

Balitang DAR

The Official Newsletter of the Department of Agrarian Reform

Special Edition

DAR'S AGRI-CREDIT & MICRO-FINANCE PROGRAMS

Balitang DAR is featuring stories of farmers and cooperatives whose lives have been uplifted through DAR's agri-credit and micro-finance programs.

These stories will be the footprints on how the ACMF assistance becomes beneficial to the lives of the ARBs to productively manage and sustain the lands awarded to them.



Balitang DAR

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DAR INTENSIFIES ACCESS TO CREDIT TO ARBS THRU AGRI-CREDIT & MICRO-FINANCE PROGRAMS

In support of the government's aggressive drive to increase the productivity and income of farmers and fishers through greater access to financing, the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) is pursuing a more focused and direct approach in lending to provide more agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARBs) and individual small farmers with access to credit.

"As we seek to reach more farmers nationwide, we are heavily focusing on making loans accessible. These micro-finance programs are aggressively strengthening its goals to provide more individual borrowers with direct access to credit especially in this time of the

pandemic," DAR Secretary Bernie Cruz said.

Agricultural credit is a major support service extended to serve the financial needs for agricultural production, marketing, and other stages of the value chain. Enhancing access to credit by small farmers has always been a major component of development program and projects of the DAR.

DAR Undersecretary for support services Emily Padilla said these credit programs were established by the government not only to increase their production and pay for their farming needs, but also to help them in times of natural calamities and pay for the emergency expenses of their

families.

"Thousands have already been helped by our credit programs. We also extend credit to family members of farmers especially if they have emergencies like medical care, food shortage, or even unemployment," Padilla said.

The DAR partnered with the departments of agriculture (DA), environment and natural resources (DENR), and the Land Bank of the Philippines to provide credit assistance to ARBs through their respective organizations and support their on-farm and off-farm activities whether individual or communal projects.

The agri-credit and micro-finance

(ACMF) programs of DAR is a way to make financing services and products accessible, available, affordable, appropriate, and acceptable to the ARBs. These are made possible through the development and installation of policy, systems, programs, and projects.

The ACMF aims to build the capacities of ARB organizations to become viable financial intermediaries at the community level; to develop credit worthiness of individual farmers and teach them how to grow and manage funds to improve their farm productivity and income.

Here are DAR's initiative on credit and micro-finance programs for ARBs. 

Agrarian Production Credit Program (APCP)

Provides credit assistance to ARBs or ARB household members through their respective organization or other conduits to support their individual or communal crop production, agri-enterprise, and livelihood projects.

Eligible borrowers: ARBOs, FAs/POs with ARBs/ARB HH members; other conduits such as cooperatives, NGOs, and rural banks, with ARBs or ARB HH members or APCP ineligible ARBOs as clients.

Loanable amount: 90% of the production requirement

Interest rate: 8.5% per annum for short-term loan; and 9.5 p.a. for term loan.

Coverage: 885 ARBOs with more than 6,800 ARBs benefitted nationwide since 2013

Microfinance Capacity Development Program in Agrarian Reform Areas (MICROFIN_CAP@ARAs)

The program provides technical assistance to enable cooperatives to start or expand their microfinance operations. It aims to develop ARBOs as microfinance providers so they can improve the delivery of both financial and non-financial services to its ARBs and ARC members.

Eligible borrowers: ARBs, ARB HH members and rural women

Coverage: 919 ARBO developed as MF Service Providers Nationwide

Linking Smallholder Farmers to Markets and Microfinance

The program seeks to make smallholder farmers increase their productivity and income by linking them to local microfinance institutions who are willing to extend support in providing timely financial assistance.

As of December 2021, the project has provided access to agri-credit and micro-finance loans to 10,966 farmers, 4,715 of which are women farmers.

The credit programs developed under the Duterte administration are the following:

Enhanced Partnership Against Hunger and Poverty (EPHAP) Lending Program

This program supports the national government's efforts to reduce incidence of hunger and poverty in the country. It aims to provide credit assistance to qualified community-based organizations to address hunger, food, nutrition, and poverty in the countryside.

Eligible borrowers: Community-based organizations as community-based service providers or farm service providers with legal personality to borrow (e.g. ARBOs, SLPAs, FOs, NGOs)

Eligible criteria: Duly registered with concerned GOs, certified or endorsed by any participating agency that CBO is under EPHAP or listed in the EPHAP CBO database and has the following: a) confirmed marketing contract, purchase order, and/or contract receivables from any government agency or LGUs; and b) No adverse findings on the CBOs and its principals/key officers.

Loan purpose: To finance purchase orders and/or contract receivables from government agencies for the provision of needed food time required in the various government programs.

Credit Facility: Short term loan

Interest rate: 5% per annum

Availability: Up to 1 year loan line available via a maximum of 360-day PN

Loanable Amount: Up to 80% of the awarded contract price of goods.

Expanded Assistance to Restore and Install Sustainable Enterprise for ARBs and Small Holders (ARISE-ARBs) Program

This program is designed to finance the needs of affected men and women ARBs in agrarian reform areas affected by natural disasters.

Eligible borrowers: ARBOs, farmer associations whose members are affected by disasters and other calamities such as pandemic, pest and diseases, and similar perils.

Loanable amount: P1-M per ARBO for livelihood and enterprise loan; P10,000 per ARBs and up to P100,000 per conduit ARBO/FA

Interest rate: 3% per annum for livelihood and enterprise loan; 0% for providential loan

Coverage: 12 ARBOs with 905 ARB/ARB HH borrowers since 2018.

Farmer Elizabeth, now worry-free from loans

By Judith C. Longid and Elizabeth Balingway

"Money is a terrible master but an excellent servant" Elizabeth Balingway said.

Born to poor parents on December 17, 1968, in San Mariano Isabela, Elizabeth was used to living in poverty. In her mid-twenties, she married Pantaleon Balingway of Rizal, Kalinga. Getting married didn't change her stature in life. But with perseverance, hard work, and a lot of sacrifice, they were able to buy a two-hectare land and planted it with corn. As typical Cordillera farmers, they lease land to till in addition to the two-hectare land they own and plant vegetables, raise fowls and animals for food.

Years passed and they were blessed with five children. As the children grew, the family finances also grew. What they were earning from farming was not enough for the family to survive. To cope with the expenses, Elizabeth and her husband turned to borrowing money from loan sharks.

"I loaned from traders and private individuals with interest ranging from five percent to 12 percent. That started our financial breakdown. The interest grew and grew. It traumatized me," Elizabeth said.

