

GREAT Women Project



Weaving Progress for the Miag-ao Hablon Industry

Gender-Responsive Value Chain Analysis
of Hablon Weaves in Miag-ao, Iloilo



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Abstract This case study highlights the role of as well as challenges faced by women in the hablon making industry of Miag-ao, Iloilo. The GREAT Women Project supported the Municipality of Miag-ao to create a local enabling environment responsive to women hablon makers.

Background Miag-ao is one of the seven municipalities comprising the 1st District of Iloilo. It is primarily an agricultural town, with rice as its primary crop. It has enterprises along salt making, bamboo craft, candy making, fish preservation, peanut products processing and fishing. It also has abundant sources of clay used for pottery making and mixtures of sand and lime for construction. It has been known for its traditional industry – hablon, a hand-woven textile made of cotton, abaca, pineapple or silk.

The Hablon Industry of Miag-ao

Handloom weaving in Iloilo started when Ilonggos wove textiles from materials bartered with the Chinese. Hablon is derived from the Hiligaynon word “habol”, meaning to weave, and hablon refers to both the process of weaving and its finished products.

Textile goods were the top-ranking exports of Iloilo in the 1850s, with woven materials constituting more than 50% of the total value of the provincial exports. Towards the 1880s, when international ports opened, the weaving industry lost its primary importance to the sugar trade of Western Visayas and the cheaper, machine-made English cotton. Many Ilonggo entrepreneurs then shifted their interests and capital from weaving to sugar production.

In the 1980s and 1990s, specialty fashion materials in the market brought in a fresh demand for hablon. In 1991, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and the promotion of garment products helped revive the hablon industry. Hablon then became Miag-ao’s One Town, One Product (OTOP) that year.



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Hablon weaving is a women-led trade. Skilled female labor is widely available in the locality since loom weaving skills are passed on through generations. Girls are usually brought to the production center, and taught by older weavers to do loomweaving. When girls are ready to weave on their own, they may substitute their mothers. Older women weavers then tend to be complacent about the educational pursuit of their daughters since after finishing high school, these girls are expected to replace them at work and become providers for the family.

Major hablon producers in Miag-ao include Indag-an Multi-Purpose Cooperative, Connie Hand-woven Products, Facto's Hand-woven Products, Natinga Hand-woven Products, Valencia Hand-woven products, Miag-ao Hablon Weaving, Miag-ao's Warps and Wefts.

Today, hablon products range from barongs, gowns and shawls, to bags, belts, pillow cases, lamp sheets, table runners, placemats, pencil cases, pouches, and similar accessories. These products are marketed in local markets such as product outlets, boutiques and fashion shops, department stores, showrooms and flea markets or tiangge, and a few foreign buyers.

Made-to-order hablon cloth is preferred by most corporate buyers such as airline companies, schools and government offices for their office uniforms. Local customers, on the other hand, are frequent buyers of hablon table cloth and runners, pillows, bags and pouches with unique designs.

High-end customers such as local and international fashion designers and boutiques value the craftsmanship and fine texture of Miag-ao hablon products. These qualities enable most Miag-ao hablon producers to command higher market prices.

In the past, abaca fibers were used as hablon materials however, given its declining supply and long production time, most hablon producers now use imported threads with abaca fibers. Thread, the main material used in hablon making, is procured on a weekly basis or during delivery of finished products to local outlets in Iloilo City to minimize costs of procuring raw materials. The cost of thread is at least PhP 56.15 per meter. Thread, made mostly of synthetic fibers, is measured per 10,000 meters or more.

A hablon weave takes about two hours, from designing, preparing loom and threads, hand loom weaving, and warping threads to hablon cloth.

*Hablon Weaving
Process*

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Usually, women loomweavers report for work in the cooperative between 8 to 9 o'clock in the morning, go home at 11:30 to cook lunch and eat with their family. In the afternoon, when their children are in school, weavers usually go back to work at 1:30 until 5 in the afternoon.

Usually, a loom weaver can finish three to five meters a day, working for four to five days a week. They are paid at an average of PhP 45/per meter for weaving and PhP 3 per meter for warping. Total cost of hablon cloth is PhP 114.15 per meter, which can be sold commercially at PhP 250 to PhP 350 per meter, depending on the quality of materials used.

Finished hablon cloth is usually placed inside a transparent plastic bag to keep the cloth clean and unstained, and in some cases, reusable brown paper bags. Labels containing information on how to properly use, handle and store the products are placed in the product packaging. Wholesalers and retailers, on the other hand, are given brochures with instructions on how to properly wash and iron the cloth.

