The background features a light gray map outline of Southeast Asia. Overlaid on this are various traditional patterns, including a repeating diamond motif at the top and a circular sunburst pattern at the bottom. The main title is rendered in large, bold, red letters with a collage of small images inside each letter.

# WOMEN BEYOND BORDERS

*The Beginning of*  
**GREAT Women *in* ASEAN**



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*A Cambodian Silk drape*

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GREAT Women *in* ASEAN



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This Publication is made possible by the generous support of the American People through the United States Agency for International Development, in collaboration with GREAT Women and ECHOsi Foundation Philippines.

The background of the page is a detailed embroidery of a woman in traditional attire, possibly a Philippine folk costume, with intricate patterns and colors. The embroidery is rendered in a light, muted color, allowing the text to stand out.

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# About the Author

Jeannie E. Javelosa is an advocate for culture, sustainability and practical spirituality. She speaks internationally on these topics. She is Co-Founder of the pioneering and multi-awarded retail store and social enterprise ECHOstore Sustainable Lifestyle, and the ECHOSi Foundation, focused on product development and market access for products of small artisan communities. She is a prime mover of the GREAT Women Brand, an advocacy-driven marketing platform that supports women's economic empowerment through a regional supply chain.

She was Asia-Pacific Finalist Winner to the 2012 Cartier Women's Initiative Award in Paris, France. She is the Founding President, now Chair of the BPW Makati (Business and Professional Women Network); member of the Women's Business Council of the Philippines; and Gender Representative in the Micro-Small-Medium Enterprise Development (MSMED) Council of the Department of Trade and Industry. Her Sunday column "A Spirited Soul" has been running for 18 years at the Philippine Star. She is one of the writers of the anthology Planet Entrepreneur printed by John Wiley and Sons, writing the chapter on "Women and Minority Entrepreneurs". Jeannie is also Co-founder of the 18-year old award-winning agency EON Stakeholder Relations Firm recognized by the 2014 Sabre Awards Asia Pacific as the Southeast Asia Consultancy of the Year where she now sits on the Board.

Jeannie graduated with a Masters of Fine Arts from the University of Pennsylvania, USA. The first half of her eclectic career path was as an award-winning artist and printmaker, with 20 solo exhibitions to her name, two international jewelry design awards, and a national award for printmaking. Her paintings and prints are in private and institutional collections in the Philippines, USA, Taiwan and Singapore. As an art critic and book author, she was winner of a Manila Critic's Award for the coffee table book Art Philippines. She was a recipient of a writing and printmaking grant to Paris from the government of France. She has run international projects for the Philippines in ASEAN and Europe. She continues to be a museum curator and strategic branding-marketing-communicator. She is also a certified yoga teacher, and has an international following for soul-destiny counseling and workshops on practical spirituality. *(Photo courtesy of AXA)*





# Preface

The formal partnership between the United States and ASEAN began four decades ago, when the US became a dialogue partner in 1977. Promoting opportunity for ASEAN women is one of five focus areas of US-ASEAN cooperation. Women's empowerment is important not only for what they can contribute to their family, community and country, but for their own self-realization as well. Without helping women realize their potential, we miss out on a crucial part of development. When women achieve their full potential, no matter what field they may be in, they become powerful exponents for uplifting their families, their communities and their nation, thereby building a stronger Philippines and ASEAN.

Gender-Responsive Economic Actions for the Transformation of Women, better known as GREAT Women, is an exemplary initiative that provides a concrete platform for asserting women's critical role in propelling enterprise and creating jobs in the Philippines. USAID is pleased to have been instrumental towards scaling up the initiative to benefit women in the entire ASEAN region, with the launch of the GREAT Women in ASEAN initiative in 2015 in Kuala Lumpur.

This publication chronicles GREAT Women's good work since its early beginnings, along with USAID's other initiatives to support women-powered enterprises in the Philippines. We hope it will inspire much more good work to bring out the best in women entrepreneurs and women-powered enterprises in the Philippines and well beyond.

# Foreword from AWEN

This is the opportune time for women in ASEAN to leverage their skills and talents towards successful entrepreneurship. This can easily happen with the emergence of networks like the ASEAN Women Entrepreneurs Network (AWEN) which can connect with government representatives and more importantly, with other sister entrepreneurs throughout the region.

There is a growing number of country to country collaborations, franchises and licenses of brands crossing the ASEAN borders, and exchange of the very basic goods and services.

Through the help of dialogue partners and aid agencies like USAID, women are able to use technology in advancing their business, whether it is a startup or an established enterprise that wants to innovate with the times.

In the end, it is not a competition but a beautiful collaboration among like-minded women who want to give all the other women in the value chain and supply chain a hand up. The men also have their roles as champions and believers in the power of networks to increase the incomes of women and enterprises in general. Further, male champions have come of age and have come forward to work with women bosses without fear of emasculation or subservience—simply because it is the right thing to do.

We hope that the stories put forward will encourage and inspire more women, and men, to help other smaller players become the big companies which will soon be of prominence in the region. Giving more jobs and more pay, giving hope and bringing change to each and every community.

**Pacita U. Juan**

*Chair, ASEAN Women Entrepreneur Network  
2016-2018*



# Introduction

It has been four years into its birth, this advocacy-driven brand born out of a development platform. But its story was already there, before we launched it by giving it a name, an image, a presence in the market space. Or by giving it strength in the way the noisy world accepts, consumes and identifies with things: by creating a brand for women. The GREAT Women Brand.

A brand with a story. A brand with a history. A brand that allows many to resonate and call it their own. A brand that, riding with the global winds of women's economic empowerment, has a future potential to speak for change and transformation.

This is how I see GREAT Women. Always, it has been ahead of me...the experiences that mold what GREAT Women is and continues to become. I am always running after it to give it a voice and form, to explain what I am seeing and to do them until thankfully, others see it too.

So I will tell a story to chronicle the beginning of this journey, and that of other women's journeys that intersect—came together—and in the magic of the flow, created something good. GREAT Women narrates stories of empowerment through collaboration, of enterprise and trade, of the little women on the ground, within the context of the social enterprise space where we, as entrepreneurs, choose to hang our hearts on our sleeves and still sustain profits as we move together. And more importantly, the enabling environment that government and international donor agencies strive to build and sustain, while the private sector and other organizations come in to support and grow.

Never in my wildest dreams did I, an artist, imagine myself running a retail business, being an advocate for women, or engineer the building of an advocacy marketing platform to support women enterprises. In hindsight, the journey was really about many women who bought into the vision, a fulcrum of women that includes Pacita “Chit” Juan, Regina “Reena” Francisco, Luzviminda “Luvy” Villanueva, Myrna Jarillas, Emmeline Verzosa, Imelda Canuel, Patty Alleman and Thitapha Wattanapruttipaisan. Each so committed in their own respective roles, each trying to bring the partnerships together and see how it could move forward. I think deep down, we each knew there was something good here.

Meanwhile, the women we continue to work with under the GREAT Women Collective all have the heart, and the business acumen to reach out to their supply chain, to bring the poor and marginalized up through the businesses they run. Or there are also male champions of women, as well as women enablers in the field of development, or in professions that believe in the advocacy to move it forward.

It has been life changing and inspiring to witness how shared commitment and drive can transform a vision and concept into action and reality. What could be more encouraging than to see change actually happen? I witness this incredible energy that moves in a circle, as the inclusive business model started to be defined in this Platform. And this energy so wanting to be born... is Feminine.

In a time when the world reels in crisis, climate change is here and now, and greed and profit driven values dictate the market place, we find half of the world's population are women and many are disempowered. International data and statistics show basic facts: that economically empowering women means a way out of global poverty, helps country GDPs rise, and creates a healthier, educated and more humane society as women plow back their income to their children's health, nutrition and education. Women's issues were often categorized under human rights, so GREAT Women seeks to expand economic opportunities to decrease women's vulnerability in human trafficking and domestic violence.

Women, as the backbone of our economies, must be empowered. How can a small woman producer, microentrepreneur or a woman entrepreneur starting off, do it alone? She can, but with great difficulty. But by stepping into an inclusive, gender sensitive, eco-system for enterprise, she will be able to move up the value chain by preparing her products for other markets, introduce her to a network and teach her to access credit or capital. GREAT Women is not an exclusive approach, but a way to bring women forward, not as subjects that should be supported, but as actors of their own empowerment.

Today, the necessary institutional support that provides structure the process has been increasingly open to innovation and change. It is amazing to see how GREAT Women allows multi-donor government funding to work together. Already, Canada, the United States, Australia and Japan's aid agencies are aligning. Many groups and institutions see the gaps now and move in to address issues such as financial access, market readiness and access to markets, capacity training, technological understanding, and support for their businesses. Through the many inner changes that we have seen the microcosm of our microentrepreneurs go through, we find the outer action arise out of the inner changes, experiences and growth they go through under GREAT Women.

We are building leadership, confidence, courage, creativity and a network of sisterhood aided by big-sister run enterprises. Mentoring naturally happens, in market access, in financial literacy, in purchasing directions. Innovation is happening as institutions, government aid agencies, groups and associations bring their heads together to think through how to change systems that do not work or change policies that find no meaning on the ground.

GREAT Women is also about the awakening of women to their strength, to the capacity to expand and the network of a new regional market: the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Economic Community (AEC). It is heartening that this book is coming out during the Philippines' Chairmanship, which coincides with the 50<sup>th</sup> Year Anniversary of the founding of ASEAN. We are one country member alongside Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Laos PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore and Vietnam. This milestone presents an opportunity to forge more partnerships and to open avenues to bring this platform to more women in the region. It is heady to be at the co-driver's seat in this pioneering gender platform of the Philippines. We share it with the region under the GREAT Women in ASEAN Initiative which will give women vendors access to regional and international trade, and through the donor partnerships we continue to create, a development fund that can strengthen and help the women in their supply chains. We have already generated a lot of interest from counterparts in ASEAN as we discuss licensing, certifications, technology alignments and export exchange. We have also begun discussions on how we can replicate the inclusive business model for both product and services for women in their respective countries. It is truly an exciting time to help in the economic awakening and empowerment of the women in the region.

As GREAT Women pursues its advocacy and platform within the country and in ASEAN, Philippine development partners have since engaged in noteworthy initiatives that enable and empower women entrepreneurs. The United States Assistance for International Development (USAID), through its projects—Advancing Philippine Competitiveness (COMPETE), Science, Technology, Research, and Innovation for Development (STRIDE), Mindanao Youth for Development (MYDev), ASEAN Connectivity through Trade and Investment (ACTI), Strengthening Urban Resilience for Growth with Equity (SURGE), and E-Peso have achieved substantial gains in strengthening the foundation on which women entrepreneurs build their competence, capabilities and skills to ensure the success of their chosen endeavors.

Our country's hosting on ASEAN's 50th year is significant. 50 years...that's half a century hence our founding fathers' vision, and now, as stewards, we usher in the AEC. We have the ASEAN Foundation recently formed. We even have the ASEAN Women-Entrepreneur Network or AWEN which will undoubtedly help empower the other half of the population of our region and strive to bring women issues into the ASEAN's economic and socio-cultural pillars. And there are all sorts of ASEAN groupings in all aspects of trade, politics and socio-economic fields.

What our leaders are doing to create the policies to make our region more secure, more competitive and collaborative is a turtle slow process but will have its gains in the future, for more women in the future. To tap new opportunities and overcome challenges,

it is essential for ASEAN to strengthen its internal unity and adjust the “rules of game,” including the principle of consensus which has always been a seeming roadblock.

It is truly an exciting time for ASEAN, as the global community faces many challenges, yet paralleled with so much innovation and opportunities—this is the region where the action is!

The technical impacts and activities created by the Philippine program are not covered by the scope of this book. Rather, this narrative builds on how, in the Philippines, the strength of government initiatives and donor collaboration on gender equality and women’s empowerment—where USAID and Canada are active members—along with most bilateral donor agencies and multilaterals, can be effective alongside private sector’s dynamic directions. Or how these conversations towards aid effective partnerships can be brought to the ASEAN region. Canada started the Philippine program. The USAID, on the other hand, was responsible for its debut and foray into ASEAN.

GREAT Women, at the rate it is morphing, will elevate empowerment from being transactional, to being truly transformational.

The GREAT Women in ASEAN Initiative is AEC on the ground, for women, led by women.

**Jeannie E. Javelosa**  
*2017, Manila*



GREAT Women  
in ASEAN





*Crochet cotton scarf by the GKonomics women cooperative  
(photo courtesy of GREAT Women)*





# CHAPTER 1

Going Green and Doing Good

*Premium red coffee beans (photo courtesy of Ros Juan)*

*“So what do we want to do in the second half of our lives?”*

I was pondering this question while having dinner with two of my friends—Regina “Reena” Francisco, my grade school and high school group mate, and our friend from college, Pacita “Chit” Juan. We wanted to use our talents, get out of our respective career rat races in profit-driven companies, and do something worthwhile.

*“So what’s the gap? What’s needed?”* I asked them.

*“Why don’t we help the poor people bring their products to the market?”* Chit answered.

*“Yes, their packaging really needs help,”* Reena affirmed. *“Their products can’t even get to the bigger groceries because of this.”*

*“It’s got to be eco-friendly, green...”* Chit recommended.

*“Yes, but it should not just be eco-green,”* I pointed out. *“It’s got to be something that can be replicated by others.”*

*“Let’s add H then, make it ECHO?”* Chit said.

*“Yes! It would be an acronym for Environment, Community, Hope, Organization,”* I blurted out. *“Hope brings the heart in, and we will need to work with organized groups.”*

*“But we will sell things to make people’s life eco-friendly,”* Reena reiterated.

*“Ok then. Let’s add the word ‘store’ after ECHO because it’s what we want to set up,”* Chit reasoned. *“Let’s add the word ‘sustainable’ as well since it’s the current buzzword.”*

*“ECHOstore!”* We all excitedly chimed in.

*“Sustainable Lifestyle,”* I added.

*Ok, one store? Deal. No stress. Yes. Let’s enjoy the ride.*

We dove into discussing the details; we wanted to do something where we could use our combined skills, talent and network to help others, something we could enjoy doing, and make us grow old gracefully.



*The ECHOtrio (L-R) Reena Francisco, Jeannie Javelosa and Chit Juan (photo courtesy of ECHOstore)*

I believe that in life, there are moments when, blessings and graces of wonderful ideas come and root, and then something good is born. And we, who are recipients, are mindful of the gift and the responsibility to make the seed grow and flourish. This is what happened when three friends came together for dinner, with no idea of doing business.

The ECHOtrio, as we would collectively call ourselves, came upon a concept that was just waiting to be born. It seemed to come out of nowhere. In hindsight, that was the moment when the unexpected, unscripted occurs—where all of what we have done in our professional lives, our intentions and our desire to do good, our skills and talents, came to a meeting point to make us begin what we are truly meant to do in our lives. We weren't even thinking of going into business together. Suddenly—it was there, against all traditional business practices...very limited capital, no financial projections or the vision-mission-objective process plus a supply chain of community groups, poor people and

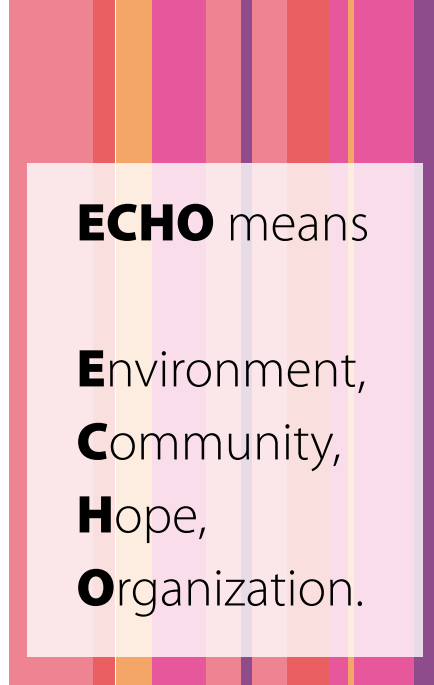
small micro entrepreneurs that needed help. Who would have thought that we could birth a concept so fresh yet so radically right for the times? And then we realized that the three of us, considering our individual talents and past professional experiences were well equipped to assume synergistic roles in ECHOstore.

We were fired up to establish a one-stop shop that would offer a healthy alternative and sustainable lifestyle. And the business, which we later would understand to be a social enterprise, was set in motion. A social enterprise is a business for profit, but with an added twist—the very core would be creating social and environmental impact, and not just profits. It will also consider the triple bottom line, including people and planet. We wanted to help the Self, the Community and Planet.

This was our manifesto, the phrase seen on our store sign and our guiding North Star. We wanted to push forward the idea of sustainable living. First, the self needs to be whole and healthy. Then followed by effective collaborations to help the community make a great impact and care for our ravaged planet.

We looked at the gaps and realized nobody was helping the poor producers sell their products, and no one was talking about the sustainable green lifestyle. Many marginalized groups and communities needed more livelihood that meant we needed to sell, sell, and sell their products. While so many NGO and micro-finance groups were helping them, no one was really selling their products in a focused manner. So bringing our unique expertise together, we dove into ECHOstore.

We decided to stand for how clean, natural and good Filipino products are even as foreign brands flooded the retail space. We stood for fair trade to ease poverty, for recycling to help the planet and yes for women's livelihood...name it, we tried to embrace as much as we could then. ECHOstore represented the vehicle by which we knew could help change the lifestyle of people.





*Façade of our flagship store (showing the tri-concept) in Serendra, Bonifacio Global City, Taguig, Metro Manila  
(photo courtesy of ECHOstore)*

It was a novel idea, revolutionary even...to try to be the umbrella, or the home to share ideas for sustainable living. There was no green store in any high-end mall in 2008, no one really “owning” the green speak. And we could feel the energy mount as we spoke to people about it. We rallied our network of social enterprises, communities, foundations, and charitable groups who badly needed a retail space to sell their goods such as home décor, fashionable accessories, gift items and many more. We rallied our friends in media to help us spread the news. After all, our producers—*lumads* or indigenous peoples, women prisoners, urban poor folks, farmers, foundation heads supporting abused children and young girls, environmentalists, and even the artisans of the creative industries—needed media space to tell their stories too. We invited producers of organic, natural and non-toxic goods to bring in their products from body personal care, home cleaning stuff, and home staples like organic rice, sugar, and other food produce. Many of these small producers did not have a main outlet in a high-traffic mall area. Also, many community groups needed help with marketing, branding and strategic positioning of their products in a local market flooded by foreign products and brands.



