

Balitang



The Official Newsletter of the Department of Agrarian Reform

Special Edition



We celebrate the National Women's Month by featuring stories of female agrarian reform workers whose life stories embody the promise of this landmark program.

I encourage every member of the Department to give praise and respect to our women counterparts for their invaluable service in the DAR and the agrarian community as a whole.

- Sec. John R. Castriciones

Discover more inspiring agrarian women in our website through the QR code below.



EMPOWER



THE VOLUNTEER: Mimi Furro

By: Ma. Loulaine Glee H. Ochavo

Helping other people through various voluntary services. This is the selfless advocacy of Cynthia C. Furro, a 43-year-old housewife and agrarian reform beneficiary (ARB) from Barangay New Guia, Maayon, Capiz.

Mimi, as her friends and the New Guia community call her, has dedicatedly served her constituents in various capacities as a day care center teacher, a cooperative bookkeeper, a lector, a barangay health worker, a parent-teacher-association (PTA) school treasurer, and a gender and development advocate, among others.

THE FAMILY WOMAN

First and foremost, Mimi is a family woman. Married at 22, she and her husband, Jonathan, struggled to be accepted by her family because they had not been in favor of the man she tied the knot with. Undeterred, the couple persevered to build a family filled with love and mutual respect. They have three children – Josen Paul, CJ and Angel Joy.

However, Mimi's domestic bliss hit a snag when her youngest, Angel Joy, was diagnosed with epilepsy, a neurological disorder marked by sudden recurrent episodes of loss of consciousness and convulsions associated with abnormal electrical activity in the brain. For three years, Mimi and her family provided constant care to Angel Joy. She had to be with the child for most of the time to ensure that her little one was not injured during epileptic episodes. After the long ordeal, Mimi is thankful that her daughter's condition had subsided and was declared fully recovered. Joy is now nine years old, healthy and living a normal life.

While she continues to be a devoted wife and mother, Mimi has also made community work a priority for the past two decades.

THE ARB WOMAN

Mimi comes from a family of farmers. Before the Comprehensive

Agrarian Reform Program (CARP), her family worked under a hacienda system.

"Prior to being an ARB I was a laborer. In the morning we wait in line to receive our weekly wages," Mimi recalls.

"But after we were awarded a landholding, we now make decisions on what to plant on the land. We finance all expenses even if we have to incur loans," she added.

The land awarded to Mimi is under a collective certificate of land ownership award with three other farmers for an area of 18.61 hectares. The land amortization of which is currently pending while waiting for the individual title. Her husband is also an ARB whose lot covers 0.9022 has.

As an ARB with concern for the environment, one of Mimi's advocacies is promoting sustainable farming practices by way of using mud press, foliar and animal manure as alternative fertilizers. She has also adopted environment-friendly sugarcane production by practicing the filing and thrashing of cane leaves and wastes during cultivation instead of burning.

From the lands awarded to them by the government, Mimi's family makes an annual gross income of at least P351,600.00. She also earns extra as a day care center worker which amounts to P34,800.00. Using their family income, Mimi and her husband have paid their loans to the coop, sent all of their children to school, transferred to a better home, acquired a hand tractor, owned various appliances at home, and purchased their own motorcycle.

THE COOPERATIVE WOMAN

Dedication is an understatement to the years of Mimi's continuous service to the cooperative. She first joined the ARC of New Guia (formerly ARBs Multi-Purpose Cooperative of New Guia) in 1999 and was later designated

as bookkeeper. For the last 18 years, she has served the cooperative without any compensation as part of the core management staff. She has endured sleepless nights tallying the coop's books of accounts to report an accurate financial statement. Many times she even had to shell out her own money to pay for annual fees.

All her sacrifices eventually bore a great reward. The coop is finally on track to be financially stable. Mimi is considered as a cornerstone of the cooperative.

THE COMMUNITY WORKER

Being an active member and a reliable bookkeeper of the ARC of New Guia are only two in the long list of volunteer works that she has been involved with over the years. t

At present, Mimi is a PTA treasurer, an active church lector, and a volunteer for a group opposed to violence against women and children, and works closely with abused women through counselling.

But for this woman, community involvement is not work but the expression of principle. She actively participates in social and community affairs and has received various citations for all her work.

THE MULTI-FACETED WOMAN

Indeed, Mimi is a multi-faceted woman. She is a devoted wife and mother, who has enriched the land awarded to her through the CARP. She is a key agent in the success of the local ARC while taking an active role in community development. Mimi is a true example of the generous and limitless potential of women in agrarian reform. ♀

For this woman, community involvement is not work but the expression of principle.



THE HOUSEWIFE: ANABEL MENESES

By Florida Lafuente



From a simple woman to an extraordinary leader of a cooperative – this is the journey of a spouse and mother, who led the way for a housewives-led cooperative to reach the peak of its success.

Anabel U. Meneses had been a simple housewife who was bound in the four corners of her home in Primicias, Mapandan, Pangasinan. She tirelessly worked on everyday chores, such as preparing food for her husband and two children, maintaining the house, and mending clothes.

“Bihira lang akong lumabas ng bahay. Ang asawa ko ang tiga-rito kaya kaunti lang ang kakilala ko,” Meneses said.

“Ni hindi ko nga alam ang pangalan ng mga barangay council noon,” she added.

