homes. Slowly but surely, these women began to defy the long-held perception of their community towards them when they started to show early at the barangay assemblies, take part on the training on community procurement and finance, and even hold positions in the Barangay Sub-Project Management Committee (BSPMC).

“Marami kami noon na nag-aattend. Puro mga kababaihan nga. Nagugulat na lang iyong ibang kapit-bahay namin dahil doon lang kami nakita na ganoon karami, at sumasama ang ibang mga kababaihan (There were a lot of us who attended. Most are women. Our neighbors were surprised because that was only the time when they realized just how many women were in the village, and that we were all interested in joining)”, said Carmelina.

Carmelina knew that the women volunteers have to work hard, if not harder than the men, in order to prove that they can change the way the community sees them. Her husband is actually one of her biggest detractors in terms of supporting Kalahi-CIDSS. Like the other men in the community, he believed that the Project is full of empty promises. Thus, Carmelina had a hard time explaining to her husband what the Project entails. Even so, she did not stop telling her experiences upon her involvement with Kalahi-CIDSS, even sharing to him all the sacrifices made by her fellow volunteers and the taunts thrown their way by the non-believers.

Carmelina and the other volunteers continued with their work though, as their desire was to address the longtime need of the barangay to have a steady supply of water.

Despite the strong involvement of the women in the first cycle of Kalahi-CIDSS implementation in Torrijos, Carmelina felt that there was more that can be done. As such, she decided not pursue being a volunteer of the Project after the 1st cycle of implementation; instead, she chose to run for the barangay elections last October as a barangay kagawad. She said that prior to running, it had never occurred to her to run for local office, let alone become part of the barangay local government.

“Sinabihan ako ng asawa ko na tumakbo, pero ayoko talaga nung una. Dahil mahirap din at mahahati ang oras ko sa pamilya ko. Nagulat din ako na nanggaling din sa kanya mismo iyon dahil noong una, ayaw nya ako sumasali sa Kalahi (My husband was the one who encouraged me to run, but I really did not want to at first, because I thought it would be too difficult, and I would not be able to spend as much time with my family. I was surprised that he was the one who told me to run, because before he did not want me to join Kalahi-CIDSS)”, Carmelina shared.

She shared how surprised she was when her husband suggested that she run as kagawad of the barangay. *“Hindi ko talaga akalain na siya pa mismo ang magsasabi noon sa akin. Natutuwa ako kasi naintindihan niya yung pinagdaanan ko nun sa Kalahi. Nakita niya din na kaya ko mamuno, na siya naming nahasa dahil sa proyekto. Pero ang laging tanong ko noon sa sarili ko ay sino ang boboto sa akin? Hindi naman ako tubong Marinduque, taga-Calauan, Laguna ako. Baka walang bumoto sa akin (I never expected that he would be the one to tell me that. I was happy, because it meant he understood what I went through in Kalahi-CIDSS. He saw that I could be a leader, which was honed because of the Project. Yet I found myself asking who would end up*

vote for me? I'm not a native of Marinduque. I'm from Calauan, Laguna, so no one may end up voting for me)".

Her husband saw Carmelina's heart to serve and her strong-willed stance in everything she does. These traits are what made her husband change his mind as he deemed she can help the barangay better if she has a post. And with the constant prodding from her husband, she finally gave it a try. Carmelina also credited her fellow volunteers to have encouraged her to be part of something big and a chance to serve the barangay better.

The gender sensitivity training from Kalahi-CIDSS helped Carmelina a lot in asserting her rights as a woman and knowing how she can be part of the decision-making in their barangay. The said training also helped in changing the perspectives of men towards women, that they are equals in the society and both are capable of initiating change in the community. Nevertheless, it helped improve the relationship of Carmelina and her husband, and the family as well.

Lo and behold, Carmelina won as one of the councilor's in their barangay. She gives credit to Kalahi-CIDSS for teaching her things she may not have known otherwise. When asked about the significant experience she had in Kalahi-CIDSS that will help her in current post, she said that it would be the consultation process of the Project, wherein people are actively encouraged to be part of identifying their needs.

"Iyon talaga ang puno't dulo ng paglilingkod sa barangay (That is the very essence of what service to the community is about)", she remarked.

Her eyes twinkle in delight every time she speaks of her post. However, she was quick to say that she was not enamored by the fact that she now has power over the residents. *"Gagamitin ko dito ang mga natutunan ko sa Kalahi-CIDSS, tutulongan ko ang mga kababaihan na maging mas asertibo sa mga bagay at huwag matakot kung alam naman na wala silang pagkakamali (I will use what I learned in Kalahi-CIDSS so I can help the other women become more assertive and to not be afraid if they know they have done nothing wrong)",* she stated.

She makes sure that she will do everything she can to prove that she will be the voice of the women in their community, that despite all the challenges that the barangay present to her, she will never lose her heart to serve. *"Habang hinahamon ako, lalo akong lumaban (The more I am faced with challenges, the more I will fight)"*.

More than the position she had for herself, she is grateful to Kalahi-CIDSS for the opportunities that were opened for her because of her involvement in the Project. Not only she has been given a chance to serve the barangay, she was also able to imbibe the values that Kalahi-CIDSS inculcated, specifically on the matter of gender equality.

Carmelina hopes that in the near future, the residents of Brgy. Kayduke will be able to change their perception towards women in general, and that more women will be encouraged to serve and be part of the barangay local government.

When Wives Volunteer:

KALAHI-CIDSS
in the Domestic Setting



A couple's time for chances and changes

By Mayrose Urbano-Cariño

The sight of the cold dawn mist that drapes the mountains and the mighty Abra River signalling another radiant Cordillera morning has always fascinated visitors to Langiden, but not the locals who were used to such early morning panorama that, for them, is just the start of another workday.

Thus, even before sunrise, Maricel and Glenn Beroña have already taken their coffee, washed their trusty tricycle, cooked, and set the breakfast table for their brood of three. Not long after, Glenn would start plying the route to town as the children leave for school. Maricel would stay at home to do the rest of the household. All these formed part of the household routine, their typical mornings.

Things changed when Maricel became a Kalahi-CIDSS community volunteer. When she started leaving home early to volunteer, Glenn was not happy about it. Quarrels ensued because Maricel could not always be at home to do the housework that her husband believed to be her primary responsibility. In many rural communities like Langiden, men are seen as breadwinners while the women stay at home. Household work is seldom a shared responsibility.

Maricel does not share such view because she had seen women earning their keep outside the home, and yet they were able to adapt to their various roles and responsibilities.



Maricel welcoming the visit of DSWD staff



Maricel narrates her story

Maricel was originally from Florida, Pampanga. When she met Glenn in 2001, it was not “love at first sight” but his persistence as a suitor impressed her. She fell in love. They started a family of their own, depending on Glenn’s earnings as a construction worker.

When they had their first child, they decided to settle in Langiden, Glenn’s hometown.



Maricel prepared lunch for her children's meal

For Maricel, this meant embracing a new way of life – new culture, neighbors, and so forth. She had to adjust to the new environment, something that she managed to do well enough, according to Glenn. They were blessed with three children – Glemar, 11, Giselle, 9, and Princess, 5.

Maricel believed that their problem, as a couple, was finding a balance for their daily activities, and not the fact that her husband thinks that a woman's place is in the home. It started when Maricel attended a village assembly where she got to know the Kalahi-CIDSS Project of DSWD. She liked the project so much that, according to community facilitator Roxan Ramirez, Maricel attended the subsequent meetings. Maricel tried convincing Glenn to be part of the project but the issue remained on the time spent outside, instead of being at home. *"Narigat talaga nga agibalanse ti oras lalo no sika ti babae ti pagtaengan* (It is really hard to balance time especially when you are the woman of the house)," Maricel said. Sometimes she left home early and came home late. Thus, her chores were undone and supper was late. Tired, she would have wanted to ask her husband to cook supper but she cannot express that.

Glenn admitted that his participation in Kalahi-CIDSS was half-hearted saying that *"haan ko talaga ikaskaso dagidyay maar-aramid idi, no maminsan umayak, no maminsan haan, ta kailangak nga agpasada* (I was not that serious about it; sometimes I would join, other times I did not because I have to drive the tricycle)." Still another reason why he chose to keep away was that he thought the Kalahi-CIDSS project was only for women. This thinking persisted until a community facilitator talked to him. Maricel said that the facilitator explained to them the equal responsibility of a father and a mother during a gender sensitivity training.

Since then, changes took place in their household. Glenn started helping his wife to cook and wash clothes. It was a relief to Maricel who continued her volunteer work, having resolved the tension between her and her husband.

“Na-realize ko nga babae man o lalaki basta kayat na nga aramiden ti pag-imbagan na, agaramid nga agaramid isuna ti paraan (I realized that be it a woman or man, as long as they want to be better, they will find ways),” Maricel said.

At the construction stage of the flood-control project, the community’s sub-project funded by Kalahi-CIDSS, Maricel worked as a laborer and she earned a daily wage. The money went into the household expenses. Being a laborer meant carrying heavy rocks to the construction site but Maricel did not seem to mind. She said: *“Kinanayonak nga busy ken adda kinanayon nga magungun-ud ko ket naragsakak nga makatulong (It keeps me busy and productive and I’m happy that I’m helping).”*

Glenn saw Maricel’s determination to support the project. *“Nakitak met nga uray marigrigatan ni misis, ket itultuloy na latta isunga sinuportarak ti kayat na (Even though my wife experienced difficulty, she still continued so I supported what she wanted [to do]).”*

Maricel and Glenn have learned a lot from joining the project. They were able to manage time even though they perform various roles within and outside their home. But, more than that, they have learned to become “gender sensitive,” as manifested by their realization that men should also share in household chores. This new outlook opens up their lives to changes for the better. Thus, while they are still up before sunrise and busy with various tasks, their Cordillera mornings have become even more radiant than before.

Bigger and bolder

By Angelica de las Alas

At first glance, Florida Rayos's fragility and coyness define her, and not the strength and tenacity that she earned through years of being a housewife and a mother of five in the small village of Manhac in Looc, Romblon.

The toughest job for her is doing housework and raising a family. The tasks combined to become an endless cycle of washing, cooking, cleaning, and looking after the needs of children and husband. Being a mother and a wife means being available any time to do things for everyone, no matter how small or important they are.