Elizabeth recalled the time when her husband gave her the money earned from the corn, and she immediately went to pay their debts, only to realize that she has paid the debt but there was nothing left to take home except the receipts from the payments.

"A lot of times, I almost surrendered. I was depressed and wanted to stop farming. But one look at my children and I remember that I cannot surrender," Elizabeth said.

She recalled that in other times, there

was just enough money for food and nothing else. These situations pushed them repeatedly to borrow from loans sharks.

Elizabeth said that situation lasted for years, and it exhausted them physically and mentally. Until one day, when her cooperative that she belongs to offered loans to its members, she decided to try and find out if she will qualify for a loan.

In 2015, the Rizal Muti-Purpose Cooperative (RIZAMPCO) availed of the DAR's Agrarian Production Credit Program (APCP) where interest loans are very low. RIZAMPCO availed from the APCP a total of amount of ₱6.8 million and offers only 8.5 percent annual interest for its 151 members.

Before the credit service went on full operation, trainings were conducted to prepare the cooperative and its members on effectively managing the funds.

"When the cooperative availed of the APCP in 2015, I immediately grabbed the opportunity. I borrowed twice a year. With only 8.5 percent interest annually, it is far lower than the usual interest I pay to traders and private individuals. I consider the credit assistance of APCP a heavenly gift," Elizabeth said.

"The APCP worked like a magic! Our first harvest tripled after availing our first loan. So our take-home income tripled too," gushed Elizabeth.

She recalled an instance where after loaning from the APCP, they earned ₱78,000 from a harvest of corn from their two-hectare land. From this income, they were able to buy a motorcycle for them to use in visiting the farm. After paying the motor

vehicle, they again applied for another loan for her son's tuition fee. The latter, she paid in full last April 2022 through the monthly amortization program of the APCP. Aside from the motor vehicle, they are currently amortizing a 1.3-hectare of land hoping to finish the payment after two harvest period.

"The APCP came at the right time when I feel that quitting farming was the only option due to the high interest of creditors, rising cost of agri-inputs versus the low prices of agri-outputs," she said.

For Elizabeth, the courage to borrow money with the determination to pay on time is one of the secrets to a successful credit handling.

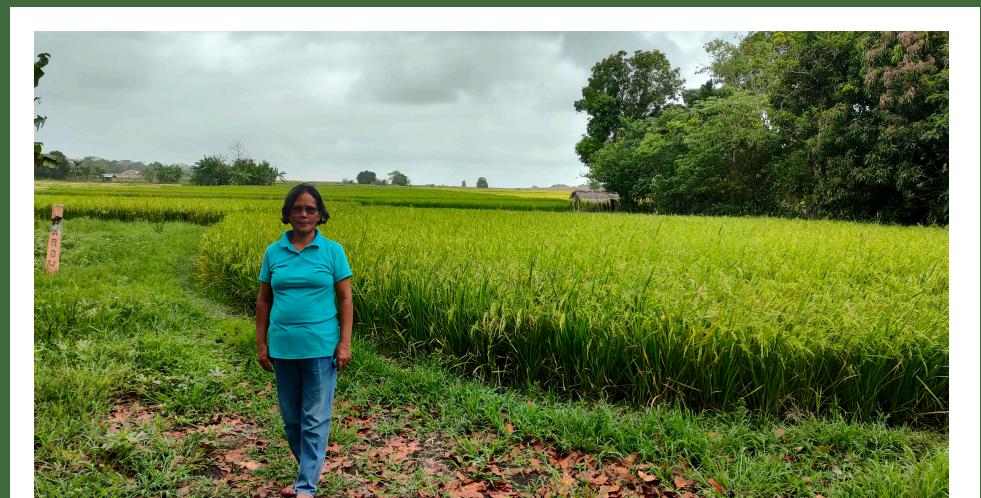
"At last, I can say that not all loans are stressors, there are credit assistance that are worry-free. I was traumatized in previous loans sharks. But after loaning with the

APCP, paying our loans became easy and worry-free," Elizabeth said.

Now, with the help of APCP, her four children finished their studies and are now independently earning for their living. One is devoting her time working in the cooperative as gratitude to what the APCP through RIZAMPCO has done for them. The last of the siblings is on his way finishing his dreams.

Realizing the necessity of having her children join the cooperative, she persuaded all of them to apply for membership. Now, the whole family are active members of the RIZAMPCO.

"It's my prayer that the APCP will continue with RIZAMPCO to benefit more farmers. With worry-free loans like the APCP, no one would go to loan sharks," Elizabeth said. 



Credit Assistance Program-Beneficiaries Development (CAP-PBD)

The program intends to make available credit assistance to non-bank-eligible ARC cooperatives and farmers' organizations and graduate them into bank-eligible organizations.

Eligible borrowers: ARB organizations and farmers' associations with ARB members and registered either to Security and Exchange Commission (SEC) or Cooperative Development Authority (CDA)

Loanable amount: Up to 80% of the total project cost (TPC) but not to exceed P5.0-M per borrower; loans above P5.0-M will require local project management committee (LPMC) endorsement and national program management committee (NPMC) clearance

Interest rate: 5% per annum

Coverage: 150 ARBOs nationwide since 1996

Accessible Fund for Delivery to Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries (AFFORD to ARBs)

The program aims to provide timely direct credit assistance to small farmers for crop production such as rice, corn and high-value crops and acquisition of small farm implements.

Eligible borrowers: Name of farmer-borrower included in the DAR's list; owner of the awarded land or leaseholder and own lease 0.5 hectare.

Loanable amount: 80% of the total project cost/acquisition cost of small farm equipment

Interest rate: 5% per annum

Coverage: With targets of 14,187 new availers and 8,842 re-avaler ARB/LH borrowers nationwide. Total outreach as of October 2020 is 1,306 ARBs.

Beyond the Usual

By: Rechel D. Besonia

If bad loans, crop failures and low yields hover like dark clouds over farmer's lives, agricultural credit programs with minimal interest rate are the silver lining.

Without a doubt, it is an important element in agricultural development. It helps improve the productivity of the sector by facilitating the adoption of modern technologies and the purchase of farm inputs. It also improves the efficiency of the smallholder farmers.

True enough, Farmers Alternative for Self-Reliance Multi-Purpose Cooperative (FASRMCO) is achieving new records every year in agricultural credit sector and is moving in the way of development in an accelerated way. It has become a torch bearer to other agricultural credit cooperative in the Province of Agusan del Sur.

However, "nothing comes easy," an adage says.

Established sometime on 1992, FASRMCO had an initial member of 15 who were also irrigators. They, at the same time pursued their claim for agrarian reform coverage.