In 2009, four months after opening ECHOstore, we joined and won the First Business Plan Competition of the Philippine Business in Development (BiD) Challenge that provided coaching and investor matching for sustainable enterprises. The Challenge was conducted in partnership with Dutch NGO Fair Ventures and organized by the Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP). We were one of two Philippine champions sent to Amsterdam to compete in the international BiD marketplace. While we didn't win the top prize (*I humorously thought it a bit much if we won the grand prize after just four months into operating the store...*) that trip to Rotterdam allowed us to visit fair trade stores and opened our eyes to one fact: that we want to remain small.



Our advocacies are our business. Our lifestyle is our business. Our business is also the lifestyle. So we lived, worked, innovated and tried to define the green lifestyle. The academe looked to our blue ocean strategies and innovations and started to study, write and publish our story. ECHOstore was always a case study epitomizing the morphing business format they termed “social enterprise,” and the three of us as social entrepreneurs.



### Some firsts we introduced at ECHOstore

- We pioneered the first green store in a high-end mall and retail space at a time when only an organic weekend market was present.
- We recycle old magazine papers for our packaging and store bags.
- We place story cards on our products.
- We actively spoke and wrote about the green sustainable lifestyle to make green living hip.
- We embraced many communities and small producers, making their products the core of our business.

### ENTERPRISES WITH IMPACT

*A social enterprise is a business for profit, but whose mission at its core is to address, not just profit, but social and environmental impact as well. It is enterprise with a heart, grounded on strong business fundamentals. Its growth organically happens as it continues to address gaps in the market to influence positive societal changes.*





# CHAPTER 2

## The Twin Combination

*Philippine abaca woven textiles from Southern Philippines tribes  
(photo courtesy of GREAT Women)*

**I**nto our first year of running the store, we were already talking about ECHOstore as a vehicle that would allow us to mentor and teach would-be and existing entrepreneurs. On our second year, it was clear that a separate entity was needed, a non-profit one as opposed to the for-profit social enterprise retail brand. With the help of my two

## **ECHOsi:**

**E**mpowering  
**C**ommunities with  
**H**ope and  
**O**pportunities through  
**S**ustainable  
**I**nitiatives



*Seated L-R: Architect Dan Lichauco, Jeannie Javelosa, Pacita Juan. Standing L-R: Reena Francisco and Ricky Cruz (photo courtesy of ECHOsi Foundation)*



*ECHOtrio product development with communities on the ground (photo courtesy of ECHOsi Foundation)*

angel funder friends, Architect Dan Lichauco and micro-financer Ricky Cruz, we set up the ECHOsi Foundation in 2009.

I always say that the social enterprise and the non-profit foundation are linked at the hip. They are a twin combination. The ECHOsi Foundation grew out of the need of ECHOstore to organize our developmental efforts and not confuse it with retail work. ECHOstore's unique role as an integrating-bridging-collaborative brand-company paralleled its initial growth alongside development efforts of the foundation. ECHOstore was then the only retail store in the country with a national developmental arm, and a foundation with a retail store. The twin combination worked with marginalized groups, government agencies, NGOs and private sector to support livelihood by increasing access to domestic and international markets, thereby contributing in efforts to break the cycle of poverty while supporting the environment through a sustainable value chain.

An enabling institution that helped us push forward our adhoc development work was the Peace and Equity Foundation (PEF). We agreed to help their Partner Access Centers Cooperative Inc. (PACCI) in Baguio, Bacolod, General Santos, Palawan, Bohol and Albay. PEF paid for our airfare and lodging, but we gave our time and trainings for free. It was a win-win situation to fulfil our desire to train community groups then try to sell their products at the store.



*L-R clockwise: GREAT Women upcycled plastic beach tote, ECHOstore body basics gift box, GREAT Women travel pouches of Bagobo kinatkat textiles with fine leather, GREAT Women peanut butter (photo courtesy of GREAT Women and ECHOstore)*

So we set to work and organized all our development and volunteer efforts under the ECHOsi Foundation. We never thought we would be involved with countrywide development efforts; we just wanted to organize ourselves since we had been, for the past two years, invited around the country to become spokespersons advocating for sustainability issues.

The core of what we did and continue to do goes beyond fostering sustainability in production, consumption and lifestyle. It is also about checking the supply and value chain of the lifestyle products we sell. We started from the bottom of the pyramid, learning how the farmers plant the material, and then engaging micro and small producers to ensure that their products are ready for our shelves.

There are many groups and foundations helping so many other communities. We are not unique. But ECHOsi Foundation's was bridging what I called, the "loop of sustainability"—of first, strategically developing products for different markets and second, helping open these markets for them. Livelihood groups make products unaware of what the market wants. So it's really also about teaching these community groups about the different markets, bringing in innovative designers and product developers who sell in these markets, and creating actual links to bring their products to these markets.

## **MARKET ACCESS AND FEEDBACK**

*Giving market access to microentrepreneurs means changing a mindset to focus on what the market wants and not what they want to make. It is guiding them through product development that value adds for segmented markets, and making sure they get feedback after market testing.*



*Wacky post-workshop photo of participants in Bobol's product development workshop with the Chair of the Philippine Commission on Women, Remy Rikken and the ECHOtrio (photo courtesy of ECHOsi Foundation)*



Our ECHOdesign Lab was in charge of teaching communities about market-driven product development, packaging, and the niche, or specialty market. The main messages we gave to the communities included:

- There are new markets, and they could expand their product lines to both the local market, AND to niche, specialty markets.
- Look at what the market wants, produce or create for this, and not what you want to do or make.
- Know where you want to bring your products.
- Constant market testing and feedback is important.
- Women microentrepreneurs should develop products that could at least enter two new markets and not just one.

In those early years when we were trying to form the ECHOsi Foundation's programs, people would ask us what made us different. As social entrepreneurs, we felt that it was our duty to make sure that producers listen to the market. Our real capital then was intangible. This included the ECHOtrio's collective past professional experiences, our relationships with organizations and our creative talents to package products, ideas and events for strategic retailing. We were able to operate by consolidating our business strategies, our know-how in operations, branding, marketing and communications, plus stakeholder partnerships. We were very clear about the impact metrics we wanted—social, financial and environmental. That way, we can continue to do things for the communities, for the planet, and for profit. For the store to remain sustainable with new innovative good products, the key for real change was to bring the ECHOdesign lab to a national level aligned with the government's initiatives for poverty reduction through livelihood development.



A close-up photograph of a hand holding a piece of yellow abaca fiber. The fiber is thick and textured, with some fraying at the ends. The background is dark and out of focus, making the fiber and hand stand out. The lighting is soft, highlighting the natural texture of the plant material.

# CHAPTER 3

## The Loop of Sustainability

*Philippine abaca prepared for ikat weaving (photo credit Dariel Quiogue)*

**W**e taught and guided small producers on creating product variants with nicer and newer designs. We were always conscious of our traditions and inspired by our culture when we create, design and develop products. Always, we offered our customers an option to purchase products with a social good attached to it. While different government agencies offered help, the wholistic and integrated perspective of incorporating product development, packaging, design directions, strengthening production capacity, financial considerations for market testing, branding, marketing and opening niche and specialty markets for these small entrepreneurs remain a whole sustainable value chain that we were building.

What we found out was that this integrated approach meant handholding our community groups and micro-producers every step of the way. The challenge we took on was how to involve everyone who can help the value chain bring newer, better-designed products of small community groups to markets that offer higher profit. We had to get everyone involved—from small community producers, government agency representatives, to designer and merchandise developers, retailers and conscious consumers—and then plugged them into the process of creating a sustainable value chain.

It was about getting serious with what really matters to people—the realities—throughout the value chain. The small producers needed to reach markets that can pay them better and help keep their livelihood sustainable; that people would buy a small producer's products not out of pity but for quality; that small producers needed to step up and understand why they must be reliable and efficient; that development partners and government agencies needed worthwhile public-private partnerships to fund while achieving their success indicators; that designers wanted to help but needed assurance that their designs would not be copied and communities have the production capacity to supply their orders; that conscious retailers required the professionalization of the value chain; that micro-financing groups considered the security of the market as a crucial factor when supporting micro-enterprise products that can sell; and finally, consumers preferred good and healthy products with great social and environmental impact.

Thus, mindsets needed to change.



*Members of the La Huerta de Rosario Rural Improvement Club, Barangay Agdangan, Bao, Camarines Sur  
(photo courtesy of Bernadette delos Santos)*

It's not always about packing neatly, or selling or financing it a lower price like the big producers and retailers. It is about co-creating the whole system with stakeholders who value the importance of integration and collaboration—a format that creates sustainability.

We all want to make a difference—people dynamic and courageous enough to shun the old ways, and revolutionize the next possible innovative steps to address gaps that were never fully addressed. These gaps include: micro-financing production when no collateral is available; designers who reach out to create new sustainable products rooted in tradition; government workers in the bureaucracy who work long hours to streamline business procedures; funding groups who ask where else they can help; retailers who are willing to stretch and take the risk to pay for community products that look shaky, even for market testing; and, the media who step in to write and talk about all of these. Each has a role and each role is precious in the integrated value chain that starts from the bottom of the pyramid to the customer's enjoyment of the product.

So, it is about handholding the weaker because one is stronger. And then lifting them up so they could prosper.

### Redefining terms...

- From service to an art of collaboration
- From distribution to access
- From development to enabling empowerment and growth
- From design to sustainable design, or design for development
- From helping to proactive hand-holding that impact lives, elevate, inspire and empower

One example is Teodora. We met Teodora Aquino, a woman microentrepreneur, during one of the GREAT Women product development workshops in Camarines Sur. Teodora and her husband established the Everlasting Food Products in 1987 to take advantage of a newly introduced pre-processed crabmeat market in Pampanga. She also helped organize the women in her community, and formed the Samahang Inang Manggagawa and the Cagbunga Crab Paste Producers Association of Gainza (CCPAG) in Naga City.

During that product development workshop, Teodora timidly opened a bottle of her crab paste product for us to sample, and everyone was amazed since it was the purest crab paste we had tasted. Apparently, Teodora's pure crab paste (*taba ng talangka*) product is purchased wholesale and brought to Pampanga where fillers are added to double the volume while maintaining a comparable flavor. The biggest surprise and revelation was that crab paste, a product that everyone thinks comes from the northern province of Pampanga where crabs and crablets abound, are sourced from Camarines Sur!

Teodora's crab paste was brought to ECHOsi's lab where it was used to make crab paste pasta and served as one of the dishes at the ECHOcafé. A few months later, Teodora and other GREAT Women project participants went to the ECHOcafé in Serendra where they were served Teodora's pure crab paste pasta and were blown away by its rich flavor, consistency and versatility.



*Top: Designer Tes Pasola mentoring weaver Ludivina Boston in province of Davao*

*bottom: Designer Len Cabili sketching a design in Miag-ao, province of Iloilo (photos courtesy of ECHOsi Foundation)*



## **AN INTEGRATED APPROACH**

*A holistic and integrated development approach, and the creation of an enabling eco-system to support value addition in ever gap seen in the supply chain is the process by which our women microentrepreneurs can be empowered. Sustainability can be achieved by co-creating the whole system with stakeholders who value the importance of integration, innovation, collaboration, and inclusivity.*

Working with Teodora's organizations, the GREAT Women Project also assisted in sustaining the quality and supply of crab paste by combining and harmonizing other existing forms of assistance for the local government to set up common service facilities. These initiatives addressed product standards and helped in obtaining compliance and approval from the Bureau of Food and Drugs (BFAD) for the crab paste. Together with the municipal government, the CCPAG took steps to spawn more crablets in the Bicol River, and at the same time, prevent resource depletion particularly during harvest season.

Many years after, the crab paste is still available in all of ECHOstore's physical and online branches, and in other affiliate cafes like Kafelokal, Commune Café in Poblacion, Makati, GREAT Women Café, and in other gourmet spots.

Pure crab paste for gourmets. What used to be a regular, adulterated and ordinary product is now a gourmet product—only the label was changed. All it needed was the appropriate intervention to maintain its quality, elevate its status and market reach.

Teodora's path serves as an inspiration for the microentrepreneurs in Gainza. Her perseverance in community organizing and dedication to entrepreneurship helped establish Everlasting Food Products as the leading crab paste venture in Gainza where substantial change happened. Teodora's colleagues and community were able to access a specialty market that took the product for what it is, kept it pure, paid its correct price, and made it sustainable. And that's a GREAT Women maxim: take the best and just bring it to market.



*A smile lights Teodora's face when she saw her crab paste in a pasta dish served at ECHOcafé (photo courtesy of ECHOsi Foundation)*



*GREAT Women pure crab paste by Teodora Aquino's group from Camarines Sur (photo courtesy of ECHOsi Foundation)*





*ECHOtrio assessing products in Bohol (photo courtesy of ECHOsi Foundation)*



*Zarah Juan with Jeannie Javelosa sharing contemporary designs inspiration to the B'laan School of Living Traditions in South Cotabato, Mindanao (photo courtesy of ECHOsi Foundation)*





# CHAPTER 4

## The Gender Card

*Panay Bukidnon tribe woman doing their traditional embroidery  
(photo courtesy of ECHOsi Foundation)*

The result of our data gathering after one year running ECHOstore surprised us. We were a fully owned and women-led enterprise at the management and leadership levels. Our network of suppliers was 86% women-led. Most of our staff were women too. Our customer base was 90% women, mostly young mothers who chose to buy healthy food for their families. We became attentive to this “gender lens” because during our international travels, Chit and I would encounter people who were interested in women-led enterprises under global programs of women and trade.

It was natural then for Luvy Villanueva, leading a five-year Canadian funded project under the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW), to approach Chit for Womenbiz and ECHOstore.

In 2012, ECHOstore would win as Finalist for Asia Pacific for the Cartier Women’s initiative award in Paris, France.

In 2015, ECHOstore was included in the list of the 50 top women-led companies in the Asia Pacific Economic Council (APEC). It was identified as one of the successful cases from APEC member economies particularly Australia, Peru, Vietnam, Philippines and Indonesia in APEC’s “Women in Inclusive Business” study, highlighting our social enterprise and how we engaged with the base of the pyramid while remaining focused on gender.

As defined by Asian Development Bank (ADB) and adopted by APEC, *“Inclusive businesses are private sector investments specifically targeting this low-income market with the double purpose of making reasonable profit and creating tangible development impact through the provision of sustainable jobs and better income opportunities, as well as services that matter for the poor.”*



*Benguet coffee farmer  
(photo courtesy of Philippine  
Coffee Board)*

Luvy was following through from a conversation Chit had with Emmeline “Miyen” Verzosa, PCW’s Executive Director during one of those steering committee meetings where Miyen, handing over some coffee wrapped in plastic, asked if those could be sold at ECHOstore. “*Oh please Miyen!*” Chit responded. “*We really need to dress up our products for the global market. That coffee product still needs to go through so much product development and packaging!*”

Chit was also the President of the Women’s Business Council of the Philippines. Womenbiz (which is WBCP’s nickname), is a policy-focused group whose members are owners of companies. Luvy was hoping to get the private sector buy-in to help in the training of microentrepreneurs, who, at the culmination of Phase 1, kept asking for increased market access and livelihood sustainability. Luvy inquired if Womenbiz could conduct the training and if the women’s products could be sold in ECHOstore thereafter.

Since Womenbiz and ECHOstore were not into capacity building activities, Chit asked Luvy to get in touch with me as I was then trying to make some sense of the adhoc ECHOdesign lab of the foundation. Luvy wanted to change the game, and expand the PCW focus from purely human rights issues. She was open to out-of-the-box thinking and innovation and the PCW gave her the leeway to implement the GREAT Women Phase 1 Project. We couldn't have found a more perfect partner working from the government side.

Miyen, as PCW's Executive Director, and Remy Rikken as its Chair were nurturing the relationship of the PCW with Canada as a country donor. The partnership dates way back to the late 80s during the conduct of a Gender Analysis Training—the first introduction ever to gender roles and gender planning in the Philippines. More long-term projects followed with two institutional strengthening projects in the 1990s, which honed the expertise of the PCW on gender mainstreaming and enabled them to be recognized internationally.

Miyen once told me that gender mainstreaming had to be concretized in a particular sector that would eventually influence the lives of women. The partnership between PCW and Canada was making great strides so Canada once again trusted PCW with a third project, the GREAT Women Phase 1 Program in 2007. This focused on enhancing the enabling environment for women's access to economic opportunities.

Luvy had been designing and implementing the GREAT Women Phase 1 program since 2007, and crucial to her task was partnership building and stakeholder management. The program's focus was to work with LGUs to teach them how to create policies and programs through a gender lens to enable women's economic empowerment. She had her hands full managing the national program with local governments to deliver assistance to women micro entrepreneurs and introduce reforms to policies affecting women's livelihoods.

**GREAT:**

**G**ender

**R**esponsive

**E**conomic

**A**ctions for the

**T**ransformation

of Women



*Shieg Bulaong (left) head of Naga Development Office led the GREAT Women Project Phase 1 in Naga, with micro entrepreneur Fe Caranza (photo courtesy of Fe Caranza)*

*Development workers Imelda Canuel (left) and Sef Carandang (right) checking products from communities (photo courtesy of ECHOsi Foundation)*

It was Miyen who actually created the acronym of GREAT. She shared, *“I came up with the word GREAT during one of my reflective moments when I was trying to squeeze creative juices and play with words that would best describe the project on women’s economic empowerment. I knew that the project must be transformative to the lives of women; that it should focus on economic activities—or actions really, which is a broader term... and that the project is gender-responsive. So voila! GREAT Women!”*

So, with Luvy as our partner on the ground, the ECHOtrio dove into the communities, revising what was not working, innovating and shifting the program as we learned along the way to get best results with our women microentrepreneurs. Luvy tried to enable us throughout the next eight months of the Phase 1 project. With a limited budget, we tried our best to do more on the livelihood side.

As I took on the program planning and logistics with Luvy, I would drag Reena away from ECHOstore operations and Chit from all her boardrooms and coffee-related meetings. ECHOstore had started licensing and opening other branches, overloading Reena with work. So we asked Imelda “M” Canuel to join the ECHOsi Foundation. M was a research writer raring to return into the workforce after a 12-year hiatus of being a

mom to two girls. M was so passionate in wanting to help the poor microentrepreneurs; and I believe that the private sector part of GREAT Women would not have happened if M were not around. I recall telling her after a very long, tiring but fruitful provincial workshop, that we seemed to be creating things as they were coming; and I asked her to document everything we were doing. And she did—following me, mindful of the gaps in the gaps I did not see, and even trying to fill these herself. M was also creating her own network with the several provincial governments, the other development workers, and developing personal relationships with the microentrepreneurs.

