

GREAT Women Project



Getting A Good View of Buenavista *Successes of Buenavista in Building A Local Enabling Environment for Women's Economic Empowerment*



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Introducing Buenavista

The municipality of Buenavista lies some 84 kilometers northwest of Tagbilaran City, the capital of the province of Bohol. In 2006, Buenavista had a population of 26,443 individuals that made up 4,400 households. Of the total households, 55.56 % or 2,445 households were earning incomes below the food threshold income while 71.26% or 3,136 households fell below the income threshold. Of these, 64% had incomes below the mean threshold. Unemployment rate was 8.42%.¹

Buenavista literally means “good view” in Spanish. People from the place say that the name refers to a beautiful view or scenery of the sea from a rocky cliff at the back of the town church, a few meters across the municipal hall.² A Spaniard or maybe some earlier Indios (Filipinos) trained by the frailes (Spanish friars) to speak the Spanish language must have given the town its name.

Like the rest of the province’s coastal towns, Buenavista is a relatively quiet town compared to the neighboring towns of Tubigon, Jagna, Ubay or Talibon, serving as ports of entry of people and goods coming from various neighboring provinces in Visayas and Mindanao. Buenavista is coming to life economically with the entry of more economic or eco-tourism activities. From 2007 to 2009, the town was run by a lady mayor, Elsa G. Tirol, who was the widow of the former mayor, the late Mayor Leandro Tirol.

Just like Balilihan and Jagna, the municipality of Buenavista was chosen to implement the GREAT Women Project (GWP) because of the high poverty incidence, high economic growth potentials and presence of women entrepreneurs.

This case study looks into the entrepreneurial efforts that had been initiated among women micro-entrepreneurs in Buenavista. It also highlights the role played by the LGU leadership and the GWP to support these efforts and how these helped the process of empowering women in the long term.



Footnotes

¹Local Government Unit of Buenavista, Municipal Profile, 2006

²Stories from oral tradition of Buenavista

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Ms. Elsa Tirol, the wife of then Mayor Tirol, actively supporting women's entrepreneurial initiatives. She helped organize the Barangay Women's Associations (BWA), the first women's organization in the municipality, and made the wives of the barangay captains as chairpersons of women's associations. She initiated majority of the associations, which later on organized themselves into the Municipal Women's Federation (MWF).

**Leadership
for Women's
Empowerment**

Organizing women was not easy, because it meant getting women out of their homes, their household chores and farm work. As the mayor's wife, Ms. Tirol was able to tap wives of barangay captains to mobilize local women. Women in the municipality were encouraged to leave aside domestic tasks for women's activities. Because of the BWA activities, the women learned to socialize and conduct themselves in public. At that time, women perceived barangay women's associations and federation for socialization, while they viewed the cooperative as means to support income generation.

As the Mayor's wife then, Ms. Tirol was aware of the need to educate and organize women for their own good. They submitted proposals for programs and projects, and solicited funding and donations to help mobilize women's organization.

The late Mayor Leandro Tirol (1998-2007) also supported and implemented Gender and Development (GAD) policies. However, support to GAD was generally deemed as token gesture. Appreciation of GAD was limited to celebrating Women's Month.

Upon assumption to office as Mayor of Buenavista, following the death of her husband, Mayor Leandro Tirol in 2007, Mayor Elsa Tirol continued GAD implementation. She rationalized the planning and budgeting process and helped install systems and procedures. She facilitated the conduct of workshops that later on helped identify programs, projects, activities and services; and provided budgetary allocations for these programs and projects.

Each of the barangay women's associations elected their officers and organized themselves into a municipal federation in 1997. In 2007, the association presidents or chairpersons of these women's organizations in their individual capacities formed a cooperative with 35 members.

Most associations relied mainly on funds coming from national agencies, electoral candidates and other sources. As an LGU-assisted women's organization, the Buenavista Municipal Women's Federation (BMWF) was not an exception.³

Footnote

³ Claudette Anora; In charge of Banana Chips Processing Project and Member of the Board of the Buenavista Federated Women's Multi-Purpose Cooperative and Vice President of the Buenavista Municipal Women's Federation, Key informant interview, March 23, 2010, Inabanga, Bohol.

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A cooperative, the new Buenavista Federated Women's Multi-Purpose Cooperative (BFWMPC) was later formed. Now, with these two organizations co-existing, women devoted one-half day for association activities and another one-half day for cooperative meeting.

Entrepreneurial Initiatives: Banana Chips and Dried Mango Processing



Organization of the BFWMPC was also in time for the launching of the Bohol Made Program (BMP) by the Provincial Agriculture Office (PAO). In coordination with other agencies, the BMP intended to support tourism and sustainable agriculture programs of the province. It provided assistance to community initiatives to produce particular products from certain local foods or other material sources, which were later branded and marketed as Bohol-made. Among the products supported by the province were squash noodles, ube tarts, dried mango and banana chips.