Her selflessness could probably explain why she joined Kalahi-CIDSS, which requires her to spend time to work on a project that would benefit their community.

Community projects are often started in rural areas by government agencies and politicians without consulting the locals. Sometimes, the projects are not even what the communities needed. Thus, Kalahi-CIDSS impressed her because it encourages participation. "*Kakaiba yung Kalahi eh, sa tao mismo manggagaling kung anong dapat na proyekto* (Kalahi is different, it is the people who decide)", she said. She never knew of a similar participative project implemented in their community.

Florida attended all the community meetings of Kalahi-CIDSS. In the course of her interaction with others, she realized that she should be concerned not only with her family but with the larger community as well. "*Nakita ko na hindi lang ako sa bahay lang na nag-aalaga sa pamilya ko, na pwede rin akong makatulong dito sa barangay namin* (I realized that I am not only capable of taking care of my family, that I can also be of help to our barangay)".

For others, such concern does not need much thought. But for Florida, whose world is bound to housework and family, such realization is significant. This means that she can respond to bigger challenges, that is, caring for others that she has no close ties with. "*Kasi iniisip ko na sa pamilya ko lang ako, pero maganda din yung nakakalabas ka at nakikita mo kung ano yung nangyayari sa paligid mo* (I always think that what I do is for my family, but it is also quite nice to go out and see what's happening around you)", she said.

Her husband, Jesus, used to be jealous of Florida's newfound interest. "It's just a waste of time," he was wont to say. Jesus wanted Florida to devote her energy to caring for him and their family. In other words, Florida's husband shares the traditional view that women are meant to serve the men and their children as their life-long goals. "*Ganun ang gusto ng asawa ko, pero ako gusto ko din naman na malaman at maging parte ako kung ano man ang nangyayari sa*

barangay namin (My husband wants my time to be devoted only to our family, but then I also want to know and be part of whatever it is that happening in our barangay)”).

This time Florida did not listen to her husband. She continued attending Kalahi-CIDSS activities. Because she was active right from the start, she was voted to be part of the procurement team for the sub-project implementation. With such huge responsibility, Florida started thinking about how she would divide her time between running her family and Kalahi-CIDSS, both of which have started to become complicated.

One time, she failed to cook dinner and forgot to do the laundry when she was busy scouting for fair prices of construction materials for a road project. Sometimes she would go home late and her children were already asleep. Those were instances when her husband was not pleased because she was spending more time outside their home because of the project. Her husband would confront her by asking if what she was doing would benefit their family. But Florida refused to give in. *“Sinasabi ko talaga sa asawa ko na hindi man ito mismo para sa atin, marami naman ang makikinabang. Lagi kong kinekwentuhan ang asawa ko tungkol sa Kalahi. Lagi kong pinapaliwanagan. Sinasabi ko lahat-lahat para alam nya kung paano ang proseso at kung ano ang papel na ginagawa ko* (I tell my husband that even if the sub-project will not directly benefit us, many will still benefit from it. I always tell stories of Kalahi-CIDSS to him. I tell him everything so that he also knows the process and the role that I play in the project.).”

The tension remained in Florida’s household. Notwithstanding her husband’s belief, Florida thinks that there is nothing wrong in engaging with Kalahi-CIDSS, hence there is no need to end her community work. Her husband finally stopped nagging Florida when their eldest daughter got a scholarship with the help of some volunteers of Kalahi-CIDSS. *“May isa kasing volunteer nun na nagsabi sa akin tungkol dun sa scholarship. Sakto naman kasi yung panganay namin ay papasok na sa college, at wala naman kaming malaking pera para mapag-aral siya. Dahil sa tulong nila, nakakuha ang anak ko ng scholarship, hindi na kami na-mroblema”* (There is a volunteer who told me about the scholarship. Our eldest is entering college, and we don’t have the money to send her to school. Because of their help, my daughter got the scholarship).

Through that scholarship, suddenly Jesus saw Florida’s involvement as beneficial to their family as well. He realized that with the network established by her wife, their daughter was able to go to college. *“Hindi sapat yung kinikita ko bilang karpentero para mapaaral lahat ng mga anak namin. Kaya laking pasalamat talaga naming dahil nakakuha ng scholarship ang anak ko. Malaking tulong yun talaga.”* (My earnings as a carpenter are not enough to send all our children to school. We are very thankful that our daughter got a

scholarship. It's a big help to us).

Jesus's epiphany translates to better family relations. He started doing the housework when Florida is away. "Dahil nga lagi akong wala sa bahay, yung asawa ko ang gumagawa ng mga gawain ko dati, mag-alaga sa mga bata at magluto. Hindi na rin siya masyado nagtatanong tungkol sa ginagawa ko sa Kalahi CIDSS, kasi naririnig din niya sa mga kapit-bahay namin yung paghihirap ng mga volunteer tulad ko. Kaya nabago din pananaw niya, na hindi na siya tumututol," (Because I rarely spend time at home, my husband does the things that I used to do at home, like taking care of the kids and cooking. He stopped asking me about Kalahi-CIDSS, because he heard about the sacrifices of volunteers like me, from our neighbors. That evidently changed his perception of Kalahi-CIDSS).

"Ngayong natapos ang proyekto, nakita ng asawa ko ang laking ginhawa ng daan na yun para sa iba naming ka-barangay. Nakikita ko din sa asawa ko na proud din siya sa akin, kasi naging parte ako nun (Now that the project is completed, my husband saw its effects. I noticed that my husband has grown proud of me and of what I did)," she said. She also found out that Jesus would tell his friends about her role in constructing the Kalahi-CIDSS road project.

Now, it can be told that what started as a source of tension in Florida's family eventually became a bond that strengthens it. In the course of the project, Florida has discovered her inner strength and her capacity to take on bigger tasks she hasn't known before. In the end, Florida wins out.

Life is . . . a ‘habal-habal’ ride

by Joan Baclay

Riding a “habal-habal,” or a motorcycle for hire, from the town proper of Motiong to an uphill barangay like Calantawan, requires alertness to maintain balance in order to complement driver’s deft maneuvers along the rough zigzag road.

Calantawan, located in one of the outlying areas in the mountains of Motiong, has 62 households. To reach it, one has to take a 30-minute ride on a “habal-habal,” the local name for a motorcycle with extended seats so that more passengers can be accommodated, with safety being compromised. Villagers have always been concerned about the safety of their children walking or riding a habal-habal to and from school, particularly during instances of emergencies, because of Calantawan’s remoteness.

Thus, when Kalahi-CIDSS came to their village to implement a sub-project, the residents prioritized construct a 2.60 km concrete path walk connecting Calantawan with New Minarog, a nearby barangay. It is just a concrete path but it would serve the needs of school children especially during the rainy season. It also provides some relief to those taking the “habal-habal” as the ride is somewhat smoother.

Implementing the project required the cooperation of residents who willingly joined the effort.

Among them was the couple Inocencio and Elena Labong. They are landless farmers, so they both worked as tenants. In addition to working in the farm like planting and harvesting rice, Elena had to do all the housework and take care of their four children. This double burden is common in the rural areas where women are seen to have the primary responsibility of running the household. Men are not expected to do housework.

However, Elena said that Inocencio is different because he does the housework. She said her husband babysit their children whenever he could. That is why when Kalahi-CIDSS gave them a seminar on gender sensitivity under the Community Empowerment Activity Cycle (CEAC), it was easy for them to relate to the lectures on the equality of women and men.

Inocencio said that when Elena joined the team to implement the project, she spent more time outside their home, and that made Inocencio conscious of doing the housework. “Han una, importante ha balay la hiya (Elena). Yana, kay maupay man. Maupay gad nga ha trabahuon nagbulig kay para ha akon magaan [Before, what’s more important is just for her (Elena) to stay at home. Now, it’s even better. Better because the work gets lighter if we do it together].”

Inocencio does not find it odd that Elena is among the paid laborers of the sub-project, just like him. They both earned as a result.

For Elena, working in the project meant even more than simply earning some money. *“Ako naman para ha akon, nagka may-ada ghap ako experience parte pakig atubang hin mga tawo. Kuan man gud ako dati, awdunon ako. Tapos yana pag meeting namon parang nahibabaru na gihap ako pakig atubang hit mga tawo (For me, I learned to face people, because I used to be a shy person. Now, during meetings I have the courage to face them),”* Elena said.

Elena became the project’s bookkeeper, a task she considered a challenge because she only reached first year high school. But she learned to become good bookkeeper, something that she was really proud of.

Life has grown kinder to Inocencio and Elena these days. Their family receives a regular subsidy under the DSWD Conditional Cash Transfer or the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program which funds the education and health needs of their children. Inocencio was elected as one of the barangay councilors. However, they continued to help each other at home. Thus, if life is a *“habal-habal”* ride, theirs is somewhere along a better path for now.



Self-Discovery
through
Volunteerism



A Woman Welcomes New Experience

Eunice G. Montaos

It is said that life gives us two options: to exist or to live. A woman, for example, could live according to the dictates of society's conventions or she can break free from such conventions, fiercely proving that she can do more than what she was expected.



Charito Valdez is one of the community leaders in Sibagat, Agusan del Sur, defying the long-held belief that women should~1

Charito Ybanez Valdez, 36, a mother of four from Sibagat, Agusan del Sur, chose the latter.

Charito grew up thinking that every wife and mother's destiny is to wash plates and clothes, and take care of the children and husband. In fact, when she got married, she did all that and more. But somehow Charito thought that she is capable of doing things other than housework.

Such a chance came when Kalahi-CIDSS, an anti-poverty special project of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) was introduced in their barangay. Using a community participation approach, the project encouraged everyone in the community to participate.

This novel way of implementing a project got Charito interested. *"Nag-desisyon ko nga mag-volunteer aron maka-tisting pud ko ug buluhaton nga lahi ra sa akong pirmi na nga ginabuhay sa balay. Gusto pud ko nga makatabang sa among barangay (I decided to volunteer so that I can try another work other than my usual tasks at home. I also would want to help our barangay),"* Charito shared.

At first, she did not say much during the meetings held for the project. She was a high school graduate and probably was better educated than the others in the community but she was not that confident to speak before a crowd. *"Maulawon gyud kaayo ko ug wala gyud ko kumpyansa sa akong kaugalingon kay gamay ra ang akong kahibalo (I am really shy and I don't have the confidence in myself because I have little knowledge on many things),"* she said.