Luvy's regional community coordinators were all out and open for change too. I distinctly remember Bing Cubing-Lao, a dynamic lady who was overseeing the development directions in the Panay region. Bing was so involved in the project that even after she left the project and moved into the Iloilo provincial government, she continued gender economic efforts, helping institutionalize these as well. From the Canadian side, we had Myrna Jarillas to champion the project's direction. As Senior Program Officer of the Development Section of the embassy, Myrna was tasked to see this project until its completion. But she watched over the program with an interest beyond her official duties.



*GREAT Women Project leads (seated second from left-right): Luvy Villanueva, PCW GREAT Women director; Emmeline Verzosa, PCW executive director; Myrna Jarillas, Canadian Embassy; Jeannie Javelosa and Chit Juan from the ECHOsi Foundation (photo courtesy of ECHOsi Foundation)*



This brings to mind an inspiring story about farmer embroiderers.

Baao, Camarines Sur has always been known as the Bicol Region's embroidery center from the 60s until the 80s, and its clergy was one of its major patrons. Back then, the embroidered products ranged from priestly vestments to home furnishing and clothing. The onslaught of disruptive technology saw machines and computers doing embroidery work instead of humans; and these contributed heavily to the demise of Baao embroidery and the industry faded into obsolence.



*Bernadette de los Santos explaining production details to her women workers.  
(photo courtesy of Bernadette de los Santos)*

In 2015, Bernadette de los Santos, a woman entrepreneur-farmer and leader, submitted a project proposal to the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) to help revive local embroidery. When her proposal was approved, and together with the local government counterpart funding, she conducted embroidery training in September 2015. After the training, the members of the group dwindled but soon enough were replaced by fresh blood when applicants came to work as embroiderers and underwent a crash course in hand-embroidery.

In 2016, the group was organized into a Rural Improvement Club (RIC) by the Department of Agriculture (DA) and named La Huerta de Rosario RIC following the name of Bernadette's farm where trainings were conducted. That same year, the PCW took in the Department of Agriculture as partner for the Great Women 2 project, and Bernadette, a farmer and an RIC leader, was identified as one of the beneficiaries of the GREAT Women 2 Project.



*Members of the La Huerta de Rosario Rural Improvement Club, Barangay Agdangan, Bao, Camarines Sur  
(photo courtesy of Bernadette de los Santos)*

In 2017, the Department of Social Welfare and Development requested Bernadette to share her knowledge and expertise with the 4Ps (*Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program*) beneficiaries of DSWD's Sustainable Livelihood Program. She graduated 120 women beneficiaries of Barangay Agdangan, Baa, Camarines Sur from the Hand-Embroidery & Basic Sewing Training. Of the 120 beneficiaries, a number of these women are now working for F.A.R.M. by Bidibidi Enterprise, Bernadette's business venture, and will soon be enrolled in the La Huerta de Rosario RIC which currently has 25 members.

From earning Php50/day (US\$1), the women with their embroidery work, now earn a total of Php180-300/day (US\$3-6 per day). The embroiderers work from home while Bernadette provides them the raw materials. She has also opened accounts for her "regulars" at a local cooperative bank and helped them save by matching the amount they set aside for their savings.

Participating in the GREAT Women 2 Project helped revive local embroidery, provided the women the opportunity to build and develop their skills, improve product development and generate orders under the GREAT Women Brand. Bernadette is now a member of the GREAT Women collective and this relationship has opened windows of hope for the women of Baa, and doors to vast opportunities. Liberating as it is fulfilling, embroidery for these women members have become more than just a skill but a sustainable source of income that gives them the means to feed their families and send their children to school.

Bernadette's journey is one of several testimonials proving that the path to success requires the convergence of enablers in government and those in the field of development work.

## **ENHANCING THE ENABLING ENVIRONMENT**

*A gender lens must be applied to all policies of government. Development programs and private sector enterprises must work together to bridge gaps. This synergy produces an enabling environment for women's increased access to economic opportunities.*





# CHAPTER 5

Minding the Gaps

*Mat making from Lanao del Sur  
(photo courtesy of ECHOsi Foundation)*

What we did was mind the gaps! As we began working with our microentrepreneurs, we realized that an inordinate amount of patience was required of us. Looking back, I believe they were a bit shocked at our product development style.

Here's how a typical workshop flowed:

We began by introducing ourselves and explaining who we are and what we do. We would then describe the niche or specialty market into export, shared what our customers looked for, and why healthy products and clean living were the major trends in big cities. We also went into discussions of different kinds of markets—from wet markets, small town groceries, supermarkets, and malls—but inevitably, always defined product development for the niche and global markets.



*GREAT Women Project micro entrepreneurs (L-R) Ronavella Amen, Teodora Aquino, Vivencia Mamites (photo courtesy of ECHOsi Foundation)*

Then we would ask the women producers to display their products that we had asked them to bring; and after separating the food from the non-food products, we cautioned them that “*Our critique of your products should not be taken personally, okay?*”

We would begin to assess each product—playing good cop, bad cop—and for every negative critique, a positive one would be offered. Reena would take on the food, Chit the packaging process, and I would discuss labeling and the program’s general directions. The non-food—often textiles and handicrafts—saw Reena and myself discussing material, form, and design, while Chit would discuss functionality. Later on, M joined in and tackled the food products too. Not only were we educating the women microentrepreneurs, we were also showing the development workers a new perspective: the market perspective. We included the tedious task of costing out inputs so they would understand profit levels of retailers as well as taxes and credit card charges.

During one of our GREAT Women sessions, Ronavelle Amen of Nating’s Homemade Peanut Butter from Iloilo City came to ECHOstore with her fellow GREAT Women mentees and brought her product: peanuts. Yes, the local kind, small and naturally grown, and she was looking for a market for it.

Peanuts are common and are found everywhere in the Philippines. These are sold by hardworking vendors who stand by bus and jeep stations, along main thoroughfares during traffic build-ups, and in every public market—even in groceries. Peanuts are a commodity. But most of those flooding the market are imported from China—bigger and probably cheaper in large volumes.

What chance does a woman like Ronavelle Amen have in the busy marketplace? But she chose to be honest about her nuts. She plants them and waits for the harvest. She only grows the indigenous variety, unfazed by the bigger variety from China. “*It’s not about the size, anyway,*” she declares. “*I will only grow this variety and farm it in a natural manner.*”

Reena, as her mentor, had to think of different variants for Ronavelle to produce—natural, spicy and salted peanuts. Eventually, Ronavelle sent us a jar of peanut butter and our reaction was, “*please remove the sugar and extra oil.*” Quickly, and after following our suggestions, she sent the improved variant—Nating’s Homemade Peanut Butter—which flew off the shelves at ECHOstore. Apparently, the health conscious market has been buying imported unsweetened peanut butter because all the locally produced ones had sugar added. Ronavelle adjusted her recipe and supplied the market demand: peanut butter, the unsweetened kind.

The local government officials in her town came across a feature story on Ronavelle in a weekly magazine when GREAT Women launched in 2013. Soon after, the local government provided her with her own mechanical peanut roaster. The local officials were proud in having a hard working lady like Ronavelle in their microentrepreneur community. She said that after she joined the project, the LGU provided assistance in packaging and labeling. *“It pays to be talked about and be a little famous,”* we teased her.

Recently, Ronavelle was on the phone with us, telling us she was doing well and has started a family. *“I now have a baby,”* she excitedly told us and recounted how the GREAT Women Project opened doors and opportunities for her to continue her mother’s small business. *“I would never have leveled up if you did not push me! You gave me the courage to go for it instead of looking for a job to support my family.”* Her four years of supplying ECHOstore as her steady market allowed her to invest in production equipment and a second-hand multi-cab that helps with delivery and logistics.

Even while she strives to grow her business, Ronavelle continues to face challenges with the fluctuating harvest of peanuts, which meant diminished supply and a slowing down of delivery to ECHOstores. She said capital and moving the cash is so difficult, that even with a small loan of Php15,000 (US\$300) from their cooperative, she still had cash flow problems. One of the reasons is that most of her capital is spent on the medical expenses of her infirmed child, but she remains hopeful and confident that these will soon be resolved.



*(photo courtesy of ECHOsi Foundation)*

Yes, it’s just peanuts. And a growing peanut butter business proves that with determination and commitment, a mentee who values wisdom, experience, and guidance stands a better chance of getting her business off the ground and running. Nating’s Homemade Peanut butter has reached local and Manila markets already, which may soon convince other farmers in her town to grow local peanuts again. After all, using indigenous and local produce truly makes a difference and her commitment to use only natural farming methods gives her an edge in the growing natural and organic marketplace.

There will always be an entrepreneur and a worker, and this distinction became clearer after some time. The more dynamic entrepreneurial ones rise to learn managerial skills, take on the leadership role with confidence, and end up managing the other





*Bagobo Tagabawa tribe woman Vivencia Mamites  
(photo courtesy of Dariel Quiogue)*

women workers. One lesson we learned early enough was to spot these leader-entrepreneurs, work with them, teach them as much management and business skills, and then lead them upward. Eventually, these women leaders help the other women by hiring them as workers.

Vivencia Mamites is one of only five women who was handed down the knowledge and techniques of making inabal, a traditional cloth of the Bagobo-Tagabawa tribe. She learned inabal weaving from Salinta Monon, a national folk master craftswoman identified by the National Commission on Culture and the Arts (NCCA) and awarded for her legendary weaves. Inabal was traditionally used as the garment weave for ancestral royalty. Vivencia recreates the eleven inabal woven designs handed down to her by her grandmother Lingnan Manuel, whose designs were usually interpretations of the skyscape. For years, Vivencia's textiles failed to reach fresh markets and new buyers and her only way was to find some buyers in trade shows.

Barely a year into the GREAT Women 1 program, Vivencia's growth was remarkable. From a shy tribeswoman, she blossomed into an empowered and confident microentrepreneur, rising to the challenge of managing and organizing the Bagobo weavers who live scattered around the foothills of Mount Apo in Davao del Sur.

She bridged the Bagobo weavers, helping them obtain and fulfill orders for traditional textiles with passion and creativity. From 20 individuals who weave and sell on their own—with intermittent sales—the GREAT Women Project's Intensive Design Clinic helped them come together as a group and benefitted from capacity training. They were guided on steps to becoming a cooperative, with legal papers and receipts. Vivencia works the bank account, facebook pages and mobile phone for product development and order taking. They have expanded their production output, managing orders of 20 rolls every two months and averaging a monthly income of at least US\$350.

In August 2014, ECHOstore joined the New York Artisan Resource trade fair to showcase four tribes from Southern Mindanao under the GREAT Women brand, and where the Bagobo group's textiles debuted in an international fair. The skills, talent and cultural stories of these weavers amazed international buyers.



*Bagobo traditional abaca textiles (photo courtesy of GREAT Women)*

Aside from orders Vivencia receives from the GREAT Women Brand, another revenue stream is in partnership with exporter Yolanda Sevilla of The Leather Collection, Inc (TLC). TLC was transitioning from a traditional to social enterprise when, with TLC's Yolanda Sevilla, I sat down to discuss how our combined strengths could help move the GREAT Women Brand forward. Two collections of bags and accessories were designed and promoted under the GREAT Women brand: the "Babogo Legacy Collection," showcasing the Bagobo tribeswomen's inabal; and the "Sibaltan Woven Leather Collection," featuring woven leather components made by traditional weavers of banig (mats) and bayong (market baskets) from another Palawan community with whom TLC was working. These collections are positioned for private label branding and own design manufacturing in the export market. Both collections were well received and initial orders have already been booked.



*Sulu women preparing their loom (photo courtesy of ECHOsi Foundation)*



*Sulu woman weaves a mat (photo courtesy of Marvin Alcaraz)*

## **MENTORSHIP**

*Mentoring is a key driver to helping women microentrepreneurs succeed. A mentee who values wisdom, experience and guidance stands a better chance of getting her business off the ground and running.*

*Not every one has the entrepreneurial spirit. A distinction must be made. Learn to spot the leader-entrepreneurs and teach them as much about management and business skills. Eventually these women leaders help other women by hiring them as workers, and sharing their knowledge and expertise.*

Today, Vivencia Mamites and the Tribal Women's Weaving Association of Davao Del Sur, Mindanao have 25 weavers who aspire for a centralized weaving center where they could work together to maintain the quality and standards for weaving and abaca dying.

There are times I would ask my designer friends to come along, when Reena or Chit could not join me, because there were certain products—such as textiles and crafts—which were not aligned with ECHOstore's product mix.

Many of our women are weavers, mostly indigenous tribeswomen who weave fabrics in backstrap looms in their homes, in between harvest and caring for their families. These textiles and crafts find their way to souvenir shops, commoditized as mere products and stripped of cultural meaning. How can we sell these and show their real value and worth? Since most were textiles, I turned to the fashion designer friends, or those in the creative industries for help. They either volunteered their time and talent, or agreed to charge discounted rates when they came along with me during these community trips.

Our Design Clinics were intensive. We needed to pack all we could share in two days because the designers and product developers who joined us during Phase 1 were professionals running their own businesses. I believe this differentiated our workshops from those conducted by government agencies where product developers or designers, or even a new design graduate, focused solely on design, excluding the gaps between pricing, market direction and reach, even branding. Our designers, on the other hand, had flourishing businesses, dedicated entrepreneurs or were engaged in some form of retail or export activity. They knew their own markets and our intention was for them to integrate these community women into their supply chain.



*Fashion designer Lulu Tan Gan mentoring a weaver in Miag-ao, province of Iloilo (photo courtesy of ECHOsi Foundation)*

### Initial core group of designers and product developers:

Clothes designer and T'boli tribe advocate **Len Cabili** when she was just starting her *Filip+Inna* line which is now going global; Internationally awarded designer **Tes Pasola**, also one of the founders of Movement 8 design group that helped push Philippine design internationally in the mid-80s; Movement 8 designer **Ann Pamintuan**; top fashion designer **Lulu Tan-Gan**, who advocates for the wearability of the *piña* pineapple fiber. Younger product developers and designers like **Zarah Juan**, **Rene Patron** and **Rambie Lim**. Even design driven museum curator **Dannie Alvarez** and Architect **Dan Lichauco**, retailer **Isabel Tesoro**, who all push for functionality with a Filipino design ethos, all had their days in the field with us.

The phase “value-addition or leveling up” sounds quite simple when used to describe what we were doing—helping community products reach higher markets. But the process actually showed us several gaps that needed to be addressed. So we stepped into the gaps and intervened in all parts of the supply chain process, adding value each step of the way. We wanted to share what we knew. But we also needed the community supply chain for our businesses.

Our designers love to use our indigenous textiles. But challenges such as coordinating with the communities, ensuring a steady supply of materials, maintaining quality and capacity, following actual measurements and specifications of textiles, dealing with bank accounts for money transfers, and providing correct costs, were some of the reasons why the designers found it tedious and frustrating to engage the communities.

The modules of our capacity building workshops were simple and I wondered why no one bothered to teach them all this time! The modules included how to cost correctly, create swatches of textiles for ordering, and review their production processes to make them more efficient. If our indigenous weavers needed to prepare for the markets to sustain their livelihood, they must be taught the proper skills and be made to understand the production and financial aspects of the business. These, while preserving the traditional designs as they try to innovate, earn money and bring food to the table.

There were more gaps beyond what we could address. We struggled with women microentrepreneurs who were not accustomed to the professional way of doing business, who did not have the materials or financial means to improve their businesses—from fulfilling orders to lack of skills, product sampling and R&D. They lacked motivation and were not willing to try something new.

From food, to weaves and beadwork, we found ourselves working with the Bagobo Tagabawa Tribe of Davao del Sur, Mindanao.

Before the GREAT Women Project engaged the Bagobo Tagabawa tribe in 2014, an average Bagobo woman would work in wet markets as “tinderas” (storekeepers) making anywhere from nothing to Php150 (US\$3) per day, or as household help earning an average of Php1,500–2,000 (US\$30–40) per month, or engage in farming that yields a seasonal income from the sales of their produce. Others would rely on the income of their spouses who were mostly carpenters, construction workers and tricycle drivers, which means that their income would be seasonal too.



*Bagobo Tagabawa tribe (photo courtesy of Zarah Juan)*

When the Great Women Project started and the GREAT Women Brand established, it set out towards the direction of sustainability. The Project focused on the skills and creativity of the Bagobo women that resulted in the development and creation of the Bagobo's "Prayer" espadrilles, a hit when these debuted in the local market. Each pair of "Prayer" espadrilles had a prayer attached to it, as each woman beaded her own design while praying for intentions of good health, long life, safety, love, and peace. With continuous mentoring to improve their productivity, the Bagobos began to boldly create their colorful traditional designs that were contemporary in appeal.



*GREAT Women Bagobo Tagabawa beaded one-of-a-kind espadrilles and ladies evening clutches (photos courtesy of GREAT Women)*



Now, a fixed monthly production under the GREAT Women Brand has given them the opportunity to reach international markets—the United States, Spain, Switzerland and Singapore—to name a few, and with constant design mentoring, the Bagobo beadwork collection has expanded into beaded evening clutch bags, beaded envelop bags and beaded cuff accessories.

Today, a Bagobo woman and mother can earn as much as Php1,500–Php5,000 (US\$ 30-100) per week. Their husbands have joined them in this sustainable livelihood endeavor which has become a stable source of income that keeps the family together, and has improved their quality of life. Fathers have opted to stay closer to home and tend to livestock and poultry as an alternate source of income, affording them the time to attend to domestic work like increment home repairs and help take care of their children. Some of the Bagobo tribal members have little “sari-sari” (general merchandise) stores too, which they can attend to while doing their beadwork. Presently, the beading group has around 38 people, mostly women who appreciate the value of continuing their traditions and have every intention of passing these on to their children.



*Zarah Juan working with the Bagobo Tagabawa tribe (photo courtesy of Zarah Juan)*



## Fast Facts

In 2013, the ECHOSi Foundation and ECHOstore posted an impact reach of approximately 500 women, with an additional 900 beneficiaries through cascade workshops, impacting 28,500 women, their own supply chains, and household members.

The GREAT Women Project Phase 1 assisted 7,331 women microentrepreneurs (WMEs) in 204 groups across 45 local government units, giving them increased access to public and private sector programs and services thus expanding their market access opportunities.

Bridging organizations and agencies that can help improve the production capacities of women microentrepreneurs is crucial to their development and sustainability. One of ECHOSi Foundation's roles was that of a bridge—connecting the stakeholders in this project—making sure that people and programs converged and worked together. In a visit to Sorsogon, I requested the presence of regional representatives from agriculture, science and technology, trade and industry, including those from the local government units. They had to come and see the results of this assessment workshop and why things have not been moving forward. Yes, they were working with microentrepreneurs through their agency mandates but were all working in silos. It was a weekend, but miraculously they all showed up! And for that first time, convergence happened.