Soon enough, Meneses needed a source of income to augment the family’s budget. One of her first thoughts was to appeal to the same need and frustrations of other housewives in her extended family and enjoined them to her cause.

However, starting to build an association from scratch required the courage to deal with criticisms and negative comments from some of those who do not share the same aspirations.

“Tinatawanan lang kami ng mga ka-barangay namin noong nagsisimula kaming bumuo ng asosasyon. Hindi rin daw magtatagal at mabubuwig din ito,” Meneses said.

“Hindi naman namin sila masisi, kasi walang nagtatagal na asosasyon dito sa amin kasi ang habol lang ng karamihan ay makakuha ng grant at hindi ang kapakanan ng karamihan,” she added.

This only motivated her to further to organize an association that would cater to the needs of the women in her community. On December 14, 2004, the Women’s Unity for Progress Association was born with an initial membership of 26 housewives.

The first two years of running the association was a struggle. But help came along the way.

The Pangasinan Population Office (PPO) extended assistance by granting them a loan amounting to P75,000 through the Provincial Livelihood Assistance Program.

This was used for commodity trading, backyard hog raising, vegetables and fruits selling, and personal care products marketing.

The PPO has also provided trainings to the members of the association on organization mechanics, team-building, basic book keeping, and values formation and leadership programs.

Gradually the group was gaining ground with its smooth operations, and a staff from PPO encouraged the officers to convert the association into a cooperative.

Meneses was hesitant at first. They do not know anything about running a cooperative. Her failure to finish her college education as with other key members loomed over their heads.

“Hindi ako nakatapos kasi maa-ga akong nag-asawa at umiikot lang ang mundo ko sa aking pamilya. Lahat kami dropout at ang sitwasyon namin ay simpleng maybahay lang talaga,” Meneses said.

“Then, I realized hindi kakulanan na wala kang pinag-aralan o wala kang diploma para ma-reach mo ‘yung gusto mong marating o mangyari sa

grupo. Ang mahalaga, gusto mong matuto,” she added.

On September 25, 2016, the Women’s Unity for Progress Association was converted into Women’s Unity for Progress and Farmers Multi-Purpose Cooperative. This paved the way of welcoming male farmers in the community and neighboring barangays.

The first years of operation as a cooperative was difficult, most especially on the technical aspects.

“Marami kaming aspeto na hindi naiintindihan. Sabi ko nga, hindi naman kami nag-aral. So, ang kailangan namin ay iyong technical assistance ng mga taong gusto talagang tumulong,” Menese said.

Then came the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) and its cooperative strengthening program. The agency offered technical assistance and conducted basic courses for the members to be equipped with knowledge on how cooperatives work and familiarize them with its concepts and principles.

The cooperative also received from DAR water pumps and rice threshers as part of the Agrarian Reform Community Connectivity Economic Support Services project.

“Noong nag-uumpisa pa lang kami, pinagtatawanan kami sa barangay, sa munisipyo, at sa kung saan-saan. Sabi nila, ‘Andiyan na naman iyong mga masisipag na mag-solicit,’” Meneses said.

“Ngayong naipakita namin ang kahalagahan ng aming samahan, kami na ang pinupuntahan.

Na-establish na namin iyong respeto ng aming mga ka-barangay at sa

amin na ngayon nagso-solicit,” she proudly adds.

The cooperative is of great help not only in boosting the income of its members but also of their morale and self-confidence.

“Dahil nga sa hindi ako nakapagtapos, halos takot pa akong humawak ng mikropono at tuwing may seminar o training, doon lang kami sa likod,” Meneses said.

Now, she is invited to share her experiences to other women, who are into entrepreneurship. She constantly emphasizes in her talks the secret to their astounding success: heart.

“Ang isang coop ay dapat na may puso. You have to treat your fellow officers and members with respect. It’s not always the money and the profit that counts. It is about the help and the selfless services you give to the community,” Meneses says. ♀

Meneses needed to augment the family’s budget. One of her first thoughts was to appeal to the same need and frustrations of other housewives.



The Evacuee: Aminah Ampuan

By Johaniah N. Yusoph

It was a quiet afternoon on May 23, 2017, when lawless gunmen stormed the Islamic City of Marawi. 54-year-old agrarian reform beneficiary (ARB) Aminah Ampuan said that the commotion could be heard from where they lived in Barangay Malimono, a short distance from where the clash between the military and the ISIS-linked Maute Group happened.

"I was at home when I heard gunfire and news of the attack. The first thing I did was call my six children and their families to see if they were all safe," said Ampuan.

After the first attack of the terrorists, firefight and bombings between the government forces and the Maute Group intensified from town to town. Within the next three days, Catholic churches, schools and hospitals were bombed or burned down by terrorists. Teachers, priests and parishioners were taken hostage.

"In the same amount of time, we had consumed all our resources. The market and stores were all closed. This was when I decided to find refuge where there was no immediate danger for us," said Ampuan.

To help bring the citizens of Marawi City to safety, the local government put up evacuation centers in nearby towns, one of which was located at Barangay Sta. Elena in Pantar, Lanao del Norte.

However, all the major roads were closed because of the destruction brought by the war. Ampuan and her group decided to traverse the mountains from Barangay Malimono to Barangay Tomarumum to get to Pantar.

They started trekking at 10:00 a.m.

on the fourth day since the firefight began. The group even found themselves lost in the mountains before they reached Pantar at past 2 p.m.

