



Department of Agriculture  
**MINDANAO RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM 2**

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Improving Lives MRDP2 MidTerm Impact Stories



# Improving **LIVES**

MRDP2 MidTerm Impact Stories

# Message

My felicitations to the hardworking men and women of the Mindanao Rural Development Program and my warm congratulations for the success of the Program, thus far, elucidated in the stories herein.

This compendium of success stories does not just herald of the triumph of the Department of Agriculture but it also spells out the bountiful harvest of the seeds that altogether we have sown.

Each inspiring story does not just present the characters of the farmers, fisherfolk, IP groups or the women organizations we have reached out to, but it illustrates the indispensable contribution of everyone from the national government down to the barangay level.

Mindanao is blessed in countless ways that poverty reduction in this part of the country is not long shot. The vast track of rich soils, the resiliency of the people, the rich and diverse culture, the high potentials of agri-fishery sector are the big tickets the government and DA-MRDP could count on to achieve the set goal of poverty reduction.

Not long ago, I have volunteered to be the “playing coach” of the Program with the clear vision that Mindanao can be the driving force in securing our country’s food sufficiency.

Indeed, we are on the right track. We are contributing to the country’s continual growth and combating poverty the way it should be: holistic and socially equitable.

Kudos to every farmer, fisherfolk housewife and organization who put in their stake in the program and share in the magnanimous task of fighting poverty in the rural areas of Mindanao. Your every testimonial words have inspired me, in particular, to be more proactive in dealing the task of rural development , to be more humble in our successes and valiant in accepting mistakes by learning and rectifying where it necessary.

We continue to strive and strive harder. We remain steadfast in trusting the agriculture as backbone of the country’s economy.

Mabuhay.



PROCESO G. ALCALA  
Secretary  
Department of Agriculture

IMPROVING LIVES  
MRDP2 Mid-Term Impact Stories  
Published by  
MINDANAO RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM  
Program Support Office, Davao City. 120p.

First Edition 2011



# ImprovingLIVES

MRDP2 Mid-Term Impact Stories



# Foreword

The Land of Promise.

This is the most iconic title of Mindanao. To others it's a vision, to some it's an old cliché, an abstraction commonly heard but has never formed shape. It has been questioned, criticized, even doubted.

But we in the Department of Agriculture (DA) are staunch advocates that, indeed, Mindanao is vast land of rich potential to be the country's basket of food, a bastion to feed this nation.

Yet, there is this other undeniable face of Mindanao, that of poverty.

When the DA launched the second phase Mindanao Rural Development Program, it was keen to reduce poverty by utilizing the opulence of the land.

The aim was empowerment.

After learning our beneficiaries' stories, without doubt, we have empowered small farmers, fisherfolk, women, the indigenous peoples and communities.

**Improving lives** narrates success stories that will not just warm a heart but enrich a soul. Here are stories of free-spirited people, warm and kind hearted farmers and fisherfolk who in the face of life's adversity and scarcity have found hope in putting their stake in the field of agriculture.

It is an honor to have participated in the goal of improving lives in Mindanao. I represent every men and women of the Program who is both grateful and blessed having shared with our fellow Mindanaowon the table of rural development across the six regions of Mindanao.

In the past years of MRDP, we have waged war against poverty, fought a battle of a long-standing foe. Here's the good news though, we are winning. We are now seeing results of everybody's effort.



LEALYN A. RAMOS  
Program Director

# Preface

**Improving lives** is a compilation of inspiring stories of Mindanao rural folks whose lives have been touched by the phase-two implementation of the Mindanao Rural Development Program (MRDP2).

Although MRDP2 implementation is still halfway, the selected stories tell how the Program has made significant improvements in the lives of rural Mindanawons.

Rice farmers in Sulop, Davao del Sur share how the irrigation project has restored their hope and confidence on the potentials of rice farming. Residents of Purok Masagana in Polomolok, South Cotabato reveal how small infrastructure such as the box-culvert has promoted productivity and safety. The mayor in Kapatagan, Lanao del Norte shares how the road helped not only in attaining progress but in their pursuit for peace.

Farmers in Zamboanga del Sur tell how they liberate themselves from huge debts after they have accessed funds from the Program's livelihood component. Residents of Sitio Midal in Barangay Palao, Libungan, North Cotabato share how their once lethargic and neglected community has come to life through the goat raising project. A farmer in Sta. Josefa, Agusan del Sur is thankful that her family has acquired a new house through their vegetable production.

The town of Linamon, Lanao del Norte serves as a showcase of atypical yet effective way of rebuilding submarine habitat through coral transplantation. "Vanguards of the seas," as a group of volunteers in R.T. Lim, Zamboanga Sibugay call themselves, share the difficult yet fulfilling results of protecting their coastal resources. Residents in Datu Odin Sinsuat, Maguindanao share how the Program's conservation initiatives help them restore the natural resources damaged by a tsunami more than three decades ago.

Models of revenue generation like Bunawan, Agusan del Sur and Alicia, Zamboanga Sibugay share how the Program's capability-building enabled them to increase their local coffers and institute governance reforms.

To some readers these stories may just be the usual anecdotes from project beneficiaries. But for the people behind MRDP2 the stories are no mere tales but rather a testament on how the Program has made significant impact on the poor rural communities in Mindanao. For the beneficiaries, these are chronicles of their struggles and victories they would like to share to others.

As implementation continues, the Program looks forward to documenting and publishing more inspiring stories of people reaping the fruits of their labor. May this book encourage Program partners and supporters to be steadfast in working for the goal of improving the lives of Mindanawons.

IMPROVING LIVES  
MRDP2 Mid-Term Impact Stories

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**Rural Infrastructure (RI)**

**RI** implements agricultural infrastructure critical in enhancing farm productivity and access to market.

Subprojects under this component include:  
rehabilitation and construction of communal irrigation systems, farm-to-market roads, single-lane bridges, potable water supplies, and pre- and postharvest facilities.



## *Irrigation brings back* **RICE PRODUCTION**

Brgy. Poblacion, Sulop, Davao del Sur

**R**ice farmers in this town have fresh reason to hope for better harvest with the newly established communal irrigation system (CIS).

Oscar Mandalope, president of Sulop Irrigators' Association Inc. said irrigation is a priority need in their area considering that they just rely on rain in irrigating their fields. This limits their capacity to produce rice of at least two cropping season in a year.

Growing rice takes a lot of water. According to the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), it takes 3,000-5,000 liter of rice to produce a kilo of rice. Declining water availability in many places appears to threaten the sustainability of irrigated rice farming, safeguarding food security and alleviating poverty, the IRRI said.

To sustain rice farming, Mandalope said some farmers have resorted to using shallow-tube wells (STW) 120 to 150 feet deep in irrigating their fields but this makes rice farming more expensive and laborious.

“With STW, we spent more on fuel consumption. It also demands extra

time as we have to irrigate our fields not only during the day but also at night,” he said adding:

“The high input and labor cost prompted farmers to shift to other crops particularly banana, sugarcane and kangkong which can give them better yield and more income.”

“Crop shifting is one of the major concerns affecting the decline in rice production in the region,” said Carlos Mendoza who was then the DA regional executive director.

“Although it would be difficult to stop farmers from shifting to other crops as this would affect their income, we need to address this [crop shifting] growing concern,” he added.

Mendoza said one of the measures that should be undertaken to improve productivity of rice farmers is for government to provide sufficient investment in irrigation facilities.

Agriculture Secretary Proceso J. Alcala has announced DA’s goal of self-sufficiency in rice for the next three years. The DA through MRDP targets the rehabilitation of estimated 8,300 hectare rice lands comprising of community-owned and managed run-of-the-river communal irrigation systems (CIS). It also supports the construction of 800 hectares communal irrigation projects (CIP).

“We are glad that our town officials as well as the provincial government have teamed-up with DA-MRDP to establish the CIP in our community,” Mandalope.

He said rice farmers in the area are optimistic that with the abundant water now available, they can now increase their yield and improve their income.

“Some farmers who shifted to other crops have already prepared their lands for rice production,” he said.

The CIP which is the first irrigation project constructed under MRDP is now serving at least 200 hectares of rice field in Sulop. □



## *Roads pave the way to* **PEACE & DEVELOPMENT**

Brgy. Tipulo, Kapatagan, Lanao del Norte

**T**he local chief of this town reckons that the arms for peace are not an armada of weapons but road infrastructures.

Mayor Benny Y. Baguio believes the road projects that his administration invested with the MRDP had been instrumental in achieving peace and order in his town.

The barangays that the road project passes through used to be low producing and highly infested by insurgent groups.

Although the farmers in the area have fertile lands, they were producing very low because farmers have abandoned their farms due to unfavorable road condition and insurgency problems.

“The basic reason why some of our people were on the ‘other segment of society’ was that they felt neglected by the government,” the mayor said.



“Now, it’s peaceful and people went back to farming. That’s why we are really thankful first and foremost to the national government, and the DA for this opportunity,” Bagiuo said.

“Farm-to-market roads helped a lot not only in attaining progress but also in our pursuit for lasting peace,” he added.

### **Farmers sigh of relief**

The road project has also been a sigh of relief to the residents and farmers in Brgy. Tipulo as the rehabilitated road now connects them to town’s commercial center.

Brgy. Tipulo is the farthest barangay in Kapatagan. It lies in the boundary between Zamboanga del Sur and Lanao del Norte.

For years, they were considered remote and virtually detached from the town since they did not have accessible route to the town proper. This forced them to bring their produce to the town of Aurora, Zamboanga del Sur, though quite far but more accessible.

“We were really thinking of transferring to the town of Aurora, had the local government unit disregarded our problem,” said Brgy. Councilor Albino Caballes.

“Before, only carabaos and horses could pass this road to poblacion,” he added.

Edmund Abne one of the farmer beneficiaries said that their products like coconut, corn, and vegetables were carried by farm carts pulled by horses or carabaos or manually carried by paid labor which often destroyed the quality of their produce.

“Before it will take us at least two and a half hours to bring our produce to the town, notwithstanding, the great effort we have to exert. But with the completion of the road, we can now do it in around twenty minutes,” he said.

Due to the accessible road to the market, the farmer beneficiaries noted an increase on their income since their transportation cost has reduced.

### **Complementation means effective governance**

Although admittedly, Mayor Bagiuo felt the 50:50 cost sharing scheme applied in MRDP was a bit difficult for the municipal government, nevertheless, he said it will help a lot if LCEs efficiently manage its local coffers.

“As mayor I understand that when development activities such as establishment of roads enter a community, more projects will come, so we prioritized putting in place the necessary infrastructures to support our farmers

and residents,” Baguio said.

Inspired by the Program, Baguio even coined his own MRDP which stands for Municipal Roads for Development and Peace.

The roads really brought development and peace to Kapatagan. The mayor said farmers are inspired to expand their farming activities as they can now increase their incomes as a result of reduced transport cost and travel time to the market.

It has also improved access to social services by people residing in far-flung barangays so they no longer feel isolated.

“We are glad, we partner with MRDP as it has helped us a lot in raising funds for our priority infrastructure,” said the mayor. □



## *New roads,* **NEW OPPORTUNITIES**

Brgy. Tuyan, Malapatan, Sarangani Province

**T**heirs is a vast productive farm land planted mostly to corn. But come harvest and marketing time, the hiking and trekking over a difficult terrain imperils their lives and livelihood.

Fortunately, that was a thing of the past now. For the highland community of B'laans, the new 8-kilometer road that connects them to main hub of the town is a gateway to better farming income.

“With the use of motorcycles or trucks, it is now easier for us to bring our produce to the market since the condition of the road is favorable,” said Alan Malagante, one of the B'laan farmers.

Before, they only use horse to bring their produce to the market, or worse carry it overhead and on foot through a muddy and even slippery trail, particularly when it rains.

He said their fertile lands in the mountains have been producing enough corn whose income could sustain his family's needs. But when harvest time arrived, he had to endure the unfavorable road condition that, with luck sometimes a horse could tread.