An initiative from the ground up, this convergence brought the GREAT Women Program to where it is now, and resulted to inter-agency support in creating common service facilities and enterprise desks, availability of technical capacity training and support, training sessions on product development, and ensuring procurement and market accessibility. The PCW was doing what it could and we, the private sector, were contributing our small share. When the program ended, PCW asked me to speak to all the government and development workers who were involved in Phase 1. I was the only private sector representative and entrepreneur there. They asked me how we could ensure the continuity of our initiatives and I promised: *“for as long as we in the private sector are around, this will continue.”*

Then I asked them to repeat after me, in unison. *“GREAT Women is the gender platform of the country.”* Everyone repeated it. No qualms, no opposition, and no questions. So I adopted this mantra and repeated it whenever I would discuss the program. No opposition and no questions. Soon, I heard Undersecretaries in government telling their Secretaries this. No opposition and no questions.

Then, there it was. GREAT Women became the gender platform of the country focused on women's economic empowerment.





# CHAPTER 6

**In a capsule: Philippine gender economics**

*Philippine traditional textile (photo courtesy of GREAT Women)*

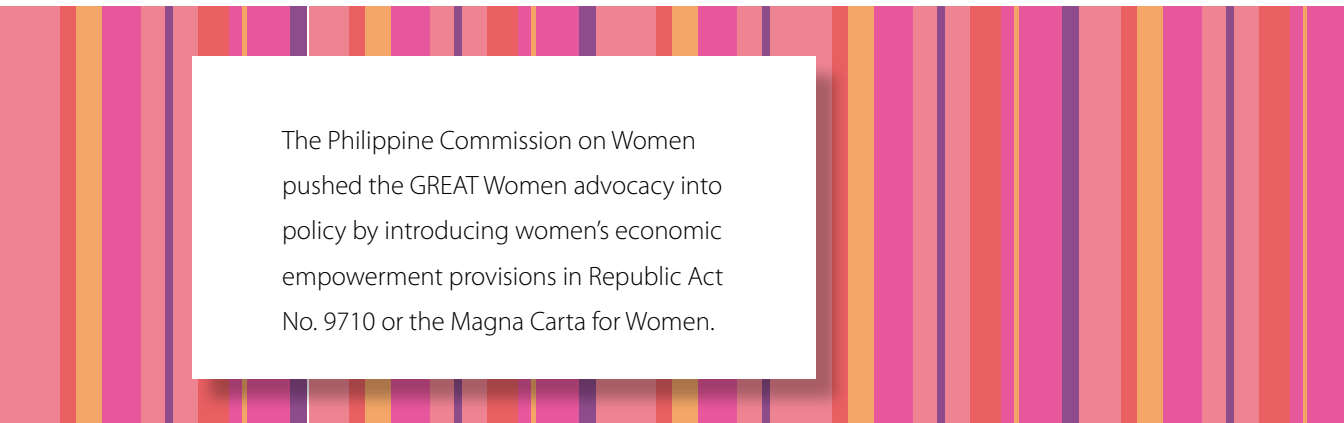
In the space of gender equality, the Philippines, as a matriarchal society is way ahead of other countries in Asia. The Filipino traditional social practices have at the core, the family, and central to this is the hierarchy of a woman (grandmother, mother, unmarried aunt or sister) who holds the purse strings. The woman often looks after the accounts in a business while the men do the trading and deals outside. Strong women leaders have emerged in the political arena and we have had two female Presidents to date. The Philippines is known as a country of strong women, also to the credit of the Filipino man who supports his woman, or stays out of her way.

The Philippines is a highly entrepreneurial country, and the main reason that drives our entrepreneurial spirit is poverty. We have so many small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), including micro-enterprises that account for 99% of all business establishments and 60% of the exporting firms in the Philippines. Women hold significant leadership positions in national and local government, universities, business corporations and family business enterprises in the country. 51% of entrepreneurs in the Philippines are female, and are more active in starting a business than men. With these encouraging and positive facts, the Philippines has key drivers to reposition our the country in this dynamic global community. We have both entrepreneurs and dynamic women. And the new job makers will be women in microenterprises, even if they are starting or have started with a small capital (below US\$250 per the findings of the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor).

In 2015 and 2016, international data through the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report ranked the Philippines as 7<sup>th</sup> in that list, the only Asian country to get up there, beating other more economically advanced economies by closing 78% of the total gender gap. This annual report quantifies and focuses on relative gaps between men and women based on economic, education, health and political indicators. Meanwhile, per the International Labor Organization, Philippine data highlights the invisibility and undervaluation of women's productive work because most women are unskilled or are in the informal sector in unregistered businesses.

One of the notable Philippine legislations is the Republic Act 9710 or the Magna Carta for Women—the only one of its kind in the Asian region. It includes gender sensitive areas on human rights issues such as: (1) violence against women: the need for protection

shelters for victims, health facilities, legal aid and empowerment education for young girls; (2) health issues: the need to address the vulnerability of women to infectious diseases, lifestyle problems, mental health conditions, reproductive health issues and maternal health; (3) social protection: to grant access of these to victims of violence for the sake of their children; and, (4) legislative solutions: specific to pushing inclusions in the existing Family Code towards annulment proceedings to include–violence against a spouse or their children as a ground for annulment; adultery and abandonment as grounds for annulment; that abandonment for one year and adultery against a spouse will be considered psychological incapacity on the part of the offending party; unequal treatment to men committing concubinage versus women committing adultery. The direction is to make solutions like annulment or legal separation accessible to women in all walks of life in the event relationship breakdowns are caused by violence and other factors that trample on the rights of women.



The Philippine Commission on Women pushed the GREAT Women advocacy into policy by introducing women's economic empowerment provisions in Republic Act No. 9710 or the Magna Carta for Women.

And then, there is this thing called GAD. This is the Gender Awareness and Development budget of government agencies and local government that requires 5% of their budget to go to gender-related activities; or that 30% of official development assistance and soft loans from bilateral and multilateral agencies extended to the government should also be spent for GAD projects. This is no small amount! This translates to billions of pesos which could be spent to finance many women's shelters, health projects, skills training and small loans for women's livelihood, training on women's rights and gender issues, and help desks for women who suffer from domestic violence. But enforcement has always been the issue as GAD budgets at the local government level are usually spent on t-shirts, basketball courts, Christmas parties and non-related gender projects.

GREAT Women Project 1's efforts to ensure gender responsive governance at the local level included local policy making and programming, increased usage of the GAD budgets, establishments of common service facilities and enterprise desks, and the creation of technical working groups.

We have witnessed gender responsive governance and intervention at the local level, and have had the privilege of working with these beneficiary-communities, as well.

Fe Carranza, a 50 year old polio survivor, sold vegetables to augment her family income though it was not enough to make ends meet. One fortunate day, some college students sought shelter from a typhoon in Fe's home. Whiling time away, one of the students used soya beans to make tofu. Fe observed the process and used this knowledge to start her tofu business. She had a rough start, earning a monthly income of Php6,000.



*(photo courtesy of Fe Carranza)*

Fe regularly delivers goods to the employees of Naga city hall when the President of the Naga City Council of Women (NCCW) noticed her. Because of her polio condition, Fe was using her normal left leg to push the right-sided pedal to start her motorcycle. The NCCW took action and linked Fe with the persons with disabilities (PWD) group to provide assistance. Fe eventually became the PWD's group president.

In 2011, the Department of Science and Technology (DOST), through the GREAT Women Project 1, assisted Fe to set up her own enterprise, FABCARR Food Products producing soya milk, soya choco, soya coffee, tofu, and soya beans-based vegetable meat called soya ham. The Metro Naga Development Council (MNDC) and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) provided assistance too, while the NCCW linked her up with the school board as well as the nutrition council to become a regular supplier of soya products. Under the city's feeding program, Fe began supplying soya bread and chilled "taho" to 29 schools and 27 barangay day care centers. This gave her the opportunity to employ more than ten workers.

Today, her business has expanded from supplying the feeding program to selling packs of egg noodle pancit that has no preservatives. She also runs a small store under Naga's Grow Negosyo Program and is often invited to give inspirational talks on her journey to being a successful microentrepreneur. Her small factory has become a learning place where people come for educational visits. Today, she manages an average monthly income of Php30,000 and proudly declares that she has sent all her children to school, and one of them is now a dentist. Fe has not stopped learning and continues to attend mentoring sessions given by the DTI. She believes that every day is an opportunity to become better and do better.

Another case study—or what we would like to refer to as success stories—is one that brings diversity and gender equality into fore, with coffee and peace at the center of it all.

The farmers of the once sleepy and quiet town of Kandayok, Panamao, Sulu would harvest their coffee fruits, dry these on the roadside and hopefully get some cracked by the tires of passing vehicles. This 'accidental' hulling process would expose two coffee beans, and when they had a sackful, the farmers would trek for three hours to the town of Jolo to sell their coffee beans.

Princess Kumalah Sug-Elardo traveled from their Zamboanga home to Panamao with her daughter who had to render rural service in her birthplace, a requisite to becoming a medical doctor, her daughter's chosen profession. When they arrived in Panamao, Princess witnessed the wasteful practice of the town's coffee farmers and resolved to help correct this and turn it into a moneymaking and sustainable venture.



*(photo courtesy of Princess Kumalah Sug-Elardo)*

After attending a forum of the Philippine Coffee Board on “Pick Red” or choosing only ripe coffee fruits, Princess saw the opportunity to market specialty coffee, specifically the exotic civet coffee that was abundant from civet droppings in the Panamao forests.

Princess established Sulu Royal Coffee and owes its success to two secret ingredients: Princess’ entrepreneurial ideas, and her marriage to a military Scout Ranger, and a Christian, Peter Elardo. The mixed marriage allowed her access to both sides of the conflicting groups in their area, and convinced them to engage in coffee farming. She formed the People’s Alliance for Progress Multi-Purpose Cooperative (PAP-MPC) and made possible the availability of running water and solar power in her birthplace. She also shared with them what she learned about coffee farming and soon enough, the families were earning an average of US\$200-300 (Php10,000–15,000) a month. More importantly, the combatants and other gun-toting elements soon sold their arms to invest in coffee. “During the Zamboanga siege,” she relates, “our men stayed in Panamao because their income was assured through coffee, rather than get paid to risk their lives in battle.” Sustainable coffee farming has brought genuine peace and economic benefits to her town.

All that civet coffee had to do was find markets. The ECHOSi Foundation and the Great Women Project gave Princess access to the very best specialty markets in Metro Manila and in Davao City, too. ECHOSi Foundation also engaged trainers from Leyte to teach Princess and her young girls how to make grass and nipa baskets which were used as packaging materials for the coffee. The local menfolk and military men also joined in the basket-making workshop, and found it profitable.



*Princess Kumalah Sug-Elardo (far right)  
(photo courtesy of Philippine Coffee Board)*



*Benguet coffee farmers  
(photo courtesy of Philippine Coffee Board)*



Princess continues to be part of many networks in Metro Manila while she shuttles from Zamboanga City, to Panamao and to Manila to market the coffee that has undeniably brought peace to her town. With ECHOstores serving as her main selling platform, she has penetrated regional markets with the help of USAID and USDA contacts in the ASEAN community. She recently received an order from Universal Robina Corporation, one of the biggest coffee processors in the Philippines.

These days, she trains younger men and women to operate the cooperative, which has a complete coffee processing line—an amazing feat from what she witnessed years ago. This remarkable journey continues for Princess who remains determined to sustain the coffee initiative that has brought peace to her community.



*Benguet coffee farmers (photo courtesy of Philippine Coffee Board)*

## CONVERGENCE

*All stakeholders must work together, pitching in their respective unique strength and capacity, towards a shared and common objective. Where efforts of both government and private sector engage more organizations and groups into becoming active partners.*

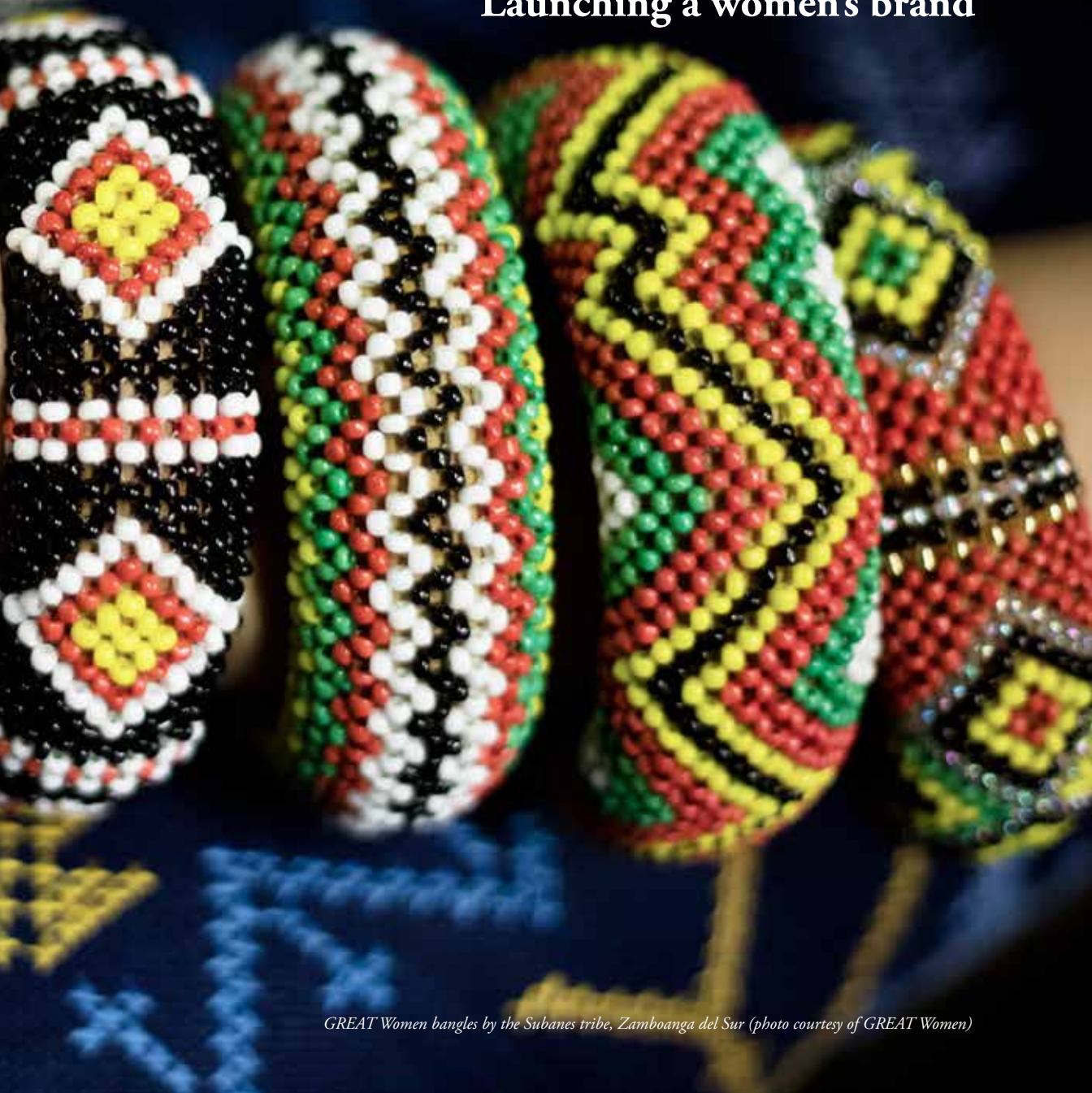
### Data Sources:

1. WEF Gender Gap Report 2015: <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2015/>
2. Gender Gap Report PHILIPPINES: <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2015/economies/#economy=PHL>



# CHAPTER 7

Launching a women's brand



*GREAT Women bangles by the Subanes tribe, Zamboanga del Sur (photo courtesy of GREAT Women)*

Considering all the work our designers accomplished on the ground, I decided to bring them together in a women's month exhibition-showcase on the theme of revitalizing traditions. The setting was the Yuchengco Museum, where I hold a Consultancy as Curator. I saw some beautiful items come out of those Design Clinics at the community level. GREAT Women was a natural fit for a women's month event. So our museum team, Dannie Alvarez, Elma Abrina, Carla Martinez and Hazel Miranda (with the help of designer Tes Pasola) went all out to put together the museum-led exhibition showcase that included both food and non-food products. In a way, I wanted to highlight the culmination of the collaborative design work we did with the communities.



*Launch of the GREAT Women Brand at the Yuchengco Museum, Makati City (photo courtesy of ECHOsi Foundation)*



*Designers and product developers during the launch. (L-R): Ann Pamintuan, Jeannie Javelosa, Rene Patron, Reena Francisco, Lulu Tan Gan and Len Cabili (photo courtesy of ECHOsi Foundation)*

It was a harvest event of the first batch of women under the GREAT Women Phase 1 Program. During that night, we had a packed crowd with media to boot. The event acknowledged all the designers, retail partners and stakeholders of the program. Our women microentrepreneurs stood up proudly when their names were called. It was a festive night, with food-tasting led by lady chefs serving ingredients of our women-microentrepreneurs such as crab paste, guava jam, *malunggay* noodles, native garlic peanuts and even *ube* on the sweet canapés.

At the exhibition galleries were fashion couture and accessories from the indigenous tribes the designers worked with, as well as new bags designs and home items created with natural materials. And of course, we had the items for sale in the museum shop. What

was most moving was seeing our women microentrepreneurs dressed to the hilt in their beautiful traditional outfits, hobnobbing with everyone, happily attending perhaps for some of them, a dress-up event of a lifetime.

We proudly displayed the Subanen Beadwork of the Pekpungunan Lebun Subanen Womens Organization, a group composed of the Subanen Tribe from Josefina, Zamboanga del Sur, Mindanao.



*Arida Ysmael and  
Ludivina Boston at the  
launch (photo courtesy  
of ECHOsi Foundation)*



*Selling space during the  
launch (photo courtesy of  
ECHOsi Foundation)*



*Museum Gallery set-up (photo courtesy of ECHOsi Foundation)*

For thousands of years, the Subanen women have practiced beadwork to express their taste and artistic skills. Their custom of beadwork is largely connected to the tribe's culture and heritage, where beaded accessories, such as necklaces, bracelets and belts, are used to adorn traditional clothing.

In 2007, a small group of Subanen women organized themselves into the Pekpungunan Lebun Subanen Women's Organization to transform the craft into a community-based industry to foster stronger ties and create wealth for indigenous women and their families. Technical and financial assistance from the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), and support from the local barangay to establish a small display center/store in their community, encouraged the women to pursue their goal. But it wasn't until 2015, when the organization became a partner of the GREAT Women Program, that it was able to access new markets in the country and beyond.