"It was really scary but we had to take the risk because it was even scarier to stay as the loud roars of the bombings shook us and our homes," Ampuan said.

Becoming displaced

Jam-packed in a small room at the evacuation center in Barangay Sta. Elena with her children, Aminah barely survived the next days for lack of food and water. On most days they had to rely on relief goods because they didn't pack enough, thinking that chaos would blow over quickly.

Days and nights passed and Ampuan's hope became slimmer and slimmer. She saw videos of the bombings and the attacks from the news until she got tired of watching television altogether.

"Living in the center with other evacuees was a struggle, more so for my 17 grandchildren.

Food and drinking water were lacking and we had to endure extremely hot and humid weather with not enough ventilation in the center," she said.

One morning, although everything was still clouded with uncertainties, Aminah braved to venture outside the walls of the evacuation center to look for satellite offices of government agencies that had also been displaced by the siege.

Ampuan found that the Department

of Agrarian Reform (DAR) in Iligan City. Luckily, the agency was also in the process of locating more than 700 ARBs from the Malimono-Dulay Agrarian Reform Community (ARC) in Marawi City to deliver emergency rice assistance in partnership with the United Nations-World Food Programme (UN-WFP).

Also, through the efforts of the DAR, together with the UN-WFP, the United Nation-Food & Agriculture Organization, and the Department of Agriculture provided more assistance by giving away farming tools, seedlings, and farm inputs to the farming-families of Malimono-Dulay ARC.

Ampuan and other ARB families who were still in evacuation centers started working on a patch of land and were able to grow various vegetables which were very vital for the displaced farmers.

A couple of months after the liberation of Marawi City from the terror of war, Aminah, together with her family and neighbors, were able to return back to their homes.

Despite the loss of farm animals and equipment, Ampuan was happy just to be back. She looked forward to farming again.

Rebuilding Marawi

Now, more than a year since Ampuan's return, she says life has returned to what it was before.

"Although, it is sad that half of our city is still empty and closed to the public, the best thing that we can learn from all that has happened is to be better and help Marawi rise once again. Peace and development are a shared responsibility of all," she says.

Ampuan continues to work with the DAR in Lanao del Sur for future programs and projects under the Malimono-Dulay Rehabilitation Plan. The DAR started implementing its rehabilitation plan in March of this year.

Ampuan currently serves as the chairperson of the Masao-Malimono Farmers Multipurpose Cooperative with more than 100 members. It was established in 1995 and is among the active agrarian reform beneficiaries' organizations. ♀



I was at home when I heard gunfire and the news of the attack. The first thing I did was call my six children and their families to see if they are all safe



THE SCORNEO WOMAN: BRIGIDA PAR

By Alejandro S. Buñag

“My dream is that our association will be able stand on its own just as I did with my life.” This is the hope of Brigida Par, chairperson of the Baliis Farmers and Community Association.

“Our life was a lot better when my husband, Diego, worked in Nigeria as a mechanic in the early 80s. We have just began building our house when war broke out in the West African country,” Brigida recalls.

Her husband was not able to return to his overseas job since. By then the couple had been blessed with four children, Lizyl, Dechael, Lady Ann and Dexter.

DID YOU KNOW?



A study of Daryl Leyesa of National Rural Women Coalition-Philippines revealed that women work for 11 hours during planting and harvestings days. In the farm household, they take the lead decision-making role in nine of 12 production areas, including farm capital, animal raising, and vegetable growing. Her male counterpart meanwhile, decides over the seeds and where/when to sell their produce.

Diego needed a way to support his family. After job-hunting for quite some time, he finally landed a new job in Palawan.

Soon after Diego started work in another province, Brigida heard rumors of another woman. Her husband never returned home but continuously gave financial support for their children.

“There were so many sleepless nights when I asked myself why this had to happen to me and my children. And every time, I couldn’t find the answer,” said Brigida.

In 1994, when their eldest daughter, Lizyl, graduated valedictorian in high school, Diego offered to pay for his daughter’s college education on the condition that she will study in Palawan. Attached in the letter was a plane ticket.

Brigida took advantage of the opportunity. She used the ticket for herself and left for Palawan.

“I had to see him and find the answers for myself,” said Brigida.

And find the answers, she did. Her man was, indeed, living with another woman.

“The heartache was unbearable. That conversation made me realize that I am now alone in raising our children. I left Palawan with a broken heart,” Brigida said.

“Life was difficult especially when I was still recuperating from a broken heart and building a strong resolve to make ends meet.”



The rice land she tilled was left to the care of another farmer, handing only three sacks of palay during wet season and just a sack of palay during dry season.

“Life was difficult especially when I was still recuperating from a broken heart and building a strong resolve to make ends meet,” said Brigida.

“But God did not leave me. An outpouring of blessings through assistance from relatives and friends came,” she added.

In 1996, upon the awarding of a certificate of land ownership award (CLOA), she decided to till the land by herself. She found out that she could harvest 15 cavans during rainy season and 10-11 cavans during dry season.

“Our financial lives became better when I received a CLOA from DAR. I felt secure that the land that was my livelihood is now legally mine,” Brigida said.

The Baliis Farmers and Community (BFCA) was organized in 2003 with a meager capital of P9,000 for lending services. With an initial membership of only 30, the president and its members were able to find a benefactor who added funds for the coop.