The then President Ruben S. Isiderio, also the founder, decided to form themselves into an irrigators association primarily to provide credit access to all the members since lack or inadequate access to finance is considered one of the major constraints they faced every day as it provides an important means by which they can finance their daily and fundamental source of livelihood, which is farming.

"It's quite challenging at first, running an organization isn't easy at all. But through my passion to help small holder farmers like me made it less daunting," Ruben said.

Nothing Comes Easy

With just 15 of them, they tried not to think about failing, instead they thought about solutions that will propel them forward.

"When you do this, it forces you to think positively, and positivity is one of the biggest keys to success," he added.

They discussed the goals, mission, and visions that they wanted to embody. Day by day, the passionate Ruben strategically built a plan for them to work their way to where they are today.

Since then, the membership was doubled year after year and the cooperative was sustained through its credit program. Their assets grew, and they eventually ventured to other businesses.

After the cooperative started growing, Ruben, now the general manager is ready for a new challenge and adventure.

"One day I realized that with a 2.5 percent interest rate, members struggled to pay their loans," he said.

"Although, it helped the cooperative a lot in terms of profitability, it cannot be denied that some of the members wrestled in paying the interest of their loans. I personally don't want that to happen, because ultimately, our goal is to help our members' lives become a bit more comfortable," he added.

In 2014, the Agricultural Production Credit Program (APCP) came to life. It is a joint venture of DAR and LANDBANK, which aims to achieve sustainable crop production and increase the income of Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries (ARBs) and their households through the provision of credit assistance at much lower interest rate of 1.2 percent.

Eligible Agrarian Reform Beneficiary Organizations (ARBOs) may avail of loans under this program and in turn re-lend to eligible ARBs to finance their agri-production projects and activities.

FASRMCO, then engaged in APCP program with an initial loan of P2 million and relend it to 29 ARB recipients. It was indeed a big help to some of the members who are qualified to avail with the program.

Today, FASRMCO is on its 14th cycle, with 10 million loan availment and has increased the recipients to 79 ARB. The cooperative received the Highest Loan Availment Plaque from DAR during the agency's CARP anniversary celebration.

One of the recipients of the program, Medmalene E. Llorito said that APCP has helped her and her family in so many ways.

She noted her preference of the program rather than banks and other lending institutions because of its lower interest rates, lesser documents required and faster loan processing and release.

"It saved me around P20,000 in every loan availment. That for me it is a huge savings," she said.

Medmalene, along with hundreds of other farmers who live in the locality has been at the mercy of enterprising lenders, and, sometimes, loan sharks to finance their farm. For years, they paid their loans with interest that adds up overtime.

"It was always a struggle for us. But we chose to engage into it because sometimes it is the only way," she added.

But when APCP came, it made their lives better. In fact, Medmalene was able to purchase another agricultural land aside from the rice field that she and her husband owned after becoming an ARB.

"Thank you so much for APCP. Thanks to the DAR and its conduit partner, the LBP for making this happen. Because of

this, I was able to save a lot for my family," she said.

Aside from the loan availment, APCP also comes with a capacity building assistance. DAR helps them acquire skills in financial literacy. The learning sessions provided the necessary competencies for key officers in managing the cooperative's financial resources.

Today, FASRMCO has become the leading ARBO in Agusan del Sur in terms of credit assistance to its members. It has come a long way from a simple irrigators' association to a millionaire cooperative with a growing membership of more than 2,000.

Amongst the major recognition FASRMCO received includes the Best Farmer Cooperative and Best Agrarian ARBO in Agusan del Sur, and in 2021 Most Outstanding Community Enterprise Award given by the Villar Sipag Awards Poverty Reduction Challenge.

General manager Ruben said that the success of FASRMCO is measured by the success of their members. Whether helping to refinance a loan at better terms, providing financial education, employ them or getting someone to live into the home of their dreams and live a better life.

"We are just a footnote in the development of our members, but we owe everything to our partner agencies like DAR. Thank you so much for your program like APCP." he said. 

It was always a struggle for us. But we chose to engage into it because sometimes it is the only way

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THE ROAD TO SUCCESS

Program (PRDP) to be a proponent cooperative for a 15 million project for "Tilapia Production and Marketing Enterprise" which includes warehouse for feeds, 2 units 6-tonner trucks, 2 center car, 10 portable water pumps, 1 unit 110hp tractor with implements and marketing equipment for harvesting.

In 2015, the RAMFARMCO garnered two awards, 1st runner-up for the most outstanding cooperative of the CDA Gawad Parangal (Small Cooperative Category) and 3rd place for the Faustino N. Dy, Sr. award (Best Performing Agri-Based Cooperative – Small Category).

At present, because of good management and performance of the cooperative, their income, capital build-up and savings increased resulting to the decrease of APCP borrowings from P51 million down to P36 million. Truly the cooperative continues to travel the road towards success. 

The road to success

By: Ronan S. Tuzon and Zenaida P. Mesa

"I can never put into words how grateful we are to the Department of Agrarian Reform," said Jacinta Apoy, the Manager of Ramcor Farmers Multi-purpose Cooperative (RAMFARMCO).

Jacinta is grateful for the DAR's intervention to the cooperative's growth. She saw how the members of RAMFARMCO struggled and how they were helped by the government.

The RAMFARMCO in Barangay Planas, Ramon, Isabela, was formed in August 2012 and was fully operational by 2013.

Jacinta said the cooperative's income between 2012 and 2013 was very limited due to extremely high interest rates. Crop insurance from the banks to which they owe money is not even free. They had no choice but to borrow from these corporations due to difficult natural calamities like typhoons and drought damaging their crops, as well as expensive transportation costs for loading their farm materials.

"To cope with our expenses, we were compelled to borrow funds from banks and farm inputs from private loan sharks," Jacinta said.

In 2014, the RAMFARMCO, a cooperative assisted by the DAR, was granted access to the Agrarian Production Credit Program (APCP). The cooperative received a P15 million loan to help them develop its business.

Jacinta said that under the APCP, the financing and trading of agricultural inputs services of the cooperative improved.

Since then, the number of members grew from 157 to 922 with three satellite offices located in Cordon, Centro Ramon and Alfonsolista, Ifugao. Their total assets increased too, from P27.9 million to P102.4 million.

"Because of the APCP, the cooperative's earnings doubled. Hindi na kami nangungutang sa mga pribadong sector," Jacinta said.

To cope with our expenses, we were compelled to borrow funds from banks and farm inputs from loan sharks.