*Subanen tribe, Zamboanga del Sur (photo courtesy of Sef Carandang)*





*Pekungunan Lebun Subanen Women's Organization from Zamboang del Sur (photo courtesy of Sef Carandang)*

The partnership also paved the way for product diversification as the women learned how to integrate more contemporary colors and patterns into their designs, as well as create beaded components that can be applied to other products such as designer clothes, bags, and pillows, among others.

From an initial revenue of only Php500–1,000 (US\$10–20) per month, the organization now earns as much as five to six times this amount. Women members take home an average monthly income of Php200–1,000 (US\$4–US\$20), depending on their production. This provided the means for them to build or improve their homes, and even encouraged one of them to finish her Education degree. With a fledgling membership of 10 in 2010, the organization is now 30 women-strong, with the addition of 15 members aged 9–18, the next generation of Subanen artists who will keep the craft alive, preserve the cultural heritage, and continue to empower the Subanen women.

Handmade products of the Agarao Barong and Gown Embroidery from Lumban, Laguna captured the essence of traditional embroidery made richer by new textiles, motifs, designs and applications.

In 2004, Beth Agarao was working as a secretary for an embroidery company when her husband was laid off. They decided to venture into business and used his last salary (Php5,100/US\$104) as capital. Beth purchased three pieces of piña and six pieces of jusi textiles and started to embroider them herself. She sold these to friends and traveled to Manila and nearby cities and municipalities to show her embroidery samples and take orders for traditional barongs and wedding gowns.

Looking back, she said that the most difficult part was capital to roll and cash flow. With orders coming in, she bought one sewing machine and hired six people—three female hand embroiderers and two male sewers—who would sew the barongs. Beadwork was outsourced to women who worked from home. Funds weren't enough so she and her husband took out a loan from a microfinance group and used half for their small business operations and the other half to buy a house. With their business, they were able to pay the monthly amortization of Php30,000 for their loan.

When she was asked to be part of the supply chain of the GREAT Women Brand, she began working with designers with new designs different from what she and her women knew how to embroider. This was a new experience for her. She was challenged to expand her skills with new textiles, motifs and designs and mentor the other women in her group, many of whom were resisting change and new things.



*Beth Agarao (seated center) with her lumban embroiderers in Laguna (photo courtesy of Beth Agarao)*



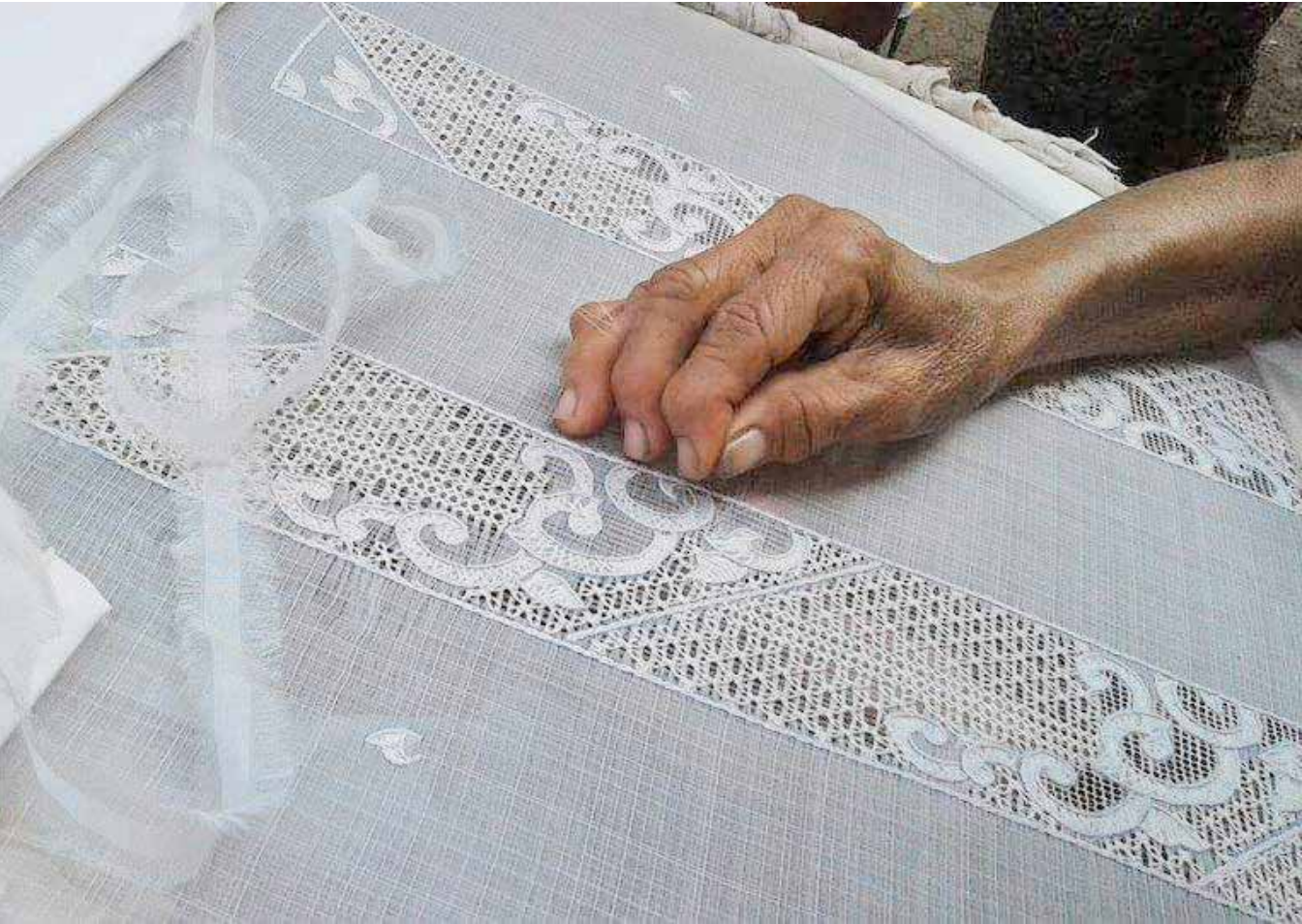
*Contemporary art embroidery on jusi (banana and pineapple fiber mix) textile by Jeannie Javelosa by Lumban embroiderers (photo courtesy of Jeannie Javelosa)*

Today, she handles marketing, meeting with clients, and product development for new products with the GREAT Women Brand. She enjoys mentoring and values the steady business the partnership brings. She is considering outsourcing work to women in her community and looks forward to helping run the GREAT Women Project 2 capacity training sessions in her hometown.

In this happy event, the GREAT Women Brand was launched on March 19, 2013 during women's month.

*"You know what we just did?"* Chit and Reena asked me. *"We just launched a brand."*

*"Well yes, but I actually wanted to conclude all the work we did with the PCW towards the end of their five-year Project. What will we do now? The Phase 1 Program has ended,"* I answered. We stared at each other. Now we had a second brand and it would take all of the next two years figuring out what we would do with the new brand.



*Traditional embroidery on piña (pineapple) fiber (photo courtesy of Beth Agarao)*

Countless times, my business partners would sit me down trying to understand where I was driving this, and my only frustrated response was that I couldn't sleep as the ideas just kept coming through. Some nights, I would battle conversations in my mind to just stop everything since it seemed not to make any business sense. But a greater impulse kept pushing this forward and from the outside, events and people would synchronize into the next steps to take.

Sometime later, we received a letter from the PCW. The Canadian donor agency and the PCW decided to give ownership of the GREAT Women Brand and the Mark to us. They reasoned that commercializing anything was not within the mandates of their agencies. Accepting this, we met with our lawyers who advised us to register the Mark.

And we are grateful that both government groups trusted us with this.

## **BRAND**

*Branding is the direction by which the consumer identifies with products. Advocacy driven brands have a great potential to be used for change and transformation as all stakeholders make it their own.*





# CHAPTER 8

A step into the region...

I was in Singapore when I received a text from Patty Alleman, then USAID's Senior Gender Advisor Programs of Asia-Pacific, asking if she could meet me. She had attended a panel where she heard Ambassador Delia Albert, our former Secretary of Foreign Affairs and the first female Ambassador in the ASEAN and Asia, talk about GREAT Women. When Patty asked questions, Ambassador Albert requested me, sitting in the audience, to reply. In that packed crowded room, I didn't even know who asked the question as I stood up to respond.

We were all in Bali, Indonesia for the 2013 APEC Women and the Economy Forum. There, during the High Level Policy Dialogue of the Policy Partnership for Women and the Economy (PPWE), the GREAT Women Project was officially presented as a best practice on women's economic empowerment. I flew there as I was also asked to represent the private sector in a special bilateral meeting between Canada and the Philippines.

The Bali trip was pivotal for GREAT Women on two counts.

First, it was in that bilateral meeting with Canadian Ministers where a decision was to be made whether the GREAT Women Program would have a Phase 2 because of the good results seen from private sector involvement. The positive decision was called SWEEP (*Supporting Women's Economic Empowerment in the Philippines aka GREAT Women Phase 2*), a five-year program (2015-2020) with aid funds of eight million Canadian dollars going to the Philippines. ECHOSi Foundation was identified as the lead private sector partner for Phase 2. The new focus of the Program was now how to "intensify the role of private sector in the equation."

Second, I connected to Patty Alleman, who, during a later date in Manila would sit me down, and say, "*tell me your vision. This is the first time I heard of an economic platform for women which got me really excited.*" Patty was getting frustrated at small projects per country that were not creating the economic impact she was looking for. She did single out Vietnam's recent attempt of putting together the ASEAN Women's Entrepreneur Network (AWEN).



Patty listened to me for an hour as I shared my ideas, and the vision that GREAT Women can be for all women in the region. Her openness allowed me to speak freely about how I could see it develop into a regional program and business as a way to define the economic strength of collaborative from many different stakeholders. “*I can’t promise anything, but let us try,*” was her response. She asked me to prepare a presentation, as she would try to include this in the agenda of a meeting USAID was putting together with the Business Alliance of US companies doing business in the ASEAN region. That meeting included 50 ASEAN women entrepreneur delegates. My role was to sell them the idea.



*Bangkok Meet-up, (L-R): Jeannie Javelosa, Wee Choo Hua, then with ebay, Pacita Juan, Patty Alleman then USAID-Asia-Pacific Regional Head for Gender, Isabelle Neo Xiao Yun, then with ebay, Elizabeth Hernandez, then Asia-Pacific Regional Head for Facebook. (photo courtesy of Jeannie Javelosa)*



It was in Bangkok in 2014 that Chit and I made our presentation called: *GREAT Women Brand: The ASEAN Collection* to see if there would be a buy-in. Interestingly, in hindsight now, where the story of GREAT Women in the Philippines started with focus on the microentrepreneurs, the ASEAN part started with all these strong women entrepreneurs and leaders. It seemed that we were bringing together both ends of the economic spectrum from local and into the region.

Into the two days of that Bangkok meeting, we girl-talk networked, we discussed, we challenged each other and we shared. We met a great number of dynamic women leaders and entrepreneurs, and formed friendships with them.

*“I couldn’t sleep after hearing your presentation! I stayed up all night! I can see so much potential of GREAT Women!”* This was Thitapha Wattanapruttipaisan telling me excitedly over breakfast in Bangkok. She was leading the SME work stream of the USAID Project called ASEAN Connectivity Through Trade and Investment (ACTI) and this meeting was her responsibility. Thitapha or “T” has more than two decades experience of working in ASEAN and had a wide network in the region with stakeholders. Patty and Thitapha would throw their full support from the levels they worked as enablers to try and see how far we could take this.

The ASEAN region then was focused on the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), which would come into fruition by end of 2015. AEC brings the ten member states—



*The official photograph of all ASEAN women entrepreneurs who were invited to attend the Workshop on the Governance Structure of the GREAT Women in ASEAN Initiative (photo courtesy of USAID-ACTI)*

Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam—together as one market base of 600 million consumers. Everyone in that Bangkok meeting knew this. The concept of GREAT Women fired everyone up. They wanted to see how we could come together in a platform that will address development gaps, work out a regional supply chain and a production base that can unite to produce world class products and services, and together under one brand, reach global markets. While integration is all about ASEAN free trade, it is also about the opportunity to bring about a more inclusive regional economy by strengthening women entrepreneurship and businesses to benefit from this expanded economic base.

We discussed the need to support artisan hand-made products in this globalized homogenous world. The factory “Made in China” labor label has affected the world economy and some form of a backlash was already happening. So many small producers were losing their livelihood, as they could not compete with cheap goods. Worst, intellectual properties of ASEAN tribes were being taken from them and used internationally. We went on to share how the demand for handmade and artisan products was rising everywhere, with conscious consumers looking at the stories of people’s lives and social impact behind the products they buy, aside from the quality and beauty of the products. We all agreed that the GREAT Women advocacy-driven brand should be more than just about women economic empowerment and livelihood sustainability, but also about the preservation of distinct ASEAN culture and tradition to support our indigenous cultural tribes, as well as creating more sustainable health and wellness products together.

Dynamic Nadira Yusoff, a Malaysian tech-entrepreneur and woman leader, stood up with the invitation, “*Malaysia is offering GREAT Women a free booth at the ASEAN SME Summit in Kuala Lumpur in a couple of months! Are you ready to do this together?*”

She got a resounding yes! And that was that. The women entrepreneurs agreed to come together with a capsule collection under *The GREAT Women in ASEAN Initiative*. And we dove into a flurry of preparations, experiencing this acronym called AEC in action! Indonesia sent textile photos needed for the brochure, Thailand sent silks for us to sew here, while we sent over packaging design to Cambodia for body lotion. We were conversing with Malaysia for the trade showcase venue as Vietnam was showing us their charcoal soaps. And the Philippines was trying to gather various coffee and body care products to create some kind of thematic product grouping. We were working towards a showcase represented by all those committed to join: home textile products, apparel, accessories, jewelry and food, health and wellness products.

The logistics and coordination would prove to be a challenge but the universal branding idea was embraced by all.



*“We want to join the Kuala Lumpur trade showcase!” (photo courtesy of ECHOsi Foundation)*



*A resounding Yes! from the Bangkok participants.  
(photo courtesy of ECHOsi Foundation)*

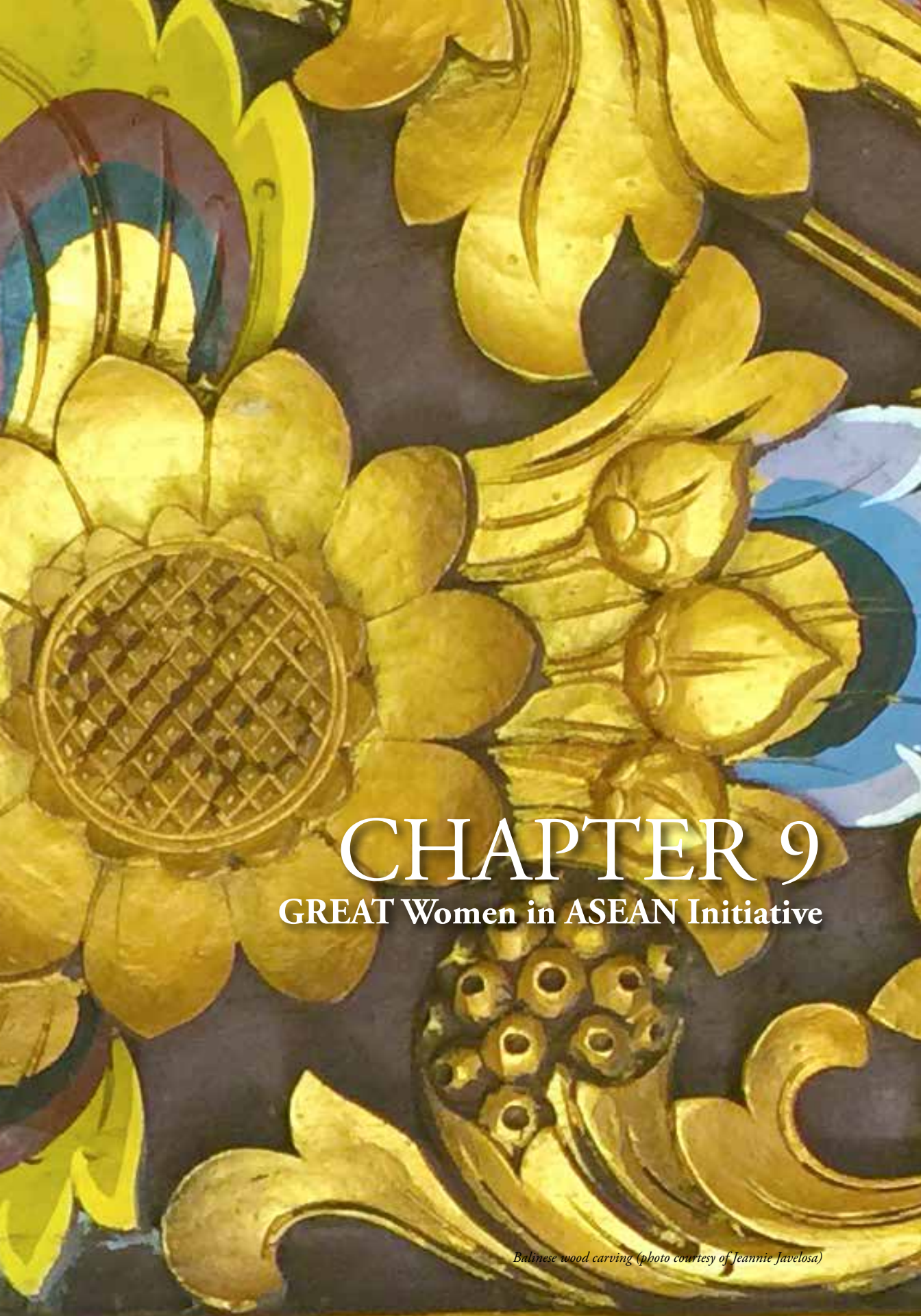


*GREAT Women in the languages of ASEAN  
(photo courtesy of GREAT Women)*

## REGION

*The transformative and transactional power of the advocacy driven brand is about bringing together both ends of the development, economic and entrepreneurial spectrum of stakeholders in the region. GREAT Women is more than just livelihood sustainability but also the preservation of distinct ASEAN cultures and from this, the distillation of a truly ASEAN ethos with its own space in the global market.*





# CHAPTER 9

## GREAT Women in ASEAN Initiative

*Balinese wood carving (photo courtesy of Jeannie Javelosa)*

In May 2015, 20 women entrepreneurs from eight ASEAN member countries collaborated to launch the first GREAT Women In ASEAN Initiative Trade Booth in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia during the ASEAN SME Summit. Supporting this project was the Malaysian government and USAID-ACTI project. USAID also enabled the beginning of friendships and business networking that would drive women entrepreneurs into business alignments with the GREAT Women Brand.