What also held her back was Eddie, her farmer husband. He discouraged her from joining Kalahi-CIDSS's activities because, for him, it is a waste of time *"Wala kay makuha anang pag-volunteer nimo, maayo pa nga diri ra ka sa balay, mag-atiman sa atong panimalay* (You will not get anything from being a volunteer; it would be better if you stay in the house and take care of our household)," he told her when she expressed her interest to volunteer in the community project.

However, she patiently asked Eddie's permission so that she could join the training in the sub-project implementation. She learned a lot from the training – new words, new ways of thinking – that she believed could help her grow as a person. Yet, it wasn't easy to convince her husband. *"Akoa siya gi-ingnan nga ang kani nga oportunidad dili ni pirmi ug usahay lang* (I told him that this opportunity does not always come," Charito said. *"Dili man nato mahimo nga maghatag ug kwarta para makapatukod ug mahal nga proyekto, naa ra man ta mabuhat, mao na ang mag-serbisyo* (We cannot afford to contribute to the project, but we can do something -- service)."

She promised her husband that she would not neglect her household chores. When he said yes, Charito felt she won half the battle for her empowerment.

An unexpected position

Her fellow volunteers thought that Charito is a natural leader but she did not believe them. When they voted her as the Barangay Sub-project Management Committee (BSPMC) chairperson, she was surprised but welcomed it as a huge challenge. *"Wala gyud ko nag-expect nga ako ilang pilion nga mahimong BSPMC. Ga-hilomhilom ra man tawon ko atong mga asembliya namo* (I did not expect that they will choose me to be the BSPMC. I was so silent during our assemblies)," she shared.

It was not the first time that Charito joined a community project. *"Tungod daw kay naka-apil ko sa una sa usa ka proyekto nga na-implementar pinaagi sa mga kooperatiba sa among barangay unya nakita nila nga masaligan ko mao nga ako ilang gi-rekomenda* (Since I once served as a member in a project implementation in our barangay through cooperatives and they observed that I am trustworthy that is why they recommended me)," she added.

It was in 2007 that the first sub-project, a cable foot bridge, was implemented in Barangay Tag-oyango, under what is known as the Poder y Prosperidad dela Comunidad Project (Empowerment and Development of Communities) or PODER, which is implemented by Kalahi-CIDSS in partnership with the Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo (AECID).

As a leader, Charito supervised and managed the project's implementation. That was not easy. When there were delays in the project, such as in the delivery of



Women volunteers and beneficiaries in Sibagat, Agusan del Sur

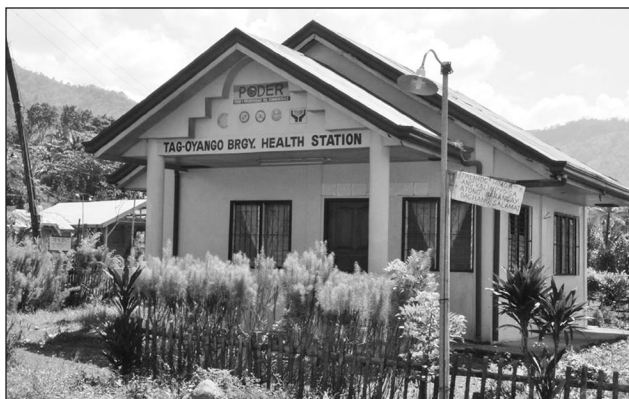
construction materials, she was almost without sleep from worrying. She knew that she would be blamed if things go wrong. But the worse thing was when some people started saying: “Nah, ngano lagi babae inyo gipili nga BSPMC, langan kaayo, hinay mudiskarte (Why is it that you chose a female BSPMC, things are delayed because she is very slow and weak).” Comments like that affected Charito so much that she even thought of quitting. But she decided to continue overseeing the project to prove that she could bring it to completion.

Charito’s husband also complained because she goes home late. He would then remind her of her promise not to neglect her household duties and caring for their four children. Scenes like these are common, of course, in farming households where men dominate decision-making and the women and children were expected to merely follow. Women’s place is believed to be in the home and when the women violate that, they undermine the stability of the family. However, despite the scolding of her husband, Charito was undeterred.

When the footbridge was finished, it was also when Charito’s husband started to appreciate her efforts, maybe because he was part of the project, albeit indirectly. “*Saksi man jud akong bana sa tanan nako kahago ug sakripisyo mahuman lang gyud ang proyekto* (My husband was a witness to all my hard work and sacrifices for the project to be completed),” she said.

“*Ana pa gani siya nga sa akong pagtutok sa proyekto labaw pa daw nako ang nag-kapitan o nag-kagawad* (He even said that in my involvement with the project, I did more than the barangay captain and councilors),” Charito said. “*Mao nga pagkatukod jud sa maong bridge, proud nagud dayon akong bana sa akoa nga ako ang BSPMC ato nga mga proyekto, char!* (My husband was very proud that I was at the helm of the BSPMC in that project, char!).”

After the footbridge project, Charito volunteered as bookkeeper in the barangay because she had been trained in recordkeeping during the Kalahi-CIDSS project. But the footbridge project was not her last under Kalahi-CIDSS.



This health station is one of the sub-projects constructed in the community through the leadership of Charito Valdez

Tag-oyango was again blessed with another Kalahi-CIDSS sub-project in 2010, this time a health station. Charito was again chosen to head the project because of her leadership skills. Again, the project was completed as planned.

Three years later, in 2013, a two-classroom school building, also a sub-project under the Kalahi-CIDSS supported by Australian Agency for International Development (AusAid), was constructed in the community. Charito's string of accomplishments was unrivaled in her community that immensely benefited from her style of leadership.

Significant gains and changes

Looking back, Charito said it was her experience as chair of BSPMC that made her gain self-confidence. Before that, as a housewife, she was quite shy and unsure of herself. *"Tungod sa Kalahi-CIDSS, nibaga akong nawong ug dili na ko maulaw muatubang ug tao* (Because of Kalahi-CIDSS, I am no longer "onion-skinned" and shy in approaching and conversing with other people)." *"Pinaagi pud sa proyekto akong nahimaymay nga naa ra man pud diay ko talent ug ikabuga* (Through the project, I discovered my hidden talents)." Charito said she has changed a lot, and for the better.

"Dako akong kalipay nga adunay proyekto sama ani nga wala naghikaw nga makaapil kami nga mga babae (I'm very happy that there is a project that included women)," Charito said. *"Ang akong mga kaagi sa Kalahi-CIDSS dili gyud nako makalimtan. Kung unsa na ko karon, dako ang akong naambag sa proyekto* (I will never forget my experiences in Kalahi-CIDSS. The project made me the kind of person that I am now)," she said.

There are other women leaders like Charito who found in Kalahi-CIDDSS projects a chance to improve themselves and their communities. They have proven that women could take on responsibilities that would benefit everyone, male or female, in their communities. Hence, they have sown the seeds of gender equality.

The mighty rose

She bagged and sifted gravel and sand; she also shoveled, mixed, poured, and then smoothed the freshly poured concrete. She carried hollow blocks, one at a time, and even filled the huge water drum. All these she had learned within a month of exposure to masonry at the construction site.

“Kaya talaga ng mga babae. Kung pahina-pahina ka, magugutom ka. Hindi ka mabubuhay sa pagnanakaw. Kailangan ka magtrabaho ng maayos. Sige lang hanggang kaya. Kung kaya ng lalake, kaya ng babae [Women can do it. If you’re weak, you will starve. You can’t live by stealing. We need to work. For as long as I can, I will do it. If men can do it, women can also do it],” said Rosinie Oximar, also known as Rose, a mother of two.



Rose Oximar smiles widely while in the construction site she is working in

Rose embraced hard work and sacrifice, when her husband left her in 2013, for reasons that she never knew. Hers was a love story that was quick to bloom when they met in Manila in 2006; she even followed him to his home province in Bicol. However, after seven years and two sons, he left her. To survive, Rose scavenged the garbage dump for recyclable items that can be sold. Her weekly income of P300 was only enough to buy rice.

It was through the Kalahi-CIDSS project that she found a larger meaning for hard work and sacrifice. When she joined the project in 2013, she stood out from among the 550 women in her community because of her determination and optimism. She believed that building a health center, in a remote community of Tagaytay in Gubat, Sorsogon province, was urgent. Soon, Rose became active in the project, not only because she stands to benefit from it, but also because the community has long been deprived of a decent health facility. She decided to join the construction crew members, all of them men, hoping to earn a daily income.

“Nagtanong ako kung pwede pumasok at tinanggap ako. Dagdag kasi yun sa kikitain [I inquired if I could work and I was accepted. It’s an additional earning],” she said.

Masonry was no easy job. When she used the shovel for the first time, Rose thought that it was such a grueling task. But she liked hauling and scooping cement during the mixing process as these are less arduous although equally challenging.

Her tenacity was easily noticed by other volunteers in the construction site. *“Nagpapala at nagmimikskla talaga ‘yan ng semento si Rose [Rose really shovels and mixes cement],”* said Rodolfo Escota. It was the first time that Escota saw women doing construction work in Tagaytay.

Her home and the “hard hat” zone

While working in the project, Rose learned about time management. *“May oras ako para sa gabos na gibo sa baluy para hindi ako mapagal masyado [I allot time for everything at home to avoid getting too tired],”* she said.

Rose would wake up at 3:00 a.m. to fetch water from a dug well that runs dry a few hours later. She does the laundry at 5:00 a.m. then prepares breakfast and lunch for herself and her sons. At 7:00 a.m., she reports for work. Before she leaves, she would tell her kids, Vhert and Jevart, to stay inside the house because, if they behave, she would buy them toys.

Rose earned a daily wage of P252 in the construction site. She did whatever the supervising mason told her to do. The day’s work was literally backbreaking but Rose still found time to go to the dumpsite afterwards to look for recyclable trash.

Escota said that Rose reports to work on time, something that would have been impossible given her circumstances. She also did her work well that, according to Escota, she could easily match the skills of men workers.

“Mahigusun talaga ini palibhasa naging single parent. Hinihimo niya ang makakaya para masuportaran ang mga bata [She is very diligent knowing the fact that she is a solo parent. She will do anything to support her children],” he added.