"It was really difficult for us. And due to the poor handling of our crops, traders buy our corn in lower prices," he said.

"But today, we don't expect that to happen again. This early we have already felt the benefits of this road as our income has increased and we hope to do better in coming days," he added.

For the local government unit, the road opened up the easier and faster delivery of services.

Mayor Alfonso M. Singcoy said new road provided easier access to the community in bringing them the necessary social services.

"It is now easier on our part to bring, for instance, medical services and other assistance since the road has provided access," Mayor Singcoy said.

"School children now enjoy easy walk from home to school and back since the road is wider and safer to traverse," he added.

The construction of the 8-kilometer farm-to-market road (FMR) which directly benefited over a hundred households was made possible through the efforts of the local government unit of Malapatan, the provincial government and the MRDP.

### **Leadership thrust**

Singcoy focused on the construction of road networks since he knew of its impact on the lives of the people.

He said the road is not only for boosting food production but also for the government services to reach the area.

"In Malapatan, I understand the need to put in place more infrastructure just like any other developing towns. We are happy that MRDP as well as the provincial government is with us in this thrust," the mayor said.

### **More opportunities**

The newly accessible road brings not only ease of transportation but a whole lot of new opportunities.

In 2009, the provincial government of Sarangani has given at least 200 sacks of corn seeds for the farmers to start their corn farming.

"The farmers here are encouraged to further expand their farms since they

don't fear of losing anymore," said Wahid Musa, the barangay's chief official.

"In the past, some residents and farmers here had abandoned their land since farming had been a failure. But now, they are back to their parcel of land; they till and start to rebuild their houses where their farm is. They no longer worry about farming losses," Musa said.

Aside from farming, the road has created jobs for motorcycle drivers that now ferry residents and students to the town center.

There is also another non-governmental organization that invested for the spring development of the barangay.

The mayor stressed that road opening could also trigger tourism activities in the area since the barangay has a scenic panoramic view of Malapatan and Sarangani bay, and natural land formations.

### **Grateful B'laans**

Alan Malagante, in verge of tears, said he couldn't say in words how thankful he is for the road built for them.

"This road has brought us new hope in life," he said.

From the mountain top of Brgy. Tayun, one sees the picturesque sprawl of Sarangani Bay, an image of promise and refreshing breath of hope of better life for the B'laans living in the highland community. □



## *More time* **FOR FISHING**

Brgy. Tagabakid, Mati, Davao Oriental

**T**he people bid goodbye to the old and dilapidated water system and said hello to the refurbished multimillion peso worth waterworks.

Neither Eleuterio Martino nor any member of his family need to wake up early in the morning; gather plastic containers and pails; cross a river and trek a trail to find an open spring close to a kilometer away to fetch their water for the day.

“What for? We already have the water faucet nearby,” said Martino who is the barangay captain of Brgy. Tagabakid.

The daily morning routine of this mostly Muslim community has been changed after the MRDP and the local government here completed the P2.78 million water system.



But years ago, Martino, who is now in the twilight years of life, tells a different story.

“Our source of water before was a spring which was almost a kilometer away. Every morning we had to wake up early as walking could consume about close to an hour to and from the water source,” Martino said.

“We had a water system back in the early 70’s but it never lasted. It was dysfunctional so we went back to the old water spring,” he added.

“Worse, when it flooded we had to use our banca to fetch water in the open well. Unsure if it was safe,” Martino said.

There were diarrhea cases in the barangay which they alluded to the unsafe water and the old and flawed water system but people didn’t have choice otherwise they thirst.

The refurbished water system is expected to reduce water-borne and water-related diseases as the leaky pipes and defective intake structure had major makeover.

Designed as level-2 potable water system or communal water system with 37 units of faucets amounting P2.78 million, it serves the 325 households and about 1,500 residents.

The local government unit of Mati led the project implementation with its 50 percent share of the total project cost while the other half was shouldered by DA-MRPD.

“We are impressed with the water system, water is constant and the design is sturdy,” said Martino.

Having seen the benefits of the potable water system nearby, Martino said their community folks vowed to observe proper operation and maintenance for it to last.

“With the assistance of the LGU we will establish the Barangay Waterworks and Sanitation Association (BAWASA) which will set up appropriate measures including the schedule of fees for the maintenance of the water system,” Martino shared of their plans.

“Our daily mornings now are not consumed by fetching water. We now have more time mending our fishnets, repair our bancas or set out early on the sea to have more catch,” Martino said. □



## *Quenching thirst* **FOR SAFE WATER**

Brgy. San Roque, Kitcharao, Agusan del Norte

“ I am happy that this town now has its potable water system because I was once a victim of unsafe water here.”

So goes the line of Joel S. Rudinas, no less the undersecretary for operations of the DA after learning that Kitcharao town has completed its

rehabilitation of San Roque waterworks.

The old and leaky water system in Brgy. San Roque made the people thirsty of safe water over the years.

But in the early part of 2010 the system has been refurbished bursting with fresh, clean and potable water.

“Water is a basic necessity, that’s why it’s the priority project of our administration,” said mayor Aristotle Montante.

The repair of the old system has long been the clamor of the residents but the local government is financially strapped to fully rehabilitate the system as it was estimated to cost over P3 million.

When Mayor Amante learned that the MRDP can provide 50 percent of the funds needed for infrastructure projects including potable water system, he made the project a priority.

### **Refurbishing the bad and old**

The old water system was in real bad condition. Its intake box had seepages. The pipelines were bursting and leaking, making it susceptible to contamination. And the water pressure was low.

While the water barely reached the community and met the growing demand, water-borne diseases in the community was also observed high.

Communal faucets no longer give enough water especially during peak hours. If they have to fetch water, it would take them 45 minutes to reach the nearest water supply.

People are also forced to buy commercially packaged water for drinking which entails additional expense on every household.

The rehabilitation of the water system included construction of a 67.48 cubic meter reservoir and chlorination tank, the replacement of the intake box and the main pipelines, installation of 60 units communal faucets and rerouting and replacement of distribution pipelines to better serve the community.

Now serving 2,203 population in 360 households in Brgy. San Roque, including the San Roque Elementary School, the renovated facility promoted proper hygiene in the community and people are now back to using water-sealed toilets instead of dumping human wastes in farmlands and nearby lake.

Neighboring barangays also come to avail of the clean and safe water as problem of insufficient water supply still affects other areas of the town.

## **Thankful school**

Micheal Tadulan, an alumnus of San Roque Elementary School and now grade 6 teacher here could not remember the school having its own water facility, not until today.

“Our pupils now are lucky since there is a readily accessible clean and safe water in the campus. Unlike years back when I was a pupil here, we had to go out of the campus to fetch water,” Tadulan said.

“It’s necessary to have water in the classrooms. Before, pupils were exposed to risks in fetching water outside the campus because we were near the National highway,” he added.

Today, two faucets were installed inside the campus.

“As a resident and a teacher, I am so thankful that we became beneficiaries of the projects. So, I encourage my community to protect this project and conserve water,” Tadulan said adding that there is a need to educate the community to ensure that the water system would last.

## **Community Mobilization**

The barangay council has agreed to have the facility managed by the Barangay Water and Sanitation Association (BAWASA). Monthly bills of P15 per month will be imposed to raise more revenues to sustain the project.

“We set rules and regulations which, among others, state prohibition of illegal tapping and doing laundry near the faucet,” said BAWASA Chairperson Danilo Bravo.

“Every member is also asked to guard the faucet installed near each residence,” Bravo added.

With the reduced time for fetching water, Bravo said “we expect our community to be more productive and children to have plenty of time for their studies. So I sincerely thank the government for its efforts.” □



## *Remote barangay* **CAN NOW BE REACHED**

Brgy. Gosum, Kumalarang, Zamboanga del Sur

**L**iving in the town's remotest barangay, residents felt they are not just isolated but neglected.

"We are isolated because our barangay is located at the tail-end of Kumalarang. To reach the town proper we have to pass through the town of Buug which is already part of Zamboanga Sibugay province," said barangay captain Escandal Dacula.

They also felt being neglected as basic government services could hardly reach their community.

For 50 years, farmers had been traversing the rough and narrow road in bringing their copra or corn produce to the market by riding a horse with very limited carrying capacity.

The situation is doubly difficult during rainy season as rain usually falls while they are on the road and drenched their farm produce, affecting its quality and buying price as wet copra and corn are usually sold at much cheaper price.

The alternative mode of travel which has become the conventional way in many years is to hire pump boat (motorized banca).

Lack of adequate road network had also taken its toll on small fisherfolk as they are limited to market their catch within the barangay otherwise, they hire pump boats which collect higher cost as they have to traverse along the waters of Margosatubig town.

During monsoon season when winds are strong and waves are huge, fisherfolk could hardly bring their catch to the market as it would be very risky for small boats to sail.

The need to improve the road network was eventually realized when the local government unit and MRDP partnered and established a farm-to-market road.

The 2.3 kilometer road network had brought several changes in their community. Transport of produce was cut down from more than an hour to less than 30 minutes. The mode of transportation also improved as motorcycles and other hauling vehicles can now enter their community.

“Both farmers and fisherfolk now transport their harvest and catch using the road. Better road condition has also kept the quality of their produce and command better price,” Dacula said adding that people now are inspired to get back to work.

Aside from intensifying agricultural production, the farm-to-market road in the area has also improved delivery of health services for the Gosum residents.

“Municipal midwife assigned to our barangay now regularly visits us unlike before when she can only render services every three months,” Dacula said.

“Although Barangay Gosum is the town’s remotest barangay, the current local officials did not hesitate to pour in investment in this community. The construction of the FMR marked our commitment to hasten delivery of services as well as in opening better opportunities for them,” said municipal engineer Adriano Bravo.

Recently, a USAID funded project has constructed a fish landing project

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which he attributed to the better road network.

They (USAID) had long been proposing that project but had the difficulty of transporting the construction materials.

As a Muslim-dominated community, another significant development that the road network has offered to them was the construction of two Mosques were they can now regularly fulfill their religious obligations.

Before the road, residents also lived in fear of lawless elements, who usually roamed in the area. But when the barangay is now more accessible to the police, the new road has succeeded in driving the rebels away.

“I am thankful to our LGU and MRDP for the road project they established in our community. It did not only improve our economic activities, it has also helped us strengthen our faith and given us hope that more opportunities will come our way,” Dacula said, adding:

“Now I can confidently tell my constituents that we are indeed part of Kumalarang town.” □





## *Safe water for* **THEIR PUPILS**

Brgy. Darapuay, Bansalan, Davao del Sur

**T**he newly installed faucet in Darapuay Elementary School reduced the risk of pupils from water-borne diseases and improved their academic performance.

This is how Mrs. Lanie D. Cabahug, the school in-charge, describes the impact of the newly established communal potable water system in the barangay.

“Before, our pupils have to go out from the campus to fetch water every time they have to attend to their personal necessities. This cost them valuable time at school,” Cabahug said.

“Going around the community to fetch water also exposes children to the danger of stray dogs and passing vehicles,” she said.

She added that there had been an experience when a mongrel bit one of the children as he entered one residence in the area to fetch water.

In 2007, some of our pupils were hit by diarrhea, and six children became critical. They found out that it was due to their poor hygiene owing to lack of safe water.

Today, the school has its own faucet installed in the campus. This is one of at least 35 units communal faucets installed all over the barangay.

MRDP and the local government have invested for two potable water systems in the town. The other one is in Brgy. Marber.

Aside from the school that accommodates over 450 pupils, the water system has directly benefited around 250 residents who are members of the Darapu-ay Water System Users Association (DAWASUA).

The residents themselves have long suffered the hardship of fetching clean water from makeshift wells consuming most of their productive time which could have been devoted to farming as well as in marketing their produce.

DAWASUA has included the elementary school as one of the beneficiaries by installing one faucet, as yet.

“Now, we fetch water beside our school building. It’s now easy for us and we have more time doing school activities,” said grade 6 pupil Cristine P. Limbao.

Cabahug said that the school is now planning to activate existing and install additional faucets in each classroom.