*The booth in Kuala Lumpur (photo courtesy of ECHOsi Foundation)*



*Inaugurating the first GREAT Women Trade Showcase Booth, (L-R): Undersecretary for Trade and Industry of the Philippines Zenaida Maglaya, former Prime Minister of Malaysia Dato Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yasin and Former USA Ambassador to ASEAN Nina Hachigan (photo courtesy of ECHOsi Foundation)*





*(photo courtesy of ECHOsi Foundation)*

**Participants in the first GREAT Women in ASEAN Trade Booth in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia:**

**Cambodia** – Nanda Pok (Kampot Pepper Farm), Christine Gauthier (Waterlily), Seng Takakneary (SentosaSilk)

**Indonesia** – Xenia Palar (Runa Jewelry), Rinda Sri Wulandari (KopiKelena)

**Lao PDR** – Dao Heuang Group

**Malaysia** – Host

**Myanmar** – Mo Hom (Mon Precieux Design House), Dr. Yin Min Kyaw (Shwe Kant Kaw Silk), Ananda Group of Companies,

**Philippines** – Regina Francisco, Pacita Juan, Jeannie Javelosa (ECHOstore), Zarah Juan (Green-leaf Eco-bags), Camille Escudero (Quality Philippine Export Lingerie & Apparel), Joanna Preysler (Tint)

**Thailand** – Ketsuphee Pitupan (Pop Hobby Craft), Patton Leelavit (Comcraft Company), Wongduan Wangviwat (Raming Tea Inc), Banasee Thaneevanich (Green Earth Biotechnology), Kamolnate Kraitrakul and Dr. Siribenja Khowadhana (Silk Avenue Co)

**Philippines & Myanmar:** Wynn Wynn Ong (Artisanal Works, Inc)

**Vietnam** – Vinh Tien Company Limited and Hoa Lan Joint Stock Company



As ECHOsi Foundation, we ran two standardization supply chain workshops in Manila when the United Parcel Service (UPS) Foundation gave us a grant. One was on specialty coffee. We flew in ASEAN women entrepreneurs from various parts of the coffee value chain (from farming coffee in Cambodia to operating a coffee capsule manufacturing outfit in Laos). The objective was to identify common quality standards and the best coffee varieties from each country. The other workshop on textiles was about identifying commonalities in indigenous tribal weaves, and this group included designers, textile retailers, and women entrepreneurs who worked with weaving communities. Later that year, Facebook Asia-Pacific rolled out with ECHOsi Foundation in the Philippines, a Teachers-Training module on online marketing to help women, with the plan to replicate this in the region.



*(photos courtesy of ECHOsi Foundation)*





*Textile workshop group (photo courtesy of ECHOsi Foundation)*

**Women entrepreneurs who attended the ECHOsi and UPS Foundations Workshops for Specialty Coffee and Textiles:**

**Indonesia** – Xenia Danie Tajati Palar (RUNA Jewellery Indonesia), Francisca Indarsiani (Indonesia Rainfo International), Rinda Sri Wulandari (KopiKelena), Sukmawati Nitta Lestari (Sogo Indonesia)

**Cambodia** – Nanda Pok (The Pok Kampot Pepper Farm), Takakneary Seng (SentosaSilk), Kim Leakhena (Song Heng Coffee)

**Laos PDR** - Soulinda Saysanavongphet (Patuxay Coffee), Sirina Hervy (Sinouk Coffee), Taykeo Sayavongkhamdy (Taykeo Textile Gallery), Viengsouth Oula Phetsanghane (Ammalin Lao Silk),

**Malaysia** – Zahara Abd Jalal and Syafenaaz Wahid

**Myanmar** – Nang Mo Hom (Mon Precieux Design House), Soe Amy Kyaw (Ananda Cocoa and Coffee)

**Thailand** – Ketsuphee Pitupan (Pop Craft), Sasinporn Srichantab (Ramino Thailand Co., Ltd.)

**Philippines** – Yolanda Sevilla and Erlinda Miranda (The Leather Collection), Zarah Jane Juan (Estudio Juan), Camille Escudero (Quality Philippine Export Lingerie & Apparel, Inc), Regina Francisco (ECHOstore), Pacita Juan (International Women in Coffee Alliance), Jeannie Javelosa and Carlota Tan (Great Women Philippines Corporation), Ros Juan (Commune Café)

**Singapore** – Vanessa Caceres (Jimmy Monkey Café)

**Vietnam** - Dr. Nguyen Bao Thoa (Vietnam Rural Industries Research and Development Institute/VIRICO)



*Specialty Coffee workshop group (photo courtesy of ECHOsi Foundation)*



*GREAT Women  
Showroom & Café, Makati City  
(photo courtesy of GREAT Women)*

On the business and commercial level, we set up the GREAT Women Showroom & Café in the Philippines as our local footprint for our ASEAN exchanges. We also established partnerships with other retail brands in stores—both brick-and-mortar and online. To date, GREAT Women Brand products have been exported in small quantities to the United States, Switzerland, Spain and Singapore.

We are building the GREAT Women (GW) Collective of women social entrepreneurs as we enter varying formats of business agreements. Together, we create collaborative products under the brand’s inclusive business advocacy-driven marketing direction. All members of the GW Collective—be they designers, women enterprises and communities—are vetted under a criteria for inclusion to support both the development programs and the commercialization of products. An interested party is checked via an assessment process requiring their enterprise to be 51% majority owned by women or a male-owned company hiring at least a 50% female workforce, with the objective of raising this percentage in the near future. Businesses must also subscribe to the principles of inclusive and fair business practices, fair trade and providing access to gender-responsive and decent work for women.

Under each of the members are supply chains of community livelihood and women microentrepreneurs. The GW Collective has a common goal of driving profits alongside expanding impact on the development side. To date, we have extended our network to women microentrepreneurs from MSMEs in Malaysia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Laos PDR and Cambodia. They were linked by our women collective as we continue the platform model at the business/commercial level with key partners we have identified.

I sit as private sector representative for Gender in the Department of Trade and Industry's (DTI) MSME Council. With gender as a key area in the country's MSME Development Plan, the DTI has focused more attention on women entrepreneurs as movers of inclusive growth and significant contributors to domestic and global economic activities. The DTI has been providing them with essential tools and skills, hastening the growth and expansion of their businesses within and beyond borders, and establishing a foothold in both the regional and global markets. The DTI has likewise identified the needed strategies in seven Ms—Mindset, Mastery, Mentoring, Markets, Money, Machines and Models—to further boost the participation and contribution of small enterprises in overall production and jobs. It is good to know the GREAT Women Project impacts all these Ms in the many touch points of development programs and business transactions and partnerships.

*Farmers' wives in Bohol do part-time sewing (photo courtesy of Bernadette de los Santos)*



*Myanmar woman earns a daily living by cooking street food in Yangon (photo courtesy of Jeannie Javelosa)*



Empowering women entrepreneurs is a pivotal strategy to maximize and harness their full potential so they can reap the benefits of bigger markets brought about by greater economic integration, particularly in the AEC. The AEC brings with it a host of challenges and opportunities on various levels.

GREAT Women is a strategy to bring together women microentrepreneurs and small businesses into the global supply chain. Through this, we can build skills and capabilities, foster business linkages among women in the region, allow them to help other women in their own supply chains, and help them access national or international markets. The initiative will also allow a strategic and focused direction for mapping needs of a regional and integrated supply chain from the bottom of the pyramid (BoP) to the target market. This will eventually bring in the needed capacity building for livelihood skills, tools and processes that can boost productivity and wages, cross-border training that can support job



GREAT Women ASEAN fusion. Fashion designer Happy Andrada's creations make it to 2017 London Fashion Week and Vogue. She mixed our Philippine Ifugao tribe's woven textiles and Vietnam's Hmong tribe embroidered and woven accessories.

## COLLABORATION

*Success comes through collaborations with like-minded entrepreneurs and stakeholders with shared values who have bought into the vision of GREAT Women.*

*Collaboration between stakeholders must innovate new directions in business, finance, technology and market strategies as gaps are addressed.*



creation; ensure sustainability of production, harmonized product design quality standards; improve technology and logistics; establish universal branding; foster entrepreneurship; and, address barriers to trade, legal requirements, business plans and financial investments, market opportunities and marketing channels. The platform would be instrumental in building domestic and regional supply chains specific to the diverse products of ASEAN and allow the full development and social and environmental impact checks. And so, this is what we share as a best practice on women's economic empowerment from the Philippines into ASEAN.

With USAID's ASEAN Connectivity through Trade and Investment (ACTI) Project support, in cooperation with the ASEAN SME Agencies Working Group (SMEWG), the U.S. - ASEAN Business Alliance for Competitive SMEs, and the ECHOSi Foundation, the GREAT Women in ASEAN Initiative was launched in the region through several activities:

- The Business Alliance Regional Policy Dialogue on Empowering Women Entrepreneurs to Advance AEC Development. Presentation of the "GREAT Women Brand: ASEAN Collection"
- An ASEAN Trade Showcase in Kuala Lumpur Malaysia in 2015
- Convening a GREAT Women in ASEAN Initiative Governance Workshop in 2015 to study the direction for potential next step enterprise partnerships and alignments
- Partial support to development programs such as the GREAT WOMEN in ASEAN Specialty Coffee Training Workshop funded by UPS Foundation grant given to the ECHOSi Foundation
- A grant to include the ASEAN booths at the GREAT Women Trade Showcase in Manila, Philippines 2017
- The publication of this book (under the USAID-TRADE Project)





# CHAPTER 10

## Platforms of Impact

*Weaving shuttles (photo courtesy of GREAT Women)*

**T**he task of building women’s entrepreneurial skills and scaling up their businesses is HUGE. A big number of microenterprises remain unstable, vulnerable to competition, changes in trends, disasters or any of the slightest economic shocks. Small women community producers cannot succeed alone, nor can micro and small entrepreneurs. They need assistance to achieve varying levels of growth.

What we see in the Philippines is mirrored in all the countries of ASEAN, even made more challenging in the less developed countries like Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar and Vietnam. While inclusive growth is the banner cry of governments, we believe that the convergence of government in partnership with the private sector, and in close alignment with donor international groups, should be pursued to reach the microenterprises, especially those owned by women.



*At the APEC Women and Economy Forum in Bali, Indonesia 2014, government and Womenbiz members from private sector come together. (L-R): Department of Trade and Industry’s Lydia Guevarra, Aurora Geotina-Garcia, Jeannie Javelosa, Remy Rikken Chair of the Philippine Commission on Women, Chiqui Go. (From left): Undersecretary for Agriculture Berna Puyat, Monette Hamlin, Ambassador Delia Albert, and Cathy Turvill (photo courtesy of Chit Juan)*



*AWEN driving the policy push for women in the region: (L-R): Founding Chair Vietnam, Minh Nguyen Thi Tuyet and 2016-2018 Chair, Philippines, Pacita Juan. (photo courtesy of Jeannie Javelosa)*

Strategic partnerships are key to collaboration. A complete ecosystem must be created to support them. GREAT Women's move into the ASEAN region with the help of USAID placed the brand in the radar of other funding agencies and donor groups that have development programs. These meetings also enabled the development of the ASEAN Women's Entrepreneur Network (AWEN) when Chair Minh Nguyen Thi Tuyet from Vietnam requested if the Philippines, through Chit Juan who was President of the Philippine Women's Business Council, could take the next Chairmanship of AWEN. Another pivotal move as the Philippines is Host Country for the 50<sup>th</sup> Year Anniversary of ASEAN's founding.

We witness USAID Projects such as MYDev (Mindanao Youth for Development) focusing efforts to encourage, engage and empower out-of-school-youth (OSY) in Mindanao and women microentrepreneurs. MYDev's data reveal that only 36% of registered OSY are female and hopes to increase the number of registered female OSY as local communities develop a positive mindset and inclusive attitude that will encourage more female OSY to participate in community building initiatives. Female out-of-school youth bear the burden of dealing with severe stereotyped perceptions of local communities about their traditional roles and vulnerabilities. Aside from the adverse general image of being an out-of-school youth, female OSY feel that they face more challenges throughout their journeys to achieving their dreams of a better future, which discourage them from seizing opportunities and pursuing their goals.



*Muslim women participate in Alternative Learning System (photo courtesy of USAID)*

To this end, MYDev has instituted programs that focus on enhancing the quality of participation of female OSY in life skills sessions through the Alternative Learning System (ALS) of the Department of Education, and Livelihood Skills Training (LST) of the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority. To date, approximately 2,385 female OSY have been benefited from MYDev initiatives that help female OSY develop a positive outlook and overcome the negative nuances of their situation.

MYDev also increased youth participation in community affairs by creating platforms where youth leaders can dialogue with their local leaders and actively participate in the identifying youth programs. As MYDev pursues increased collaborations with other existing youth programs, more female OSY are getting involved in leadership opportunities in Mindanao.

Working with tribes and communities, national government agencies and local government units, and NGOs, USAID-Advancing Philippine Competitiveness (COMPETE) has engendered and supported an environment where they flourish, thrive and open up possibilities for sustainable growth. Inspiring as they are remarkable, these success stories highlight milestones of USAID initiatives in the sphere of women economic empowerment.

When the PCW partnered with us to help level up products for their women community groups, we moved to institutionalize a clear program that can provide metrics and sustainability not only through product and design development but more importantly, through market access. The second was to consolidate efforts of independent groups willing

## Women Youth Leadership

HALIMA SALIM is a 21-year-old out-of-school youth (OSY) from Lamitan City, Basilan, and one of the beneficiaries of the Mindanao Youth for Development (MYDev) Project of USAID which aims to actively engage out-of-school youth (OSY) in workforce and community development activities. Halima was elected by her fellow OSY as one of the female youth leaders to be a member of the multi-stakeholder governance body that ensures effective and improved education service delivery to the youth. To date, 173 of the 415 elected youth leaders are female.



With renewed confidence and a positive outlook, OSY now see a better future for themselves and their communities. Now a fellow of the Basilan Young Leaders Program, Halima says, *"I now see OSY in a far better light. I am confident I can do a lot of things."*

*(From USAID MYDev Project Success Stories)*

to extend assistance. We set out to try to secure committed partnerships of stakeholders who are part of the value chain: local government groups, regional representatives from government agencies, retailers, designers, media and purchasing companies and customers. We continue to narrow the gaps and connect the loop of sustainability.

Interestingly, we had difficulties in identifying women microentrepreneurs who are really willing to rise up and expand their businesses. This involves issues of empowerment. The end results of GREAT Women Project Phase 1 in the Philippines showed that most of the women believed that they were able to challenge the stereotypical perspective of women, and were engaged in community leadership and initiatives. But many still believed that home and care work for their children or extended families were still their primary responsibilities. Many women microentrepreneurs do not want to make it big.

## Youth, Engaged and Empowered

The OSY COCO JOLLY ASSOCIATION is a group of out-of-school-youth (OSY) from Barangay Sta. Clara, Lamitan City, Basilan that earns from producing coconut-based food products with the assistance of USAID's Mindanao Youth for Development (MYDev) Project.

After completing a MYDev Project training program, this OSY group started producing and marketing food products made from coconut, such as pan de coco, sapin-sapin, buko pie, puto cuchinta, macaroons and tarts. To augment the family income, they sold their products in the public market and during events and activities of local institutions, earning as much as Php15,000 (US\$300) a month. Through the help of Lamitan City's Out-of-School Youth Development Alliance, they were able to provide snacks during the events of the Isabela Foundation, the city government, the Education Development Center, and Nalamar Restaurant. They are also involved in community feeding programs of Barangay Sta. Clara.



The members of this association were also trained by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) under its Basic Entrepreneurial Development Training program, and are registered with the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE). Their business permit and BIR registration are currently being processed so they can engage in bidding as suppliers in local government projects and events.

In 2015, the association was awarded one of the Ten Accomplished Youth Organization (TAYO) in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). The TAYO Awards recognizes Filipino youth groups that have made substantial contributions to nation building through projects and programs aimed to bridge gaps in education, the environment, culture and the arts, livelihood, and health.

This successful OSY group bested 100 nominees, and was recognized for their business endeavor, its impact on the community, and how the enterprise has strengthened their relationship with their community. OSY Coco Jolly Association president, Judith Lamenggong, received the TAYO Award including a trophy and a cash prize of Php10,000 (US\$200). *"We were not expecting to receive an award," Judith said. "We just wanted to help our families."*



Judith also said that with the MYDev training, they have been kept busy preparing products that fetch an estimated income of Php2,000 (US\$ 40) a week—a far cry from their idle days as OSY. But more than the income, this group symbolizes hope and encouragement for other OSY and is a living testament to what can be achieved with the right attitude and appropriate assistance. By gaining skills and competencies, OSY are enabled to become productive members of their communities, contributing in efforts to attain peace and stability.

Judith is among the 19,000 OSY whom MYDev commits to reach by 2018, providing them with life skills, basic education, and vocational skills training throughout eight conflict-affected areas in Mindanao.

*(From the USAID–Mindanao Youth (MYDEV) for Development Activity)*

Their understanding of economic empowerment is more on the economic returns they expected but not on the higher goal of transforming the gender roles or relations at home or at the community level. We also found this true for other women entrepreneurs as we went up higher on the supply chain. They did not want to expand too much. We could understand this. We ourselves needed to shift our own personal mindsets in wanting to “remain small.”

### **Legendary Matweavers**

It isn't every day that a lifestyle guru of Josie Natori's stature buys your product right off the display wall. But the wares Wilma Cabutija brought to the Crafts of Palawan exhibit at Manila FAME 2016 were no ordinary mats. They were the products of generations of weavers from the Jama Mapun people of Palawan. Characterized by complex recurring patterns made from dyed pandan leaves, this indigenous art is a cultural treasure of the Jama Mapun. It was this complex beauty that captivated Ms. Natori, the creative director of Manila FAME.