Finished products are usually displayed in the cooperative's display room or in fashion boutiques, showrooms, and tiangge. Personal marketing is often used to get direct orders from the customers and products are delivered to clients via public transportation such as motorbikes and jeepneys. Trade fairs and festivals, usually organized by local government unit and the national government agencies like the DTI, are venues where hablon products are promoted. Product brochures are also used to reach a wider market base.

Net profit is estimated at 35 percent as hablon making only requires labor, materials and minimal overhead, and administrative and marketing costs. Cost of raw materials accounts as the major cost item.

Upstream or supply section of the value chain composed of suppliers and fashion designers mostly male, while the processor and downstream sections are female-dominated.

Industry growth requires a stable supply of affordable raw materials (i.e., thread yarns). About 46 percent of cost of products go to the purchase of raw materials. Currently, producers are dependent on imported raw materials from China and Thailand. Such calls for the need to explore locally produced raw materials such as cotton and other natural fibers, which can be supplied by other municipalities and provinces.

*Challenges
Confronting Hablon-
Making of Miag-ao*

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The global market requires fast lab-to-market business cycles. Given the manual processes and limited financial capacity of the operators in the value chain, other business opportunities for hablon are not fully explored.

Some hablon producers do not keep a large number of designs, risking monotony of product designs. With the increasing market competition and the growing number of substitute products, the low variety of designs would diminish hablon market shares in the local textile industry.

As skilled hablon designers are being absorbed as overseas Filipino workers, local designers will continue to diminish in number unless local capabilities in fashion design are built. Hence, there is a need to link learning institutions with the industry to build local in fashion designing pool. The potential for mixing hablon weaves in other fashion accessory products (such as bags, belts, etc.) has not been explored.

Hablon producers oftentimes resort to high-interest financial institutions for micro-credit. Interest often consumes producers' earnings and producers are, at times, finding difficulty in paying loans especially during lean months.

Hablon cooperatives should also link with government for business and design skills trainings, as well as for incentives and benefits to boost longer-term productivity.

In 2010, hablon weaving in Miag-ao, alongside Pavia pottery making and Badiangan Ginger Tahu, were women-led industries recommended for gender-responsive value chain analysis by the Central Philippine University, which conducted product baselines. The GREAT Women Project supported the conduct of a GR-VCA in these enterprises.

In 2012, the Municipal Government of Miag-ao facilitated the inclusion of hablon weaves in the Intensive Design Clinic Series led by the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW) and the GREAT Women Project. After the design clinic, the hablon weaves pre-qualified to become one of the products to carry the GREAT Women Brand. The Municipal LGU of Miag-ao allocated funds to pay for the initial volume of hablon weaves to be featured in the GREAT Women Brand Launch.

Through GREAT Women Project, Miag-ao conducted orientations on women's economic empowerment and enterprise development and organized consultations with women's groups and barangays. Partners' Fora for women's economic empowerment were likewise held to inform women on available enterprise development programs

*Support
of the
GREAT Women
Project to the
Miag-ao
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and services at the local level. Through PCW-organized knowledge management training, gender and women's economic empowerment resources were uploaded in Miag-ao's website to provide information for women entrepreneurs.

In August 2012, Miag-ao started the construction of a Pasalubong (Souvenir) Center, situated across the popular Miag-ao Church, to serve as a show window and store of women's products, including hablon weaves.

Miag-ao also started implementing programs and providing services for women such as enterprise development skills trainings on marketing, appropriation of LGU budget and support to Philhealth and SSS enrolment of women microentrepreneurs, institutionalization of barangay monitoring information system (BMIS) with sex-disaggregated data for 119 barangays, and organization of WMEs and enterprise groups into cooperatives. Gender disaggregated and responsive data provides the local government more focused data for local planning and policymaking for WEE.

One hablon-weaving cooperative in Miag-ao, the Indag-an Primary Multi-Purpose Cooperative (IPMPC) is an example of a growing enterprise. The cooperative started with five women weavers, producing *patadyong*--a plaid-designed textile used by women as a wrap-around. Weavers then were earning PhP 12.50 per dozen of patadyong done in a week's time.

Through GREAT Women Project, DTI and other support agencies trained and provided technical assistance to local women weavers to produce a wide array of hablon products, which were marketed in leading local department stores.

Starting with only five women weavers, now the cooperative has 20 all-female regular loom weavers. The cooperative is headed by a female manager who oversees the cooperative operations. One male assistant manager is in charge of the procurement of raw materials and delivery of finished products.

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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