

# GREAT Women Project



***Supporting Enterprises of Women***  
*Balilihan Experience in Supporting Current  
and New Enterprises of Women*



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# Supporting Enterprises of Women

## Balilihan Experience in Supporting Current and New Enterprises of Women

### Case Summary



The case study documents changes among women in Balilihan, Buenavista and Jagna municipalities of Bohol through GREAT Women Project, a capacity development and governance project. The case study focuses on how the local enabling environment is gradually enabling the Balilihan Association of Women for Development (BAWOD) and the women involved in the local women-led handicraft-making enterprise, known as tuhog-tuhog, to branch out into new enterprises and opportunities for women

Balilihan is an interior landlocked town 22 kilometers north of Tagbilaran City, the capital of Bohol province. The economy largely relies on agricultural production. The Island's limestone and corral formation are slowly making the soil sterile, with less food produced each year. In 2006, 65.7% of the 2,130 household population of Balilihan earned income below the income threshold, while 48.12% or 1,561 households had incomes below the food threshold.<sup>1</sup>

### Weaving As A Traditional Enterprise

Balilihan constituents have found alternative ways of earning income. Handicraft production is offering additional income to local households. Balilihan was a big contributor to the handicraft production of the province, being near the Abatan River. Balilihan continues the province's long tradition of mat weaving.



Early records showed Boholanos produced various handicrafts such as mats, baskets, winnower, fish and crab traps and animal snares. Traditionally, seagrass, not buri, was woven finely in a loom. Colors used were dark green, purple and magenta. Bohol towns were known for certain woven products. Certain towns specialized in finely woven buntal hats, bamboo and nito weaving, and nipa overlaid in basketry.<sup>2</sup> The 1970s up to the 1980s saw a rise in Boholano weaving, with Antequera declared as "Handicraft Capital." Products are developed from basic items such as mat and hats, to more luxurious items such as napkin holders and glass coasters.

Tuhog-tuhog is the process or steps being used in making handicrafts using rounded rattan core and nito or buri strips. The rounded strips of rattan core are connected together by nito or buri using these as a thread in an in and out, push and pull circular motions. The steps are done continuously until a product comes out, from a simple coaster, placemat or centerpiece to the more complicated tray or box.

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Local Government Unit of Balilihan Pro le, 2006

<sup>2</sup> "Boholana" by: Diana Lyn Lopez, tripod.com

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Tuhog-tuhog weavers use rattan core and nito as their materials. Rattan core is usually brought in by traders or handicraft buyers from Cebu. Often these come from Mindanao but purchased in bulk by handicraft traders and sold at a marked up price to middlemen or consolidators, if not directly to the weavers. Nito is a local vine in green (least mature), brown or black (most mature), depending on the degree of maturity – green being the least mature and black as the most mature. Green nito is more supine while black tends to be brittle and either break or snap during weaving.

Buri palm is an alternative to nito. Both nito and buri strips are sourced from the local market, though these can also be found in nearby thickets and bushes. Weavers prefer purchasing their supplies from local suppliers, than spend time gathering materials themselves. Nito gatherers and buri strip makers also supply the local markets.

Balilihan has also been exploring enterprise potentials of Abatan River ecotourism, since its beginning in 2006. Balilihan is one of five municipalities including Cortes, Maribojoc, Antequera and Catigbian surrounding the Abatan River that has drawn up plans to create economic activities from local ecotourism. Women, who represent the bulk of unemployed population, are seen to benefit from this collective strategy. Local and national government agencies such as the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), Department of Tourism, support ecotourism development.<sup>3</sup>

Ecotourism development of the river through the inter-LGU collaboration is seen to benefit the five municipalities and is now considered as a Local and Regional Economic Development (LRED) model that accelerates development through the cluster approach.<sup>4</sup> It is a bottom-up participatory planning process that builds on the comparative and competitive advantages of an LGU. The strategy spurred the organizing and growth of women's organizations in all municipalities including BAWOD of Balilihan.

The Balilihan Association of Women for Development (BAWOD) has its beginnings in SUMAD, an association was officially formed in October 2006. The four thrusts of the association were: (1) Women's Rights, (2) Ecological Solid Waste Management and Tourism, (3) Health and Nutrition and (4) Livelihood Projects.

BAWOD's members were mostly women tuhog-tuhog weavers. With LGU and GREAT Women Project support, BAWOD members are branching into other income-generating enterprises. Through BAWOD, women microentrepreneurs receive business support

### Ecotourism And Potential Women's Enterprises

#### Footnotes

<sup>3</sup> Abatan River Ecological Tourism Master Plan, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Nemia Lungay, BAWOD Brief history.



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### Upscaling Tuhog-Tuhog Production of BAWOD

from the local government, GREAT Women Project and their partners.

In the cluster planning for ecological tourism, particularly for Balilihan, BAWOD identified specific programs for women microentrepreneurs. These included handcraft and souvenir items production; household cleaning and herbal products; and food processing and catering. Women were categorized according to their skills. These women received specific training from the Department of Trade and Industry, specifically on tuhog-tuhog production for handcraft; banana chips and corn coffee processing; organic and herbal massage oil production; and food safety and presentation.

BAWOD weavers numbered around 30 when the tuhog-tuhog handcraft production started. They came from various barangays of Balilihan. Women tuhog-tuhog weavers' ages ranged from 14 to 60. Weaving was usually done at home, while doing household chores. Tuhog-tuhog is one of several forms of weaving that women simultaneously engage in.