Buenavista chose to develop women-led enterprises into banana chips processing, as bananas are abundant. The cooperative immediately started banana chips processing in September 2008. Most women members of the federation and cooperative grew bananas in their backyards and farms. Cooperative women members attended trainings on food safety and standardization, which also taught them cooking procedures, mixtures and duration. By second quarter of 2009, the women produced and marketed their first batch of banana chips. Women limited their production, since their market consisted only of eco-tourism centers, local stores and individual orders during special occasions. Within summer months of March to May when orders are slow, they produced only a small quantity of banana chips once a week because there were few orders. Women members, however, like to sustain or increase production if market demand would increase. They are also faced with the challenge of increasing product competitiveness, since other organizations in the province are also producing banana chips.

The cooperative encouraged federation members to sell their bananas to the cooperative, while the cooperative provided incentives for women to plant and produce more bananas. To further encourage women, the LGU through the Department of Agriculture, supported the efforts of individual farmers to sell their produce to the cooperative, specifically banana shoots at P10 per handful. Farmers were then able to double and even triple profits, with more shoots they grew and sold.

Women in the cooperative briefly ventured into dried mango processing. After only two seasons, the cooperative stopped producing dried mango after they realized that it was not a sustainable enterprise for them. Buenavista had limited the supply of mango, with

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only seasonal harvests twice a year. For dried mango processing enterprise to be viable, the municipality had to have a big portion of the land planted to mango in the next ten years. Local government would have to encourage farmers and mango growers or producers to grow more mangoes.

During the trial stage of mango processing enterprise, women learned and applied two varying standards taught by Davao fruit processors and the PAO-assisted Bohol Made standards for dried mangoes. Women entrepreneurs had difficulty learning and applying different standards to the enterprise. Women were also burdened to take charge of the entire production chain, from buying mangoes to processing, packaging and marketing, even without corresponding compensation.

Many women workers did not have any income while setting up production and their products were not marketed. Soon, the number of women engaged in start-up mango processing dwindled as more of them quit and instead, attended to their households and farms. Later on, only two women, paid by the LGU, remained to manage the mango processing enterprise.

Two organizations supported other livelihood projects and economic enterprises, such as rice retailing, pig dispersal and retail stores. The cooperative ran Tindahan sa Daet and the Cambuhat Eco-tourism Centers and banana chips processing in the poblacion center. The Federation managed rice retailing and pig dispersal.

Both the Federation and the Cooperative benefit from the GREAT Women Project, by way of accessing services, assistance and technical training delivered through the LGU. LGUs support GAD activities through the Barangay GAD Fund. Thirty-five barangays individually have a P5,000 GAD Fund to support GAD activities. The LGU assists the cooperative by leasing the lot and center building for the mango and banana chips processing center.

The Municipality of Buenavista operates the Cambuhat River and Village Tour (CRVT). Since 2006, CRVT has played a significant role in entrepreneurial initiatives of women in the municipality, especially the barangays of Daet and Cambuhat. CRVT was regarded as a Coastal Resource Management Project of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) and later on as a Community Based Resource Management (CRM) project of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR). Barangays Daet and Cambuhat, being located along the Cambuhat River, were barangay beneficiaries of the DENR-CRM Project.⁴

Other Livelihood
Projects
Benefiting
Women

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Local Ecotourism



Cambuhat River, with its blue-green waters, nipa palms and mangrove varieties along river banks, was a source of livelihood of many townfolk in surrounding barangays. To keep Cambuhat River unpolluted, the barangays of Buenavista were educated on the importance of preserving the natural eco-system and resources of the municipality.

As a result, the communities first organized the Cambuhat Enterprise Development and Fisheries Association (CEDFA), which was later tapped to implement ecotourism projects to prevent people from settling near the river. Among the projects provided by the DENR and BFAR were the river and village tour and talaba (mussel) culture projects. Back then, tourists were received in one small cottage without water or power supply.

Ecotourism projects paved the way for the entry of tourists, starting with Manila and Cebu media personalities and a Sri Lankan group promoting the site. They were followed by some French study tour tourists and other foreign nationals. The local government unit worked to provide water and electricity to barangays of Cambuhat and Daet, and in turn, improved the lives of local townfolk.⁵

Ecotourism projects started with male members, particularly the paddlers and the fishermen. As women provided other services such as preparing food and giving loomweaving demonstrations to tourists, they later became project members.