Brigida started as member in 2003 and became association chairperson from 2006 to 2009 and now, again, in 2018.

“When the DAR arrived in our barangay we became aware of the government programs. The agency kept us informed and we benefitted in the capacity building and skills trainings they provided,” she said.

Soon, the BFCA took off. Relending and rice retailing became the primary businesses of the organization and the DAR focused on strengthening the capabilities of the association and the agrarian reform beneficiaries.

“I now earn P150/day without leaving my barangay. With all the trainings on entrepreneurship, modern farming, and provision of support services, the DAR has taught us how to stand on our own two feet,” she said.

After all her struggles, Brigida feels that her reward are her four children who all finished their studies and now have stable jobs.

“My husband is back with us, but he is paralyzed and blind in one eye. Maybe this is his karma. God has given me trials and I survived with His grace and help from good people around me. I always keep a positive attitude and by letting go of the past,” she ended. ♀





THE MATRIARCH: MARILYN ORTIZ

By Catherine Lana

It's poverty that motivated Marilyn Ortiz Segayo, a Talisaynon, to strive hard and attain the kind of life her family is enjoying today. An agrarian reform beneficiary from Barangay Concepcion in Talisay City, Negros Occidental, Marilyn recalls her humble beginnings from a mere laborer to a successful small-scale sugarcane farmer in Negros island.

Marilyn was born in a struggling sugarcane farmworker's family. Growing up, she would sometimes work in the field under the scorching heat of the sun to help her parents make ends meet.

"As long as I can remember, me and my siblings have been helping my parents in the field. Work comes first, playing only comes second. We were poor but happy kids," Marilyn said.

Despite their financial difficulties, Marilyn's parents still managed to send her and her other nine siblings to school. Right after she graduated from high school, Marilyn took up vocational courses on dressmaking and master tailoring. She then enrolled in a secretarial course but was unable to finish because her parents could no longer support her education.

In 1976, at the age of 22, she married Dionisio Segayo, also a Talisaynon. Their family grew and so did their needs. Marilyn would sew garments to augment her husband's meager income as a family driver.

However, her efforts were still not enough that she had to resort to working in a nearby sugarcane plantation as laborer. As the work became too laborious for her, she was left with no choice but to

her children along to help her finish the day's work.

"It was just like I did when I was their age," said Marilyn.

One day, she overheard a conversation between her five children who were then nine to 16 years of age. She heard that they find working in the farm very tiresome and longed for things they wish they had.

"Hearing them say those words really saddened me. As a mother, all I wanted was to provide for their every need. But sadly, we were even struggling to make ends meet," Marilyn said.

One day, she overheard a conversation between her five children. They said working in the farm was very tiresome and longed for things they wish they had.

Come 1996, the Department of Agrarian Reform subjected the land-holding Marilyn worked for under the land reform program and identified her as one of the beneficiaries. Three years after, she received her Certificate of Land Ownership Award granting her with 1.24 hectares of land.

With this vital resource, Marilyn, together with her family, toiled to make the land productive. She initially planted rice and corn and eventually ventured on sugarcane production.

Their initial yield ranged from 70 to 80 tons per hectare earning more or less a gross of P150,000 per cropping year.

"The P150,000 a year is around P12,000 a month. With five children to feed and send to school, their income was still not enough for a comfortable living," Marilyn said.

In 2000, Marilyn along with 16 other farmers who were mostly women organized themselves and named their organization Casa Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries Multipurpose Cooperative or CASA ARB MPC.

Marilyn was initially elected as the secretary and later elected as treasurer of which she is in position up to this date. Through this cooperative, they were able to avail of support services from different government agencies and establish links with the community. The name of the cooperative was later amended to Casa Agrarian Reform Cooperative or CASA ARC in 2012.

"Through our women-dominated cooperative, the DAR and other government agencies poured support services, such as farm trucks, seedlings, and trainings to become farmer-entrepreneurs," Marilyn said.

She and her husband didn't stop with crop production, they expanded their agri-business on livestock raising and in other investments, such as acquiring a utility jeepney as an additional source of income.

Out of their perseverance, diligence and hardwork, all her children have graduated and become successful in their chosen fields.

Today, as she and her husband

sit comfortably at the veranda of their home, watching over their grandchildren and a forthcoming harvest, Marilyn couldn't ask for more gratitude for all the blessings they received which all started from the day their land was awarded to them.

"With the right character, anyone can greatly benefit from the land that the government has awarded them," Marilyn said.

"As for us, it was never our desire to get rich. We just wanted to enjoy the simple things in life like witnessing our children graduate and seeing our grandchildren happy. That is more than enough for us," she added. ♀

DID YOU KNOW?



Despite equal work, Tanzo's study on cross-country hired farm labor and wage differences showed that women-farmers earn less than the men by around P108 a day. In Nueva Ecija, the women-farmers' wage is around P50 less than the men during crop establishment and P216 less during threshing.



THE FRONTLINER: CHRISTIANNE SUGUITAN

A FIRST-PERSON NARRATION OF A DAR OFFICER

Nanang Pilang walked alongside me, down a steep road en route to their cooperative's office. Her umbrella was a makeshift cane she used in her slow descent. I told her to be careful, to take it slow. I can adjust to her pace, I said. She is 81 years old, after all, and one misstep could spell disaster. She was conscious of each step she takes wherever she goes. This was her response.