“The Department of Education has really pushed for hygiene practice in each campus but it was hard for us to comply since clean water was not available then. But now, we could really impose proper hygiene practice as potable water is now accessible within our campus,” she said.

“We are happy the municipal officials, our mayor Edwin Reyes and barangay officials actively responded to our clamor to really include the school as one of the beneficiaries of the potable water system of MRDP,” Cahabug said. □





## *Road enlivens* **RURAL ECONOMY**

Brgy. Calades, Alicia, Zamboanga Sibugay Province

“Life was still difficult then, until MRDP eases up our burden of delivering our farm produce to the market,” remarks Barangay Captain Melecio Monero of Barangay Calades.

The 37-year old Monero lives in Barangay Calades since birth. He engages in copra buy-and-sell for 15 years and heads the not less than 1,000 residents in express gladness over the opportunities ushered in by the MRDP.

Monero said: “Before barangay roads of Naga-naga-Calades-Kapatagan were improved, I had to gather as much as 3,000 kilos of copra because my financier would not haul less than this weight to maximize the fuel and tire expenses; tires often got punctured.”

As soon as MRDP improves the 8.42 kilometer farm-to-market road connecting the three barangays, anytime of the day, hauling trucks just arrive during harvest season, the barangay captain said.

Today, he reveals that his competitor is not only one but four. They just differ

in strategies to keep the farmers' patronage because their buying price is almost the same with those buyers in the Poblacion.

He observed that the economic activity in his barangay is more vibrant with at least 10 "sari-sari" stores while a lot of single motorcycles plying from one barangay to the other are available, providing easy transport for students and anyone who sells his yield to the market.

One remarkable development in Barangay Calades, according to Monero is the gradual return of landowners who for quite sometime left their lands idle as they were discouraged to cultivate their lands because of huge labor cost due to very poor farm-to-market road.

He said that the market price of land in their barangay increased compared to the prevailing price two years back.

The businessman punong barangay happily claims that gone are the days that he stumbles and falls from his motorcycle loaded with copra while traversing the slippery and narrow trail to the Poblacion.

One 52 year old farmer, Ismael Velasco who moved from Barangay Kapatagan to Calades for the sake of his children's schooling, is also grateful for the government's effort to improve rural life.

"Ten years ago, my family left Kapatagan because it is too far for my children to go to school," he said.

Today, his youngest daughter, Angelie is already a second year high school studying at the Poblacion. "Angelie can accessibly go to school and comes home through a motorcycle compared to her older siblings who had to walk more than three kilometers because no other means of transportation was available then.

"I harvests his coconut and rubber in Kapatagan, I don't worry anymore that hauling truck won't arrive because ambulant buyers just come roving around the neighboring Calades and Kapatangan barangays. □





## *Bridging* **PRODUCTIVITY & SAFETY**

Brgy. Magsaysay, Polomolok, South Cotabato

**T**hey used to cross a narrow lane of a makeshift bamboo bridge to reach town proper while the eminent danger of falling into heavy boulders and scouring floodwater of a widened creek underneath is with their every step.

This is among the difficulties endured for years by the residents of Purok Masagana.

Aside from the dangers it poses to the residents, it has also affected the income of farmers in the area.

“For such a long time, we were bothered by the dangers of crossing the narrow bridge. During heavy rains the situation is even more difficult as the water from the creek overflows causing the bridge to collapse. Most of the residents have no choice but to stay at home and wait for the water to subside or the bridge to be rebuilt,” Iluminda Jaranilla, a former purok leader said.

“Since no vehicle can cross the bridge, we need to double haul our produce and pay an additional P10 per sack,” said Eduardo Salarsa adding:



“Double hauling oftentimes damage the quality of our produce especially vegetables. Once damaged we can no longer command higher price and worst buyers will reject it,” he said.

As a grandfather Salarsa is also happy to note that with the permanent bridge, his grandson can now safely cross the creek and study at the adjacent day care center.

Jaranilla recounted there were several attempts to construct a permanent structure to make the creek safely passable but did not materialize. “We are glad that our local officials have finally realized our long time dream,” she said.

“As a farmer I am happy that the vehicle can now directly carry my produce to the market. The need to double haul my produce was eliminated which means reduction of more than one half of the transport cost. The savings would also mean increase in my income,” Salarsa said.

Thanks to the two barrel box-type culvert constructed in their sitio, the difficulties and dangers of crossing the makeshift bridge are now just water under the bridge. The construction of the said infrastructure was made possible through the partnership of the local government unit of Polomok and the MRDP.

Polomolok Mayor Isidro Lumayag said he prioritized putting up of necessary infrastructure in production areas to promote farm productivity.

“Aside from sustaining the town’s economic growth, the bridge in Sitio Masagana has also secured the lives of the residents as they go along with daily activities,” he added.

When asked if how they can do their share in the operation and maintenance of the bridge, Barangay Captain Emmanuel Labrador said they are already planning to come-up with flood control activities as well as in regulating the use of the bridge based on its required capacity.

“If there was one good thing that the old bridge has brought us, it was on how we have enlivened the bayanihan spirit. Now that our dream of having a permanent bridge has become a sparkling reality, I am confident that everyone here is more than willing to maintain its utility,” Labrador said. □



## *Multiple benefits* **FROM SINGLE-LANE BRIDGES**

### Compostela Valley Province

**R**eduction of postharvest losses and transport cost, safety, and convenience. These are just some of the numerous benefits the beneficiaries enjoy in this province.

Thanks to the single lane bridges constructed in Barangay Anibogan in Maco and in Barangay Tubo-tubo in Monkayo.

Anibongan barangay captain, Antonio Ang said the construction of the 15-meter Reinforced Concrete Deck Girder (RCDG) bridge has greatly improved the living condition not only of farmers but the rest of the populace.

The construction of the bridge is vital in facilitating residents' daily activities. Farmers use it in transporting their products to the market while students use it on their way to school.

The RCDG bridge which was constructed under the MRDP's rural infrastructure component has reduced by half the traveling distance from 14 kilometers to only 7 kilometers.

“We used to travel for at least 14 kilometers in delivering our produce to Tagum City. The long travel time does not only entail higher transport cost but also affect the quality of our produce as bumpy road can cause bruises to our vegetable and banana produce,” Ang said.

Our town market cannot absorb all our produce, hence we need to sell it to bigger market such as Tagum City or else a great volume of it will only be wasted,” he said.

Students, on the other hand, have their own share of difficulty in crossing the river especially during heavy rains as the current gets strong making it risky for small children to cross the river.

In times like this, parents would rather advise their children to be absent from class than risking their lives while crossing the river.

Enjoying the safety and convenience in discharging their daily routine, Ang said his constituents as well as residents from other seven neighboring barangays were truly grateful to their local government and MRDP.

“We are grateful and happy for the safety, the convenience and many other benefits we get from the construction of the bridge,” Ang said.

Faced with the same problem of inaccessibility, farmers in Barangay Tubo-tubo in Monkayo are now enjoying similar benefits from a newly constructed RCDG bridge in the area.

The single-lane bridge which was also part of MRDP's rural infrastructure project was a replacement of a dilapidated Pilian Bailey Bridge.

“It is (bailey bridge) the shortest route in going to the poblacion. After it collapsed, vehicles have to cross the river which becomes impassable when water level rises during heavy rain,” a farmer here said.

“Before motorcycle was the only mode of transportation which aside from posing danger to its passengers it also makes our farm produce vulnerable to bruises and mishandling while in transit,” he said.

After the bridge was completed, farmers can now transport their produce through a four-wheel vehicle which does not only enable them to save time but also preserve the quality of their produce when it reaches the market.

“This increased the selling price of our products particularly banana which demands better quality from buyers,” he said. □

**Community Fund for  
Agricultural Development  
(CFAD)**



**CFAD** aims to increase agricultural production and rural incomes. It also aims to empower communities and the disadvantage sector (indigenous people and rural women) by providing funds and technical assistance to generate savings and manage investments for rural development.





## *Rice against* **POVERTY**

### Zamboanga del Sur

**F**armers in this province are resolved that despite difficulties in producing rice, the crop is their best bet to rise from poverty.

Armed with modest credit assistance, two rice farmers' associations in the towns of Tigbao and Kumalarang have made significant progress in their lives.

Farmers in Barangay Begong in Tigbao now heave a sigh of relief after recovering from high-interest debts incurred from non-formal lenders.



Begong People's Organization (BPO) president Rommel Alegarbes said lack of financial capital was a major constraint among rice farmers like him as they needed to purchase necessary inputs such as fertilizers and pesticides.

"Having no access to financial assistance, we are left with no option but to borrow money from traders-lenders who usually put interest as high as 30 percent," Alegarbes said.

Part of their borrowing agreement was for farmers to directly sell their produce to these trader-lenders who dictated low buying price. This unfair financial arrangement usually short-changed the farmers and plunged them to even bigger debts.

"Unless we have other financial means only then we can recover from incurring huge debts," Alegarbes added.

### **Breaking-free from huge debts**

Their break came when the municipal government endorsed them as one of the beneficiaries of MRDP.

Through the Community Fund for Agricultural Development (CFAD), the program's livelihood component, the association was able to access funds for their proposed rice production project in June 2010.

"The P250, 000 funds they received was used to finance the rice production of 23 members during the previous cropping season. The farmers agreed that the money borrowed by its members will have a 10 percent interest which is a much lower amount compared to non-formal lenders who charged 30 percent or more," said agricultural technician Josephine Natinga.

"Prompt repayment is strictly observed so that roll-over funds will be extended to next in-line beneficiaries," she added.

"This opportunity to relieve ourselves from high-interest lending happens only once; so we need to observe the policy to sustain our livelihood," Alegarbes said.

Alberto Umas one of the members who availed himself of the CFAD funds said that aside from paying his debts he has also bought ducks and chicken to augment his income.

"I told my co-members to learn from my experience. Life was too difficult then but now I can look forward to better income. I can choose where to sell my palay at much better price," he said.

"I am glad that the assistance I received from CFAD enabled me to recover from huge debts incurred during the previous cropping seasons and allowed me to start anew," he added.

## Acquiring valuable assets

On the other hand, farmers in Barangay Gawil, Kumalarang have acquired farm implements to further boost their scarce financial resources.

Similar to Begong, Gawil is another major rice producing area in Zamboanga del Sur where farmers are heavily dependent in growing rice as their livelihood.

Valentin Pabinguit of the Gawil Farmers Irrigator's Association (GFIA) said the funding they have availed from CFAD was used to purchase certified seeds, fertilizers and pesticides. These were distributed to their members as their inputs for the cropping period.

"It would be better to provide farm inputs instead of cash so that funds will be actually spent in rice production. Farmers will have no way of spending the allocated funds for other means such as gambling and drinking," Pabinguit said.

Pabinguit said the farm inputs were given not as dole out but loan which in turn the farmers will pay in cash with 10 percent interest. Such interest is more affordable compared to 30 percent interest from non-formal lenders.

Aside from financing, lack of adequate farm equipment is another limiting factor for these rice farmers to improve their production and income. The bulk of expenses go to rental of farm equipment during land preparation and harvest season.

"Private individuals are earning much from rental fees of their farm equipment. However, renting the equipment is sometimes difficult as they have to prioritize their own farming activities," Pabinguit said, adding:

"We have decided to buy thresher, hand tractor, and a carabao as draft animal from the last tranche of funds downloaded to our association. This will not only address availability of farm equipment but also in augmenting our scarce financial resources," he added.

The farm equipment and draft animal they have acquired are available for rent at P1, 500 for GFIA members and P1, 600 for non-members. Based on the report of their treasurer Laurencio Gaudencio, the association earned at least P15, 000 from the previous cropping season, giving them enough amount for equipment maintenance with extra amount for their savings.

Pabinguit said members are made to realize that they have to pay the amount of the inputs as well as the rental fees after they have harvested their crop. He said farmers preferred to rent the association's equipment not only because it is cheaper but they have a share of its income.