Wilma's route to Manila FAME began in September 2015, when her family, known artisans in the community, attended the training program on product development for tourist souvenirs of the USAID's Advancing Philippine Competitiveness (COMPETE) Project, in cooperation with the Provincial Government of Palawan and Department of Trade and Industry. Wilma, her sister, and her 89-year-old grandmother—the family's master weaver—took classes and were mentored in product development, visual merchandising, pricing, costing, and other skills required for commercial level



production. USAID-COMPETE consultants Percy Aranador and Noemi Avancena provided new designs, assistance, and advice as they endeavored to expand the Cabutijas' ancient collection of 16 patterns. *"Our work has definitely improved,"* Wilma said. *"We're using new colors outside of tradition, new sizes, and new products. We have also learned to converse with people and tell them all about our mats—where they come from, and what weaving means to us."*

The mats, Wilma says, are labor-intensive: the larger sizes, beautiful as wall decorations, have two woven layers, take two months to create, and are priced at PhP10,000 (about US\$220). One of these mats was bought by Ms. Natori. A small price to pay for authentic art, says Ms. Avancena. *"A professor in indigenous art came by the exhibit and said that they were selling their work much too cheaply,"* she pointed out. *"We hope that as long as the craft can give them a livable income, the art and technique of Jama Mapun weaving can be preserved for future generations."*

After receiving numerous inquiries for throw pillows, bags, wallets and other accessories made from their mats, Wilma is already imagining solutions to the demand-supply gap. *"We can make a commercial version where just one side has the traditional design, and the back layer can be plain. We can outsource that side and just weave the main side,"* she mused. She is also trying to address future training and production capacity issues. *"Right now there are around six people in the family who know how to weave. One of my cousins knows how, but we need him to be interested in weaving again. When I get home, I'll tell him how much people in Manila loved our craft. Maybe that will persuade him."*

(From *Telling our Story*, USAID-COMPETE Success Story. <http://stories.usaid.gov>)



### **Where the Grass is always Green**

Many tourists in Puerto Princesa, Palawan find their way to Binuatan Creations, and for good reason. The enterprise is known throughout Palawan for its beautiful woven products, made from locally sourced grass and fibers. Their woven raw material has been picked up by suppliers of Calvin Klein, while tourists who take the interactive tour of its workshop inevitably snap up Binuatan's finished products, including table runners, placemats, home décor and personal accessories.

Eva Valledor, manager of Binuatan Creations, considers her business a reflection of her community. This was a context with which Eva was already familiar owing to her stint as a former development specialist for agrarian reform projects for the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR). At that time, one of her projects was a cooperative for prisoners' families that used handloom weaving to raise funds. An important order was on the line when the project nearly fell apart due to internal friction. To save the deal, Eva made the decisive move to quit her job and take over the project. After delivering the order, Eva formed Binuatan Creations on her uncle's property. *"I thought, I won't have a boss this time,"* she said. *"If there's a mistake, I have to fix it. If there is a problem with the buyer, I have to solve it."*

Established 14 years ago, Eva's primary employees have been working students and mothers, some who work from home so they can work while caring for their children. She sources her raw materials from the poor people in the community. Her

supporters include her former colleagues from DTI, who have regularly asked her to come in as a resource person for seminars. It was for all three groups that Eva took on the challenge of the Souvenirs Upscaling Activity of USAID's Advancing Philippine Competitiveness (COMPETE) Project in September 2015. USAID-COMPETE, the DTI and the Provincial Government of Palawan (PGP) invited 50 SMEs and cooperatives to a series of workshops, mentoring sessions and design challenges formulated to enhance their brand evolution, product development, visual merchandising, and business process knowledge. The activity's culminating project brought the most successful makers to Manila FAME, the Philippines' premier design and lifestyle event, where local and international buyers look for new trends and items to stock.

After four days of meeting buyers, Eva had four potential bulk export sales on the line worth more than US\$20,000, partially on the back of prototypes they produced with the guidance of USAID-COMPETE. *"My employees were so eager to do well so we could go to Manila FAME, so this is their triumph as well,"* says Eva. *"It took me 14 years to take Binuatan Creations to something like this, because I was not sure of our capacity. But they worked so hard to make the prototypes we're selling. It's empowered them. And now I know we can do it. Now, I know we have the quality and workmanship that can meet the exporters' standards and demand."*

*(From Telling our Story, USAID-COMPETE Success Story. <http://stories.usaid.gov>)*

Empowering women entrepreneurs is a pivotal strategy to maximize and harness their full potential so they can reap the benefits of bigger markets brought about by greater economic integration. If we have enabling environments to push for women or women-led businesses (of any scale—MSMEs, SMEs, big businesses) to thrive and be as productive as men's, there is enormous potential for enhanced economic growth and poverty reduction. The key direction is to move women businesses into higher growth sectors. But because majority of women businesses are small or concentrated in sectors with low productivity, they need help.

Supporting and working for women's economic empowerment is key to shift the whole cycle of energy and power in our world today. The ASEAN challenge will bring in

even deeper cultural, religious and traditional gender biases. But we believe that with the changing times, and the support of such convergence directions of international donors, country governments and their agencies, private organizations and businesses, we will see traction for GREAT Women in ASEAN.

Insights from the ground show how much women hunger to learn more about business and how to be financially independent from their spouses. Majority are caught in the balancing act of family and livelihood, often forgetting their own health and well-being. Unlike men, women's time is given to family with so little left for themselves to build or work a network. But this space of the network is precious, and women must seek this. Power is obtained through the network and collaborations, for all women in various stages of their career and enterprise.

*Inclusive business, integrated supply chains, loops of sustainability, regional initiatives ...* these are all phrases that attempt to describe platforms, a model making sense today. For us, we take on three G-platforms for impact. There is our GREEN ECHOstore, and the GOOD we try to do through our development work in the ECHOsi Foundation, and now, GENDER that we support through GREAT Women. The Good, the Green, and Gender! We have seen it continue to work for the small farmers and producers, the start-up entrepreneur, and even with women-led enterprises with expansion challenges. The Platform allows the small ones to step on it, for trade, exchanges, mentoring, and skills training for sustainability.

What GREAT Women Platform and Brand can offer women entrepreneurs is access to capital growth for their businesses too. Here, social impact and angel investors may find a viable platform from which to identify blue chip women enterprises or sunrise industry products that needed a push into the market, from green sustainable products and services to responsible luxury products—all produced by women entrepreneurs who have already been pre-screened, brought together by professional trust, enterprise capacity and the overwhelming desire to help create jobs for women in the supply chain.

We are replicating in the ASEAN region what we did in the Philippines. In the bravura of the small entrepreneur, we say we will do this come hell or high water! And it is interesting how the many “small ones” can rise together to try to do business beyond borders and test their products in each other's markets.

As we continue the journey of GREAT Women into the ASEAN region, we will continue to forge relationships with our personal networks so we can learn more about



# The GREAT WOMEN

The GREAT Women Platform is the gender platform of the Philippines. It is an innovative multi-stakeholder public-private partnership that supports the economic empowerment of women. This is a partnership of the Government of Canada and the Philippines through national convergence initiatives. Partner agencies, the Department of Trade and Industry and the Philippine Commission on Women, with private sector lead partner ECHOsi Foundation (Empowering Communities with Hope and Opportunities through Sustainable Initiatives).

GREAT (Gender Responsive Economic Actions for the Transformation of Women) Phase 1 (2007-2013) was implemented by the Philippine Commission on Women aimed to enhance the enabling environment for women's economic empowerment with focus on women in microenterprises and women workers. It facilitated the resurgence and better understanding of gender issues in economic development among partner agencies. In 2013, ECHOsi Foundation launched the GREAT Women Platform that emerged from product development programs creating food and non-food products market tested in ECHOsi Foundation Lifestyle. The GREAT WOMEN Phase 2 (2015-2020) looks to an expansion of an integrated value and supply chain support services, capacity building, access to credit facilities and finance, technology and global market access for not only micro-entrepreneurs but also women entrepreneurs and women led businesses.

*GREAT Women was presented as the Philippines's best example of a gender economic platform during the Philippine's hosting of APEC in 2016. (photo courtesy of GREAT Women)*

their culture, to see that their lives and struggles are much like ours. The most positive aspects of this journey have been the visits to each country, to be with the people, who welcome us to their homes and for some, their hearts too. This can be in Singapore where we have dinners with women leaders or speak in women circles, in Myanmar where we trek coffee farms, textile weaver's spaces, study the cuisine, or deepen friendships as homes are opened to us. In Jakarta, we build relationships based on shared advocacies, visit quiet sublime places in Bali and talk yoga and spirituality with friends. In Laos, sharing traditional cuisine in small coffee shops, in Cambodia meeting where women groups bring us all the way to their Minister, or our Thailand and Vietnam visits that continually awe us with the traditional culture so ingrained in the fabric of daily life.

# WOMEN Platform and Brand

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GREAT Women  
in ASEAN



PARTNER

## PLATFORMS

*Strategic partnerships are key to collaboration. GREAT Women is a convergence strategy of a platform that links government development initiatives supported by aid funds, and private sector inclusive business enterprises to bring micro-entrepreneurs from the bottom of the pyramid into global value chains.*



*Taking up the GREAT Women cause to government with Cambodian women leaders led by Nanda Pok (seated third from left).  
(photo courtesy of GREAT Women)*





*GREAT Women walk around Sithar coffee plantation in Pyin Oo Lwin, Myanmar, led by (third from left) Ma Khine Zaw (photo courtesy of GREAT Women)*

Travel then becomes an opportunity not only to enjoy the place, but also to form relationships with the locals, and be more open to trust. Only then do we begin talking business. Understanding the region and the diversity of the cultures becomes a must. And friendships created become the glue by which commerce, trade and our advocacies can move forward. And together, we always have a stronger united voice in the global market place. One BRAND platform. One ASEAN region. And many, many, many GREAT Women.





# Partners in Women's Economic Development

*Tikog mats from Basey, Samar (photo courtesy of Mervin Concepcion Vergara)*

## Defining Inclusive Business with a Gender Lens: the Philippine Innovation

*From the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW) publication report, with financial assistance from the Government of Canada provided through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Development (DFAT)*

*Impact on Women Microentrepreneurs.* The GREAT Women Project saw that a gender responsive enabling environment contributed to greater productivity of women's enterprises and improved their products which generated greater market acceptance. Women microentrepreneurs (WMEs) displayed more confidence in dealing with service providers. A number expressed enhanced relationships with spouses who acquired better appreciation of the role women play in running a business. Several WMEs also began emerging as enterprise leaders and were later trained to be mentors in gender and entrepreneurship.

WMEs were happy with the assistance they received from local government and national government agencies citing that they:

- Acquired and improved entrepreneurial skills and knowledge
- Gained access to various business services ranging from business registration/licensing, enterprise development, technology and social protection
- Obtained training and technical assistance on occupational safety and environment

- Received assistance in acquiring equipment and accessed common service facilities that helped them boost production and increased production sales
- Expanded the markets for their products through trade fairs and product promotions
- Gained access to credit and were able to gradually pay loans
- Felt an improvement in the standard of living and gender roles

*Design Clinics.* The GREAT Women, in partnership with the private sector (ECHOsi Foundation), conducted Design Clinic Series for women enterprises' products. Through this activity, women microentrepreneurs received technical advice and mentoring on value-adding for products, developing new product variants, costing products, improving production capacities, proper packaging and labeling, and assistance with food and nutrition labeling requirements.

Together through the PCW, product experts and leading entrepreneurs helped over 1,000 women's products in various project sites. Many women are now reaping better sales through exposure to urban markets and institutional buyers.

*The Brand.* The partnership yielded the GREAT Women Brand, a concept brand that taps local designers and leading women entrepreneurs to gather community products by women, upscaling and linking these quality products with local and export markets through social entrepreneurship channels. GREAT Women Brand products are now sold under the GREAT Women Philippines Corporation.

## The ASEAN Direction

*The United States Agency for International Development (USAID)'s ASEAN Connectivity through Trade and Investment (ACTI) project, with the ASEAN SME Agencies Working Group (SMEWG), the U.S.–ASEAN Business Alliance for Competitive SMEs, and the ECHOsi Foundation,* launched the GREAT Women in ASEAN Initiative through several activities. Among these are two regional meetings of women entrepreneurs, and the first GREAT Women Trade Showcase in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia during the 2015 ASEAN SME Conference under sponsorship of the Malaysian government (SME Corp) Malaysia and the USAID-ACTI project.

In 2017, the Trade Related Assistance for Development (TRADE) Project, in partnership with the author, developed a publication that chronicles the journey of women entrepreneurs which seeks to further educate and inspire more women to start up, scale up and venture into the ASEAN region.

The GREAT Women received support from the USAID-ACTI Project for providing seven ASEAN country booths at the GREAT Women Trade Showcase during the ASEAN Women Business Conference in Manila, Philippines, August 2017.

### **Capacity Building for ASEAN Women**

*UPS Foundation*

In 2016, United Parcel Services or UPS Foundation gave the ECHOsi Foundation a grant to run two supply chain workshops in Manila—one on the GREAT Women ASEAN Coffee Training for Specialty Coffee Supply Chain (which was partially funded by USAID-ACTI) and another on the GREAT Women ASEAN Textile Mapping of textiles from indigenous communities.

### **Women and Technology Training**

*Facebook Asia Pacific*

In 2017, the ECHOsi Foundation enabled Facebook Asia-Pacific to run a Teachers Training module on *Online Marketing for SMEs* in the Philippines under the GREAT Women Program.

### **Financial Innovation and Support**

(Philippines)

*Peace and Equity Foundation (PEF)*

Through a grant to the ECHOsi Foundation, supported a “Weaving Away War” collection of indigenous textile purchase for international market access. This included funding for the New York Artisans Resource Fair’s booth in New York in 2014.

Working in partnership with the GREAT Women Philippines Corporation, the PEF provides an innovative “Purchase Loan” that extends capital for payment of community textiles and components, allowing an extended friendly period of interest free payment which covers for the stretch of R&D product development period. This agreement likewise allows microentrepreneurs and indigenous cultural weaving communities to be paid straight up for their products; and permits designers’ use of materials to create collaborative products under the GREAT Women Collective Brand that sells the products.

# UNITED STATES ASSISTANCE FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (USAID) PROJECTS

## Mindanao Youth for Development (MYDev)

**USAID's Mindanao Youth for Development (MYDev) Project** addresses key constraints to peace and stability in selected conflict-affected areas in Mindanao through improved life skills, increased civic engagement, strengthened local government, and increased employability. It promotes an enabling environment that protects the out-of-school youth (OSY) against unproductive and violent social activities in their communities.

The Project provides livelihood skills training, demand-driven skills training, critical training and post-training support such as civic engagement activities, entrepreneurship, and job placements. It has also established Out-of-School Youth Development Alliances (OSYDAs) that convene local government, academia, the private sector and national government agencies, including the Department of Education and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, to discuss issues related to OSY in eight conflict-affected regions. National and local governments are working to expand and scale these alliances.

Since 2013, MYDev has actively engaged more than 19,000\* OSY in workforce and community development activities; contributing to incremental gains in mutual trust and social capital that underpin local area stability, security, and prosperity.

*(\*Source: Private Sector Partnership and Out-of-School Youth Development: The MYDev Experience Report, <https://www.edc.org/private-sector-partnership-and-out-school-youth-development-mydev-experience>)*

## Advancing Philippine Competitiveness (COMPETE)

**USAID's Advancing Philippine Competitiveness (COMPETE) Project** supports policy and regulatory reforms to improve the business-enabling environment for existing and potential investors in the country. It promotes increased trade and investment through the provision of better infrastructure, advancement of key sectors' competitiveness, and improvement of access to credit to attain higher levels of investment and trade, create job opportunities, and promote inclusive growth. The Project has been working alongside partners and stakeholders to develop the main sectors identified in the Philippine Development Plan such as the tourism, manufacturing, logistics, and agribusiness sectors.

The Project conducts workshops, mentoring sessions and design challenges formulated to enhance small cooperatives, enterprises and local artisans' brand evolution, product development, visual merchandising, and business process knowledge. It likewise provides trainings on the business of creating fine handicrafts, furniture, and souvenir items using locally-available and sustainable materials.

COMPETE also expands small and medium enterprises (SMEs) access to credit by providing technical assistance and trainings to build their knowledge, capacity and confidence to prepare their individual business and financial plans, and eventually develop a winning business proposal that is acceptable to loan application. It also facilitates introduction to banks and vice-versa. Beneficiaries are companies engaged in construction, energy, healthcare, manufacturing, post-harvest agricultural processing and agribusiness, and tourism sectors.

*(Sources: Advancing Philippine Competitiveness (COMPETE) Annual Report, pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\_docs/PA00K5PM.pdf; USAID launches project to facilitate loans to SMEs, http://www.philstar.com/business/2013/09/30/1239591/usa-id-launches-project-facilitate-loans-smes)*

## Trade-Related Assistance for Development (TRADE)

**USAID's Trade-Related Assistance for Development (TRADE)** Project supports reform measures that help the Philippines fulfill its obligations under the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Economic Community (AEC). The country's increased compliance with these and other trade agreements was seen to pave the way for Philippine membership in new generation trade deals such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). This, in turn, would boost the country's exports and foreign direct investments, leading to stronger and more inclusive growth.

The Project addresses trade and investment issues from three angles. It worked

to: (1) enhance the policy and institutional environment for trade and investment, (2) improve trade facilitation, and (3) strengthen the environment for competition. A fourth, cross-cutting component, supported work in these three areas with advocacy and outreach activities to further advance the government's trade policy agenda.

The TRADE Project employs a highly collaborative approach, engaging and supporting counterparts in the government in work planning, strategic visioning, and in the hands-on implementation of agreed-upon endeavors. Among these is the development of accurate and comprehensive knowledge materials, including the DTI's AEC Communications Toolkit that provides stakeholders and general audiences a clearer understanding of the AEC, its impact on and benefits to the Philippine economy, and the programs the government is undertaking to prepare the country for regional economic integration. It has also supported women entrepreneurs with publications highlighting government initiatives to help MSMEs, many of which are women-led enterprises in wholesale and retail trade, accommodation, and food and other services.



# Milestones

The GREAT Women Platform

Empowering Women Up the Value Chain





*Beaded ornament of Kalinga (photo courtesy of Marvin Alcaraz)*

# 2006

- October 2006. The Gender Responsive Economic Actions for the Transformation of Women (GREAT Women) Project. The GREAT Women Phase 1 Project was launched in the Philippines. The Memorandum of Agreement was signed by institutional government signatories from the Philippines, particularly the NEDA Director General and Canada, specifically by the Canadian Ambassador to the Philippines. The Project was a governance and capacity development project that aimed to promote and support a gender-responsive enabling environment for women's economic empowerment (WEE), particularly those in microenterprises.
  - 15 November 2006. The contributions between the two governments were signed by representatives from the Philippine Commission on Women and the Canadian Program Manager, Development Corporation in the Embassy of Canada.
  - The Philippine Commission for Women (PCW) and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) likewise signed the MOA to implement the project. The PCW was tasked to facilitate the convergence of initial partners composed of non-government agencies (NGA) and local government units (LGUs) following the project criteria.
- GREAT Women Phase 1 Project was formalized with the signing of the Memorandum of Agreement.
  - Pilot LGUs (Metro Naga and PALMA Alliance in North Cotabato) were engaged.
  - Initial capacity building activities and sub-project planning for PCW and NGAs were conducted.