The LGU was able to source fund assistance from the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives for the construction of the Cambuhat and Daet Eco-tourism Centers in 2006. The fund assistance was channeled through the First Consolidated Bank Foundation Inc. (FCBFI) since the community organization was not yet registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission and did not have a legal personality. The FCBFI then used the money to fund a training series for organization members and serve as capital outlay of projects, such as the purchase of equipment and construction of talaba cages.

CRVT's initial operation was very simple and community-oriented. CRVT's operations relied upon proper financial management and marketing of tour packages, both locally and internationally. LGU assistance in marketing and projecting CRVT to media significantly contributed to the growth of tourists.⁶ As more local tourists visited Buenavista, women turned to grow their enterprises. Raffia weaving demonstration began drawing more foreign visitors in craft-making and crafts produced by women. In 2009, a new weaving loom and demonstration center was added.

Through partnership with the GREAT Women Project, the LGU introduced other

Footnotes

⁴ Rowena Celocia, in charge of Women's Tindahan at the Cambuhat Eco-tourism Center, Key informant interview, Cambuhat, Buenavista, Bohol, March 23, 2010

⁵ Mardonio Aparice, In charge of Cambuhat Talaba Project, Key informant interview, Cambuhat, Buenavista, Bohol, March 23, 2010

⁶ Crescenciana Aparice; In charge of the Cambuhat River and Village Tour Eco-tourism Center, Key informant interview, Cambuhat, Buenavista, Bohol, March 23, 2010.

Revitalizing GAD and WEE Promotion

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initiatives benefiting local women. One initiative was a P10,000 grant for the operation of a women's store selling food and souvenir items to local and foreign tourists. The LGU receives 15 percent-share of the women's store income, to help for loans to construct the building.

Men and women in the community considered talaba culture to be a very viable source of income. Talaba culture requires low financial inputs, easy maintenance and little time to manage. Women had roles in talaba culture, ranging from tending talaba cages, tying the bagal" or shells, harvesting and cleaning talaba and serving talaba dishes to town visitors. The local market for talaba is growing.

About 70% of the Cambuhat talaba farm harvest goes to Buenavista's neighboring towns including Clarin, Inabanga, Jetafe and as far as Tagbilaran and Panglao. The remaining 30% are sold in Buenavista and in the eco-tourism centers in Cambuhat and Daet. Cleanliness of the Cambuhat River is said to benefit the quality of talaba culture. Mangroves along the river banks maintain the balance of sea and fresh water essential for the growing of sweet-tasting talaba.

Talaba Culture



There are two types of talaba cages in a talaba farm. These are generally made of bamboo and plastic strings—one is semi-permanent or "damba" and the other is a floating or "gakit" raft. In the semi-permanent or damba, the bamboo posts are planted on the river bed and the strings are tied up at the level where there is still water even during low tide. This is to avoid exposing the shells or "bagal" to too much heat from the sun which would kill the young talaba in the shells. The disadvantage of this kind of cage is that harvesting has to be done only during low tide.

The floating cage or gakit, on the other hand, is like a raft. The disadvantage of this kind of cage is that it requires a longer area for the cage. The advantage is that harvesting can be done during low or high tide because the harvester is aboard the raft or gakit while pulling the strings where the bagal or talaba shells have grown.

The cost per cage depends on the size and the length and distance of the strings. The average size of cage per person or family is 50 square meters. The number of string hangings would vary according to the length and distance but generally it could accommodate an average of 3,000 hangings (strings). A hanging of talaba during harvest is P15.00 for small shells and P20.00 for bigger shells or an added income to the family of about P3,750 or more per month. Some P 3,000 a year to be used for the purchase of cage materials, nylon strings and shells or bagal would be needed to operate a talaba cage.

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With the entry of the GREAT Women Project, the local government of Buenavista heightened its commitment to pursue gender and WEE-responsive governance. It began when the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women (NCRFW) held a GWP Planning Workshop in December 2008 with the Municipal Planning and Development Coordinator, Mr. Efren Logrono as representative. The following year, the LGU drew up a Work and Financial Plan and gave a counterpart fund using the GAD Budget for GWP implementation.⁷

Pursuit of GAD and WEE in Local Governance

Before the GREAT Women Project, the LGU only required a list of GAD-related activities to use its GAD budget. More commonly, the LGU utilized the GAD Budget to finance livelihood projects of women. Even while a GAD policy was already implemented in the municipality, GAD activities were merely the Women's Tour and Women's Month Celebration. Planning process was not as participatory, as it was mainly done for compliance. The LGU became more gender-responsive with the passage of the Magna Carta of Women and particularly with the GREAT Women Project implementation.