Each day, along with three younger members of the cooperative, Nanang Pilang personally collects loan payments and sales from their cooperative's small ventures in the barangay.

The cooperative manager, Manang Delia, walked with us. She invited me to their office, after a short launching of another project that the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) is implementing in their barangay. During the event, she profusely thanked the agency for the assistance it has afforded them through the years. They started as a small cooperative, she said in her speech, and DAR held their hands every step of the way.

As the group reached the coop's two-story building, we were welcomed by the sight of a tractor, which she proudly informed me was sourced from a partner agency the DAR worked with in rural development. She informed me that the equipment that was also awarded by DAR, a corn seeder, is always rented by the cooperative members. They tell her that their yield have improved because of the farm equipment.

She ushered me into their now airconditioned office. It was a small space, with three tables for the

employees; a small cashier booth in glass was situated at one corner; the other devoted to the manager's office. I peeked inside and there was a proper table and a television set.

She said that the small space was their first office, and through the years, the cooperative's growth has enabled them to expand into several rooms.

She led me to a staircase to the second floor, another expansion, where there was an airconditioned conference area for meetings. A lone cabinet was in the corner where all the framed awards and recognition of the cooperative from several sectors in society were on display. I took my time to look at each one. I stood there in awe, overwhelmed with pride.

She told me that their most recent award was from the provincial government, in recognition of their cooperative's outstanding progress. She said they received ₱20,000 aside from a beautiful token. The cash, the cooperative decided, was to be used for the purchase of an overhead projector and a screen.

Her stories validated the confidence I have in my colleagues whom have worked with the cooperative from the very start.



We walked to the veranda outside the conference room as I was getting ready to leave. But we stood there for a couple more minutes as Manang Delia told story after story of their humble beginnings and their small victories, which led them to become one of the most stable and consistently-growing cooperatives not only in their province but in the region as well.

The couple of minutes extended to another, and then another. I did not mind. My heart was bursting with happiness, I wanted to give her a tight embrace. But I kept my emotions in check. She did not know it but her stories validated the confidence I have in my colleagues who have worked with the cooperative from the very start. I was beaming with pride for all of them.

It was one of the best days I have ever experienced in my 30 years in government service. Aside from the warm reception and happy disposition of the people in the barangay, the stories I hear reward me with so many lessons.

One, I thought of how thinking of others can be a powerful tool to challenge the "givens" in a poverty-stricken countryside. Two, it is in "leading by example" that others may be inspired to do what is best for a community. And lastly, the key to stability of cooperatives lies in the fortitude of those who laid the foundation for these organizations.

At times I feel tired of my duties. Of my work. Of the bureaucracy. Of the politics. In fact, I have contemplated early retirement. I want to go back to teaching, my first love. And maybe write and write crazy

maybe write and write crazy until someone out there realizes my skills are worth paying good money to keep me alive.

But there are days like this one when I rethink of my angsts, the whining, the complaints. And I am motivated once again to do more, much more than I already have. Because Nanang Pilang is 81 years old, and my goodness, she is still at it. What right do I have to stop? ♀

Christianne Suguitan is the Provincial Agrarian Reform Program Officer of Ilocos Sur. She has been crusading for the welfare of farmers for the last 30 years in government service. As a staunch leader, she continues to bring the government closer to the grassroots through outreach programs. Her latest endeavor was "Project Palung-Awen" where she raised funds to help the farming families of Barangay Amguid in Candon, Ilocos Sur, whose homes and farms were devastated by Typhoon Ompong.

DID YOU KNOW?

A 2016 study, "Women at Work in the Farm," by Dr. Irene R. Tanzo found that women-farmers in Quezon and Zamboanga del Norte are engaged in more than half of the 51 farm activities from land preparation until selling of rice. They are mostly involved during pulling of seedlings, transplanting, and harvesting.

The Sharecropper’s Daughter: Pacita Amor

By Hector Doctor



She is a diminutive woman of 48 years but her slight build belies the responsibilities that lie on her shoulders. One can say she personifies the myth of the Greek titan Atlas. But instead of carrying the world, Pacita Lampawog Amor bears the responsibility of managing the agri-trading enterprises of a cooperative with more than 3,000 members and an asset of more than ₱42 million.

It sure is no easy task; and while it sounded daunting to others, Pacita bravely took on the role of assistant manager to the Siari Valley Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries Multi-Purpose Cooperative (SVARBEMCO). The coop is located in the Siari Valley Estate ARC in the municipality of Sindangan, province of Zamboanga del Norte.

Pacita is one of the cooperative’s key officials who contribute to the success of the organization. Her main task is to oversee the milling and trading operations of the cooperative’s enterprises: rice mill, copra, palay and corn trading as well as cacao production and processing. She ensures the financial viability of these enterprises and sees to it that the organization provides continuous services and benefits to its members as well as non-members.

Her beginnings

Pacita hails from a family of farmers. She is a daughter of a farmer beneficiary who had received a Certificate of Land Ownership Award through the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program.

“Before, the proceeds of the farm my father tilled were shared with the landowner which had resulted to a meager income,” Pacita, recalls.

“Because of this I was compelled to work at a young age to help my family

and finance my schooling,” she adds.