# 2007

# 2008

- Partnership Agreements with NGAs and LGUs were signed.
  - Local Officials and Technical Working Groups were engaged and capacitated for project implementation.
  - Capacity Development on various WEE themes by PCW and Partners were implemented.
- National and local partners started infusing gender and development (GAD) and women's economic empowerment (WEE) perspectives to their policies and plans.
  - Began the development of business plans and partnerships for WEE-related common service facilities.
  - National agency partners began developing GAD-WEE tools and database.
  - Local partners conducted local baseline studies for WEE.

# 2009

# 2010

- WEE-focused services and enabling mechanisms for women microentrepreneurs (WMEs) were designed and introduced at the LGU level.
- LGUs were more strategically organized and WME groups were developed.
- NGAs and LGUs initiated inter-agency convergence efforts for WEE. NGAs extended program services specifically to Project-involved women microentrepreneur groups.

- PCW nominated Pacita “Chit” Juan as member of the Project’s Steering Committee, as women entrepreneur and private sector representative. She was then the President of Women’s Business Council of the Philippines.
- 10 February 2010, Bangkok, Thailand and July 2010, Cambodia. PCW Project Head for GREAT Phase 1 Luzviminda “Luvy” Villanueva discussed activities on women’s economic leadership (WEL) in agricultural markets during OXFAM’s multi-stakeholder forum on participation in the community of practice (COP). This resulted into developed tools and knowledge products on WEL.

## 2012

- Public-private sector partnership with ECHOsi Foundation-ECHOstore Sustainable Lifestyle established an Intensive Design Clinic Series for design and product development of women-produced community products, initiated market testing of products, and created the GREAT Women Brand (GWB).
- Jeannie Javelosa, as ECHOsi Foundation President took the lead on the program with PCW.
- Reena Francisco of ECHOsi Foundation-ECHOstore was tasked to design the GWB Mark and retail product branding for market testing of some of the products.
- GREAT Women Project reached near-completion of Performance Measurement Framework targets.
- Women leaders in women’s groups were honed to become community champions.
- 29-30 May 2012, Hanoi, Vietnam. Luvy Villanueva presented a GREAT Women Project material for the theme “Women Led SME Development” as part of the “Southeast Asia Forum on Sustainable Economic Growth.” Organized by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the forum engaged partners in government, non-government and business sectors from Vietnam, Indonesia and Philippines.

- Ownership of GREAT Women Brand (GWB) Mark and brand ownership was moved by the Canadian donor group and PCW to the private sector partner as commercialization of products are not under the purview of governments.

## 2013

- GREAT Women Brand was launched and introduced to media and consumer public at a March Women’s Day exhibition and event launch at the Yuchengco Museum, RCBC Tower.

### Platform Direction:

- 27-29 April 2013, Amman, Jordan. Luvy Villanueva (PCW) and Jeannie Javelosa (ECHOsi Foundation) were invited as guest speakers for the panel on emerging good practices for women’s economic empowerment in the “Conference on Supporting Women’s Economic Empowerment: Today and Tomorrow;” organized by OXFAM-Quebec for its Middle East and North African (MENA) partners.
- September 2013, New York. Luvy Villanueva (PCW) was invited as resource person to the United Nations Women organized launch for the Knowledge Gateway on Women’s Economic Empowerment; a side event for the UN General Assembly in New York.
- September 2013, Bali, Indonesia. Chit Juan, Jeannie Javelosa and Luvy Villanueva were part of of the Philippine Delegation to the APEC Women and the Economy Forum. GREAT Women Project was presented as a best practice on WEE in the High Level Policy Dialogue of the Policy Partnership for Women and the Economy (PPWE) by Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) Undersecretary Nora Terrado, and supported by PCW Executive Director Emmeline Verzosa.

- Taipei, Taiwan. Jeannie Javelosa presented the GREAT Women as an innovative case at APEC Women and ICT Forum.
- Barcelona, Spain. Jeannie Javelosa was invited to present the GREAT Women at the Spanish-Asia Women in Tourism Conference.
- Jeannie Javelosa begins discussions with Patty Alleman, then USAid Asia-Pacific Head for Gender for potential replication of GREAT Women Program in five APEC economies.

#### **Development Direction: (Program)**

- Peace and Equity Foundation (PEF) gave ECHOSi Foundation a grant to support GREAT Women for the specific production and marketing of indigenous community textiles under the brand.

#### **Enterprise Direction: (Brand)**

- Market testing of products were conducted in ECHOstore outlets, Tesoro's Handicrafts, Milky Way, Yuchengco Museum shop.

# 2014

- SWEEP (Supporting Women's Economic Empowerment in the Philippines) aka GREAT Women Phase 2 MOA was signed by the Canadian and Philippine governments. The project, allotted 8 million Canadian dollars and expected to run from 2015-2020, seeks to formally institutionalize its programs as the gender platform of the Philippines.
- Planning for the "GREAT WOMEN in ASEAN Initiative" began. In particular, the ASEAN Connectivity through Trade and Investment (ACTI)– a United States Agency for International Development (USAid) Project in ASEAN–assisted in positioning the development platform and the brand into the region.

#### **Platform Direction:**

- February 2014, Bali, Indonesia. Luvy Villanueva participated as resource person to the UN ESCAP organized concluding forum on Creating an Enabling Environment Supporting Women's Economic Empowerment.
- 24-27 May 2014, Jeju Island, Korea. Jeannie Javelosa and Luvy Villanueva presented the GREAT Women Project model during the Business and Professional Women (BPW) International Triennial Conference.
- 24-25 September 2014, Hanoi, Vietnam. The GREAT Women in ASEAN Initiative and Brand was presented by Jeannie Javelosa during the Regional Conference on SME Access to Finance: Moving Forward in Support of Women Entrepreneurs in the Less Developed ASEAN Countries.
- 5 November 2014, Bangkok, Thailand. Jeannie Javelosa and Chit Juan discussed the "GREAT Women Brand: ASEAN Collection" at the Business Alliance Regional Policy Dialogue on Empowering Women Entrepreneurs to Advance AEC Development.
- 17-20 November 2014. Bangkok, Thailand. Jeannie Javelosa was invited to speak on GREAT Women at the Enhancing women's economic participation in the post-2015 era during a panel discussion at the Asia Pacific Conference on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Beijing +20 Review.

#### **Development Direction: (Program)**

- Aligned as a gender development program with national agencies, the GREAT Women Platform was identified as the Philippine gender platform for presentation to APEC.

- Following the signing of the MOA of Great Women 2, the DTI and the PCW were identified as the lead government agencies.
- ECHOsi Foundation aligned its program with the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) and Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR).

#### **Enterprise Direction: (Brand)**

- Social enterprise for the production-marketing for GW products, specifically focused on the textiles of indigenous communities.
- 14-20 August 2014. Peace and Equity Foundation gave ECHOsi Foundation a grant to showcase GREAT Women's indigenous textiles of the southern Philippine tribes during the NY Artisan Resource Fair in New York City.

# 2015

- GREAT WOMEN Platform was presented as the best-case example of a Philippine gender platform to the APEC economies during the Philippine hosting of the APEC Women and the Economy (APEC-WE) Forum.
- The first GREAT Women in ASEAN Initiative Trade Booth was launched in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia during the ASEAN SME Summit. This was under the sponsorship of the Malaysian government and USAid-ACTI project.

#### **Platform Direction:**

- 21 January 2015. The Contribution Arrangement between the Canadian and Philippine governments was signed by the Development Cooperation of the Embassy of Canada in Manila's Program Manager Luke Myers, the Philippine Commission on Women's Executive Director Emmeline Verzosa, with private sector lead partner ECHOsi Foundation President, Jeannie Javelosa. It was witnessed by PCW Chair Remy Rikken, ECHOsi Foundation Chair Chit Juan, Myrna Jarillas, Senior Program Officer of the development Corporation of the Embassy of Canada in Manila and Luvy Villanueva, Project Head for GREAT Women Phase 2.
- January 2015: Luvy Villanueva (PCW), Reena Francisco and Chit Juan (ECHOsi Foundation) spoke on GREAT Women as part of the Philippine Delegation to Tehran, Iran for the Conference on Empowering Rural Women.
- March 2015, Hanoi, Vietnam. Zarah Juan was sent on behalf of the GREAT Women Program to the ASEAN Women Entrepreneurs Meeting, Hanoi to share her experiences during product development with the ECHOsi Foundation.
- 26-28 May 2015. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The first GREAT Women In ASEAN Initiative Trade Booth at the ASEAN SME Conference, under sponsorship of the Malaysian government and the USAid-ACTI project.
- 8-11 June 2015, Atlanta, Georgia, USA. Jeannie Javelosa was invited as a speaker to present GREAT Women for the APEC Meeting on Global Value Chains.
- 16-18 September 2015. GREAT WOMEN Platform was presented as the best-case example of a Philippine gender platform of a multi-stakeholder public-private partnership, and inclusive business model for women's economic empowerment to the APEC economies. It was also featured at the exhibition and retail showcase of APEC Women and the Economy (APEC-WE) Forum during the Philippines hosting of APEC.
- October 2015, Lima, Peru. Jeannie Javelosa was invited to speak about the GREAT Women model at the planning meeting for Peru's hosting of APEC in 2016.

- 10-11 November 2015, Jakarta, Indonesia. Luvy Villanueva (PCW) was invited as resource person for UN Women organized Regional Consultation on Increased Women's Economic Empowerment Opportunities and Rights in ASEAN.
- 30 November to 1 December 2015. GREAT Women in Asean Initiative Governance Workshop, convened by USAid-ACTI, brought in several women entrepreneurs from various ASEAN countries to study the direction for potential next step enterprise partnerships and alignments.

### **Development Direction: (Program)**

- February 2015. Phase 2 of GREAT Women has commenced.
- ECHOsi Foundation begins its alignment with the National Commission on Culture and the Arts (NCCA), focusing on livelihood sustainability for cultural indigenous communities under NCCA's Schools of Living Traditions.
- PCW nominated Jeannie Javelosa to sit as private sector representative for Gender in the Micro-Small-Medium Enterprises Council of the DTI, bringing in the GREAT Women Program.

### **Enterprise Direction: (Brand)**

- 21-24 April 2015, Manila Fame Trade Exposition. GREAT Women Brand along with its partners, the Leather Collection, Greenleaf Eco-bags and Nooks, joined Manila Fame.
- 26-28 August 2015. GREAT Women Brand joined the high-end Maarte Bazaar for the first time.

# 2016

- GREAT Women Showroom & Café opens in Makati City, Philippines.
- 3-5 March 2016, Hanoi, Vietnam. Jeannie Javelosa presented GREAT Women Brand at the ASEAN Women's Entrepreneur Network (AWEN) Meeting. During this event, Chairmanship of AWEN was moved to the Philippines and received by Chit Juan as Chair of Womenbiz.
- 10-12 March, 2016. The GREAT Women Forum and Trade Exchange was launched at the Yuchengco Museum's month.
- 17-20 April 2016, Tokyo, Japan. Luvy Villanueva was invited as resource person to present GREAT Women model during the Dialogue on Economic Growth and the Role of Women organized by the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung Association.
- 18-20 May 2016, Jakarta, Indonesia. Jeannie Javelosa was invited as a panelist to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Five Year Review to input the economic opportunities to the human rights issues convened by UN Women.
- 28-30 July 2016. Hanoi, Vietnam. Jeannie Javelosa presented GREAT Women model at the APEC SME Summit.
- 5-7 September 2016. Vientiane, LAOS PDR. Jeannie Javelosa joined the panel on MSMS growth, youth and women entrepreneurship highlighting the GREAT Women model.
- 24-26 September 2016. Jakarta, Indonesia. Jeannie Javelosa discussed GREAT Women during a panel on financial inclusion at Sankalp Forum.
- 7-9 November 2016. Korea. Jeannie Javelosa shared the GREAT Women inclusive platform model in the forum Realizing Women's Potentials in the Creative Economy: an International Perspective.

- 21 November 2016, Singapore. Luvy Villanueva shared GREAT Women Project experiences during a panel discussion on Addressing Gender Equality Goals in Food and Agriculture Companies. The session was organized by Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture and Natural Resources (WOCAN) as a side event of the Responsible Business Forum.

#### **Development Direction:**

- Refocus of Philippine program towards strengthening private sector market development and market engagement directions.
- 24-26 February 2016, Manila, Philippines. A grant from UPS Foundation allowed ECHOsi Foundation to run two workshops: (1) GREAT Women ASEAN Textile Mapping of textiles from indigenous communities; and, (2) Great Women ASEAN Training for Specialty Coffee Supply Chain, which is also partially supported by USAid-ACTI.
- Facebook Asia-Pacific begins its partnership with ECHOsi Foundation begins to roll out SME and teacher-training and modules.

#### **Policy Direction: Women groups in Manila take up the advocacy for proper usage of GAD budgets.**

#### **Enterprise Direction (Brand):**

- A new social enterprise is registered as GREAT Women Philippines Corporation which became the Philippine licensee of the Mark.
- July onwards. Local retail and commercial directions were set for the brand. Part of these was a month long pop-up launch at Powerplant Mall, and the opening of the GREAT Women Showroom and café. Other retail partnerships and marketing distribution points were likewise planned.
- Innovations for the GREAT Women Collective began with a collaborative work process that supports the inclusive business model.
- Visits to Myanmar were conducted to begin discussions on the development of Great Women Myanmar.

#### **Development Direction:**

- 24-26 February 2017, Bali, Indonesia. Jeannie Javelosa was invited to participate in the strategic planning for Asia Pacific Urgent Fund for Women human rights defenders, and to plan to align the GREAT Women model.
- 18-20 April 2017. Jeannie Javelosa was invited to speak about GREAT Women model in the Financial Inclusion Summit Asia, organized by Seamless Asia.
- Chit Juan, Jeannie Javelosa and Reena Francisco, in a visit to the Cambodia, meet with Minister Dr. Ing Kantha Phavi of the Ministry of Women's Affairs to introduce the program and the potential of replication in Cambodia.

# 2017

#### **Enterprise Direction:**

- 25 July 2017. Opening of The GREAT Women Showroom & Café at Tesoro's Building in Makati City.
- The Peace and Equity Foundation begins a financial partnership innovation called a Purchase Grant/ Loan with GREAT Women.
- Discussions with potential licensee partners in Cambodia, Myanmar, Indonesia and Malaysia have started.
- 28-31 August 2017. GREAT Women Trade Showcase at the ASEAN Women Entrepreneur Forum (AWEN) as part of the Philippine's Chairmanship of Association of Southeast Asian Nations, during the 50th Year Anniversary of the founding of ASEAN.

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sustainable farms

echocafe  
culture · community · coffee

echostore  
sustainable lifestyle



# GREAT WOMEN

WOMEN HELPING WOMEN  
UP THE VALUE CHAIN

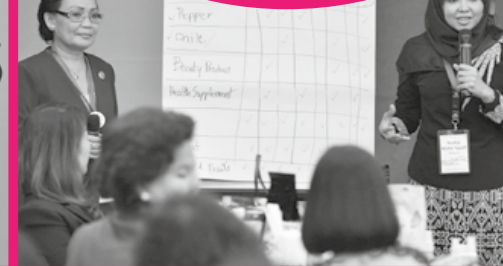







# GREAT WOMEN

EMPOWERING WOMEN UP THE VALUE CHAIN



# Acknowledgement

As so many things in my life, this book is unexpected. It asked to be written in a month, even as I dreamt through the storylines via reflections over a year ago. And just like the way the GREAT Women Platform has slowly been built by many, this book comes into form through the help of so many people.

To a lineage of women who have helped make me who I am: In memory of the lives of two grandmothers: of civic, government and religious leadership and service that my maternal grandmother **Gloria Araneta-Esteban** pursued; to the quiet entrepreneurial strength in business of my paternal grandmother **Purita Gorres-Javelosa**, and the artistic dreamer who is my mother **Glorietta Esteban-Javelosa**. To my three sisters **Cynthia “Bing” J. Ongsiako**, **Cris J. Gamboa** and **Ana J. Gloria** who journey with me finding our wholeness as women.

To the men who have formed me: My father **Atty. Emmanuel Javelosa** who gave me all the opportunities for the best education and a solid sense of values to root from. And to the memory of my partner **+Eduardo Castrillo**, who during his lifetime loved me, pushed me to express myself as a strong woman, and open wide the doors so I could fly.

For our priceless friendships with **Chit Juan** and **Reena Francisco** who toughened my business skills, accompanies my wanderlust as we journey on as the ECHOtrio, and with **Carlota Tan**, build the GREAT Women business together.

To **Imelda Canuel** or **M**, who began GREAT Women on the ground with me, both of us so unconscious of what we were doing as we went on to those first product development trips to the communities. To GREAT Women in ASEAN Initiative godmothers **Patty Alleman** and **Thitapha Wattanapruttipaisan** or **T** who bridged the links of aid institutions, and who share the vision for women in the region.

To **Chit Juan** for the Foreword and help with writing the case studies of our women micro-entrepreneurs in Sulu coffee, crabpaste and peanuts. Also to **Sef Carandang** and **Zarah Juan** who wrote case studies on the Subanen and Bagobo Tagabawa beaders respectively. Plus to **Putri Adamy** for patiently helping me name people in some photo captions. And to **Kate Fernandez**, a longtime friend who as synchronicities would have it, I would “accidentally bump into” and who suggested to bring this book out through a project she was part of called the TRADE Project of USAID.

Finally, to **USAID**, for funding this publication and for being instrumental in bringing the GREAT Women in ASEAN Initiative forward.



### *About the Book*

Women, as the backbone of our economies, must be empowered.

Awakening their strength and enabling them through an inclusive and gender sensitive ecosystem have proven instrumental in cultivating their leadership abilities, motivating their courage and confidence, and nurturing their creativity.

Several platforms and programs in the Philippines, including the GREAT Women Project and Brand, and various USAID Projects, have aided numerous micro and small women entrepreneurs by developing and supporting initiatives to promote economic and trade activities that enhance gender equality; empowering and strengthening entrepreneurship skills; advocating for policy changes to achieve ease of doing business; and, raising awareness and support for women entrepreneurship in the country and the ASEAN region.

*Women Beyond Borders: The Beginning of GREAT Women in ASEAN* recounts the journey of women enablers and entrepreneurs, chronicling experiences, lessons learned and best practices that have motivated them as actors of their own empowerment.

The narrative articulates how success and sustainability are achieved through collaboration, communication, consultation and inclusivity – and where real stories of real women serve as instruments to educate and inspire more women to start up, scale up and venture into the ASEAN region.

It is truly an exciting time to contribute to the economic awakening and empowerment of the women in the region, and to the efforts of both the government and private sector to engage more organizations and groups to become active partners in this advocacy, opening more opportunities to a multitude of women in the region.



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