Last woman standing

It is not that Rose did not recognize the difficulty of working in the construction site, rather, she knew that she could do it if given a chance to prove herself. There are times that tiredness took over her but she did not want the male workers to notice it because she might lose her job.

In the construction plan, women were only given three days to work as laborers while the men continue with their full schedule. However Rose negotiated with the barangay officials and project supervisors to extend her work for a few more weeks.



Rose Oximar at work

“Sinubukan ko kung makaya ko. Kaya naman ng katawan ko kaya sinubukan ko pa rin. Eh nakayanan kaya tumagal ako ng higit pa sa isang linggo. [I tried if I could continue working. My body endured the load of work so I also tried. I did it and even stayed for more than a week.]” she said. Of the three women in the construction site, only Rose made it until the last day. *“Ako na lang na bayi ang nagtrabaho diyan. Nag-iisa [I’m the only woman laborer left. The only one],”* she said, sounding happy and victorious.

Aside from learning construction work, Rose acquired other skills. She related well to her colleagues, even joined their bantering. She also learned how to work with a group.

As she promised her sons, part of her first wages went into buying toys that they themselves picked at the market in Gubat. In all, she earned P1,515 at the end of the week. She bought clothes, food, and some pencil and paper for Jever. But for her sons, the best gifts are the toys that they wanted for Christmas.

“Malaki ang tulong nito (trabaho sa project) sa amin kasi wala akong ibang trabaho kundi ang pagbabasura at saka lumayas ang aking asawa [It is a big help for us because the only work I know is to make money out of garbage and my husband left us],” Rose said.

Rose’s story has shown that if women are given access to economic opportunities that are available to men – training, information, technology, technical assistance, and so forth – they could end their poverty. Government agencies working on anti-poverty projects are mandated to advance the economic rights of women and their participation. Through paid work, not only were their material needs taken care of, they were able to gain communication and leadership skills that could be useful in the future. Moreover, women could

come to realize that their role transcends the confines of their homes and, in fact, contributes to the well being of their community.

The health center was inaugurated in October 2013. It was an emo The new health center meant better services and a much-needed privacy for patients undergoing medical consultations in Tagaytay. Before, the vaccinations and medical check-ups were done in the crowded barangay hall.

Rose was proud of her contribution to her community. She recounted how she, under the sweltering heat and wearing oversized rubber boots, layers of clothes, gloves and a hardhat, had built the health center.

“Pinagyayabang ko sa mga kapitbahay ko na naghalo ako ng semento,” she said, giggling.



The completed health station

Voices of women on volunteerism

*As told to Simeon Remata III, Regional Social Marketing Officer,
Central Visayas*

Two women from Negros Oriental share their how rewarding their experiences are in serving as Kalahi-CIDSS volunteers, which enabled them to help their communities, their families, and themselves

Mothers propose a day care center

We never had a decent day care center before. Our children used to go to the old and rundown barangay office where sunlight bathed the tables and chairs. When it rains, the children were crammed in a corner away from the dripping roof.

As a farming community, we plant sugar cane, corn and root crops to earn a living. We also planted vegetables and raise livestock. Life here in Barangay New Namangka in the town of Mabinay is easy; we stay contented with what we have and we never complained.

Before I became a volunteer, I was a housewife taking care of my four children. But, when the Kalahi-CIDSS Project arrived in the community, things began to change. People started to get curious and participated more in the affairs of our barangay. I noticed that my perceptions had changed after I joined the trainings and seminars. I learned that the primary purpose of the project is to educate one's self. I also volunteered because I thought that even if I did not get anything in return, seeing my community change for the better is good enough for me.



*New Namangka
Mabinay
community
volunteers
accounting
expenses of
constructing
their community
project*

Being the project preparation team leader, there were times when I had no choice but to leave my family to do my task as a community volunteer. I headed a small group of volunteers to conceptualize and write a project proposal based on the results of the situational analysis we conducted in the community. We also had to do site inspection to identify problems in the community. Then the problems were discussed in the general assembly where we gathered comments and suggestions to improve the project proposal. In preparing the proposal, we tried to be creative.

One day, we attended a forum in the town which was participated in by representatives from all the barangays of the municipality. We presented our day care center project proposal. The other barangays also presented their projects like school buildings, roads, health centers and water systems. While listening to the presentations, I was hoping that our project would be selected. When the forum ended, our day care center was among the priority projects of our town.

When the funds became available, we started the day care construction. Most of the women in our village, who were also volunteers like me, helped by carrying river rocks for grinding. They also carried sacks of sand. We did, however, left the hard labor in constructing the centre to the men in our village. The men happened to be the husbands of the community volunteers, thus the men were able to get additional income for their families. Although the men did the hard work, we liked to think that we were the supervisors of the construction because we did the accounting, procured the materials, and paid the wages of the workers.

Despite the monsoon, we completed the construction of the day care center in no time. The center was then turned over to the barangay council and an ordinance was passed for its operation and maintenance. The municipal government provided a day care teacher and we organized the parents-teachers association. All these we did because we wanted our children to have a safe and comfortable place to learn.

My name is Jhona Dagunan, and I am a community volunteer.

The reward for the hard work

When they asked me to be a community volunteer, I immediately accepted the task because aside from the skills that I could learn, I knew that it would give me an opportunity to serve our barangay.

The mountain village of Nagbinlod, in the town of Sta. Catalina, Negros Oriental, experiences water shortage. Water is abundant during the rainy season, which is a time for farming. However, in the dry season, we shifted to planting root crops that require little water.

Getting drinking water is much harder. If people could afford it, they would buy bottled water in the town. For most of us, the nearest drinking water source is an artesian well by the river, some two kilometers from our village. We drink the water from the well but we usually boil it first because there are instances when children get sick from drinking the water.

As a volunteer, I experienced hardships because I could not take care of my own children and husband when I attended trainings and seminars. I had to wake up early in the morning to prepare food for my family, clean the house, water the plants, and soak the clothes in detergent for washing in the evening when I returned home. My neighbors would tell me that I sacrificed my family for the project. However, I told them that what I was doing was not for myself but for the community. Sometimes, I felt that I was not a good mother to my children. I found out that other volunteers, mothers like me, also felt the same way.

I was blessed with an understanding husband that whenever I was not around, he would do the chores and sometimes the laundry. He understood why I needed to be a community volunteer and that we have to be concerned with our family and our community. The negative comments from the neighbors stopped when they saw that our water project is almost complete and functional. It took awhile for people to see that women can also make changes in the community while they take care of their families.

With my accomplishment as a volunteer, the local officials in our village appointed me as the barangay secretary. I owe a lot to Kalahi-CIDSS because I gained new knowledge and skills. I hope to pass on the value of helping our community to my children.

My name is Flora Troza, and I am a community volunteer.



Community Volunteers of Nagbinlod Sta Catalina Negros Oriental with Flora Troza wearing green shirt at leftmost side of t~1

HOUSEWIVES NO MORE: How Kalahi-CIDSS Provided Opportunities for Women

Marko Davey D. Reyes

There are jobs that require humility, and among them is doing pedicure and manicure. Often done by women, nail cleaning and painting would need practical patience because removing the dirt in someone else's toenails and fingernails demonstrates diligence.

Gina Pagente, 40, of Barangay Poblacion, Kauswagan, Lanao del Norte, does manicure and pedicure for a living. She would visit homes to look for customers and yet, it is not every day that she earns her keep. But more than the difficulty of finding regular customers, her biggest worry before was how she was seen in her community, in which the prevailing belief was that women should not work outside their homes. Her husband, Rolly, does not seem to mind but in their community the sight of women earning a living is uncommon.

Gina and Rolly, now married for 15 years and with a teenage daughter, lived in a community of Maranaos and Bisayans. Despite cultural differences, they tried to co-exist peacefully although tensions were unavoidable. The Bisayans deferred to the customs and traditions of the Maranaos, either to avoid misunderstanding or because the latter have settled there ahead of the Bisayans. Maranaos are predominantly Muslims while the Bisayans are Christians.



Gina Pagente narrates the gender dynamics in their municipality

While in both Maranao and Bisayan households the men are recognized heads of the family, the Maranao males restricted their wife's activities within the confines of the home so there would be little exposure for them in the community. For some reason, the Bisayans eventually adopted this practice of confining women to household concerns.

Gina did not approve of such practice because she believed the women who are capable of doing work outside their homes are deprived of economic opportunities. As a result, she said, they have grown dependent on the men. For her, a two-income household is better, as was her case.

Rolly works as a civilian security staff with the Municipal Government of Kauswagan. However, his job is temporary and his salary is sometimes delayed. Thus Gina and Rolly are always worried where to get the money for their household needs.



Involvement in livelihood activities is uncommon for women in Kauswagan, Lanao del Norte

“Agig abag sa pangita ug kabuhi-an, naningkamot ko nga makakat-on ug paghinlo sa kuko sa kamot ug tiil. Maayo nalang kini nga maka-income pud ko aron matagbo ang ubang panginahanglan sa pamilya”, Gina shares. (To help raise our income, I tried learning pedicure and manicure. In this way I would be able to have additional cash to cover some expenses for the family.)

Gina did not work in nail and beauty salons where work hours are fixed. Instead she does home service. On days that she goes home empty-handed, she dips into her savings intended to buy nail polish and nail cleaning materials. Eventually, she ended her nail business.

It was in such circumstance that she found the time to join the Payapa at Masaganang Pamayanan (PAMANA) Project under the Kapit-Bisig Laban sa Kahirapan – Comprehensive and Integrated Delivery of Social Service (Kalahi-CIDSS) Program of the Department of Social Welfare and Development in the municipality of Kauswagan.

She was impressed by the program because the implementation is wholly dependent on the volunteers from the community. Community participation is present at all times – from identifying the project, planning, and disbursing the funds during its implementation. Above all, it does not discriminate against women who are given equal chance as the men to work in the project.

Barangay Poblacion residents have decided to build a drainage canal since flooding was a perennial problem.

When they started hiring for the project, Gina was taken in as timekeeper, earning her P200 daily. But her stint lasted for only for four days because others should also be given a chance to work in the project. *“At least maka ingon ko nga part ko sa project tungod sa akong pag volunteer ug tungod kay lakip ko nitrabaho ani (At least I would be proud to say that I am part of the project, because I volunteered for it and because I worked on it)”, she said.*

She used part of what she earned as a timekeeper to buy nail polish and some tools she needed for her nail business. Thanks to her fresh supplies, she was able to seek out her old customers for pedicure and manicure.

