

# *GREAT Women Project*



## *Harnessing Bamboo Production*

*Development of A Business Plan for Women-led Bamboo Production in Bula (Camarines Sur)*



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# Harnessing Bamboo Production

## Development of a Business Plan for Women-led Bamboo Production in Bula

### Case Summary

The development of the Business Plan for Bamboo Production in the town of Bula serves as a stage on which a committed Local Team for Project Implementation (LTPI) membership, equipped with support from the LGU leadership and technical assistance from concerned government agencies, played a critical role as an effective catalyst for effecting interventions for gender-responsiveness at the local level. The key elements of success, as the case on Bula has shown, are the presence of a WEE champion to harness the personal commitment of the LTPI members, the convergence of goals and strategies, and the adaptability and growth of the LTPI to keep up with the demands of the project.

This case study highlights the experience that the key players went through in creating the local enabling environment for WEE in partnership with the GWP. It covers project events in one of the eight project partner LGUs within Metro Naga from the project inception in 2006, its formal launching in March 2007, until September of 2009. <sup>1</sup>

### Introducing Bula

The town of Bula is one of the 35 towns and two cities of the province of Camarines Sur, which lies at the southeastern tip of the island of Luzon.

Bula occupies an area of 151.25 square kilometers. It is politically subdivided into 33 barangays, of which 25 are located in lowland areas and mainly devoted to rice production. A big share of the income of the population of more than 62,000 comes from agriculture, particularly from rice production. The river that flows from its headwaters at Lake Bato and finds its way to the San Miguel Bay, also provides some of the families with income from fishing.

The town center is connected to the major national highway by some five kilometers of roads, which renders it a peripheral player of the region's "growth corridor," or the area with geographic proximity to the major land transport routes and the centers of growth.

The town of Bula has been a member of the Metro Naga Development Council (MNDC) since its inception in the 1990s. When the MNDC forged a partnership with the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women (NCRFW) for the GREAT Women Project (GWP), Bula became one of the eight LGU project partners. The early phases of operation of the GWP were focused on the establishment of partnerships with Bula and other LGUs and other prospective stakeholders. A series of orientations on the GWP were consequently held to introduce the GWP in the middle months of 2007. <sup>2</sup>

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> This case study is part of the requirements of a retrospective Process Documentation Research (PDR) on the implementation of the Great Women Project in Naga. The PDR aims to provide information on "project implementation processes which would surface needs, issues, and gaps in enhancing the enabling environment for women as well as project implementation and management strategies."

<sup>2</sup> Refer to the main Process Documentation Research (PDR) Report.

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The Bulaeños resourcefulness has made a number of families turn to bamboo production as a source of additional income through the production of furnishings and novelty items. A family-oriented production system has been adopted by families engaged in bamboo production, and this means the involvement of women in the various stages of this economic activity. In 2005, women comprised one-fourth of the 427 bamboo farmers. Women were involved in the stripping of the bark, sanding, varnishing, designing, and other work that did not require much physical inputs.

### Bamboo Industry in Bula

The development of the bamboo industry in Bula started in the 70s due to the abundance of raw materials in the locality and the presence of a market for affordable furniture. Bamboo was propagated in about 255 hectares within the town's boundaries.<sup>3</sup>

The industry began as a family business of one of the families in Pawili, a barangay now known for its bamboo products. Production skills have been transferred through generations and have proliferated progressively up to the present. The emergence and development of skilled workers resulted in the diversification and innovation in bamboo furniture. Its market has thus steadily expanded.

Meanwhile, the increasing demand for bamboo products has resulted in the proliferation of family-based producers, which through time, has given rise to cut-throat competition. With the original bamboo producers in Pawili depending only on the potential buyers among passers-by along the highway, the market remains limited. And, since they live at subsistence levels, the bamboo producers are usually forced to sell their products at low prices just to be able to earn enough for their daily financial needs. Moreover, just like their other low-income entrepreneur counterparts in other industries and in other parts of the province, they lament their lack of capitalization and technology to produce more and better products. One way of improving the product quality of the bamboo products is to subject the bamboo raw material to chemical treatment that would prolong its life and protect it from insect infestation.

### Early Efforts To Develop The Industry



The abundance of raw materials and the expansion of production of finished products in Bula earned the LGU the recognition as a "bamboo village" during a 1996 Bamboo Congress sponsored by the Cottage Industry Technology Center (CITC) in Pangasinan. Thus, when the Department of Trade & Industry (DTI) began promoting the "One Town One Product" (OTOP) concept, Bula naturally identified bamboo as their chosen product for development. Assistance to support this product's development came from the government, through the DTI and the Forest Products Research & Development

### Footnotes

<sup>3</sup> Bula's Business Plan on Bamboo Production

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Institute (FPRDI) . To help further stimulate and upgrade bamboo production, the Bambuza Multi-Purpose Cooperative (BMPC) was organized in early 2000 by Ms. Juliet Decena, Chairperson of the Social Council of Women. Its primary goal was to help provide the capital needed by the small bamboo producers to expand and improve the quality of their production. Unfortunately, the group was unable to raise enough funds and eventually became inactive. At that time, bamboo production was not prioritized as a development project by the LGU.