"We are strict in implementing our policies particularly on repayment so that each member will not be complacent with their duties and responsibilities. Timely repayment of loans will also allow our association to expand our services to next-in-line beneficiaries," he said.

The association has almost doubled the funds they have availed themselves of as their total assets (farm equipment and draft animal) amounted to P111,000 plus a collectible of P106,000 from loan of members and rental fees.

Pabinguit is optimistic that rice production in their barangay will continue to be profitable now that farmers are gradually liberating themselves from huge debts.

The association is planning to expand its services from farm input-lending to palay trading to further boost their financial resources and at the same time offer good buying price to their members.

“The financial assistance provided to us through MRDP and our LGU has given us the opportunity not only to improve our income but also on how we can sustain rice production as a profitable farming activity,” Pabinguit said. □





## *From veggies to* **CALLA LILIES**

Brgy. Songco, Lantapan, Bukidnon

**F**amous for being the province's leading vegetable producer, rural women here have also seen the potential of cutflower as a good source of income.

While the town's cool climate and fertile lands make it ideal for growing vegetables, it is also suited for growing high value cutflower particularly Calla lily.

"An Igorot immigrant from Benguet brought Calla lily bulbs here in our barangay way back in 1970s. Having almost similar climate with Benguet's, the lilies thrived well," recounted Salvacion Longjas, the chair of the Songco's Rural Improvement Club (SoRIC).

Having seen how Calla lily's vibrant foliage and well-shaped white flower blooms, Longjas and other women were fascinated and could not help but

grow the plant on their own backyards.

Little did they know that aside from beautifying their landscape it has huge demand among florists as the long stem and white flower fits as a décor in special occasions either as table centerpiece or bridal bouquet.

“A trader came here and offered to buy the flowers from our backyards. She even asked us if we can supply up to 1,000 dozens a week. It was only then that we realized the potential of Calla lily as a good source of income,” she said.

Longjas said their group also learned that meeting huge demand would require them to improve cultural practices and expand production area. It also needs necessary inputs such as fertilizers as well as additional shoots and bulbs.

“Since we lack financial resources to address production constraints, we sought the assistance of the local government unit. We are glad that they endorsed our association to be one of the beneficiaries of the MRDP’s CFAD component so we were able to access funds to start up a microenterprise venture,” Longjas said.

Through their proposed Calla lily project, the SoRIC was given P100, 000 which they used to purchase organic fertilizer and additional planting materials for expansion.

“At present we only supply a small volume of cutflower ranging from two to six dozens per member per month. Now that we have funds to expand and improve our production we are confident that we can cope up with the demand and eventually make good profit from Calla lily,” Longjas enthuses.

She said that although they are earning a little just yet, the benefits of venturing into Calla lily project are already felt among the SoRIC members.

“We used to be idle before, just relying only on our husbands to make both ends meet. Now we can look forward to additional source of income and at the same time learn how to work together to become a productive women organization,” Longjas said. □





Brgy. Sibulan, Sta. Cruz, Davao del Sur

Indigenous peoples (IPs) here seize the opportunity of growing lakatan banana for an increasing local market.

Their barangay's high elevation is a plus factor as bananas grown in these areas are observed to be sweeter and bigger than those in the lowland.

"Traders from Davao City and Gen. Santos City are coming over in our community just to buy our lakatan banana. This came after they have found out that the bananas grown here are not only bigger but also sweeter," said

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Danilo Abe, chairman of the Sibulan Upland Farmers Association (SUFA).

Although they have already realized the potential of growing lakatan banana, Abe said financial constraint limits them from expanding their production area. Among the inputs needed include quality and clean planting materials as well as appropriate amount of fertilizer.

“We are glad that the local government unit of Sta. Cruz endorsed our association to be one of the beneficiaries of the MRDP so we were able to access funds for expansion of our banana production,” Abe said.

Through the proposed banana lakatan production project funded under MRDP’s CFAD component, the SUFA was given P250,000 for purchase of tissue-cultured planting materials and organic fertilizer.

“The inputs were turned over to at least 67 household members. After 16 months these beneficiaries can already harvest and initially pay back the amount they have received which will be used for our next in-line beneficiaries,” Abe said.

Abe added that aside from financial assistance, the local agriculture office also trained the farmer-beneficiaries on recommended technologies to improve their farming practices.

He said traders buy their lakatan all-in at P13.00 a kilo which is already reasonable. With the expansion of lakatan production, Abe said their association looks forward to a more promising business enterprise as they can consolidate enough supply and negotiate for better price.

Tribal chieftain Gideon Tolentino for his part said they are glad that the development programs such as MRDP are giving priorities to IPs. The lakatan banana production not only boosts their incomes, it also conforms to their tribal’s cultural practice.

“It is environment-friendly as we don’t need to cut our existing trees. Lakatan bananas are being intercropped with our coconut, durian, lanzones and other trees. We are also using organic fertilizer,” he said. □



## *The poor's* **SUNSHINE INDUSTRY**

Brgy. Palao, Libungan, North Cotabato

**G**oat is considered as poor farmer's livestock but for rural folks here, raising goats turned out to be a stockpot of gold.

Once living in a depressed community, the residents of Sitio Midal are now earning well from goat raising.

"For years, we were engaged in destructive kaingin just to earn income but still we can barely make both ends meet," said Tarcela Tondag, chairperson of the Hugpong sa Kauswagan, the community's people's organization (PO).

Aside from causing harm to the environment, Tondag said they also realized that kaingin as livelihood is not sustainable so they have to look for other source of income.

Their break came when the local agriculture office organized them into PO to avail themselves of livelihood assistance from the MRDP.

After series of consultations, the group formed their PO and decided to venture in goat production as their livelihood under the MRDP's Community Fund for Agricultural Development (CFAD).

Tondag said that they preferred to raise goats since it needs only low initial capital investment. Goats also required low maintenance because they eat on

tree leaves, grasses, weeds, and agricultural by-products.

“Goats also multiply fast which enable us to produce more offspring for next in-line beneficiaries to also avail themselves of the project,” she added.

In December 1999, the PO were given P148,000 pesos which they bought for 51 heads of goats and distributed to 17 members as the first line of beneficiaries. Aside from the financial support, the agriculture office also trained them on goat production technologies.

“We learned that one of the important considerations in goat raising is the feeding systems. Although grasses are abundant in our area, we planted the recommended forages and legumes so that we can improve the quality of our stocks. Among the forages and legumes they planted include Ransonii, Flemengia, Indigofera, and Madre de Cacao,” Tondag said.

Tondag said the bayanihan spirit was also awaken in their community as goat houses were built using readily available materials such as bamboo poles while residents offered labor services for free.

From the initial of 51 heads the PO is now supplying the local meat market of at least an average of 30 goats every six months. Records from their PO show that about 514 heads of goats (amounting to P444,690) had been sold to various buyers usually from the adjacent town of Midsayap.

Sitio Midal is now famous as source of good quality of goat’s meat in Libungan. Tondag said marketing of goats is not a problem as every week buyers come to their community just to purchase goats. This is more favorable to them as they no longer spend hauling fees. “When buyers directly come to us, we can demand better price since it means they are in need of goat’s meat,” she said.

### **Acquiring valuable assets**

PO member Josephine Misamin recounted how the goat raising project enabled her daughter to graduate from college.

“From the six heads of goat I availed myself of, I already sold at least 45 heads. Every semester, I set aside five heads of goats and sell them in time for payment of tuition and other school fees,” she said.

Misamin is proud that out of her small enterprise her daughter was able to graduate from college. Aside from providing the education which she considers her most valuable legacy, she has also fulfilled her family’s long time dream of acquiring a piece of land. Their family is now tending the five-hectare land planted to coconut, corn, and rubber.

Beyond providing the basic needs of Sitio Midal’s residents, another good thing the goat raising project brought to the community was the confidence on their capacity to implement livelihood projects.

Municipal agriculturist Jimmy Fullecido said after the success of goat raising project other development projects started to pour in the community.

“There is now a primary school, electricity, and a postharvest facility. The social preparation conducted for the CFAD project boost their confidence to lobby support from the local government as well as other donor institution,” he said.

### **Observing organizational policy**

Tondag added that the strict implementation of their organization’s policy also helped in sustaining their project. Every member was made to realize that the goats they availed themselves of was a loan from the funding agencies so they have to pay back the required amount. They were also made to understand the need for repayment for other members to also benefit the same opportunity given to them.

Having a good track record in implementing livelihood project, the PO’s proposal for the second phase of MRDP was immediately approved. This time, the PO proposed for a carabao dispersal project since carabao, like goats, require only low capital investments.

“While we continue to raise goats, the carabao dispersal project will help our farmers in expanding their farming activities,” Tondag added.

“If it were not for the MRDP and our municipal government, our community will not be as alive as it is today. Surely, the goat raising project did not only raised our income but also our confidence in working together to make our lives productive,” Tondag said. □





*NPA's*  
**NO MORE**

Brgy. Awao, Sta. Josefa, Agusan del Sur

“**W**e were NPAs,” she said in jest as she wiped the beads of sweat off her brow.

This was how Melanie Rosauro described their life before, having no permanent address looking for work in farms to eke out a living.

“It was difficult. We moved from one town to another, we didn’t have our own house,” Melanie said.

“Even my children were not able to go to school regularly because of such situation since we hardly make both ends meet,” she said.

But her family’s plight ended up in the fertile lands of Sta. Josefa town in Agusan del Sur after relocating from Bansalan, Davao del Sur at least 150 kilometers away.

With her husband, Rosilito chairman of Awao High Value Vegetable Growers Association, they encouraged their fellow small farmers to engage in vegetable farming.

The people’s organization (PO) with 30 members had been a beneficiary of the first phase of the MRDP in 2002.



With the initial funding of P150,000 they rented two hectares of scattered lands planted to watermelon which is not only suitable in the area but has a high potential market.

From watermelon, they expanded into growing high value vegetable after noting that there was a huge demand in their locality and the neighboring towns.

Currently, most PO-growers are producing vegetables such as ampalaya, eggplant, tomato, squash, okra, and string beans, collectively termed as “pinakbet type vegetables.”

“Pinakbet type vegetables are more in demand among households compared to “chopsuey types” such as Chinese cabbage, bell pepper and carrot that are usually preferred only by institutional buyers such as carenderias and offices,” Melanie said.

For the PO to ensure year-round supply of vegetables and sustain their income, a clustering method in vegetable production was adopted where each group of five PO members is assigned to grow a particular crop.

“If one group is assigned to grow eggplant, another group is assigned to grow ampalaya, and another group is assigned to grow tomato. While few members continue to grow the chopsuey type,” she explained.

Since cost of inputs and prices of vegetable crop differ, the assignment of growing crop rotates among the group.

“With the scheduled planting and harvesting, we avoid saturating the market and keep buying prices steady,” she said adding that this also helped them increase their production volume and consequently their incomes.

Melanie said during peak season, they usually harvest at least 1,000 kilos of vegetables per month. This means that for a thousand square meter area planted to ampalaya, growers will have a gross income of at least P40,000 a month if sold at prevailing market price of P40 per kilo.

For tomato, growers can have a gross income of at least P30,000 a month while growers of squash can have at least P12,000 a month.

On the average, each farmer can earn from P6, 000.00 to P8, 000.00 a month which is enough to support their household needs.

### **Taking veggie to the next level**

Melanie observed that ample production does not mean bigger profits as oftentimes they fall prey to traders who buy their produce at a much lower price. They have also realized that the quality of vegetables is another major factor to command premium price.



“Vegetables are highly perishable. If they come from far flung areas like in our case, they are close to wilting by the time they reach the market,” Melanie said.

“If only our PO have a hauling truck then we can immediately deliver our produce in the market and can negotiate for better price,” she added.

In 2007, when the phase two of MRDP’s CFAD component started accepting proposals for livelihood projects, the PO proposed for the expansion of their vegetable production, but this time putting attention to better marketing.

Having shown good performance during the first phase of MRDP implementation, their proposal was immediately approved which enabled them to avail of the financial assistance from MRDP and the LGU of Sta. Josefa. Major part of the amount received was spent in procurement of hauling truck to overcome constraints in transporting and marketing of their produce.