Tuhog-tuhog production came into the lives of Balilihan women through the Abatan River Eco-Tourism Development Planning in mid 2008. As a cluster development strategy, it was supported by various agencies such as the Department of Labor & Employment (DOLE), DTI, and the Department of Tourism (DOT). DTI provided technical assistance and training for tuhog-tuhog production. DTI also provided a starting capital of P 5,000 for the organization to start production. Anecita Orig, the Vice President of the Municipal Federation of Women's Organization (now called BAWOD) and person in-charge of the project, borrowed another P 5,000 additional capital. BAWOD started with P 10,000 capital in November 2008.<sup>5</sup>

After the training, DTI helped the organization assign a person to take charge of the project. It was left up to the local women's organization to continue their enterprise, and for the LGU to support and sustain BAWOD in order to sustain the project. With GREAT Women Project (GWP) choosing Balilihan as a pilot municipality, BAWOD had renewed hopes of improved support to its women microentrepreneurs.

In 2008, Balilihan was one of the three municipalities of Bohol (including Jagna and Buenavista) chosen to implement the GWP. The municipality was selected for its high economic potentials and the presence of many women entrepreneurs.<sup>6</sup>

The Municipal Planning and Development Coordinator (MPDC) of Balilihan was invited

#### Footnotes

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Anecita Orig, Vice President of Balilihan Association of Women for Development and in charge of Tuhog-tuhog Handicraft Production Project, March 18, 2010. (GREAT Women) Project Provincial Technical Working Group meeting, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Documentation of (GREAT Women) Project Provincial Technical Working Group meeting, 2008.

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to a GWP orientation for LGU officers of the selected municipalities. The orientation stressed on the need to have equitable and gender fair and responsive LGU policies, plans and programs. With GWP partnership, Balilihan crafted an the action plan, in which BAWOD will serve as the institutional women's partner.

### *GREAT Women Project and the Municipality of Balilihan*

Prior to GWP, the Municipality of Balilihan had a program for women. The program,

What began as a simple order for a woven oval tray became a full-scale line of tuhog-tuhog products, from napkin holders to nito serving trays, nito plates, serving bowls, nito and buri waste baskets and other items. Buyers were placing direct orders from weavers. Payment was then unfavorable to weavers who collected payments only two to three days after.

Through the GREAT Women Project, BAWOD was assisted to design a better system of payment. Women weavers are enabled to bring their products to the consolidator anytime of the week and immediately get their payment. With DTI training, more orders came for women weavers. Orders are usually high in January to February and in July to August

Under the new system of payment, the consolidator served as the first line of quality control. The consolidator, when doubtful of product quality, would only pay for the product at half the price, while the weaver would need to wait until the buyer decided to return or accept the product. If the product had to be returned, the advance payment would not be taken back, but the weaver had to repair the product. The last payment would be given to the weaver once all the products had been repaired and accepted by the buyer.

The consolidator delivered the weekly products collected in bulk every Saturday to minimize transportation expenses. The products were delivered to the buyers either in Inabanga, Tiptip or Tagbilaran behind a local mall. The consolidator also secured the new purchase order and sourced the raw materials necessary for whatever item was ordered. The consolidator would then give the orders and materials to the weavers who would work on them and deliver the finished products to the consolidators. The consolidator, likewise, ensured that weavers regularly received their orders.

After a year of payment, the tuhog-tuhog production of BAWOD grossed a monthly income of Php 22,454 and posted a net profit of Php 9,000. The women decided to add the profit to existing capital. Weavers increased from 30 to 50. Other weavers were allowed to deliver to other consolidators, so long as BAWOD did not supply materials and the weaver did not get advance payment or credit.

BAWOD women weavers still face challenges in their enterprise. Individual weavers need to step up for the demand of quality products. Handicrafts, when commercially produced for foreign buyers, become expensive to local household consumers. Materials are also increasingly being sourced from big merchants and from other sites, and thus leave cane, rattan and nito gatherers with buri strippers at a disadvantaged.

As an organization, BAWOD has to establish more links with direct buyers, increase their capital, and enhance their capabilities in managing enterprises. BAWOD is strategizing to have their own stockroom and acquire machines for production. They also are interested in sustaining market demand for their products and ensuring adequate supply of rattan, nito and buri.



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### *Balilihan and GREAT Women Project: Scoring Gains for Women*



however, intended to support women's enterprises. Their GAD Code also needed to incorporate gender-responsive provisions. GREAT Women Project boosted LGU support to WEE advocacy and women's organizations.

Particular to BAWOD, GWP was instrumental in providing other support assistance to BAWOD and its production project. DOLE already promised new projects upon submission of project proposals. Balilihan women started participating in meetings and regular organizational activities. Communities showed improvements in implementing project activities. BAWOD women also attended activities outside the community and the town for training and seminars, study tours and other gatherings.

At the municipal level, GWP helped in making local government officials become more committed to women's economic empowerment. The LGU also reviewed and revised their Gender and Development Code that integrated provisions from the Magna Carta of Women, which strengthened the basis for women's rights promotion and advancement.<sup>7</sup>

#### Footnote

<sup>7</sup> Local Government Unit of Balilihan, Review of Gender and Development Code, Tagbilaran City, December, 2009.

## 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).

GREAT Women Project  
Management Office  
Philippine Commission  
on Women

1145 J. P. Laurel St., San Miguel, Manila  
1005 PHILIPPINES  
Tel. No. (+63-2) 734-1731  
735-1654 loc. 123  
Fax No. (+63-2) 736-4449  
Website: [www.pcw.gov.ph](http://www.pcw.gov.ph)