Before APCP availment, the members borrow from RAMFARMCO's lending service with 18 percent interest rate per annum. But under APCP, they now enjoy a lower annual interest rate of only 15 percent per year.

"Ang kita ng mga miyembro ay tumaas dahil sa mababang interes sa pautang at presyo ng mga kagamitan para sa pagsasaka," said Jacinta.

"Mas naging panatag ako sapagkat malaki ang kita para sa mga gastusin sa aming tahanan at para sa pag-aaral ng aking mga anak," she added.

Since the start of the APCP from 2014 up to present, the cooperative maintained its good credit standing with the Land bank of the Philippines (LBP) and never experienced to have a past due account. During harvest season, member-borrowers pay their loans by depositing their payments to the accounts of the cooperative on time and they do not apply for loans that they do not need. This is an excellent practice that has continued to this day. Before releasing their debts, member-borrowers sign a "farm management takeover" agreement to assure proper collection. If a member-borrower defaults on his or her debt, the cooperative will manage the member's farm until the past due amount is paid in full.

The members also receive loan rebates from the LBP through APCP for their good credit performance under the program, which they used to purchase a hauling vehicle to help farmer-members with hauling farm produce.

Jacinta said, that as officers, they are entrusted with a challenging job. Their major job is to help those in need, at the same time enhance their profits.

"Nakaka-pressure pero enjoy po ang trabaho bilang manager," said Jacinta.

The cooperative's income increased because

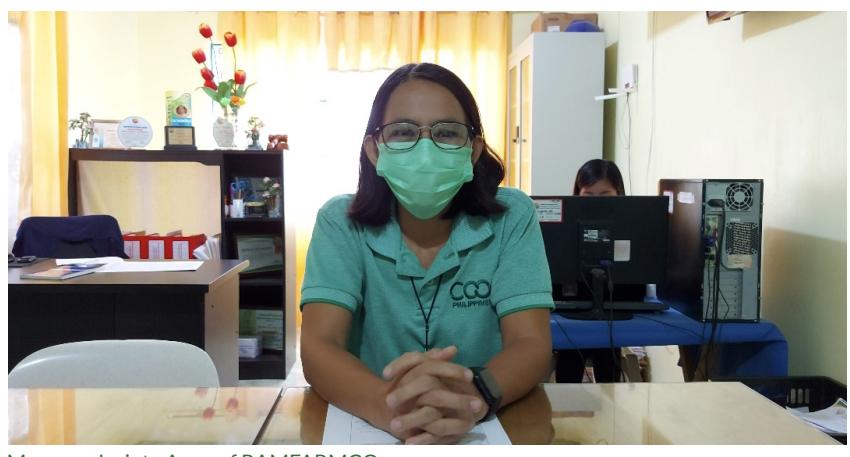
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The awards won and recognition plaques of RAMFARMCO



Vehicle bought by RAMFARMCO from the APCP rebates



Manager Jacinta Apoy of RAMFARMCO

of the APCP, allowing them to allocate funds for social services such as feeding programs, donations to local public schools. During Christmas programs, they also give cash to Senior Citizens and other non-profit groups. They were able to entice potential and quality members to join the cooperative by providing these social services.

During the Covid 19 epidemic, the RAMFARMCO board of directors approved the distribution of P200,000 worth of groceries and 49 sacks of rice to members affected. During Typhoon Ulysses, they utilized their CDF and received in-kind donations from members to purchase commodities and distributed to the residents of Cagayan and San Pablo, Isabela. This exemplifies the cooperative's members' and officers' solidarity and collaboration.

Jacinta said the Department of Agriculture officials were amazed of their progress despite being a newbie in the cooperative business. The agency granted them a farm tractor with rotovator, a rice planter and a harvester.

The Provincial Government of Isabela thru the Provincial Project Management Implementing Unit saw the good standing of the cooperative and endorsed RAMFARMCO to the DA Region 02 under the Philippine Rural Development

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Chairperson Nona shows how to rise in failure

By Ruby San Juan-Lapid

"Do not be embarrassed by your failures, learn from them and start again."

These words from Richard Branson, a British entrepreneur and business magnate were the words that made a deep impression on Nonata B. Pillas, the Chairman of the Jalajala Federation of Women's Club Multi-Purpose Cooperative (JFWCMPC).

Nonata or Nona for short, a self-confessed delinquent borrower, knows this very well as she admitted that the near closure of her sewing shop posed to her a challenge that taught her to be a responsible creditor.

Employed for a decade as a seamstress in Taytay, the garment capital of Rizal province, Nona decided in 2014 to start a small garment shop as a sub-contractor sewing shorts, house dresses, uniforms, and what-have-you. With a small capital at hand and with money she borrowed from the cooperative's lending business, she employed 10 people to sew, mostly JFWCMPC members.

The business provided a good source of income with the employees able to earn from P800 to P3,000 a week, depending on the demand and on one's diligence. The business's usual ups and downs were manageable. However, it became tough when the clients failed to get their orders on time, and when they failed to get their orders at all.

Nona said that her income as a sub-contractor was too small to pay her workers who mainly depend on their salary for a living. She said she was always making a tough decision between paying her regular loan amortization in the cooperative or giving her workers' salary. Of course, she always chose the latter. Yes, the chairman herself failed to pay her debts on time, and eventually became delinquent.

With the downfall of her business especially during the health pandemic, Nona was not able to renew her loan. However, she remained determined to rise anew with two major targets in mind: to revive her business and to regain her good-standing status in the cooperative. Swallowing her pride, she approached a co-member and sought financial assistance, a request that she was not denied of, so she was able to

pay her arrears.

It was timely that the cooperative became a recipient of the P300,000 DAR and Land Bank's Expanded Assistance to Restore and Install Sustainable Enterprises for Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries and Small Farmholders (E-ARISE ARBs) Program in March 2021.

Inspired by the brisk business in ornamental plant propagation and selling, JFWCMPC proposed to establish an ornamental plant production. This did not push though with around 90 percent of the members in their senior years barred from going out their homes.

The E-ARISE loan then re-lended to 15 cooperative members engaged in business. Now with a clean slate, Chair Nona was able to borrow P20,000 initial loan which she used as capital to her garment business. Still during the health pandemic then, her number of workers was reduced with the decrease in market demand.

However, Nona's hopes were high, and she was confident that everything will go back to normal. Though in a small quantity, she excitedly shared to everyone the good news. She received a sub-contract work for sewing chef's uniforms. With lessons learned from her past experience, she finds comfort and is confident, that being updated in loan payment, she is assured that she can borrow money again.