The PO then purchased a multi-cab which they converted into a hauling truck that delivers their consolidated vegetable produce not only to Sta. Josefa but also to the public market in adjacent towns such as Patin-ay, Trento, and San Francisco, and as far as Ormoc City in Leyte Province.

“We need to make use of our multi-cab to have a regular income and at the same time maintain our regular buyers,” Melanie said.

Since quality is a major factor towards marketability of vegetable produce, the PO continues to adopt recommended technologies they learned either through training or from their own experiences. These include mulching, protective net, and production of organic fertilizers. Aware that organic vegetable production has a promising niche market, the PO is now looking into the possibility of producing organically-grown vegetables.

“Marketing is not really a problem as long as you will continue to seek ways to improve the quality as well as the availability of your produce,” Melanie said.

## **Residing in a peaceful community**

“Before we considered ourselves NPAs as we move from one town to another just to be hired as farm hands. Now, although small, my family was able to build our own house and have a potable water supply. We are tending our own farm and can look forward to having a regular income,” Melanie said of the project’s impact on their lives.

“And my children are now regularly attending school in the nearby public elementary school,” she added.

Melanie and her family are no longer afraid of moving and settling somewhere else as vegetable farming found them not just a home but a thriving and peaceful community. □



## *Productive amidst* **SUNSET YEARS**

Carmen, Surigao del Sur

**T**hey spent more than half of their lives in the farm, weathered the scorching heat of the sun or the pouring of the heavy rains just to produce rice and earn a living for their families.

Now in their sunset years, the members of the Senior Citizens Organization (SCO) in this town still work hard but sans the painstaking field works.

This after their organization was able to put up a mechanical dryer facility servicing more than 400 hectares of rice farms.

“Since we can no longer endure the hard labor in the field, our children are now the ones tending our crop. But we cannot just be idle for we need to continuously help our family earn a living,” said Simplicia Lumanao, one of the SCO members.

Lumanao said the project is manageable to fellow senior citizens as it will not require much time and effort compared to fulltime farming.

She added that a viable dryer facility was a long felt need since erratic weather conditions had greatly affected the quality of their produce and income.

“We had experienced several losses due to lack of postharvest facility especially during rainy season. Palay if not properly dried results to poor milling quality. The rice is either broken or spotted which cannot command better price,” Lumanao said.

Much as they would like to help address the need to improve postharvest practices in their community, they are hampered by financial constraints.

“Although operating a dryer facility could help boost our organization’s hardly earned income, mostly taken from our membership contributions and loaning services, we cannot afford such investment,” said Zenaida Felix, the organization treasurer.

After learning that the MRDP is providing livelihood assistance to farming communities, their organization did not hesitate to come-up with their corresponding equity.

Out of the total project cost of P794,000.00 the SCO was able to provide a counterpart amount of P244, 000.00, one of the biggest PO cash equity so far. The said amount was taken from the savings of their 83 senior citizen members. The barangay government unit also provided P50, 000.00 while the remaining P500,000.00 was a grant from the MRDP’s CFAD component.

“We are the only ones with mechanical drying facility in Carmen, so we expect our project to earn more in the years to come,” Felix said.

Felix said a net income of P15, 378.00 was attained during the initial operation of the facility in 2009. She is optimistic that a return of investment will be attained soon since the mechanical dryer is the only operating postharvest facility in the community.

For the elderly farmers of Carmen, investing in postharvest facility is not only a means to reduce postharvest losses and improve their families’ incomes but also as a way of securing self worth even on their twilight years. □



*Higa-onons profit from*  
**SWEET PEA**

Impasug-ong, Bukidnon

**S**weet pea, the most expensive vegetable legume in the country, thrives in this town's hilly areas and the indigenous tribe is taking advantage of its abundance.

Locally known as “*sitsaro*”, sweet pea is a popular ingredient for “*chopsuey*”

and “*pancit*”. It is also an important addition in soups, sautés, and dishes with mushroom, bamboo shoots, and shrimps.

Sweet peas contain considerable amounts of digestible protein, carbohydrate, and minerals, while the green pods are rich sources of Vitamin A.

No wonder sweet pea is one of the high valued vegetables in the market.

The Higa-onon tribe in this town had long seen sweet pea’s potential as a cash crop especially that it grows well in high elevated areas such as theirs.

“Our soil is fertile and our cool climate is favorable in growing this crop,” said Emily Lunda, one of the officers of the Dumalaguing Tribal Farmers Association (DTFA).

Lunda said aside from growing vegetables, their other source of income is planting coffee and abaca, but if given enough financing, they could have expanded their sweet pea production as the high demand for the crop could further boost their incomes.

“What limits us to produce enough sweet peas is the lack of financing for fertilizer and other inputs,” she said.

When the local agriculture office endorsed their proposal as one of the livelihood projects under the MRDP, their association was able to access at least P250, 000 to finance expansion of their sweet pea production.

Initially, 26 DTFA beneficiaries with one fourth hectare each availed themselves of a start-up capital for sweet pea production.

“The bulk of the funds was used to purchase fertilizer and other materials such as trellising which in turn helped increase and improved the quality of our yield,” Lunda said.

Lunda herself has expanded her sweet pea production from only few hills to one fourth hectare. Her initial harvest of 80 kilos was sold at P90 per kilo which was able to earn a gross income of P7, 200. However she was able to earn more during her fourth harvest as she was able to harvest 150 kilos.

Like other vegetable crop, sweet pea has its peak and lean seasons as the production can be susceptible to pests and diseases especially during rainy season. Since supply is limited at this time, farmgate price is much higher giving better income to those with abundant harvest.

Andrea Tuminao, another beneficiary, was able to harvest at least 434 kilos of sweet pea from July to August last year and earned at least P26, 000.00 which enabled her to fully pay the financing she received from CFAD.

Lunda said that repayment from 26 initial beneficiaries is doing good as there are now 43 beneficiaries benefiting from the association’s roll-over funds.

“Marketing was never a problem as not all farmers especially those in the

low land can produce high quality sweet pea such as ours,” she said.

Although the association was one of the rare producers of sweet pea, the municipal agriculture office had introduced them the idea of calendar planting.

“We told them not to plant at the same time and observe proper planting schedule. A group of three farmers planted sweet pea two weeks ahead while the following batch planted the crop two weeks after,” said agricultural technician Dayana Padilla.

Padilla said calendar planting will eliminate supply glut and for farmers to have continual supply at almost stable and competitive price.

“Our income from sweet pea has helped us a lot in augmenting our regular income. Before, we could barely make both ends meet, but with additional income, we can now buy more than our daily needs such as decent clothing, kitchenware, and necessary appliances,” Lunda said.

“We are now known as producers of high quality sweet pea and I urged the members of our association to keep it that way. We have to pay back the money given to us so that others could also benefit and at the same time we could sustain our livelihood,” she said. □





## *A lift for* **PHL's CACAO CAPITAL**

Brgy. Dacudao, San Isidro, Davao del Norte

**C**acao is an important source of income for small farmers in the countryside.

Lately, demand for cacao beans has increased. The Department of Agriculture (DA) has reported that Mars Inc. in the United States is interested in the country's cacao beans.

To meet the strong demand for cacao, DA expects that this year's cacao production will produce 10,000 to 15,000 metric tons and by 2016, cacao bean production is expected to hit 75,000 to 100,000 metric tons.

In Davao Region, the town of San Isidro had been dubbed as the cacao capital of the country where numerous farmers are earning from cacao production.

"Out of the 15,000 hectares agricultural lands, 4,000 hectares are devoted to cacao production," said Rene Pintor, San Isidro's municipal agriculturist.

Pintor is optimistic that bright prospects await the local cacao industry as it has a recognized reputation as major producer of cacao not only in the region but the entire country.

“Lately, we have foreign visitors from US and Europe exploring the possibilities for San Isidro to supply materials for cocoa and chocolate production,” Pintor said.

Although there is huge potential for their local cacao industry, Pintor noted that much needs to be done to meet the required volume and improve its quality.

With this, the MRDP has poured in investments to improve cacao production among smallholder farmers in the community.

Cacao production can be an effective poverty alleviation tool for numerous farmers in the region and could be a viable source of income without disrupting the existing crop or tree crop activities.

Through the MRDP’s livelihood component, CFAD, three farmer cooperatives received a check of P250, 000 pesos for expansion of cacao production in the area.

“The assistance was used to provide quality planting materials particularly UF18 and BR25 varieties which are known to produce bigger beans and also less susceptible to pests and diseases,” said agricultural technician Alberto Arangis.

A total of 38 members availed themselves of at least 200 cacao seedlings each. Aside from planting materials, the members also availed themselves of fertilizers and other farm inputs.

Bernardino Intig, board member of the Mabuhay Farmers’ Multipurpose Cooperative (MFMC) said their cooperative is now producing at last 30 sacks per month of 50-60 kilos per sack.

Intig said farmers in their cooperative are selling their produce to Chocolate de San Isidro (CSI) a confederation of cacao farmers’ cooperative of which MFMC is a member.

CSI consolidates the cacao produce and sells it to bigger market in Davao City. In consolidating the cacao produced in San Isidro, CSI can maintain the volume required by its regular market.

“At present, our cooperative (MFMC) cannot yet supply the volume requirements of big markets. So, we join the CSI to help us in marketing our produce. In return our cooperative was allowed to buy stocks and eventually became one of its stockholders,” Intig said.

Aside from meeting the required volume, local cacao farmers are also working on ensuring the quality of their beans. An improved post harvest practice puts premium on meeting the quality standards.

“Our cooperative maintains a mechanical dryer which keeps the quality of our harvested beans. It also provided us additional income as we charge P25.00 per sack of beans dried in our facility,” Intig said.

Aware that much still needs to be done for small farmers like him to make it big in cacao production, Intig said their cooperative is working its way to meet not only the required volume and quality standard but also in providing their members more adequate facilities.

“We are thankful for MRDP in helping us expand our cacao production. Once the cacao we have planted will be in full bloom, our town will continue to live up to its name as the country’s cacao capital,” he said. □



## *Sailing for* **BETTER CATCH**

Brgy. Doyos, Carrascal, Surigao del Sur

**F**isherfolk here are now enjoying the increase of their catch from barely 5 kilograms to at least 50 kilograms a day.

This, after their organization has owned pump boats that enabled them to go on regular fishing.

“For several years, we used to just hitch-ride with the pump-boat of some fishers limiting not only our catch but the frequency of our fishing activities,” said Tito Garcia, chairman of Doyos Eastern Coast Fishermen Consumers Cooperative (DECFISCOCO).

Garcia said fishing is their only means of livelihood but having less than 5 kilograms of fish as an average catch would not be enough for their families to survive.

Having used to sail on deep waters, he and his fellow fisherfolk have learned to brave various elements as well as discovered areas where fishes abound. What limits their capacity to increase their catch is the lack of fishing vessel.

Sharing the same sentiments, Garcia along with his fellow fisherfolk banded together and sought the help of their local government for a provision

of motorized fishing vessel. Aware of their plight, the municipal government of Carrascal and the Department of Agriculture in Caraga region considered them to be one of the beneficiaries of MRDP.

Through the MRDP's CFAD component, the cooperative received a grant of P200 thousand for their hook and line fishing project. The said amount was then used to purchase pump boats and fishing gears.

Aside from the financial grant, the cooperative officials and members were also trained on simple financial management and procurement. The training proved to be effective as it has helped the fisherfolk internalize their respective roles in the cooperative.

"The training has guided us on how we can efficiently utilize our financial resources. Our procurement committee ensured that purchasing of motorized vessel would not only be transparent but advantageous to the cooperative," Garcia said.

"When we prepared the budget for the purchase of pump boats, we based it on the prevailing price in Butuan City which was the available quotation then. But before we finalized the procurement, the committee canvassed in other areas and found out that purchasing pump-boats in Surigao City will be much cheaper compared to Butuan City due to savings on transport cost," he said.