After she graduated with a degree in commerce, Pacita tried her luck in Manila and worked in a private firm. Eventually, she was forced to return to her hometown of Sindangan. Her father had become weak due to old age.

No stranger to difficult task, Pacita managed and tilled the 3-hectare farm alongside her husband, Teodoro. They planted various kind of crops such as coconut, banana, palay, and cacao. Aside from farm work, she also helped look after her parents. All throughout this time, she recognized the virtues of family loyalty, diligence, and hard work.

Joining the cooperative

Pacita joined the cooperative in 2008 as an assistant manager, a position she continues to hold today. Through her contribution, SVARBEMCO, accomplished last year an increase in membership to 2,550 from 2,282. In the same period from 2017-2018, its assets rose to P42,366,887.52 from P35,101,868.75. But the most notable accomplishment of SVARBEMCO is its consistent high maturity ranking in DAR’s Information Technology-Enabled Maturity Assessment (ITEMA), a system developed by the agency to come up with comprehensive and realistic results of assessing the levels of maturity of the agrarian reform beneficiaries organizations (ARBOs).

As if her work in the coop is not enough, Pacita is also involved in community organizations such as the Family and Life Ministry and the Women’s Association and Kaanib Enterprise Development.

She also continuously enhances

her skills and knowledge through her participation in various trainings sponsored by the DAR and other agencies.

As a woman leader

Pacita is a natural leader and it is evident to those around her. People has always pushed her to lead. She is always made to represent their cooperative when coordinating with the DAR and other government agencies – an evidence of palpable leadership ability.

Being a woman has never been an impediment to her.

Asked what she thought is a woman’s greatest asset, “we are better in budgeting and money management,” she replied half-jokingly.

“Anyone can be a leader if one is qualified and people trust you and have faith in your ability,” Pacita added.

Having known hardship herself, Pacita expresses her joy that their coop has been instrumental in helping her co-workers’ and ARB-members’ children finish schooling and enabling them to get employed.

“This would never have happened if things remained as they were when we were

just a mere tenant. Things now are much better,” Pacita says as she reflects on her past as a daughter of a sharecropper

Pacita still has bigger dreams for their cooperative. “I want our coop to establish satellite branches in other areas. I want our agri-trading business to expand and serve more farmers.”

Looks like a lot more is in store for Pacita. ♀

“Anyone can be a leader if one is qualified and people trust you and have faith in your ability”.



THE OLD-TIMER: LERMA CHIVA

By Kathleen D. Sespeñe-Pagayon

Slaving in the scorching heat of the sun with only the layered clothes on her back and a buri hat for protection, she wipes away the sweat on her forehead and straightens her tired spine and joints.

She looks over to her husband, feverishly plowing their borrowed field. She quickly erases the tiredness on her face, never letting him see how exhausted she is, for fear that he will force her to rest and then he will be left alone with the back-breaking task of preparing the soil for planting. She makes a mental note to prepare an herbal concoction for his joint pains.

She wonders if this toiling will liberate their family from poverty and whether they will be able to have a land of their own.

Reminiscing 20 years into the past made Lerma A. Chiva teary-eyed. Now 60, Nanay Lerma recalls how their family used to till borrowed fields for planting crops like rice and corn.

“We didn’t have our own land back then. We strived to earn enough money to rent unutilized fields in our area in Barangay Tayugo, Isulan, Sultan Kudarat,” she says. “If the land is productive, we can produce about 80 sacks of palay per harvest.

But, sadly, not every land we rent produces high-yielding results. Because of this, and to ensure that our family is well taken care of, we strategized on how to make our meager income grow,” she added.

In 1991, along with her husband, Narciso, and 34 fellow farmers, Nanay Lerma founded Central Tayugo Multi-Purpose Cooperative (CTMPC). They pooled all the resources they can spare and established a grocery store, a bigasan and a hog-raising business.

“Our coop mostly catered to its members at first, but as soon as word came out, the surrounding community supported

our newly formed cooperative and its membership ballooned to its current 205 members,” Nanay Lerma said.

Three years after, her dream of owning their own land also turned into a reality when the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) awarded her with a two-hectare farm land located in New Pangasinan, Isulan, Sultan Kudarat.

She was happy to be chosen as one of the recipients of a Certificate of Land Ownership Award (CLOA) from the DAR which broadened her mind to exciting possibilities that she can gain from having her own farmland.

“I am really thankful to the DAR for giving me and my family the boost we needed to elevate our income and make our livelihood sustainable.



Alas, all successes are not devoid of any obstacles or conflicts.

On a particularly stifling day, Nanay Lerma and her husband were approached by a group of hostile-looking men in the farm. In the lead was the former owner of the land, allegedly demanding them to leave the area. With her heart pounding Nanay Lerma stood her ground and did not let herself be intimidated by all the taunts and threats thrown by them.



“For two years, we endured death threats from the former landowner. When he demanded payment for the use of the land, we disregarded it. When we were summoned to the barangay, the other farmers gave in to their demand for fear that they will lose their lives. But we stood our ground,” Nanay Lerma said.

“I showed the former landowner a copy of the title we have and said that the land is legitimately ours. Luckily, my reputation in our community helped substantiate my claim that the land was awarded to me legally. The threats and demands stopped and we were able to resume our lives in peace,” she added.