Asked of the lessons from her experiences in managing her enterprise, she said, "Doon ko natutunan kung paano pakisamahan ang mga trabahador ko." At the same time, she believes that professionalism should always be present, walang kamag-anak pagdating sa trabaho."

Being a chairperson does not exempt but rather challenge her to be a good example. While she admitted being embarrassed before, "alam ko na mali ako kaya tinanggap ko."

Now on her 2nd term, quitting the chairmanship of the cooperative did not cross her mind. She admits enjoying her tasks much as she loves being an entrepreneur who will continue sewing "habang kaya kong isulot ang sinulid sa butas ng karayom."

“Do not be embarrassed by your failures, learn from them and start again.”



A glowing and more relaxed JFWCMPC Chair Nonata Pillas, after braving and winning the battle against credit

From page 7

IT BEGINS WITH A DREAM

DAR and the National Confederation of Cooperatives (NATCCO), Tanikala ng Pagkakaisa MPC became a member of NATCCO in 2012. They initially borrowed P8 million under a three-year contract. They expanded their business and rented an office space in the heart of the provincial capital. Two years after completely recouping their credit, they began to earn.

Currently, Tanikala ng Pagkakaisa MPC has grown to 831 members province-wide and has accumulated assets worth more than P10 million. Even at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, they were able to acquire two lots.

"We feel indebted and very grateful to DAR. Everything that we have now is also because of them," Pacifico said.

Despite all these significant achievements, Pacifico is still proudest of their cooperative's resilience. Having worked with various government agencies, he is proud of the network they have built. Having been with his colleagues for years, he is proud of their honest work. He serves the cooperative with a flourishing passion. Even now, Pacifico would tell his members, "Let's continue to dream."

Going 15 years as the chairperson, he loves Tanikala ng Pagkakaisa MPC like his own child. And when the time comes, he only wishes that the person next in line would look at the cooperative beyond money and love it as much as he does. ☺

IT BEGINS WITH A DREAM

By Yunika Ysa G. Lasic



Pacifico Larga Mabato's father was sick and needed urgent medical aid. They wrapped him in a blanket, strapped him on their shoulders, and carried him to the neighbouring town amid the flood. They walked on foot and had to cross a rushing river. It was an emergency and using that route was faster than trekking the hills.

Walking on foot to go to places is not new to the people of Tugos, especially before when there were no cemented roads in the area. They traversed through mud and gravel, under the heat and the rain.

Born to a farmer's family, Pacifico, now 59, grew up helping his parents in tending their farmland. They slept under the stars and spent their nights on the farm away from their home. Farming was their bread and butter – provided them food in their plates and sent him and his siblings to school. He was taught to value every grain on the table – one that he inculcated even to his own children.

Years after, their conditions improved a little. Cemented roads were built, however incomplete. Living in a remote barangay, they also lived with the reality

of the government whose hands failed to reach them and of politicians whose faces they only saw during election period. This planted a persistent motivation inside him.

"Organize and the government will help you." Pacifico remembered these exact words from Chief Agrarian Reform Program Officer Ollie Davales of the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), the then development facilitator assigned in their barangay. She approached him and asked if the agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARBs) of Tugos can organize. He was eager.

Tanikala ng Pagkakaisa Multi-Purpose Cooperative was born in September 2006. From the initial 35 founding members, their number doubled in only a week. Each member chipped in a thousand for their shared capital and agreed to focus on copra trading as their business. It was feasible as they were all coconut farmers. They know that it takes sweat, blood, and an entire day's work to walk three kilometers to reach Tugos' Población all while carrying kilograms of copra on their bare backs – hoping to trade it there

before the sun sets or else it will dry up. Their community needed a copra trader which was nearer, and their cooperative delivered. It was the copra trading that made name for the Tanikala ng Pagkakaisa MPC.

Along with the success of their first endeavor, they entered the credit business within the barangay. They simultaneously managed these enterprises, coupled with selling personally handcrafted abaca products such as handbags and slippers. They displayed these on trade fairs hosted in several cities and towns.

Everything was running smoothly. Their seed money multiplied sevenfold and more in a matter of years. But unfortunately, not all good things were meant to last. They decided

to stop trading copra after 12 years of operation, which was eventually followed by their abaca venture. At that time, it was the hardest and the wisest choice. Continuing was a risk they couldn't take as its failure would exhaust everything they earned.

It was their credit business that persevered. "They saw our good management and that persuaded them. So many people were applying for credit that our allotted capital can't cater to all of them anymore. So, I relayed this to the DAR and asked if there was a way to increase our credit capital," Pacifico recounted.

Through the Microfinance Innovations for Cooperatives at Agrarian Reform Areas (MiCOOP @ ARAs), a partnership program of the

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We feel indebted and very grateful to DAR. Everything that we have now is also because of them.

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Freedom from poverty's shackles

By Rosenda D. Pantaleon



Until about 40 years ago, the world's poorest had virtually no access to credit from large-scale lenders. These types of lenders relied on traditional methods to determine if a customer could be trusted to repay a loan, and poor people were unlikely to meet those criteria. They often did not own enough property or other forms of collateral to secure a loan and likewise did not have the kind of formal credit history, steady source of income or educational qualifications that could reassure banks in the absence of collateral.

San Pascual is a third-class municipality in the province of Masbate. In the 2021 census, the population of San Pascual, Masbate was 44,449 people, with a density of 180 inhabitants per square kilometer or 470 inhabitants per square mile. It is politically subdivided into 22 barangays, including barangay Cueva, which is primarily populated by fishermen. Some families have coconut trees and those with suitable farms plant rice, root crops, vegetables, and raise chicken and hogs.

Eda Rosell, a 43-year old resident of Sitio Dapdap, Brgy. Cueva, San Pascual, Masbate, struggled for years working as a community laundrywoman just to provide for her family's basic needs. Just like other families living in deep poverty, they suffered from economic hardships and financial

distress leading to food shortage, unemployment, unstable housing, electrical shutoffs and inadequate medical care.

"Parang dinudurog po ang puso ko kapag nakikita ko ang aming mga anak na walang makain o maibaon papuntang eskwelahan," shared Eda.

Most of the people in barangay Cueva depended heavily on intermediaries for their financial needs. These intermediaries helped them obtain money to buy new nets, repair their old ones or see to any other financial needs they faced. Some of the intermediaries are professional moneylenders who charge exorbitant interest rates. Others were fish traders and gave loans on the condition that the fishers sell their catch only to them, until the loan was repaid, thus making the people in the area a highly exploited group.

The Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) in the province of Masbate launched the microfinance credit operations of Bayanihan Multipurpose Cooperative (BAMCO) in 2016, through the Enterprise Development and Economic Support (EDES) program. Assistance coming from EDES program is being provided to agrarian reform beneficiary organizations (ARBOs) which are ready for enterprise development like BAMCO. The BAMCO is a DAR-assisted ARBO in San Pascual, Masbate

that has received organizational development, agri-enterprise and other trainings, qualifying the cooperative to become a microfinance provider.

The organization was registered in 1992 with a total of 265 members composed of 154 males and 111 females. Under the said program, the ARBO has a capital-build-up of P 100,000 that could be used by the members in starting their microfinance project. To effectively manage their microfinance services, ARBs have undergone trainings on financial system and cash flow. According to chief agrarian reform program officer Nicolas Briones, 60 members of the cooperative have been availing the credit assistance through this loan program.

"Internal borrowings in the cooperative have enabled its members to provide for their consumption needs and to take up other alternative income-generating activities such as sari-sari store, rice trading and other small trades," Briones said.

When Eda hit on the idea of fishing trade to supplement her husband's meager income as a small-time fisherman whose equipment is only a small boat and a fishing rod, she could barely afford a fishing boat, fishing net and a few other items in addition to the essentials. She used to apply for a loan from one of their barangay's professional moneylenders. However, when word got out about the BAMCO which offers low-interest loans, she quickly opted to try it out.

All it took to turn Eda's life around was a five-thousand-peso start-up loan from the BAMCO upon becoming a

member. The availability of credit has made a significant contribution to Eda's income.

"One of the major benefits in joining the microfinance program of the DAR is freedom from professional moneylenders," she said.

The funds enabled her to purchase an engine motor for their tiny boat as well as a fishing net, which they use to trade fish in Cavite.

After establishing a track record of timely repayment, she is now able to apply for a P30,000 loan. Having more capital on hand enabled Eda to expand their fish business by purchasing more fishing boats and new types of fishing nets, eventually increasing the volume of fish they sold, and opening a sari-sari store which raised her revenues nearly six-fold since then. Using the money she made from her fish trades and sari-sari store, Eda was able to finance the renovation of their house, as well as the extension of her sari-sari store.

Eda credits the DAR on her success. While reminiscing the hardships she had to go through in life before, she shared, "halos napapaluha po talaga ako tuwing maaalala ko ang paghihirap ng pamilya namin noon kaya nagpapasalamat po talaga ako sa programang ito ng DAR sapagkat sa tulong nito, ngayon ay masasabi kong hindi na kami babalik sa kahirapan." For Eda, it was the break she had always needed to free her family from the shackles of poverty.

Indeed, "it's not about your resources, it's about your resourcefulness," as Tony Robbins famously observed. Empty pockets never held anyone back; only empty heads and empty hearts did. 

**It's not about your resources,
it's about your resourcefulness.**

I tell my children my story of how I got to where I am today to give them drive and inspiration to succeed.

Iba ka, Eva!



"Dare to be different" is a statement that stimulated a woman leader and a resilient farmer of Buluangan I, Valderrama, Antique. Amidst the adversities and barricades brought about by this prolonged season of pandemic, Eva Roquero Dela Cruz remained steadfast and girded with high hopes, determination, and faith.

Eva was awarded with the Certificate of Land Ownership Award (CLOA) in 2010 with an area of 1.3 hectares which she cultivated and devoted to a plethora of crops like rice, corn, mongo beans, peanut, banana, squash, sitaw and other vegetables.

In 2012, she joined the Buluangan I Multi-Purpose Cooperative (B1 MPC), an anchor organization in Buluangan I, Buluangan II Canipayan Agrarian Reform Community (BBC ARC) in Valderrama, Antique. In July 2014, Development Facilitator (DF) Nueva Era C. Pido, now Municipal Agrarian Reform Program Officer, encouraged Eva to become the Manager of their cooperative, which she enthusiastically accepted.

B1 MPC availed of the Expanded Assistance to Restore and Install Sustainable Enterprises (E-ARISE) for Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries and Small Holder Farmers in 2021. E-ARISE is a loan program of Land Bank of the Philippines intended to help those target beneficiaries and small farmers whose livelihood were adversely affected by the COVID 19 crisis as well as to give assistance reparations for the damage on plants caused by pests and diseases. Being the cooperative manager Eva took the lead in complying with the documentary requirements for the approval and release of their loan. Eva was one of the eight (8) recipients of E-ARISE and was granted a loan amount of P 50,000.00.

"I used the loan proceeds to expand our rice and cash crop production. I am thankful for the timely release of the loan for the production inputs and to defray the labor cost. My children and I have to take turns working in the farm because my husband is working in Iloilo City as a driver and he seldom goes home", Eva uttered during one of the field activities conducted by DAR.

The income derived from her farm has sustained the needs of her family. During the time of community lock-down Eva generously shared her produce to her neighbors. The pandemic induced anxiety and uncertainty, but not for her. Her

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By: Geralyn E. Cañas

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EASTERN SAMAR COOPERATIVE ON THE RISE

now functions as a new organization running their cooperative on vision, mission, and goals. The SPARBC was able come to a mutual understanding among its members to willingly pay their dues and obligations, adapt good practices, formulate policies in minimizing loan delinquency, transparency of financial status/book of accounts, regular meetings, sharing of institutional good values and undergo trainings on Delinquency Management. Members started paying their obligations. Not long after, the cooperative's arrears were finally paid in full.

In 2021, SPARBC has been cleared from financial obligation with the Land Bank of the Philippines. Through DAR's agri-credit and micro-finance (ACMF) program, the cooperative was given funds to expand their agri-businesses.

On November 18, 2021, just two months after the submission of their E-ARISE Production loan folder to the LBP worth 1 million, the loan was released. They can now avail of the E-ARISE credit program where the interest rate is only at 3 percent per year and payable in three years.

After receiving their loans, members started new ventures for bigger production inputs. Since then, economic activity prospered. They are now into coco twine production, truck rental, egg production, rice trading, lending, hog raising and swine production.

At present, the San Pablo Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries Cooperative enjoys the new challenges in their business ventures for they can pay the wages of their member and employees working with them. SPARBC embraces the Filipino traits of a resilient organization, always willing to stand up amid the difficulties and values the good practices that guides all of them in facing the battle.

They work hard and RISE for the best! 🌱

EASTERN SAMAR COOPERATIVE

ON THE RISE

By Rosa Sandra D. Berdejo

Taft Eastern Samar is a 4th class municipality in the province of Eastern Samar. There are 24 barangays in the municipality where DAR has 10 agrarian reform communities (ARC) barangays and three agrarian reform beneficiaries' organization. One of these organization is the San Pablo Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries Cooperative.