Consequently, the savings allowed them to buy two more pump-boats to serve additional beneficiaries.

Aside from practicing better procurement, DECFISCOCO also firmly observed cost-recovery schemes to make their project sustainable. To date, four members had already paid back the P25, 000 they have availed themselves while owning their own pump-boat. From their repayment, the cooperative again bought four additional pump-boats for next-in-line beneficiaries.

"From having no fishing vessels before, we now enjoy the utility of 11 pump-boats. We thank the MRDP as well as our local officials for the valuable assistance they have given to us. We can now regularly fish, increase our catch, and provide daily sustenance to our families," Garcia enthuses.

Aside from fishing, he said their cooperative is planning to engage in fish vending where they can directly sell their catch to walk-in traders. The cooperative is also working on providing livelihood such as vegetable gardening and piggyery to their housewives so they can also be productive. □





## *The farmers'* **RELIABLE PARTNER**

### Brgy. Esperanza, Carmen, Surigao del Sur

**T**he introduction of modern farming techniques has relegated the lowly carabao in the background. The use of tractors and other farm machineries in most farms reduced the farmers' dependence on carabao's draft power.

But for small farmers in Barangay Esperanza, the carabao remains as their constant companion in doing majority of their farming activities.

"The carabao helps us a lot during land preparation as well as in transporting our farms' inputs and produce," said Castor Taladua, the chairman of Esperanza Irrigators' Multipurpose Cooperative (EIMC).

Taladua said most of the farmers of their cooperative prefer carabao over hand tractor since the animal does not require maintenance, adding that not all areas in their barangays are irrigated making it difficult for hand tractor to till their land.

"Although it would only require minimal amount to own a carabao, small farmers can hardly afford to acquire one. Most of us just rely on renting the animal during land preparation which adds up to our financial expenses," he said.

Realizing the need to raise their own carabao, the small farmers turned to their municipal government which eventually endorsed their cooperative as one of the beneficiaries of the MRDP.



John Gamboa, DA-Caraga regional livestock chief said through the program's CFAD, the coop members availed themselves of one packet of carabao (ten females and one male) in 2008.

"Since only few members were able to avail of the dispersal, they agreed that recipients must turnover the offspring to their coop for distribution to next-in-line beneficiaries," Gamboa said.

Taladua said those who availed themselves of the dispersed animals now claimed that they save at least P2,000.00 as they no longer pay for labor and animal rental. He also reported that two animals are now pregnant and expected to deliver their offspring in a few months.

"We also agreed that recipients should take care of their own animals. They should not also over burden their carabaos particularly in carrying heavy objects such as log timber," he said.

One good thing that happened with the animal dispersal project was it developed the "*bayanihan*" spirit among its members. For members to maximize the availability of draft animal, at least five persons take turn in tilling a hectare of land.

"We are grateful to DA-MRDP for providing us necessary assistance as it eases our farming activities and leads to better opportunities," Taladua said.

For small farmers like him, carabao will not only continue to be the symbol of patience, hardwork, and strength but also of hope and better opportunities. □



## *Bananas for* **P.E.A.C.E.**

### Brgy. Panampawan, Claveria, Misamis Oriental

**F**or decades now, majority of farmers in this town relied on vegetable production as main source of income. They attribute this to the town's high elevation and cool climate which are ideal for growing vegetables.

"Going around the community, you can easily notice how vegetable crops such as cabbage, Chinese cabbage, tomato, sweet pepper, and beans grow in abundance," said Ferdinand Ascuna, chairman of the Panampawan Ecological Association for Culture and Economy (PEACE), a small farmers' organization.

"Although vegetables thrive well in our community, we realize that we cannot just rely on one commodity if we are to increase our incomes," he said.

Ascuna recounted the time when cabbage was just bought as low as P3.00 a kilo giving an income not even enough to cover for transportation cost. "We need to venture into other high-value crops that can command better price," he added.

One of the crops they have seen to have marketing potential is lakatan banana as more buyers are coming to their area looking for steady supply. Compared to vegetables, the price of lakatan banana is also relatively stable. Prevailing farm gate price of lakatan is around P20.00 a kilo. Moreover, bananas grown in highly elevated areas like Claveria can even command premium price as they are observed to be sweeter and bigger.

“At least five to six buyers are coming every other day to buy lakatan banana from us but we cannot cope with their increasing demand as we only have limited area planted to banana,” he said.

Lakatan banana is now becoming Filipinos favorite fruit dessert. More canteens and eateries across the country are selling the fruit by piece instead of bunch making it more affordable for Filipino consumers. For Ascuna, the increasing demand for lakatan banana is an opportunity that their organization should not miss as this can be transformed to increasing income for small farmers. While they have the area suitable for growing lakatan banana, financial constraint hinders their plan for expansion.

Ascuna said the opportunity to venture into lakatan banana production eventually came when the municipal government endorsed their organization’s proposal to the Department of Agriculture (DA) regional office in Cagayan de Oro City. The DA office then endorsed their organization as one of the beneficiaries of the MRDP’s CFAD component.

Under CFAD, the PEACE organization received P250, 000.00 which was used to purchase planting materials and farm inputs such as fertilizer and insecticides.

To date, the organization maintains a total of 7.5 hectares of lakatan banana where 15 member-beneficiaries are now tending 500 hills. Ascuna said once they have investment returns, the next in line beneficiaries will also have the chance to avail of the organization’s funding support.

“One thing good with lakatan banana is that we can still intercrop it with vegetables. While waiting for banana to grow, we continue earning from growing vegetables to supply our daily needs,” Ascuna said.

Anticipating the volume of production that the PEACE organization will be producing in the next two years, the chairperson said they are now linking with the local banana industry association for marketing.

“We are also planning to consolidate our produce and let our organization market it on our own so we can earn more,” he enthused. □



## *Pinning hope* **ON RUBBER**

### Brgy. Bagolibas, Aleosan, North Cotabato

**U**sing rubber can cast the church's ire, but planting it would be fine especially in conflict-affected areas.

Farmers in Bagolibas, Aleosan, North Cotabato are now planting permanent crops particularly rubber as it can give them sustainable income even in times of atrocities.

Ireneo Cagud, president of Bagolibas Free Farmers Association said they are used to planting rice and corn as they are highly suited in their area and local demand for these crops are high as well. However, man-made calamities usually take its toll on their farm production and family income.

"Every time atrocities arise in our community, we are forced to evacuate on safer grounds leaving behind our farms and produce. Since rice and corn are basic staples, our produce are usually stolen by lawless elements attacking our area," he said.

When the situation calms down, Cagud said they are left empty handed as most of them are robbed with their farm produce. What makes the situation even worse is the need to overcome the huge debt they have acquired in buying seeds and farm inputs during the previous cropping season.

“We have to resort to acquiring more debts with huge interest otherwise we cannot plant in the succeeding cropping season,” he said.

Cagud observed that while majority of his fellow farmers suffered the same fate, those farmers tending rubber trees experienced otherwise. They no longer need to rehabilitate their farms as their rubber trees remained undisturbed and continued to produce latex that gives them continuous income.

Unlike other crops which are highly perishables, rubber has very long shelf life. When atrocities strike anew in their community, rubber farmers just stored rubber cup lumps underground. After evacuating, farmers retrieved their produce underground and sold it to their usual buyers as its quality remained.

More than safekeeping, rubber offers huge potentials. According to the Department of Agriculture (DA), there is an increasing domestic and global demand for natural rubber as it is more durable, adhesive, and impermeable. Popular products derived from natural rubber include automobile cars, rubbers shoes, and medical products such as surgical gloves.

“One farmer here (Bagolibas) is now earning at least P6,000 pesos per month out of his 120 trees planted only in a half-hectare farm. As his trees will mature, it is expected that he will be earning more.” Cagud said.

The positive experiences of rubber farmers in their community served as their benchmark on how to make farming more sustainable. However, despite seeing the lucrative opportunities in rubber farming, Cagud and other members of their association has no substantial financial resource to engage in rubber production.

After learning that the MRDP is providing livelihood assistance to farming communities, their association with the help of their municipal government prepared the requirements and accessed funds from the program.

Since rubber is a long-gestating crop, the farmers' association opted for rubber-based farming system particularly rubber-banana intercrop with goat.

“It will take six years for rubber to be productive, so we also planted lakatan banana which will take only a year to bear fruit. We are also raising goats since they multiply fast and easy to market,” he said.

MRDP program director Lealyn Ramos said rubber had been identified as priority crop for Mindanao since the island region is the country's major producers with North Cotabato and Zamboanga Sibugay taking the lead.

“Rubber-based farming system is ideal for MRDP beneficiaries who are usually small land holders as they can maximize the use of their land. Planting rubber simultaneously with high-value crops plus raising small ruminants during the early years is advised for farmers to have viable income while waiting for the big bang,” Ramos said.

“Rubber production had been intensified not only in increasing farmers’ income but also in promoting sustainable farming. Rubber farming limits the tilling of land to prevent soil erosion and nutrient loss,” she said.

Although residing in a community with a volatile peace and order situation bothers them, Cagud said they can still look forward to better opportunities ahead as rubber production can provide them steady income in the coming years.

“We cannot abandon our lands as it is the only asset we have. With rubber as a crop, we are confident that even when situation dictates us to temporarily evacuate our farms we can always go back and harvest what is permanently stored for us,” he said. □





## *Quality grains thru* **DRYING FACILITY**

Brgy. Ganasi, Upi, Maguindanao

**P**ostharvest facilities are among the much needed infrastructures that benefit many small farmers.

For corn farmers in Barangay Ganasi, the establishment of a solar dryer facility was a sigh of relief as they can now overcome years of several farm losses due to absence of postharvest facility.

“We used to dry our harvested corn directly on the ground or use trapal [tarpaulin] in drying our produce. This practice is not only laborious but also affects the quality of our produce,” said Lato Khalid the president of Ganasi Agri-Development Multi-Purpose Cooperative (GADMPC).

Kahlid said their area being hilly and with abundant rain year round is ideal for corn production. However lack of postharvest facility prevented farmers

from producing grains sufficiently.

To address their need for postharvest facility, the GADMPC sought the assistance of their municipal agriculture office and endorsed their proposal to MRDP.

MRDP and the local government of Upi established a multi-purpose solar drying pavement to address the postharvest needs of some 60 cooperative members.

“The establishment of the solar dryer is a big help to us corn farmers as drying grains is no longer laborious as before. The facility has also the ability to dry more grains in shorter time so we can easily store our produce before heavy rain comes,” he said.

He added that market-value of their produce has also improved since the drying pavement has improved the quality of their corn grains.

“We are glad that the MRDP, DA-ARMM, and our local officials teamed up to provide us this much needed facility and will surely help us in boosting our income,” he said.

Corn postharvest is one of the priority initiatives of the DA as it helps increase farmers’ income and at the same time reduce postharvest losses.

On the other hand, corn is one of the most important crops as it is not only used as second staple but also due to the steady increasing demand of the commodity as source of feeds for the growing livestock industry.

“The provision of solar dryers is one of the best ways we can increase our corn production and raise our income which is the best way to alleviate our impoverish life,’ he said. □



## *Potable water now flows* **FOR BANANA FARMERS**

Brgy. Macopa, Monkayo, Compostela Valley

**B**anana is abundant here but water is scarce.

The scarcity of water is a major factor that hampers the productivity of farmers in the expanding banana plantation in this barangay.

Since most of the farmers here are engaged in contract growing with banana exporters, they need to devote more time in the farm as they have to keep up with the production demand.

“Unlike other crops, banana contract growing requires us more time in tending the crop to ensure buyers that our produce is of export quality,” said Rogelio Anto, Chairman of San Miguel New Pinamongahan Water System Association.

“Access to potable water supply is a necessity as it will no longer require us to spend hours in fetching water from very far sources,” Anto said.

With the recent establishment of a potable water supply in their locality, Anto said they can now have enough time tending their crops.

The said water system which is expected to benefit more than 100 farm households was established as part of the livelihood project under the MRDP. The program is a long-term poverty alleviation initiative implemented under the Department of Agriculture (DA) in collaboration with the local government units.