“Maayo nalang kay maski kami mga babaye gitugutan nila motrabaho sa infra nga proyekto. Naanad naman gud mi nga dili makaapil ang mga babaye basta ingani nga trabaho labi na daghan lalake kay mao may naandan sa mga Maranao (One good thing was that women were allowed to work for an infrastructure project. We have been used to women cannot do this type of work, especially working with men)”, Gina said.

Rolly is thankful that Gina was able to jumpstart her nail business again. He said that Gina’s income helped the family a lot. He also approves of Gina volunteering in the community because he saw that his wife was happy and that she found meaning in it. For her part, Gina is thankful that she was part of the program. She says that her participation taught her fortitude, among others. *“Sa kadaghang problema ni abot sa akong kinabuhi, gi-pahinumdom sa ako sa Kalahi nga samtang buhi pa, adunay chansa pa nga malingkawas sa kapobrehon (With all the problems we have in our lives, Kalahi-CIDSS reminds me that as long as I am alive, there is always an opportunity to defeat poverty),”* said Gina.

To date, Gina is among the 116 women laborers who earned when they were part of the PAMANA implementation in Region 10. The number could increase when more projects will be started in communities not unlike Barangay Poblacion, which has a history of ethnic and cultural conflict. The projects implemented are seen as strategies for building peace. They also promote gender-fair practices that are now making inroads in communities that otherwise believe that women should be restricted to the home.

Gina might succeed in her nail business, and yet she might suffer some setbacks. But the values she learned from joining the PAMANA project will help her through.



Women are actively involved in the KC-PAMANA implementation in Kauswagan, Lanao del Norte

Me, Myself & My Brgy.

Women as

Active Agents

in Community Development



Wall of Fate

By Glorei Allelu Lindio and Joseph Constantine Arceo

Living along the coastline may have its benefits, but not when bad weather hits.

In the coastal community of Rizal in Tagkawayan, Quezon Province, residents get a fair share of the bounty of Ragay Gulf. But, whenever big and strong waves struck the shore, flooding follows. The residents of communities along the shoreline are affected, their homes, including their bancas, are damaged while their health is put at risk because of the volume of washed up garbage.

To protect themselves, the residents built a seawall -- 235 meters long and 3 meters tall -- in order to break the surge of waves to the coastline. This structure, made of rocks and boulders and fortified by concrete, gave the residents some peace of mind and, more importantly, protection during storms.



Necitas Estrella led the group of volunteers that worked on their Kalahi-CIDSS sub-project

“Hindi namin akalain na kaya naming mga ordinaryong tao na mag-implementa ng ganito kalaking proyekto [We never thought that ordinary citizens like us would be able to implement a large-scale project such as this],” Necitas Estrella, 53, head of the volunteers in the barangay, said while looking out at the houses protected by the seawall. “Mula sa paggawa ng proposal, pag-canvass, pagbili ng materyales sa construction, pagkwenta ng pambayad sa mga laborers at pakikipag-usap sa matataas na opisyal, lahat yan naranasan namin [From the writing of the proposal, to canvassing and purchase of the materials for

the construction, to computing the salaries of the laborers and coordinating with high-ranking officials, we went through all of that].”

But for Necitas, her unforgettable experience was hauling rocks and bags of cement despite her age. It was a physical challenge for her and the four other women volunteers who had to secure the construction materials when they were delivered.

Although there were other volunteers, including men, none were available at that moment.

“Naging malaking hamon din ang mga pagdududa sa program at sa kakayahan naming kababaihan. Narinig ko mismong sinabi ng ilang tambay - pustahan

tayo di matatapos yang project na yan dahil babae ang nagpapalakad [Their doubts about the program and our skills as women were a huge challenge for us],” Necitas recalled.

Although this strong-willed, recently widowed community leader admitted giving a mouthful to bystanders, she and the other women volunteers set out to prove them wrong.

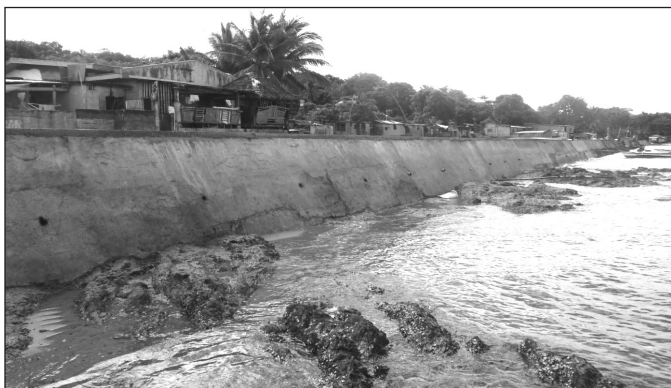
Their goal was to complete the project, no matter the requirements. They spent more time in the project than with their families in the course of the project construction. Many of those they had mobilized as volunteers were women because, at first, they did not get the support of village leaders, mostly men. However, Necitas and her team achieved a 100 percent household participation in the assemblies. During the implementation phase of the project, majority of the volunteers were women.

“Noong ginagawa na ang seawall, may mga ilang kalalakihan lamang ang kayang tumulong dahil karamihan ay mga nangingisda. Kung kaya’t mas nahikayat namin ang mga kababaihan na tumulong. Maliban sa alam nila ang kahalagahan ng proyekto, napalinawagan din sila na makakadagdag kita sila sa kanilang pamilya [When we constructed the seawall, there were only a few men who helped us out because most of them were out fishing. That is why we mobilized the women to help out. Aside from seeing the value in the project, they also knew that they would be able to earn some money for their families],” said Necitas.

Seeing the results

Necitas and her team of volunteers admitted that implementing such project was not easy. However, the sweat and time they have given for the project paid off because their community is now safe from the lashings of the waves.

“Naiiyak nga kaming mga volunteers noong matapos na ang proyekto dahil sa wakas ay natupad na rin ang aming pangarap na magkaroon ng seawall.



This seawall was built by Kalahi-CIDSS volunteers, a lot of whom are women

Ngayon ay walang bangka na nawawasak kapag sobrang malalaki ang alon. Wala na ring mga basura ang pumapasok sa aming barangay. Kitang kita sa mga residente ang saya sa pagkakaroon ng seawall [We volunteers cried when we finished the project. At last our dreams were fulfilled met with the construction of the seawall. Today, none of our boats are destroyed by the huge waves. Garbage no longer reaches our barangay from the sea. The residents are joyful because the seawall has been constructed],” Necitas shared.

Necitas admitted that at the start not everyone in the community was convinced of the necessity of the project. Some people even accused the volunteers of keeping the excess funds of the project.

“Pero pinakita namin na ginagawa namin ito para sa aming komunidad nang walang bayad. Base sa mga kwento ng kapwa residenteng naniniwala sa amin, nabuksan ang isipan nila at tumulong na rin sila sa proyekto. Para sa aming namuno, kahit nasakripisyo yung oras namin sa paghanapbuhay at yung oras namin sa pamilya, ay pursigido pa rin kami mabuo ang proyekto. Ngayong anim na buwang nang-nakalipas, napakasayang at nakaka-inspire isipin yung mga taong naniniwala sa aming kakayahan at tumutulong upang matapos ang proyekto [We showed them that we did this for our community, even without pay. From what we hear from the other residents, they now have more open minds to help out in projects such as these. For us leaders, we were determined to complete the project even if it meant sacrificing our own time for our families and for our livelihood. After six months, we are happy with and inspired by the people who believed in our abilities and helped us in completing the project],” Necitas proudly said.

Defying stereotypes: Women help build school

By Maricar M. Calubiran

It was a remarkable sight in Barangay Velasco to see women working alongside men in building a three-classroom schoolhouse. The women were wielding spades and scooping sand from piles of sand and gravel. The men were nearby, hauling bags of sand into the work area.

Barangay Velasco is one of the seven barangays in the 5th class municipality of Lemery, in Iloilo that availed of the Kalahi-CIDSS-AusAID funds. The latter were intended for the construction of classrooms and day care centers.

Velasco Elementary School lacked classrooms for its fairly large number of pupils – 272 in all, from pre-school to Grade Six. There were only five functional classrooms. The other structure inside the school was a nipa hut that functions as the principal's office.

Grade 6 pupil Christine Joy Daanoy recalled that they were occupying a very small room when they were in Grade 5. Worse, its roof was made of nipa that leaks whenever it rains.

“Sang Grade 5 ako, ang amon classroom gamay. Gagirnutok kag gaginahod. Ginhawa lang namon ka patunga sang amon mga libro para indi mabasa. Kon kaisa may gakadanlog man (When I was in Grade 5, our classroom had limited space. It was crowded and noisy. We moved our books in the middle part of the room so that it will not get wet. At times, some pupils fell because the floor was slippery).”

The need for additional classrooms prompted the villagers, teachers, and local government unit to pool their resources and raise the required cash counterpart for the construction of a new school building.



60-yr old Ana Jormigos paints the trusses for the school building

Women power

During the construction stage, only 10 women joined the project compared to 79 men. This means that women comprised 12 percent of the workforce. Despite their number, women's contribution is significant, not so much for the completion of the project but more on their empowerment. This showed that the women have overcome gender stereotypes or the common belief that women are confined to the home and not meant to do construction work.



Kalahi-CIDSS women laborers spading the sand. (l-r) Febe Arcede, Teresa Binas, Rosalina Ancuna and Gemma Tanotan

Among the 10 women laborers is 60-year-old Ana Jormigos. She tried her luck and applied as laborer. In spite of her age, she was hired. Ana laughed when she recalled that probably she was the first woman hired in the construction of Kalahi-CIDSS projects in her town. She said she applied for work because she needed the money and also thought of helping the school. *“Nagpasimpalad kami kag nabaton man kami bilang trabahador, Nabatyagan namon nga masarangan namon ang ulobrahon sa pag obra sang eskwelahan. (We tried our luck and we were accepted. We feel that we can do the work in the construction of the school building).”*

She recalled having a firm grip of the spade. She also painted the school's trusses. For her, construction work is no harder than her chores as home or her work as a barangay health worker. However it meant getting up at dawn to cook the family meal and feed her pigs. At 7 a.m. she is on her way to the construction site.