During the GREAT Women Project, the planning process was made gender-responsive through specific provisions made in the revision and formulation of the Comprehensive Development Plan, the Executive and Legislative Agenda, and the Annual Investment Plan. Participatory planning with the LGU and representatives from women's groups have realized that women's projects were hardly sustained because women had no "stake" in them, no clear implementing guidelines and weak monitoring. Skills and capability of women to sustain implementation of projects and enterprises had to be continuously built.

With the GREAT Women Project, gender-responsive local policies and plans have made it easier for women to access entrepreneurial services and engage national government services in enterprise development. At the LGU level, GREAT Women Project technical assistance to the LGU's planning process and policy formulation, enabled the LGU to help determine the readiness of women's groups to engage in a specific enterprise. Through local planning, Buenavista LGU resolved overlapping among different entities engaged in the same project. The LGU realized that earlier livelihood projects were directly given to the barangays without building the capabilities of women entrepreneurs or having an enabling legislative and executive environment to support the enterprise. These made it difficult to sustain livelihood projects. As an example, women operating the dried mango processing center needed to have the technical capability to run the center and the management capability to sustain its operations.

Footnote

⁷ Mr. Efren Logrono, Municipal Planning and Development Coordinator, key informant interview, Bohol Tropics Hotel, Tagbilaran City, March 16, 2010

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Impact of the GREAT Women Project is visible in the programs and services provided by the LGU of Buenavista, especially to the two ecotourism barangays. Through project implementation, the LGU was able to generate support from the PAO, DENR and DOT.

With the GREAT Women Project, LGU officials became increasingly aware that LGU officials and staff should provide responsive policies, programs and services to the women sector, particularly in relation to entrepreneurial initiatives. LGU officials and staff received various levels of capacity building, with some key players demonstrating receptiveness to women's economic empowerment concepts by applying them in service delivery. As a challenge, market development for women's products and market protection of existing trades are areas where women entrepreneurs need LGU support.

Policies promoting the rights of women increasingly resonated with men who became more receptive to women's ideas. Women mindsets also improved as they became more creative with existing skills in managing enterprises. Women in Buenavista were taking a more active role to spur off economic and tourism enterprises. Meanwhile, different key players in the Municipality of Buenavista remain generally supportive of women's economic empowerment, despite intervening issues in local political life. LGU officials and staff see capacity development on WEE benefits both women constituents and the LGU. Women in the municipality have shown an eagerness to take part in capacity development opportunities.

The LGU has been vocal of the lessons it learned in implementing the GREAT Women Project. Buenavista has realized that the LGU needs to strengthen organizing women for sustainability within a project, rather than just satisfying fund donor requirements. Organizing, after all, stems from awareness of women's needs. The LGU now stresses that women entrepreneurs are not merely beneficiaries of a local enabling environment, but key players with the LGU in making implementing local WEE policies and plans real and very responsive. Hence, LGU capacities that will enable them to directly capacitate women, especially with knowledge and skills on enterprise development are being prioritized. For instance, with Buenavista having built ecotourism enterprises, local human resources within ecotourism need upgraded skills.

Buenavista is intent on germinating the success of women enterprises of Cambuhat and Daet in the CRVT Project. However, the municipality is hindered by the perception that turf mentality in municipalities and political divisions may hinder them from replicating results and improvements through CRVT and GREAT Women Project. Buenavista

Perception and Behavior Changes in Stakeholders



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Germinating WEE Gains and Success of Local Enterprises

is considering the strategy of intertwining women's enterprise development and ecotourism and replicating their gains in nearby municipalities of Tubigon and Talibon, which also promote tourism.

Sustaining interest on women's economic empowerment among local community members remains a priority. After the GREAT Women Project, Buenavista realizes a concern to have follow-through projects and initiatives to continue women economic empowerment, especially in Cambuhat. The local government of Buenavista also has to ensure that other livelihood assistance is extended to the communities in general.

The quality of human resource to serve the needs of the tourism project also merits primary consideration. It is thus important for the local government unit to have a programmed and sustained training of women and other human resource for this purpose. Training the local resources would not only benefit the tourism industry but would also help make the local economy more dynamic. There should be productive follow-up projects and capital outlay that these trained human resources can use for their own individual or group investments to start and roll out products or services in the market.

The local government and small group project implementers have realized more factors to consider in choosing community investment projects for the municipality. New enterprises should be beneficial to local households and farms. Likewise, new enterprises have to be sustainable, by requiring regular production and marketing. Choosing investments and enterprises more thoroughly could help Buenavista offset disadvantages of having insufficient infrastructure, and being far from ports. Buenavista sees the need for faster market distribution of women's enterprise products and consistent promotion of CRVT eco-tour packages.

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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