Rosanna Bongcales, one of the association members said the need for potable water was a long felt need. Although there were previous attempts to seek support from other agencies it is only now that their association's proposal for potable water source had been materialized.

“Our family has been residing in this barangay for 18 years and it is only now that drinking water becomes accessible. It will relieve housewives like me including our children from fetching water from afar,” Bongcales said.

MRDP program director Lealyn Ramos said potable water supply is one of major projects under MRDP as various consultations conducted during program preparation confirmed that water supply remains a priority need among rural poor.

“For banana farmers in Monkayo, the potable water supply project will not only eliminate water-borne diseases but will also give them ample time to engage in farming being their major source of livelihood,” Ramos said.

“Aside from investing in other rural infrastructure, we urge our LGU partners to also consider the need for potable water supply as this can create impact in the productivity of poor areas in Mindanao,” Ramos said. □



## *Rice mill improves* **RICE QUALITY**

Brgy. Manungkaling, Mamasapano, Maguindanao

In the heart of sprawling rice field stands a progressive type rice mill building operated by farmers themselves.

The establishment of this rice mill facility brought much relief to rice farmers in this town where lack of the said postharvest facility limits their capacity to produce quality rice.

“We used to bring our palay as far as Shariff Aguak where we paid P20 per sack in milling. If it could no longer be accommodated we went as far as Isulan where we paid as much as P40 per sack,” related Benjamin Abdulmaoti, the chairman of the Mamayagon Farmers’ Association (MFA).

“Bringing our palay to other places for milling would mean additional transport cost as well as losses where mishandling are oftentimes unavoidable,” he added.

Although not profitable, most of the farmers here opted to sell their palay to traders sans the difficulty of milling their own produce.

To address the need for better postharvest facility, Abdulmaoti along with the other MFA members sought the assistance of their local agriculture office which in turn endorsed their proposal to be part of the MRDP's CFAD component.

"When we evaluated the area, we noted its potential of producing enough rice for our town. It has 300 hectares of irrigated rice fields and a rice mill would be of great help both in minimizing farm losses and in increasing income," said municipal agriculturist Modrika Masukat.

The rice mill project installed in Barangay Manungkalin was the first and the only facility in the area. The size (9 x 15 x 6 meters) is much bigger as compared to the usual mini-rice mill project which is only 4 x 6 x 6 meters.

"During project planning the association agreed to expand the size of the building to have enough space in storing palay during peak harvest. This turns the facility into a multi-purpose building where milling and storing of both palay and rice can be done," Masukat said.

Since the P550, 000 funding is just enough for the purchase of milling facility and construction of a small building, the association sourced out funds from the local government units.

"The barangay government provided the sand and gravel including the earth fill while the municipal government provided the adjacent solar dryer," Masukat added.

Now that the rice mill facility was installed, Abdulmaoti said their difficulty in bringing their palay to distant places is no longer a problem. The accessibility of the milling facility has eliminated their transportation expenses and helped in increasing their incomes.

Milling cost for MFA members is P1.00 per kilo while non-members is charged P1.50 per kilo. Abdulmaoti said the income they are earning will be used for continued construction of their building.

"When we started our first milling operations, the harvest season was about to end so we only earned P10, 000. We are confident that in the succeeding cropping seasons we could earn more," he said.

"The farmers will now have better option as to where they are going to sell their produce. They can sell the milled rice to their cooperative or to other rice retailers that offer better buying price," Masukat said.

"Given the increasing demand to secure the supply of our staple food, the challenge now is how to make rice production more profitable so that we can entice more farmers to sustain rice farming," Ramos added.



Ramos said while MRDP looks into potentials of rice farmers in meeting the country's food security, the program also pushes for improving postharvest practices for them to make headway in feeding millions of hungry people. □





## *Weaving hope* **WITH ABACA**

Brgy. Kapate, Kiamba, Sarangani Province

**T**he Abaca fiber for the Lumads here is more than just a strong, fine, ivory-colored fiber but a cord of life connecting them even to their ancestors.

“We have been planting abaca since our forefathers in our ancestral lands. This has been our crop and source of income for as long as I can remember,” said the 35-year old Erdelina Ababol, member of T’boli tribe.

Known for its versatility, Abaca fiber is used to make bags, ropes, tea bags, paper, furniture, hammocks, and world-class textiles. Many people may not know that it is also used to make x-ray negatives, optical lens, wire insulator, and automobile components.

Data from the Department of Agriculture (DA) reveal that almost 90 percent of the world's abaca export is produced in the Philippines and Ecuador counts for the rest.

Export of Abaca fiber to major markets United Kingdom and Japan in January to June this year went up by almost 200 percent according to the data released by the Fiber Industry Development Authority (FIDA).

The same data revealed that production of abaca fiber this year increased by 4.6 percent to 29,562.6 metric tons (MT) in January to July this year.

Mindanao remains a top producer of abaca fiber having Davao Region, Caraga region, and Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) among the bulk producers next to leading Bicol and Eastern Visayan Regions.

Abaca, known to have come from the Philippines is a member of hard fiber group internationally named as "Manila Hemp". It is a member of the banana family of plants with the scientific name of *Musa textilis*.

Weaving a rekindled hope from their traditional crop, the T'boli tribe, a dominant indigenous people's group in this part of Southern Philippines takes advantage in the resurgence of the abaca industry.

"Our abaca here is sold to a local consolidator in the nearby market," Ababol who is a member of the Kapate Abaca Farmers' Association (KAFA) said.

In turn, this consolidator sells bales of abaca in Davao City or General Santos City.

"Our practice before was to sell our abaca fibers as raw materials produced by our manual stripper. But since it's not of good quality it is bought very cheap for P35 – P40 per kilo," she said.

Their production has been very meager "mainly due to small number of abaca trees planted and the lack of proper equipment and training."

"We wanted to expand but because we are really poor, we cannot buy additional planting materials and other input to expand the number of our abaca plants," she explained.

"When we learned that the DA through the local government has funding for poor farmers for agribusiness we thought we might qualify," she said.

With the help of the agricultural technical of the municipality, KAFA prepared their proposal and other requirements and sent them to the office of MRDP with the hope to access funding which they have been wanting for a long time.

MRDP helps LGUs institutionalize an effective delivery of services to the community by capacitating municipal facilitators and attached agencies like FIDA to assist beneficiaries.

MRDP granted the PO P250,000.00," Ababol, a mother of two enthused.

She said that sum of money is enough to kick-start the expansion they have envisioned.

They used the funds to procure 2,750 tissue-cultured abaca suckers distributed to the first 11 beneficiaries, some bags of organic fertilizer and one mechanical stripper.

The brand new mechanical stripper helps the farmers produce quality fibers at a lesser cost and much lesser effort.

“Using our old manual stripper is time consuming, very laborious and costly since half of the total sale of abaca is paid to the (abaca) stripper,” she said.

“We are thankful that we underwent training under FIDA. We gained more technical know-how on top of the previous knowledge we earned through our experiences,” Ababol said grateful to the various assistance they received.

Fiber development officer Evelyn Casimiro said the PO had training on pest management, plant care and other technical skills from planting, harvesting, postharvest handling and processing of abaca fiber.

With the help of FIDA, the PO is now making tinagak which sells for P250.00 per kilo which is much bigger than their old income.

Tinagak is a local term for a continuous thread of fine quality, similar-sized fiber formed into small bale that weighs a kilo each. One bale of tinagak weighing a kilo takes at least 4 days to finish.

“Initially I was able to sell, eight (bales of) tinagak, while other members have sold more,” she said.

Having learned of the increasing market demand of abaca in the domestic and international markets and their planting area expanded, Ababol is thankful that their tribe maintained planting of abaca and for the support of government agencies.

“Our local consolidator has told us that there is a growing demand for tinagak, so we are encouraged to work more diligently to produce more bales,” she said.

“After so long a time, it’s just now that we are earning a much higher income from abaca... thanks to MRDP and FIDA who truly assisted us,” she enthused.

The T’boli tribe has found fortune in the traditional crop handed down to them from generations ago right in their very own ancestral land.

“With the better promise of our project our community has become more united and hopeful we will soon experience a life better than before,” Ababol said. □



Lantapan, Bukidnon

**T**he carpenters in Bukidnon's vegetable capital have put down their hammers and chisels to rake in profit from growing earth's gentle tillers – worms.

Compose of small carpenters, farmers and laborers who are mostly members of the Seventh Day Adventist church formed the Community Helping Livelihood Organization (CHLO) to venture into vermiculture project.

Benjamin Rosas, CHLO president, said they realized the profitability potential and market viability of vemicompost fertilizer when their town has been recognized for its organically-grown vegetables and crops.

“Since most of the vegetable farms here are now using organic fertilizer, we feel the expanding market of vermicompost,” Rosas said.

Vermiculture or worm composting is a process for recycling food waste into a rich, dark, earth-smelling soil conditioner. The castings of earthworms also known as vermicompost is an excellent soil enhancer and bioactive high quality fertilizer for organic farming.

CHLO employs the African Nightcrawler, an earthworm species, suited to be grown in the Philippines for the production of vermicompost and vermin-meal which is alternative for imported fish meal that we feed to fish and other farm animals.

In September 2008, the group received the P100,000.00 funding through the MRDP's CFAD component.

Putting down their hammers and chisels, these hired laborers and carpenters are now collecting biodegradable garbage from the public market, and farm and animal wastes around town.

"We collect biodegradable wastes from the public market, our neighbors around the poblacion. We even collect animal wastes. Aside from being carpenters, people now know us as garbage collectors," he added in jest.

Fabrication of vermi beds, the primary infrastructure for vermicomposting, was easy for these skilled carpenters.

Their efforts paid off when they started harvesting the vermicast in December 2008. Each bed yields more or less 17 to 30 bags depending on the size of bed and thickness of the wastes used called substrates.

Rosas said the vermicast is sold at P200 to P250 per sack to local farmers growing banana, corn and vegetables. Harvest interval is two months and each bed earns more or less P4,000 to P6,000.

"We have already a bulk of demand with local banana growers," said Rosas.

The group agreed to contribute P200 per bed per harvest to the association's fund.

"The contribution is in cash or one bag vermicast, so the member will be able to pay even if the vermicast is not yet sold," said CHLO secretary Jason Sulayaw.

Sulayaw added that the regular contribution will help them sustain and expand their livelihood projects. This will also allow them support their new ventures of vegetable production.

## **Needed Expansion**

Vermi ast is highly in demand in Bukidnon with the farmers now turning to organic farming technology. This opportunity allowed the group to expand their association starting from 11 members now it has 23 members all engaged in vermiculture.



They are hoping to avail another round of CFAD project so they can buy a hauler vehicle to ease the collection of substrate from other areas, a warehouse as a storage facility, and rent or buy a lot for their communal vermiculture project at the same time for crop production.

As they raked in profits from their organic fertilizer, the group ventures into planting vegetables. CHLO has already planted squash in three-fourth hectare lot expected to be harvested in early part of 2010.

Knowing the current demand for ginger, they are also planning to plant organically-grown ginger to expand their individual backyard ginger garden to meet the growing demand in the market.

### **Project Gains**

“There is really money in vermi if we only do the painstaking task required of this business,” said another member Ernesto Garcia who maintained five beds in his backyard.

“We are now able to buy food for three square meals a day which in past was difficult especially if there was no construction project,” Rosas said.

“We are thankful to the government that because of the project, our daily needs are met including our children’s education,” Rosas added. □





## *Basket makers venture in* **DIVERSIFIED FARMING**

Brgy. New La Union, Maitum, Sarangani Province

**B**asket making used to be the only income-earner for women in this community. But capitalizing on their rich ancestral soil, a women organization is now engaged actively in lakatan and peanut production.

Composed of 25 members, the Brgy. New La Union Women's association is hoping that their diversified farming project will not just augment the family's income but raise them from the usual dearth of financial resources.