Personal counterpart

Ana said she received P180 as her daily wage, of which P20 went to a common fund as the village counterpart for the construction of the school building. The common fund from the laborers' contribution totaled P48,500.

“Happy gid ako, nabatyagan gid nakon nga naka partisipar ako sa mga ulobrahon sa eskwelahan kag sa barangay (I am happy, I feel that I had

participated in the activities of the school and barangay),” she said. She was also thinking about her grandchild who would benefit from the project.

A fellow laborer, Gemma Tanotan, was thankful for Kalahi-CIDSS for funding the project and giving women jobs. *“Bilang isa ka nanay daku gid ang benepisyo sa akon bangud may pang bayad na ako sa akon bata sa eskwelahan, makabulig gid sa akon. Sa ulihi kag sa masunod nga henerasyon mapuslan gid sang amon mga kabataan ang eskwelahan, (As a mother, the project greatly benefitted me because I earned an income to pay for my children’s tuition while the school building would be useful to my children and the future generation),”* she said.

Still another laborer, Teresa Biñas, said the daily wage of P180 she received in the Kalahi-CIDSS project is much higher than what she got as a farm laborer. *“Daku bulig sang P180 sa amon sa pag obra diri sa construction tungod kon mag obra ka sa gua pila lang ang sweldo namon P120 wala pa dala pagkaon. Kag salamat sa Kalahi-CIDSS nabuligan kami. (The daily wage of P180 has helped us a lot. I am only receiving P120 a day excluding my meals in working as laborer in the ricefield. Thank you Kalahi-CIDSS for helping us),”* she said.

Teresa is grateful to Kalahi-CIDSS for providing them the school building. *“Mapuslan gid ini sang amon mga kabataan (Our children will benefit from it).”*

Febe Arcede, 38, said working in the construction site did not alienate her from her role of being a mother and a wife. She was able to attend to her household chores, with her children helping her. Febe’s husband was working while their three children all go to school. Febe takes her lunch with her children and they all go home together in the afternoon.

She said her children understood why she had to work in the construction site. They were not ashamed of seeing their mother working with men. *“Makabulig sa mga bata ko sa allowance nila ang ginabaton ko nga sweldo, (“My wage can help my children have their school allowance).”*

Community counterpart

Teacher Nelsa Besite recalled that the school administration coordinated with the community in looking for the P300,000 cash counterpart for the project. The school administration passed a resolution asking the Iloilo provincial government for financial assistance for the construction of the school building.

Besite personally handed the resolution to Iloilo Governor Arthur Defensor Sr. *“First time ko nagtubang sa mga tawo nga may mataas nga position. Nakulbaan man ako (It was my first time to meet top officials from the Iloilo provincial government. I felt nervous),”* said Besite.

Defensor, who is a Kalahi-CIDSS supporter, facilitated the donation. The cash contribution from the provincial government amounted to P252,177.

The remaining cash requirement was provided by the parents through the Parents Teachers Association (PTA). Each parent is required to pay P165 regardless of the number of children they have.

“Sa diin pa sila mangita nga mahatag sila P165 through sa PTA, hatagan kami sang 3 classrooms. Kon eskwelahan kag community lang saligan indi kami kasarang magpatindog bisan isa lang ka classroom (Where can they find a project where the contribution is only P165 and we will have three classrooms. We could not even afford to construct one classroom),” said Besite.

As of this writing, the children are looking forward to occupying the new classroom once completed.

Indeed, women’s empowerment was behind the completion of the three-classroom building. It demolishes the notion that only men are capable of doing construction work. Moreover it demonstrates the determination of some women to work hard in order to improve themselves, and the conditions of their families and community.

Becoming an empowered woman

By Lei Madeline Mohammad, Region IX

Education has way of empowering women with knowledge, skills and self-confidence to participate in the development process. This could be seen in the life of Aurora Ornopia, 61, of Kumalarang, Zamboanga del Sur.

Aurora is regarded by her neighbors as a strong-willed woman with a soft heart for children. She works in the daycare center from 9 to 11 in the morning during weekdays, a job that is closer to what she had dreamed of -- a licensed school teacher. "Gusto gyud nako magteacher sa una mam pero dili man kaya sa among ginikanan ipaiskwela mi tanan, so akung mga igsoon laki lang ang gipahaman. So karun day care worker lang gyud ko naqualify (Before, I really wanted to become a teacher. But our parents couldn't afford to send all five of us siblings to school, so only my brothers were able to attend school)," Aurora said.

These days, she has learned to like her haf-a-day job as a daycare worker because it allows her to spend time with her three grandchildren and with her husband, Ernesto, a carpenter. Whatever she earns goes to household expenses and her grandchildren's needs in school. "Dili man regular ang iyang income. Kay wala pud sya mga materyales. So kinahanglan pud nako mag trabaho, kay para pang-iskwela sa among mga apo (He doesn't earn much from doing carpentry work regularly because he doesn't have enough tools and materials. So I really have to work to send our grandchildren to school)."



Picanan BSPMC Aurora Ornopia visits the newly constructed classrooms in Purok 5, Picanan, Kumalarang, ZDS

Aurora is keen to instill the value of education to everyone. Education, for her, could improve people's lives. "Importante gud para sa akua mam na makahaman iskwela ang mga bata kay para sa ilaha na (The top priority of most parents is to send our children to finish school)."

She recalled that her generation was not kind enough to give priority to women to be educated because of the belief that the women's place is in the home, where they should rear children and attend to domestic chores. "*Gi-una man gyud sa among ginikanan ang pagpaiskwela sa akung igsoon nga laki, kay ang bayi kuno katung sa una murag pang balay ra man daw* (Our parents had to prioritize my brothers' education over mine because they believed that women are meant to stay at home)."

But Aurora's plight when she was growing is not quite remote from the conditions of school children in their community today. For one, the students needed to travel far to attend school, and the parents spent a lot for their transportation. Parents who cannot afford the higher tuition in better schools instead enroll their children in the nearby Picanan National High School that could hardly accommodate a big number of enrollees. "*Makaluoy gyud ang mga bata mam kay gipalingkud lang man sila sa piso, naa pud sa gawas. Kay upat lang nga classroom ang naa sa Picanan High School. Human tanan estudyante sa Picanan ug uban nga barangay ang naa* (There were times that the students were just made to sit on the floor, or even outside the classroom because there were only four classrooms to accommodate all high school students of barangay Picanan and also some students coming from adjacent barangays)."

The overcrowded classrooms that presumably interfered with learning could have remained had it not been for the entry of Kalahi-CIDSS to Kumarang in December 2012. Kalahi-CIDSS helped the community construct a two-classroom building for high school students. The project had Aurora at the helm because she was voted to chair the Barangay Sub-Project Management Committee (BSPMC). At first, Aurora was worried that she might not be able to perform the duties of BSPMC chair because she has no formal education and that she has no technical skills to oversee the construction. But what pushed her into the project was her dream of providing a better school for her grandchildren and those presently in high school.

Asking people to join or volunteer in the project was not easy. The usual answer was they lacked knowledge about the things discussed during the assemblies to prepare the project. Still others did not have even a slight interest in the program. "*Dili man pud namo sila mapasanginlan kung dili sila magpartisipar. Kasabut ko nganu dili sila nagsalig kay taas man gud ang proseso. Pero nakumbinsi lang man gihapun sila kay pirmi man mi mag-istorya. Gitudluan pud mi sa Kalahi (-CIDSS). Tanan, laki ug bayi gihatagan parehas nga oportunidad* (We couldn't also blame the others who ignored us and chose not to volunteer. I somehow understood where the worries were coming from. It was the process but it was a matter of talking to them constantly. However,

Kalahi-CIDSS also capacitated us, men and women alike, and everyone was given an equal opportunity to participate),” Aurora said.

Domingo Salvacion, one of Aurora’s co-volunteers, was a witness to the lukewarm community participation. He said that the first two barangay assemblies were discouraging as they didn’t fulfill the required percentage of the criteria that the proposed sub-projects should have in order to be funded. Eventually, when the other residents became familiar with the process of preparing for the project, including the possibility of funding, they started to attend the seminars and activities of Kalahi-CIDSS. Even more, the women in the villages have started to become active. *“Bilib na gyud mi sa mga bayi. Kusug man jud si Aurora mu istorya! (We were really amazed with the women. Aurora was able to convince them!),”* said Domingo.

Fourteen women volunteers became active during the first cycle of the project in Picanan. These are the women who admitted that they do not know anything about how the project would be implemented, and yet they took part in it. When the school building was finally built, it did not only bring physical improvement in the community. More than that, it improved the outlook of the women who were part of the project, where they also earned some wages from working in it. *“Sa una wala talaga sa isip ng mga kababaihan na maghanap ng buhay para sa pamilya nila kasi dumedepende lang sila sa mga asawa nila. Pero ngayon sa Kalahi (CIDSS), natuto ang mga babae na kumilos para sa komunidad. Na makipagtulungan sa mga asawa nila para sa kanilang kinabukasan (Before women didn’t think about finding a living for their family because they depended on their husbands for that. But now, with Kalahi, women are taught to act for the community. Kalahi educated women to work hand in hand with their husbands for their future),”* said Rolando Jayme.



Aurora attends regular meeting with her co KC volunteers for important feedbacks and updates re KC implementation in their barangay



Aurora spends her free time bonding with her husband and grandchildren in their house

Aurora could best exemplify those women. Despite her limited formal education, she learns fast and possesses leadership skills that served her well. However, because of her responsibilities in the community, she had to deal with her other roles as a mother, wife, and grandmother. *“Sa una kay sigig man sya pangutana kung asa ako moadtu. Mu ingun man pud ko sa iyaha kabahin sa Kalahi”* (At first, my husband would always ask me where I am going, so I’d explain to him about the work I do with Kalahi).

Ernesto, who was sitting beside Aurora during the interview, cannot help but explain himself. *“Kasabut ko tanan unsa iyahang ginahimu. Kasabut ko nganu gusto gyud nya mahuman kanang prajeka. Murag na man sya inahan sa mga bata. Por eso, natural ra sa iya nga mubalaka sa ila* (I understood everything she was doing. I understand why she had wanted to pursue the school building project. She’s already like a mother to many kids, so it’s only natural for her to be concerned about them).