In 2015, San Pablo Producer's Cooperative, now San Pablo Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries Cooperative was organized by 47 members who are all residents of Barangay San Pablo, Taft Eastern Samar. The organization comprised of 40 females and seven males engaged in hog raising and coco-twine production. Through DAR's assistance, the cooperative was able to access credit through Agrarian Reform Production Credit Program (APCP) and availed the four cycle production in 2017 and 2019. Their total loan amounted to P1.3 million with loan proceeds for capitalization and increased production under the Land Bank of the Philippines (LBP).

After their 5th cycle loan was released, some members were not able to pay their loans and became past due, especially the officers of the association, which resulted to inactive participation

in meetings, gatherings, and other activities of the association. The cooperative's policy of paying monthly amortization to LBP were not met. Internal break-up between and among members became prevalent which resulted to members not attending activities of the cooperative.

The economic activities of the cooperative were affected. The farmer-members became unproductive, and this paralyzed the operation of their organization.

In 2020, to save the cooperative from completely falling apart, a DAR municipal agrarian reform program officer and a development facilitator were designated as employees of the cooperative. The two officers went to the Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries Organization in Taft and had a meeting with members. At the meeting, the members aired their sentiments and came to a decision to reorganize by selecting a new set of officers. Since then, the cooperative slowly but surely got back on its feet. They started weekly meetings where they invited and recruited new members.

The San Pablo Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries Cooperative (SPARB), with its new set of officers,

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They work hard and RISE for the best!

Iba ka, Eva!

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concern for others and generosity has become evident despite the negativities.

When the DARPO Antique announced their need of personnel for the Support to Parcelization for Land Individual Titling (SPLIT Project), Eva applied for the position of a field documenter.

“At the age of 41, I have some doubts and insecurities knowing that my contenders are young, intelligent, and technically equipped. However, during the interview, I was keen on speaking out and in showcasing my skills. My plight as an ARB, my rich experience as a manager of the cooperative and my engagement with the community added to my confidence in which I strongly believe, helped me stand out among the other applicants.” according to her.



Eva is a graduate of Bachelor of Science in Commerce major in Management. She has three (3) children who are all in the high school, - Ralph Eren, Eve Virginett, and Jeff who she hopes will one day earn their degrees via her sacrifices and their individual tenacity and dedication.

Eva is currently a documenter of DAR's SPLIT project. “I tell my children my story of how I got to where I am today to give them drive and inspiration to succeed,” she added.

Today, she's capable of paying for one of her children's tuition fees at one of Antique's premier private schools. She's also able to renovate some parts of their home and procure things they wouldn't have been able to have before.

Eva's journey serves as an inspiration for all of us.

Unity and strength for Pag-aso farmers of Davao

By Aiza T. Brua



"Walay kalisod ang makababag sa hiniusang pakibisog. Walay pagsulay ang dili makaya sa madasigong pagtinabangay."

Jocelyn Etang, 42 is an inspiring mother residing at Purok 9 Katipunan, New Bataan, Davao de Oro and the devoted wife of Francisco Etang. In a concerted effort with her husband, they were able to acquire and manage about 3 hectares of farm area producing cavendish banana. The said enterprise contributes P190,000 net income annually, for their primary needs and in raising their two children. As a farmer never settles on one crop, they also engage in corn and vegetable production. Their business mindset never idles, and they opened a convenience store and expanded to a trucking business. Proud and optimistic, Jocelyn is also the current manager of the Pag-aso Farmers Multipurpose Cooperative (PAFAMUPCO).

This Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries Cooperative (ARBO) was registered by the Cooperative Development Authority on June 19, 1992. PAFAMUPCO successfully attained their objective with progressive capital build-up of P4.7 million and total members of 584, exceeding its target 3 million capital build-up and 400 members respectively in 2021. It is currently engaged in banana growing, contract service and microfinance. It has strong leadership under its Chairperson, Mr. Wilfredo V. Baco. Its manpower consists of 47 male and five females to sustain the daily operation of their business.

Their success didn't come without struggles along the way....

"Sa 2006 nasheriff ang PAFAMUPCO. Usa to sa pinakapait nga nasinati sa amo kooperatiba. Siguro, tungod sa kulang na kahanas sa pagdumala ug kakulangan sa mabusising pagsusi sa balaud. Maoy hinungdan nga nahagsa ang maong kooperatiba," Jocelyn said.

That time, there was intense conflict in the labor services of PAFAMUPCO. The cooperative was affected by the conflict between the Fresh Banana Agricultural

Cooperative (FBAC) and their employees. The main reason of which is the minimum wage issue.

"Ang pagdumala sa PAFAMUPCO naningkamot sa pagpaabot sa FBAC sa mga mulo sa employado mahitungod sa ubos nga sweldo apan nagpabiling walay aksyon ang kumpanya. Nipadayon ang kasamok hangtod gi DOLE sa mga employado ang PAFAMUPCO. Nagkasuhay ug napilde and kooperatiba," said Jocelyn.

That became a gloomy time in their cooperative. The number of members who withdrew approached 50 percent of its total membership at that time. Comparing its 162 registered members when it was organized in 1992, only 60 regular members remained. Despite the struggles, the management did not lose hope and continued with their microfinance and other remaining operations.

That was their cooperative's biggest battle, or so they thought, as they are caught unprepared on a more devastating calamity that came. Typhoon Pablo in 2012 was the hardest time of their lives. That time, the cavendish operation was hardest hit and livelihood of most farmers were affected.

"Tungod sa panghitabo, nag desisyon ang pagdumala sa kooperatiba nga wala unay swelduhay. Magpentakasi

una kay gikinahanglan sa koop ang pagtinabangay sa usag usa. Sakit palandungan pero tungod sa kapid-os, daghan nag resign sa kooperatiba," Jocelyn said.

With only 300,000 running capital, accompanied by the perseverance of the management and members anchored with their undying love to the cooperative, the cooperative slowly recovered with the firm support and

intervention of the different government agencies. A true manifestation of the word cooperativism residing in the hearts of its members. The spirit of bayanihan prevailed.

"Ako makapamatud sa hinay hinay na pagbangon sa kooperatiba. Sugod sa akong pagdumala isip manager niadtong 2013, ginakalipay nako ug dako ang pagsaka sa income sa matag tuig. Gikan sa pentakasi namo nga estado,

“Microfinance has brought assistance to the immediate needs of farmers that need capital for their specific projects.”

hinayhinay mi nakahatag ug ginagmay nga allowance," Jocelyn said.