Nanay Lerma now serves as the chairperson of CTMPC as well as the provincial committee representative of the livestock sector. Her awarded area produces 100 sacks of palay per harvest, which she also sells at their coop.

“As an Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries’ Organization, we were able to benefit from the mandatory trainings on coop strengthening and establishment of a system,” Nanay Lerma said.

“I am really thankful to the DAR for giving me and my family the boost we needed to elevate our income and make our livelihood sustainable. It really shows that our government, through the DAR and other agencies, has genuine concern for farmers and farmworkers like us.

It makes us feel important because services like these are provided to us. If not for DAR, we would still be cultivating borrowed land,” she added. ♀

DID YOU KNOW?



Leyesa’s study also revealed that when compared with female farmers of corn, coconut, sugar, vegetables and onion, female rice farmers had the least access to school and health care facilities.



The Beauty: Josephine Remorca

By Gherelene Mae B. Rafols



Decades of demanding work in the farm has not diminished her natural beauty. Blessed with fair skin, deep-set eyes, thin lips, and a shapely figure, 47-year-old Josephine Remorca’s appearance bears no evidence of her hardship and struggles.

She was born to a family of farmers in Silab, Amlan, Negros Oriental. In her teen years, Josephine helped her father plant bananas, pineapples and vegetables in a vast farm owned by a landlord. In 1989 at the tender age of 17, she married Ronito. They, too, turned to farming in the land of the same landowner as their main source of living.

“When my husband and I started planting pineapples, we didn’t have money for farm tools. So, we used our bare hands for everything, from land preparation to the harvest of the fruits,” Josephine said.

She recalled how much harder and more painful the tasks became. Their arms and hands suffered from cuts and pricks. But these did not deter the two. Instead, the couple were pushed to persevere harder.

Even after their first child was born, Josephine continued the impossible job that await in the plantation. Only three months after giving birth, she returned to the farm and helped her husband.

Despite their hard work, life was still very difficult for the couple – even more so with the arrival of their second child. Josephine and Ronito found additional

work to increase their household income,

“We took jobs as pickers and farm hands for other farms just to make ends meet. But it still wasn’t enough for our growing family,” Josephine said.

Their misfortunes seemed unceasing when the company that purchases their pineapples shut down in 1998. The couple resorted to peddling their harvest to the municipality of Bayawan, a 100-km ride from their home.

“Our place is very remote and the roads are not passable. So, we had to haul our harvest using carabaos. It takes an hour just to reach the highway where a rented canter truck met us to bring our produce to the poblacion,” Josephine said.



Josephine went about this tedious task alone. She left her husband to look after their farm and their children while she was away. It took about two to three days on average to sell all their produce.

This backbreaking routine

continued for several years until they became qualified beneficiaries of a landholding covered by the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program.

“After becoming an agrarian reform beneficiary, things started to change for us. The government poured various help through support services like access to credit, farm trainings and provision of farm machines,” Josephine said.

More blessings came when Josephine joined in 2002 a farmers’ association organized by the Department of Agriculture. The organization provided her with the opportunity to display and sell their produce in a flea market. Here, she sold fruits and vegetables on top of a simple bamboo table twice a week.

“It was here where we met bulk buyers of our produce,” Josephine said.

“From our earnings, we were able send our children to school. And from what we were able to save and through the trainings we received from the DAR, we were able to venture into small agribusinesses,” she added.

Today, Josephine is the chairperson of the board of directors of Hosanna Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries Association and the president of the Tabo sa PAO Bagsakan Center. She also owns and manages the canteen that sells meals and snacks to the vendors.

More importantly, she has not turned her back on farming. Josephine now earns P10,000 a week from selling fresh pineapples from her farm. She has

also added more vegetables to her list of produce: ginger, banana, camote, upo or bottle gourd, and cucumber.

Her backyard is also now filled with grazing cows, carabaos, pigs and more than a dozen native chickens.

“We are not rich by any standards but with sheer hard work and perseverance, we have crossed the bridge from poverty to a more comfortable life,” Josephine said.

A lot has changed since Josephine was planting and harvesting pineapples with her bare hands. For one, the trips to the poblacion are a lot easier and faster now with better roads and their family’s vehicles. Scarred and calloused her hands might have been from years of toiling, but her face continues to radiate beauty from the grit and perseverance that goes deep in her heart. ♀

When I started planting I didn’t have enough money for farm tools. So, I used my bare hands from land preparations to the harvesting of pineapples .



THE OUTSIDER: BAI FARIDA SUIB NAWA

By Agnes R. Torino

One can only imagine what a woman of small stature and simple beginnings could give to a community with a different cultural background. Bai Farida Suib Nawa was raised in Barangay Sapu Masla in the town of Malapatan, Sarangani Province. Without any sibling to play with, Farida, though an obedient child, was silent, shy, and introverted.

Her mother, Isa Suib, a very loving and humble woman is a pure Tausug. Her father, Usoph Suib, a pure Maguindanaon, is someone Farida considered a very principled man. He was also one of the leaders of a Moro organization in their town.



Both her parents managed a small farm covered by the CARP. It was the source of their family's daily subsistence and tuition for her education.

Being a grandchild of their town's first kapitan del barrio, Farida was invited by a close family friend to run for office as a barangay kagawad in Sapu Masla. Though surprised by the suggestion, Farida felt it was time to pay forward the blessings she had received from Allah by serving their community.