Aurora said that taking on responsibilities for the project was not easy because she has still to perform her duties at home. Feminists often call this multiple burden, a condition in which women take on community work that adds up to their work at home. The solution could be men doing the housework but this was not often realized easily because of the belief that housework is primarily the responsibility of women. Kalahi-CIDSS’s approach is to provide a chance for women to participate and lead in implementing community projects, in the hope that they would be able to convince their husbands of the value of women’s participation. Eventually, the men would be supportive of their wives’ community involvement. In the course of the project, women have transcended their role as housewives. They learned new things -- from speaking out, securing documents, buying construction materials, and even

working during the construction of project.

Aurora believed that the new school building could bring yet unknown changes to their community. *“Wa na ko nagdamgu mahuman sa eskwela. Ang gusto lang naku mahuman tanan akung mga apo (I’m no longer dreaming to finish school, I just want my grandchildren to finish their education),”* she said.

Looking back on how Kalahi-CIDSS started, Aurora believed that the women played a crucial role in the completion of the project. Thus, she said: *“Karun nahuman na ang sub-project, pirmi lang mi tanan diri mu-ingun kay unta bayi ang Kalahi-CIDSS para makapanganak pa lain nga mga proyekto.”* (Now that the sub-project is done, we say that if only Kalahi-CIDSS is a woman, maybe it could give birth to more projects.)” But her husband caught that and said: *“Pero kung wala laki, dili maka-anak ang mga bayi (But without a man, no woman can give birth!)”* And they both started laughing.

Kalahi-CIDSS: For women too

By Julie Ace Brandon Ramos

Pantukan, Compostela Valley - *“She does it like a man.”*

This is the compliment that Vanessa Diez, 33, earned from the women in her community and from the Area Coordinating Team of Kalahi-CIDSS.

Some gender advocates may not find that flattering because a woman has to measure up to a man to be recognized for her worth but, for Vanessa, it was an inspiring phrase for a woman who does the work that is unusual in their community in Brgy. Tambongon.

Vanessa recalled growing up in a household that barely made ends meet. Her father was a technician with unstable income and who rarely came home. There was a male dominated household with a belief that women’s place is in the home. Her mother stayed at home to take care of seven brood.



Vanessa Diez is an active volunteer during the discussion

To help her mother, Vanessa would sell junk food in school. What she earned had helped a little. But they were always short of cash to buy food and other basic things.

Her experience taught her fortitude. Instead of playing, she helped her mother take care of her siblings. She learned to be contented with little things that she had or not to be discouraged when there is nothing to have at all.

When her father’s income became somewhat stable, she decided to earn a degree in civil engineering even though he wanted her to be a teacher. However, on her second year, she got pregnant. She stopped schooling and got married despite the fact that she and her husband were not prepared.

Their marriage was stormy because they found raising a family an immense responsibility. At one time, she resorted to selling “banana-cue.” But she persisted. *“Hard life was nothing new to me,”* she said.

Her husband had a hard time looking for a job and she sensed that he was not really striving hard to provide for their family. For some time, their marriage suffered until her husband recognized Vanessa’s determination to save their marriage. When they reconciled, she made it clear to her husband that she needed to grow and realize her potential. They decided to work together to bring up their children to be responsible and independent.

Vanessa then became active in community work by joining church activities and government programs in their barangay. She found fulfillment in doing these activities.

“I would encourage children and parents to enlist and avail of the different services offered by government for free, like circumcision and medicines. The other women in our place refused to participate as they were already burdened with home chores. I did not want them to miss out on these opportunities.”

For her active participation, she was elected president of the Barangay Council of Women to supervise 14 “puroks” or sub-villages. Subsequently, she ran as Purok Leader and won, besting three male candidates. She was surprised by the support she got during her election bid. With Vanessa at the helm, women power began to unfold in their village.

When Kalahi-CIDSS conducted its Municipal Participatory Analysis in October 2012, Vanessa was elected to represent her purok along with two other residents. She was hesitant at first but accepted the new assignment. “The



Vanessa Diez (middle) helped and facilitated the volunteers

journey was never easy. To convince the members of the community of this new development strategy seemed to be impossible to achieve. Residents from the 14 puroks had a hard time submitting themselves to this change. They thought that what the government introduced would not be sustained anyway, so why waste time," she said.

With the construction of the 200-linear meter road through Kalahi-CIDSS, Vanessa felt she was reliving her dream to become a civil engineer.

The short span of the road is nothing when seen in the relation to the sorry state of the road from the town to their village. The dirt road had made it difficult for farmers to bring their produce to the town market, especially during rainy season. Road accidents were common. But the community participation that happened made it as if the road project was several kilometers long.

Vanessa presented the proposed road project before the Municipal Inter-Barangay Forum, where all barangays would present and defend their prioritized community sub-projects. She admitted that she became a bit emotional during the presentation. *"I could not contain my happiness; I became the voice of my community."* Their proposal was approved for funding and construction is ongoing.

For Vanessa, the process of clinching the project and overseeing it toward its completion is an accomplishment enough. She felt victorious to have risen from life's difficulties and the opportunities that Kalahi-CIDSS partly helped her to do so.

The Tres Marias of Torrijos

by Karis Vehnel C. Monton

**Editor's Note: Margery and Marinnel Vizarra were initially interviewed on 2012, which was then developed in the piece "Women's Resilience", released in the first Kalahi-CIDSS gender compendium, "Bridging the Gender Divide: Initial Gains to Women Empowerment in Kalahi-CIDSS" (2013). This is a follow-up article on their story, along with Maribeth Perin's, almost two years after they started becoming involved in Kalahi-CIDSS.*

Margerry "Marge" Vizarra, Marinnel Vizarra, and Maribeth Perin were cheerful as they recounted how the completion of their farm-to-market road project gradually changed the perception of their community towards them.



Margery Vizarra has now served as the BSPMC chairperson for two Kalahi-CIDSS cycles

Maribeth Perin ran for - and won - as a barangay kagawad. She credits her victory to her active involvement in Kalahi-CIDSS

Marinnel Vizarra did not allow her fellow villagers badmouthing her from helping her village through Kalahi-CIDSS

They are all residents of Barangay Bangwayin, a small village that some locals claim as the highest point of Torrijos, Marinduque.

Transportation to Bangwayin was far from easy. To get to the village, one would need to take a 45-minute motorcycle ride from the town center. Other means of public transport were practically unavailable, given the difficult terrain. While jeepneys go to Bangwayin, these only travel there once a week, because the unpaved roads make travel difficult.

As such, when Kalahi-CIDSS reached their village, the locals, led by the Tres Marias, so called because their names are variants of the name Mary, identified the need for the construction of a paved road as their biggest need.

The funds for a road project were given by the Kalahi-CIDSS. Concreting was not for the entire length of the road but only for a few hundred meters. But the social preparation was intensive and required attendance to several trainings. The latter took the Tres Marias away from their work at home. When Maribeth



Margerry, Maribeth, and Marinnel with DSWD staff

attended the meetings, sometimes she asked her husband, Leon, a coconut farmer, to accompany her. They would leave their two children, ages 13 and 16, behind and shut their store the whole day. *“Kung hindi ako sinuportahan ng asawa ko, sa tingin ko hindi ako nagpatuloy noon [If my husband did not support me, I think I have not continued]”*, Maribeth said.

At first, the involvement of the Tres Marias with the project was not well received by the community. Marinnel, who is a 28-year old mother of two, was in tears when she learned that the three of them were the foddors of gossip in the villages because of their “unusual” activities.

Being the members of the Barangay Sub-Project Management Committee – the leaders in the implementation of the project, the three women -- Marge, Marinnel and Maribeth— dressed up when they attended meetings so they can project a good image in front of other people. However, the opposite turned out to be the case: because many villagers were not used to seeing women that way, much more wearing lipstick, they began to spread rumors about the three women. One malicious comment was: *“Hindi naman kalahi yan, palahi yan e (This is not Kalahi, this is for breeding)”*.

The Tres Marias were not the only women who were involved in their Kalahi-CIDSS sub-project implementation. Unfortunately, the other women also experienced discrimination, albeit to a lesser degree compared to the Tres Marias, particularly from the other men who were working side by side with them in the construction site. The three recalled that during the construction phase of the road project, the men were discriminating them and pushing the women away.

The comments were disheartening, but if they were half-witted as their detractors, the three women would have quit, said Marge. Similarly, the other women volunteers did not allow the naysayers from getting the best of them. They refused to leave the project site and continued working, Maribeth

recalled, *“Sa halip na umalis ang mga babae, mas sila pa ang lumusob doon. Wala nang magawa ang mga lalaki* (Instead of leaving, the women charged the construction site, so the men had no choice but to let them work)”.

According to Maribeth, a lot of things have changed from when they started the construction work to completing the road sub-project. The most notable of that was the friendlier attitude of the villagers toward the Tres Marias.

“Nandoon na yung respeto nila. May babati na, ‘Hello, Ma’am!’ Nagpapasalamat ang mga tao kasi kahit hindi sa barangay nanggaling ang proyekto ay may natapos na proyekto [They showed respect. Some would greet, ‘Hello, Ma’am!’. The people are thankful because a project was finished even though it was not initiated by the barangay council]”.

Everyone in the community liked the road project and acknowledged the role that the Tres Marias had played.

Their experiences in Kalahi-CIDSS encouraged the women to do more for their village. For example, Maribeth ran as barangay councilor and won. She believed that her involvement in Kalahi CIDSS drew voters to support her. Because of her position, she is now able to contribute to decision making in the barangay council.

The next Kalahi-CIDSS sub-project Barangay Bangwayin will be implementing is the construction of a classroom building.

Once again, Marge is the BSPMC chairperson to oversee its construction. Although the project management committee has new members elected during the general assembly, Marge was retained as chair because of her track record as a good manager.

Their support to Marge demonstrates the changed perception of how women are regarded in the community. Before, they were belittled but now respected. Furthermore, the other villagers, including the new Kalahi-CIDSS volunteer leaders, realized just how difficult the work of the Tres Marias was during the implementation of their road sub-project.

“Na-realize nila na ang sinasabi nila noon ay mali. Nahihirapan sila umattend ng mga seminar na sunud-sunod [The newly elected BSPMC members realized that what they talked about was wrong. They find it difficult to attend in the series of trainings.]” says Maribeth.