"Pagtungtong sa tuig 2016, gikalipay namo ug dako nga nahatag na namo ang minimum wage sa among mga empleyado. Dako among kalipay sa taas na pailob ug paningkamot sa matag usa," Jocelyn added.

Microfinance has become one of their major business after struggling from the shutdown of their labor service. Indeed, it helped a lot during their difficult times, in addition to the remaining operation they had at those times. PAFAMUPCO has seen the opportunity of improving its microfinance business and gratified to become recipient of the Department of Agrarian Reform Program on its "ARBO Developed as Microfinance Provider" in 2017 where capacity development was provided that enabled to boost and introduce them to a wider perspective of doing microfinance business.

"Aduna gayod natampo ang ginanmay nga pautang sa hinanaling panginahanglan sa katawhan. Hilabi na sa niadtong panahon sa pandemic, dako jud kaayo ni natabang."

There is indeed significant impact to the lives of lenders. Microfinance has brought assistance to the immediate needs of farmers, businessman, motorcycles, and other borrowers that need immediate capital for their specific projects.

"Sa akong kabahin, nakabenipisyo usab ako nianing among microfinance nga negosyo. Tungod sa microfinance, nahimugso among trucking business," Jocelyn said.

She started her trucking business last 2013. She borrowed 70,000 in addition to her 100,000 savings capital to purchase a secondhand truck. With her effort and perseverance, she expanded her business and currently have two trucks for rental services operating in whole province of Davao de Oro.

Despite the benefits that microfinance had brought to lives of many people, there are still challenges in handling the business, particularly dealing with delinquent lenders.

"Usa sa pamaagi ang padayon nga pangulekta ug pagsabot sa mga gahi mubayad. Dili lang awayon, kumustahan lang jud permi. Hatagan ug makadaghan nga kapilian sa term nga dili bug-at sa ila para mahinayhinayan ug bayad," said Jocelyn.

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Greener pasture is within farmer's grasp with DAR's microfinance project

By: Agnes R. Torino and Marte L. Pabalay

Of the tides and instabilities of farming, small farmers look elsewhere for greener pastures to meet their basic needs. One of them was Arma Tingkang Malunes, 42 years old, who considered employment abroad as a balm that could soothe their ailing livelihood.

Nine (9) years after Arma's marriage to Marcelo Despojo Malunes, she left him and decided to work in Singapore to help sustain their growing family. As a domestic helper in 2009, she had been earning more or less P 20,000 a month to support her family's daily subsistence, as well as for her savings.

Months passed by, Arma realized that the comfort of her income wasn't enough to compensate for her homesickness and anxiety being away from home.

"Being with my family and nurturing them is my priority in life. I was optimistic that with the little savings that I had and the determination I possessed, I could earn the same amount or more when I return home," Arma disclosed.

In 2011, Arma decided to return home and used her savings to start a Sari-Sari store.

Being an agrarian reform beneficiary and a member of the Tinagacan Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries Cooperative (TARBC), located in barangay upper Biangan, Malungon, Sarangani province, has unlocked many opportunities for their family.

While operating their small sari-sari store, her family became the recipient of Department of Agrarian Reform

(DAR) – Community-managed Potable Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (CPWASH) project in 2012, where they received five (5) heads of piglets, provided under the program. They also added two (2) more heads from their own pockets to have them grown as swine for their starting piggery.

As they diligently managed their livelihood, another opportunity came when Arma qualified in the TARBC microfinance project Dagdag Kabuhayan component in 2013, in which she received additional capital for her sari-sari store and piggery.

"With the help of my husband, we applied the entrepreneurial principles we learned from the cooperative, paving the way for our sari-sari store to flourish and enabling us to meet our daily needs and sustain the operating expenses of our piggery," she said.

Arma's integrity as a loan borrower provided her the opportunity to renew anytime her TARBC microfinance loan. Presently she is on her 18th cycle of renewal. Thus, she was able to add more items to sell in her store that consistently increased her sales.

"My husband diligently managed the piggery. Every two (2) cycles since then, one (1) sow was added. At this time, we have a total of five (5) swine and one (1) boar. The piggery has augmented our



family's income. All of these helped us support our three (3) children – one (1) in grade 11, and the other in the first year and second year of college. All of them are studying in General Santos City, requiring a bigger budget for their fare," she proudly said.

The provident living that Arma's family enjoys was evident as every time their relatives visited them, they would say that their house was getting bigger.

Arma divulged that being a cooperative member has indeed many opportunities. "The TARBC microfinancing freed us from the debilitating chain of loan sharks. In addition, I am receiving a considerable salary as a Cashier of the cooperative."

"The DAR's microfinance project had strengthened my partnership with my husband in making a living and providing the necessities of life for our family. Because of it, I can now maintain a manageable schedule that allowed me to fulfill my responsibilities as a wife and a mother to my children. I realized that with the DAR's help and guidance, the greener pasture is not far, but is just within our grasp," Arma concluded. 🌱



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Unity and strength for Pag-aso farmers of Davao

"Naay risk sa microfinance, kinahanglan ang kadasig ubanan sa kakugi. Kay kung wala pay ginansya ni nga negosyo, hagbay na ning giundang..."

She shared that it's better to come up settling with delinquent lenders than filing small claim case to the court against them.

"Sa tinud-anay, dili na angay kasuhon kay magastuhan raka, sabuton na lang. Maayo nang magkasinabot nalng sila kaysa mubayad pa ang coop pag file ug kasohuman sa katapusan ipa settle lang man gihapon ang duha ka parties. Lugi pa ang kooperatiba

kay pabayron sa term nga saad nila nga wala pa jud interest."

The cooperative continually pursues its mission to mobilize sustainable resources in order to deliver quality services. Microfinance has become the cooperative's pillar in doing business from the beginning and even in the difficult moments of their operation. Record shows that the cooperative's accumulated loan releases had reached P18,997,645 to their members utilized for farm inputs of banana cavendish production.

Presently, PAFAMUPCO has 500,000 existing capital intended for microfinance. In addition, they had accessed 3 million loan form Landbank of the Philippines (LBP) to hopefully contribute in the pump priming of their microfinance business. A significant manifestation of their fast growing development is their satellite branch at Compostela in year 2021.

"Ang kooperatiba inuban masasigong paningkamot sa pagduda ug supporta sa miyembro, kab-oton namo ang mapadayunong pag uswag taliwala sa unsa pa mang kalisod ug pagsulay sa umalabot pang panahon," said Jocelyn.

In unity, there is strength. In strength, there comes success. 🌱