### Creating An Enabling Environment for the Development of the Bamboo Industry

With the implementation of the GWP, the LGU went through a training on Gender Mainstreaming in Local Governance by the SALIGAN, a legal resource group commissioned by the GWP to conduct the training for the LGU partners. The training “awakened” the consciousness of the LGU leaders on the need for greater gender responsiveness. It also contributed to the deepening of the awareness and understanding of the LGU on the issues of GAD planning and budgeting. In addition, the training heightened the LGU’s realization of the need to develop policies responding to the women sector, especially in resource allocation and creation of a GAD Code.

### Adopting the CSF Concept for Bamboo



The concept of establishing common service facilities to enhance the productivity of WMEs in the partner LGUs was developed during the first year of GWP implementation. This emerged in light of the LGU partners’ recommendations to provide for more direct GWP support for women microenterprises (WMEs), in addition to the capacity development activities for gender responsiveness.<sup>4</sup> The idea was to complement the capability development efforts of the GWP with a production facility on an industry or economic endeavor dominated by, and involving a majority of women in the LGUs. This would provide a new dimension to the creation of the “enabling environment” for WEE under the GWP.

Bula’s participation in the GWP, and the introduction of the CSF concept rekindled the LGU’s interest in bamboo production. The LGU of Bula proposed the establishment of a Common Service Facility (CSF) valued at about P2.5 million to address the problems faced by bamboo producers in the municipality. GREAT Women Project technical assistance had been valuable to the LGU, especially in preparing a business plan for the CSF and assisting the LGU in implementing other initiatives for WEE.

### Footnotes

<sup>4</sup> The process is described in the Process Documentation Research (PDR) Report.

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## Development of a Business Plan for Women-led Bamboo Production in Bula

Several key players within the LGU pushed to prepare a business plan for a Bamboo CSF. These are the Local Team for Project Implementation (LTPI), Technical Working Group, LGU of Bula and Metro Naga Development Council.

### Key Players

The LTPI, which was created by the GWP as the conduit for project information and implementation in its partnership with the LGU, became the hub of the convergence of efforts to fully develop the industry. The members of the original LTPI group included the GAD Focal Person and Municipal Agricultural Officer, the Municipal Planning and Development Officer (MPDO), an LGU staff member, the head of the Municipal Social Welfare and Development Office; the representative of the women's groups, the Chairperson of the Social Council of Women (SCW), the Bambuza Crafts' Multi-Purpose Cooperative, and the wife of the incumbent local chief executive. At this point, the LTPI still lacked representatives from the private sector and civil society.

It must be noted at this point that the private partner of the LTPI – the representative of the women's group – had not been active due to other responsibilities. There were also no partners from the civil society or business sector that were involved with the project.

The LTPI is the team ensuring cooperation between the LGU and the GWP and as such, is the leading recipient of capacity development inputs of the GWP. Capacity development inputs that the LTPI found particularly useful were the conduct of the baseline survey, the preparation of the business plan and the basic gender sensitivity training.<sup>5</sup> Information and data generated revealed the extent of women's participation in economic endeavours, notably in bamboo production, and strengthened the LGU resolve to pursue the set-up of CSFs for women entrepreneurs. Meanwhile, basic business planning for CSF involved the LTPI in a series of capacity development activities. NCRFW brought in resource persons from the Asian Center for Entrepreneurship (ACE) to guide the LGU in business plan development.

Business Planning Writeshops started in January 2009. Formal lectures and workshops, followed by field work, research, and report production that lasted until October 2009.<sup>6</sup> For the business planning, LTPI members worked beyond official hours conducting field work in bamboo production sites, exploring the latest production technology and marketing opportunities in Manila, and conducting time and motion studies.

In fact, the LGU had been so engrossed in business planning that it opted to fully take on business plan preparation, from data gathering, to writing and presentation. Even

### Footnotes

<sup>5</sup> Based on interviews with LTPI members. This is annexed in the main Process Documentation Research (PDR) Report.

<sup>6</sup> Six one to two-day sessions were held on different topics.

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though at the start, Bula relied upon a technical writer fielded by the GREAT Women Project to assist in drafting the business plan. In the end, LGU exclusively developed the plan using its internal personnel and resources. A significant effect of this arrangement was the full absorption by the LGU of the learnings gained from lengthy and extensive training for the business planning which took the whole of nine months.

CSF support also largely rests on the Technical Working Group, which channeled special harmonized assistance that the CSF needed. The DOST shared technical knowhow in processing and equipment. The DENR and DA assisted in ensuring the ecological sustainability of the supply of bamboo as the primary raw material. The DTI committed to provide marketing support.



As a key stakeholder in the CSF project, the LGU of Bula provided human and counterpart financial resources in conducting research and in developing business plans. The LGU shouldered extra honoraria and expenses incurred in product development and marketing research in Manila-based offices such as the CITC. LGU was unwavering in its support to the Project, even when the LGU received flak for use of LGU vehicles in local and Manila-based research.