The three women have shown how strong women are, able to withstand challenges regardless of how strong the opposition may be. Their desire to improve their community by joining Kalahi-CIDSS has made them transcend their roles of being “simple” housewives. In the course of their involvement, they have transformed their community and, most importantly, themselves.

Leaving No One Behind

By Hilbert Estacion

At 70, she holds several “academic titles,” even though she is a sixth grade dropout. Taciana Cigara, fondly called Lola Tacing, is sometimes referred to as M.D. (Murag Doctor or like a doctor), M.E. (Murag Engineer or like an engineer), and M.T. (Murag Teacher or like a teacher).



Age doesn't matter-Lola Tacing participating the community activity



Lola Tacing giving her opinion in one of the village activities

She earned these accolades because of her selfless service to her village of Kiloyao, Libungan, North Cotabato.

Lola Tacing is a well-loved grandmother because she is wise and has a funny bone. She would greet everyone as she walks toward the barangay hall every Monday to work as volunteer for all sorts of tasks. In Kiloyao, she is a source of advice and inspiration primarily because she has been through a lot of challenges in her life. If wrinkles could tell stories, hers would reveal a lot, perhaps even provide a road map on how to live a productive life.

Lola Tacing was born in 1944, to a family where daughters are less valued than sons. It was a generation that believed that sons should be educated not only because they would become breadwinners but also due to a belief they would bring honor to the family whose surname they carry. The women, after all, would get married, change their surnames, and bear children. However such belief is reinforced by poverty. Thus, Lola Tacing never went beyond elementary education and instead helped her family by working in the farm.

“Napulo kami magsu-on (We are ten in the family)”, Lola Tacing said. *“Kasagaran, kulang kaayo ang amoang pagkaon ug kwarta arun maka-eskwela kaming tanan, hinungdan nga naghunong kami sa pag-eskwela (Often, there was not enough food and enough funds to send all of us to school, that’s why we were left with no choice but to drop out from school)”*.

Not long after that, Lola Tacing got married and raised her own family. Her concerns were housework and looking after the needs of her children and husband. While years of running the household brought her practical wisdom, she felt that it could never be a substitute to formal education that she had dreamed of.

She believed that her limited education was the reason why her suggestions were ignored when she attended community meetings before. *“Kaniadtong una gyud nako pagtambong sa meeting dinhi, wala gyud namati sa akoa, walay nakialamam ug nanginlabot sa akoang gipangsulti (The first time I attended a community assembly, nobody listened to me, nobody cared for my opinion)”*, Lola Tacing recalled with a sad tone. *“Gibati pud naku ang kamingaw kay gamay lang ang mga babaye nga naga-attend, kasagaran puro lalake (I also often felt lonely when attending village meetings because they were dominated by men, and only few women participated).”*

Lola Tacing first volunteered as health worker. That meant juggling her work at home and her tasks as mobile health worker. She attended trainings and seminars where she learned new things and gained some skills needed for her volunteer work. And yet she attributed her effectiveness to the support of her husband. She said: *“Kung naa man isa nga ginapasalamatan gyud naku mao ang suporta sa akong bana. Usahay kay naa kami training nga duha hangtod tatlo ka semana ug siya lang intawon ang manugbantay sa among mga anak (One thing that I really thank for is the support of my husband. Sometimes I attended two to four weeks’ trainings, leaving our three children with him).”* But her husband’s support did not come easy because, at first, he did not allow her to volunteer as health worker because that would mean she would not be at home all day. But when her husband’s brother got sick, and Lola Tacing took care of him, her husband relented.



Lola Tacing guides the young Kalahi-CIDSS volunteers

Being a health worker, Lola Tacing also taught people in her community to be healthy. She would visit the outlying households and talk to women. Then people started regarding her as a rural doctor and teacher. She had evolved into a respected community leader that the villagers encouraged her to run for office. She did and won in the local barangay election, breaking the norm that only the men are elected to office in their community. She won because her ardent supporters were the women whom she had helped.

Her brand of leadership was in contrast to her male colleagues. She listens and consults people. She worked hard to improve the health of everyone in the community. She became the chair of women and health committees in the barangay council.

The Kalahi-CIDSS found a champion in Lola Tacing when it came to Kiloyao. Lola Tacing said she liked the community-driven strategy of Kalahi-CIDSS because it allows villagers to identify their own needs and projects through a series of meetings and discussions. She encouraged the women to participate in the meetings and discussions because it is for their own good. In the meetings, the women could learn about their rights and discuss issues in the community with others. Lola Tacing believes that such a process is worthwhile.

“Gina-ingnan gyud naku sila nga dili lang sila maghunong sa ilang mga balay ug dili sayangun ang mga talento nga gihatag sa ilaha (I always tell them (women) that there is a better world outside the four corners of their homes and that they should realize their potentials),” Lola Tacing said.

Under the Kalahi-CIDSS grant of almost P600,000, Kiloyao decided to build a health station. This made Lola Tacing happy because her village will finally have a facility for health services. The absence of a health station meant that the women and men of Kiloyao have to walk to the next village or the town. During rainy season, the road becomes impassable and there were instances when women gave birth while trekking to the health center in the next barangay.

After the clinic, more projects were given to Kiloyao by Kalahi-CIDSS. These are the daycare center, a stage, and a concrete pavement that doubles as solar dryer and recreation area. In all these projects, Lola Tacing was involved from the start that the villages started calling her *“murag engineer”* (like an engineer). But for Lola Tacing, the buildings are not everything. Equally important were the trainings and seminars that the women in the village underwent to learn new things, among them how to work together in running community organizations. *“Nagsugod kami ug pagdumala sa mga buhaton nga makahatag ug gahum arun matabangan ang mga kababayin-an pareho sa mga trainings, seminars ug pag-apil sa mga nagkalain-lain nga buluhaton pinaagi sa pag koordinar sa mga mas taas nga mga organisasyon arun magtabang sa amoa* (We initiated activities to empower women like trainings, seminars and involving them in

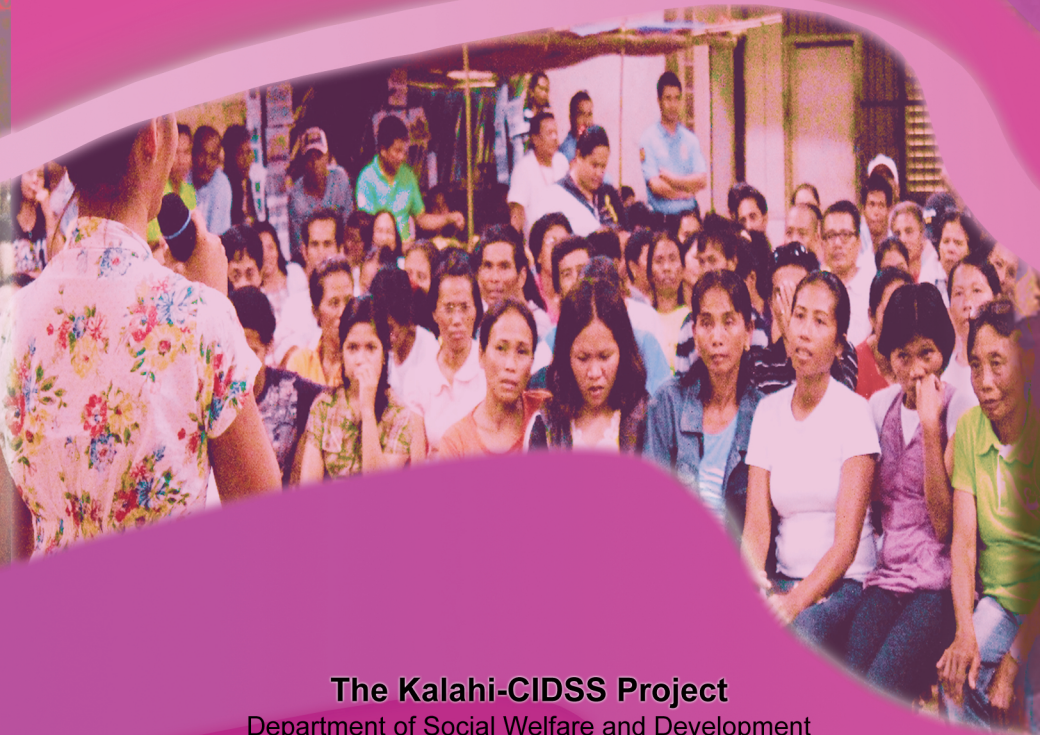
various community activities through coordination and collaboration with authorities and organizations),” Lola Tacing said.

For Lola Tacing, Kalahi-CIDSS’s activities to help women are valuable because they could learn to become leaders like the men. *“Nalipay gyud ko kay nagadaghan nga nagadaghan na nga mga babaye ang natagaan ug pribilihiyo arun magdumala sa lahi-lahing mga kumitiba ug aktibong naga-apil sa pagplano hangtud sa pag-implementar sa proyekto, dili pareho sa una naku pag-apil sa meeting dinhi kaniadto (I am happy that more and more women are given the privilege to hold different committees and be involved from project conceptualization to implementation, a practice so remote from the first time I attended the village gathering here),”* said Lola Tacing.

“Ang mga babaye karun kabahin na sa paghimo ug desisyon ug may kapasidad na nga impluwensiyahan ang mga tumong sa pag-umwad (Women now share in decision-making and have ability to direct or influence development directions),” said Lola Tacing. *“Nahibaluan pud nila nga dili gyud ko gusto makakita o makadungog nga naay mga kabataan nga gidumilian ug oportunidad nga maka-eskwela tungod kay babaye siya, pareho sa akoang kasinatian (I also don’t want seeing women children denied of opportunity to be educated just because they are women, just like what I experienced).”*

When asked about the greatest lesson she learned in all her years of being a community leader, Lola Tacing said: *“Dili dapat ang pagka-lalake o pagkababaye ang mahimong sukdanan kung unsa ang kaya o dili kaya buhaton sa usa ka tao. Sa pag-umwad ug oportunidad dapat pantay-pantay ug walay dapat mabilin (Being a man or a woman should not define what you can and cannot do. When it comes to progress and opportunities, both men and women should be equal and no one should be left behind).”*

Lola Tacing is basking in her *“titles”* and the affection of the villagers in Kiloyao, in gratitude for her kindness and leadership. If someday they would tell stories about her, she knows that those would just be wonderful stories.



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