Without any money to cover the expenses for an election campaign,

Farida relied on the generosity of her sponsors and their good name.

However, one's fate in politics is not definite.

"Perhaps, being in politics is not yet my call," Farida recalled saying as she calmly accepted her defeat.

But Farida's call to public service did not stop there. The elected Barangay Captain, Moner Calulong appointed her as a barangay desk officer for violence against women and children (VAWC).

"It was a privilege and a big responsibility. I had to orient marginalized women of their rights and had to assist those who experience violence," Farida said.

Also, serving in a tri-people community as VAWC desk officer entailed a lot of effort. She had to acquire skills in relating to B'laan, Maguindanao Muslim and Tausug women. Aside from learning their language, she had to know their culture and be familiar with their tribal courts and councils.

With the awareness she created and the accessibility of help she established, more cases of violence had been reported and settled. There were at least three cases that had been reported every quarter.

Serving in a tri-people community entailed a lot of effort.

She had to acquire skills in relating to B'laan, Maguindanao Muslim and Tausug women.



"There's nothing more fulfilling than being able to help abused women assert their rights," said Farida.

Farida's father who was a former member of the board of directors of Sapu Masla Taliawed Producers Cooperative (SMTPC) invited her to join the agrarian reform beneficiaries organization.

Not long after her membership, Farida was elected into the board of directors. By serving the cooperative and joining trainings conducted by the DAR, Farida's talents and potentials were further uncovered.

"While serving the coop, I learned to face different people. Though nervous at first, I learned to report outputs before an audience," recalled Farida.

Farida is one of the dynamic officers of SMTPC who helped the cooperative grow and venture into sustainable enterprise. The SMTPC has a level 4 maturity rating as per ITEMA 2018.

At the same time, Farida also serves as a madrasa president in their barangay. Madrasas are schools that teach the Arabic language and the Islamic religion and values. She handles students between the ages of 4 and 8 years old.

The 2018 barangay election opened another opportunity for Farida to run for the position of barangay kagawad. This time, Farida ranked fourth among the winning candidates.

Farida now heads the Barangay Committee on Appropriation. Likewise, she never departs from what she started as she holds the Committee on Women, Family, Senior Citizens and Minors. She is also a member of the Municipality of Malapatan Council of Women.

"I always have a heart for the marginalized women. I want them know

their worth and assert their rights. It's not only for them but for their children and family's welfare", Farida said.

All these responsibilities, as a wife, mother, coop director, madrasa president, and barangay kagawad are a real challenge. It requires vast commitment and patience. Still, her overflowing bounty creates tributaries to give water to the people around her. ♀

DID YOU KNOW?



As of Dec. 2018, around 599,215 women hold Certificates of Land Ownership Award. Meanwhile, around 93,825 women are holders of Emancipation Patents (EPs). The EPs granted to female beneficiaries have steadily increased from 56,352 in 2013 to 57,424 in 2015.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRARIAN REFORM'S GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT (DAR-GAD)



The opening of a dedicated Gender and Development Center during the celebration of the National Women's Month speaks of the leaps and bounds that the advocacy has grown in the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR).

The beginnings of the Gender and Development (GAD) in the DAR began in 1986 when DAR-Samar initiated to award joint titles to Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries (ARBs), who were husbands and wives. This initiative was soon adapted nationwide and became official in 1992 when then Agrarian Reform Secretary Ernesto D. Garilao issued a policy that the names of both

husbands and wives must be indicated in the Certificates of Land Ownership Awards (CLOA).

The DAR-GAD does not only focus on gender equality among officials and employees of the Department. It is also concerned with gender fairness among men and women in agrarian reform areas by giving them equal opportunity, access, and control in cultivating and managing their lands.

DAR-GAD's main goal is to mainstream its concepts, programs, and projects within the agency and in agrarian reform communities for the better implementation of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP).

The following are the components of the DAR-GAD mainstreaming strategy:

1. Gender awareness building and advocacy
2. Gender-responsive capability and capacity development
3. Gender-responsive Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (PME) system and information management
4. Linkaging, networking, alliance building, and resource mobilization
5. Fund allocation and logistic support
6. Policy review and program enhancements on the three major components of CARP such as Land Tenure Improvement, Program Beneficiaries Development, and Agrarian Justice Delivery

Indeed, the DAR-GAD has leapt forward and achieved monumental successes in the Department. And it still promises to achieve more. ♀

STATISTICS ON WOMEN IN AGRARIAN REFORM

The success of Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program's (CARP) implementation can also be attributed to the women in the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) who work tirelessly and dedicate their precious time to achieve the goal of uplifting the quality of life of our farmer beneficiaries.

The following are the statistical figures of the women in DAR who are of significant contribution in the implementation of agrarian reform in the Philippines:

- As of January 31, 2019, the number of female employees in DAR nationwide exceed the number of males by 2,069

- Out of 194 Third Level Executives in DAR, 33.51 percent are women

- The number of women occupying positions of Division Chiefs is 51.04 percent which edges its male counter part.

- Out of the total number of women farmer beneficiaries, 61,986 of which are recipients of individual titles while the other 51,436 own parts of a collective titles



Acknowledgments:

Ma. Elizabeth R. Faustino
Rosemarie S. Lomibao

Provincial Information Officers
and

Regional Information Officers

Department of Agrarian Reform
Gender and Development Center