The partner alliance, Metro Naga Development Council (MNDC), served as an important source of support for the GWP's efforts. Apart from its basic management responsibilities as the main GWP partner, the MNDC was active in the marketing and promotion of the products of its LGU members.

### CSF Contributions To Women Empowerment

Bula's business planning for a CSF resulted in improvements towards women's economic empowerment. It led to the reorganization and strengthening Bambuza (an organization of bamboo processors), the passage of a Municipal Council Resolution supporting the CSF and the inclusion of the GAD Budget in local plans.

An organization of bamboo processors, Bambuza was in the process of reviving its organization in December 2009. Through the baseline survey, Bambuza identified other bamboo processors they could encourage into membership. Key Bambuza members participated in a number of product development and skills trainings for the bamboo sector, delivered through the technical support of the DTI, DOST, DENR and other agency members of the GWP Technical Working Group. Bambuza was slated to be the primary partner of the Bamboo Processing Project, as future managers and operators of the

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facility. To date, more members will still engage incapacity development seminars to equip the organization with skills and knowhow to properly manage the facility.

### Key Players

Meantime, the LTPI anticipated the approval of the CSF Plan and thus lobbied for a resolution of support and provision of counterpart funds for CSF, signed by the Bula Legislative Council on November 25, 2009. Passing this municipal resolution meant that the LGU had sealed its support for the CSF and minimized risks that changes in political leadership might bring.

Bula LGU incorporated the GAD budget into the Municipal Development Plan through the Annual Investment Plan (AIP) for 2010. This supports the establishment of a CSF and other WEE initiatives. This move is a direct outcome of GWP-initiated series of seminars on mainstreaming gender-responsiveness in local governance.

In 2011, NCRFW approved the business plan of Bula. NCRFW committed to support the training and development of Bambuza and other bamboo producers. NCRFW earmarked P500,000 to support the business plan requiring a budget of P2.528 million. DOST is also considering assisting the project by providing the remaining balance. DOST considered assisting. In the meantime, other programmed capability development activities are being implemented for Bula and the other partner LGUs in Metro Naga.

Throughout business planning for Bula's CSF generated lessons both in project implementation and gender-responsive local governance. The LGU recognized that an LTPI was necessary to perform the technical work for business planning and generate support of both the LGU leadership and its constituency. Some LTPIs in other LGUs became inactive at some point, because they needed to attend to main LGU responsibilities and later had to depend on hire consultants in crafting their business plans. The LTPI of Bula strategized to remain independent and persistent in the business planning process, by including new members and enhancing their knowledge in gender-responsive governance. LTPI members demonstrated personal commitment to service.

The NCRFW's approval of the LGU's request to support CSFs, in addition to the programmed capacity development activities, helped unite the LGUs and the GWP to work towards the welfare of WMEs. The convergence of strategy for the welfare of WMEs served as basis for the high level of cooperation between the LGU and the GWP.



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The foreseen establishment of a CSF was one of the motivating factors of the LGU's active participation in GREAT Women Project implementation. Establishment of a CSF will bolster development of the town as a genuine "bamboo capital" and is a source of pride for constituents. LTPI members believe that more public support can be generated if and when a CSF materializes.

### *Perception Changes in Stakeholders*



In the course of developing the CSF business plan, the LTPI and other stakeholders developed greater understanding and appreciation for the value of women's participation in Bula's economy and their contribution to promote women's welfare. Exposure to gender-sensitivity and gender-responsiveness trainings continued to strengthen perceptions on the importance of women in business and development. Changes in perception can also be seen in gender-responsive policies, mechanisms and activities independently initiated by the LGUs. Formal tracking and evaluation of capacity development data, will bolster changes in perception.

The GWP, through the CSF, provided Bambuza with the opportunity to eventually manage the CSF. Having an organization of bamboo producers to manage the CSF in the future will empower producers and women entrepreneurs in the bamboo sector and ensure that gender-responsiveness is institutionalized in the facility.

As the CSF will provide durable and insect-resistant raw materials, bamboo producers are expected to increase volume of sales. Increased bamboo sales are projected to grow producers' incomes, profits for the Bambuza Cooperative, and the vision of Bula as the "bamboo capital" within LGU reach.

As a whole, economic and technical viability of the CSF, its long-term success and sustainability will ultimately be determined by the quality of training GREAT Women Project will provide the cooperative and leadership of Bambuza cooperative.

## About The Project

The Gender Responsive Economic Actions for the Transformation of Women (GREAT Women) Project is a governance and capacity development project that aims to promote and support a gender-responsive enabling environment for women's economic empowerment, particularly those in microenterprises.

The Philippine Commission on Women (PCW), the national machinery for the advancement of women in the Philippines, is the lead executing agency for the Project.

The Commission forged partnership with key national government agencies involved in micro-, small- and medium-scale enterprise (MSME) development and select local government units to create a gender-responsive enabling environment for women's economic empowerment. This project receives technical and financial support from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

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