Eunice Movilla said they (women) were trained in basket-making which they sell in their small cooperative store. However, income from such activity is not enough augmentation for most households only earn from farming abaca.

"We are still making basket. But in addition to that we are now engaged in diversified farming that conforms well to the nature of our organization," said Movilla, association's president.

Half of the organization's members are among Indigenous Peoples'(IPs)

T'boli tribe and the other half are non-IPs.

“The non-IPs who live in the lower part of the barangay are engaged in lakatan production. While most IPs, who live in the higher part of barangay are into peanut production,” she said.

She added that peanut thrives well in the area of the IPs and it does require much of their time as the farm is just adjacent to their houses.

Further, Movilla who is involved in lakatan production said each member voluntarily chose what project would they be part of.

“ We chose our project basically based on our convenience. We chose the project that is located near to where we live. So, there are also IPs who are involved in lakatan production,” Movilla said.

## **Getting started**

“When we learned about MRDP and that the local government unit is identifying beneficiaries for livelihood project we proposed diversified farming for our organization,” Movilla said.

Luckily, besides the Program’s targeting to benefit women and IPs, their decent record as an organization merited them to be among the first batch of beneficiaries in 2008.

Aside from abaca and peanut production, their project proposal also included swine and vegetable production. They alternate planting vegetable and peanuts.

With a total funding of Php 250,000.00 under the CFAD component, the organization bought farming inputs including organic fertilizer, banana seedlings and peanut seeds.

“Peanut production is easy for us to do. We used to plant this crop before but our production is very limited due to the capital constraints,” said T’Boli women leader Patricia Soldivilla.

“Our planting of peanut before is household-based and it cannot really supply the demands of the local market. We wanted to expand but we simply just can’t,” Soldivilla explained.

Today, they plant peanut to at least one-fourth hectare farm lot for which they expect to harvest over 40 kilos per cropping. While about half a hectare is planted to lakatan banana.

Soldivilla said that farming peanut is very convenient for them to do.

“ Aside from the fact that the farm is just few steps away from our home, it is not very demanding. There are times when all you have to do is to water it, or to remove some weeds and then wait for the plants to grow, so we can still continue our basket-weaving,” Patricia added.

“The one-fourth hectare is just a starter. We will expand the farm to as wide as our resources will allow,” said Soldivilla.

As of this writing, raw peanut is sold at P65.00 – P80.00 per kilo in the local market. While, lakatan is sold at around P12.00 - P15.00 a kilo.

As peanut is sold either raw or processed, Patricia said there is growing demand for peanuts not just in the local market but in the nearby cities of General Santos and Koronadal.

While, the demand for lakatan is already given.

“There is no problem with our marketing with lakatan as there is a wide domestic market,” Movilla said.

soldivilla and Movilla, representing the two groups in one active and united organization, both agreed that with the income provided by the project, they no longer fear the financial requirements of sending our children to school, nor the next food to put in our table.

“DA and the local government have given us the opportunity to become even more productive housewives,” Movilla said.

“And for our part as members of the T’boli tribe, we are thankful that despite our remote location, the government has not forgotten to help us,” Soldivilla added. □





## *C for camote,* **CANDY AND CASH**

Brgy. Diplo, Kumalarang, Zamboanga del Sur

**W**omen here have transformed their camote to candies, and cash.

Deonila Sayco, 28, is now complementing her husband's daily income as farm laborer.

Thanks to the camote candy bar-making project of the Diplo Women Association (DWA), where she and the other 25 housewives are members of.

The association was chosen to be among the beneficiaries of MRDP as the Program targets women and Indigenous peoples as beneficiaries. DWA is composed 21 Subanen and the other four are Christians.

Subanen which means people of the river are the majority of the IPs in Zamboanga peninsula.

"These days, I can now buy rice, fish and other needs of my children like slippers, papers and ballpens they need for school," said Sayco, a mother of three whose eldest is in Grade III.



DWA has capitalized on the abundance of the local root crop sweet potato, commonly known as camote.

“Camote is abundant in our barangay. We thought of value-adding it when we were asked to come up with a project proposal we are capable of managing,” said DWA president Letecia Ampong.

After the local government unit, through Program’s CFAD component, has released the first tranche of the Php150,000.00 project in January, they bought the ingredients, materials, equipment and tools for the candy-making project.

“From the amount we received, we were only able to use Php70,000.00 while the rest is saved in the bank to fund the construction of our proposed processing center,” Ampong said.

“Our temporary processing place is a space provided for by the barangay council beside the barangay hall,” Ampong added.

The barangay council has also offered these housewives the use of the barangay vehicle to deliver their products to minimize transportation cost.

They are now selling nutritious camote candy bars not only in their sari sari store but also in nearby towns of Zamboanga del Sur.

Every Wednesday, these housewives receive not less than P300 as their share of profit from the candy bars they make and sold.

Ampong said that those who have helped in the production will get their corresponding share out of the 30% of the sales for the labor cost every Wednesday. Their sharing vary depending on the total sales for the week.

Another member Nora Dagendil, 39, with seven children, admits that as a mother, she has to budget the meager income of her husband.

“I am very happy that I joined this association because this helped a lot in our daily needs,” Dagendil said.

DWA treasurer Lolita Bombio recalls that their association started producing camote bar in January 2009 and as early as October of the same year they have already saved P8,000 in the bank from their net income. □





# Natural Resource Management (NRM)



**NRM** mainstreams the protection and conservation of the upland, lowland and the coastal environment. It implements subprojects that protect and conserve watersheds, promote land use management, and integrate conservation efforts that will sustain productivity in food production areas.



## *Rebuilding* **MARINE HABITAT**

Brgy. Mago-ong, Linamon, Lanao del Norte

**T**his town has espoused an atypical yet efficient way to revive submarine habitat: coral transplantation.

The calm ripples in the surface of the northern part of Iligan Bay in the 5.2-kilometer coastline of Linamon town are mum witnesses of the thriving cluster of transplanted corals underneath.

“We need to accelerate the revival of our coral reefs to save the resources that remained in our seas,” says Ernila Obenza, the NRM Focal Person of Limanon.

“Although not so common among the usual coastal conservation activities, we heard the success of coral transplantation in Medina [Misamis Oriental]. We were interested in it and hired the researcher who conducted the project in Medina as our consultant,” Obenza said.

Corals are the natural habitat, breeding place and source of food of

different undersea organisms. Their complex growth that forms the reef acts as natural breakwater from strong current and waves.

### **Dwindling Fishery resources**

Nestor Sakay, a local fisherfolk, said that this part of Iligan Bay used to be rich in various fishes even a stone's throw away from the coastline.

Result of the Participatory Resource Appraisal and Resource and Social Assessment (PRA-RSA) in 2008 revealed that most of the fishes caught near the shoreline especially in the sea grasses and coral areas are siganids like kitang, damsels like pata and ariel- ariel, parrot fishes like "mul-mul" and grasses like "lubayan."

Further, Sardines pelagic species locally known as "tamban" is the most abundant fish especially in the fishing ground near Larapan river. Fisherfolk also catch pelagic fishes mostly tuna, and tuna-like "pidlayan" and "budlisan", and other pelagic species like mackerel, flying fishes like "bangsi and balo." Milkfish or bangus culture is also a very promising mariculture project.

"However, trend in fish catch is generally going down from 1960 to the present. Fisherfolk attributed this to fish habitat destruction especially in the coral reefs.

"Our survey in 2000 in the five coastal barangays showed that our coral reefs are in poor-to-fair conditions and the communities living in the area are aware of it as they said during our public forums," Obenza said.

Fishery resources are dwindling fast enough to cause alarm for the fishing community and the local government.

The PRA-RSA revealed that in 1993 fishermen with motorized banca, who spend 45 minutes to four hours within eight to 10 kilometers from the shore, catch about 110 kilos. But in 2008, they catch only about 20 kilos. Worse, among small fisherfolk within four to five kilometers in 1993 usually got 65 kilos; in 2008 they could barely have 10 kilos in their baskets.

"Before, dynamite fishing and fish poisoning using cyanide and the locally concocted tubli, a poisonous powder from a vine were prevalent," said Sakay who is also the secretary of Mago-ong-Samburon Fisherfolk Association (MASAFA).

### **Adaptable technology**

"The coral transplantation is just but one part of our whole effort to revive the rich resources of the seas of Linamon through the establishment of Marine Protected Area (MPA)," said Obenza.

The town has engaged in establishing a community-based 6-hectare MPA

and one hectare is devoted to coral transplantation.

“Our community partner in this project is the MAFASA,” added Obenza.

“The Samburon-Mago-ong coast was selected because based on the initial study conducted the area still has resources that can be saved, conserved, and has the capacity to regenerate while the problems of water turbidity is not so prevalent,” said the municipal marine biologist Cheryl Eballe.

“Based on a number of studies, the efficacy and the feasibility of transplanting corals was proven to be effective procedure to shorten recovery time in preserving and enhancing coral reefs,” Eballe said.

“The technology was adapted from marine biologist Lemuel Alfeche who has successfully studied coral transplantation in Duka Bay of Medina, Misamis Oriental,” explained Eballe, adding:

“Researches showed that, in the wild, corals can grow as much as 2 cm in a year but in the study of Alfeche in Duka bay the coral growth was observed to be at 16 cm for a year.”

According to the study of Alfeche, the development of varied stages for accelerated coral restoration had been improved into simplified and low-tech concept using massive re-growing of corals in varied designs of concrete materials adapted to underwater stability and environmentally fitted for physical and chemical properties of seawater.

In the Linamon project, they use 38 modules or coral substrate with three designs: the pyramidal block type, the cylindrical block type and the dome block type.

“We have transplanted the coral acropora which were taken from the natural grown coral reefs in the wild in the Brgy. Poblacion,” Eballe said.

“The donor site was contiguous to the transplantation area thus minimize stress among the donor corals,” she added.

“This strategy will allow the control of water parameters within the contiguous sites having similar vectorial current operating in the system with similar salinity,” Eballe explained.

Further, she explained that the coral fragment collected from parent corals were cautiously transferred underwater using plastic basket drawn by a pumpboat at a relatively slow speed assisted by expert scuba divers.

The live coral fragments were individually planted within the respective coral substrates with the use of concrete blocks. Coral fragments were planted upright by inserting them in the center of the hole provided in the block. These fragments were cemented right away through underwater cementing procedure. It will take four to five hours for the newly planted coral fragments to be stably cemented underwater.

“The transplantation process was painstaking. And based on our latest



monitoring we observed at least 70-80 coral survival rate which is within the expected rate,” Eballe said.

“The consequences of investing on this kind of resources management strategy for coral reef development will result in environmental, economic, and social benefits. These include increased fishery productivity, enhanced marine biodiversity, and tourism growth,” Obenza said.

“We envisioned that through this intervention we can improve the quality of life of coastal communities as well as bring back the health and integrity of the environment,” she added.

Aside from the establishment of MPA, the town also implemented river bank stabilization project to control the siltation from upstream which contributed to the water turbidity and transparency problems and agro-reforestation and eco-tourism development around the Tinago Falls and watershed.

Other national agencies also involved in the project were DENR, BFAR, BWSM and the NCIP.

“The Department of Environment and Natural Resources has also helped us especially in the assessment of the resources and threats from upland and its interconnectivity through the lowland and the coastal areas,” Obenza said.

BFAR was very helpful in our monitoring and assessment of our coastal resources, BWSM for soil analysis and evaluation while the NCIP made sure no indigenous peoples have been negatively affected by the implementation of the these projects,” she added.

## **LGU and community participation and cooperation**

“We actively involve ourselves in the project because in the long run, we will be the first beneficiaries of the success of the project,” Sakay said.

“As member of the People’s organization, we are assigned as bantay dagat. We help in the preparation of everything needed for the establishment of project; we ferry and assist the marine biologists. Some of our members were also trained to be certified scuba drivers to assist in the monitoring and sustaining activities,” he added.

“We have instituted the necessary ordinances to support these projects and given directive to various authorities like the police, the bantay dagat and bantay gubat to fully implement the local laws,” said mayor Noel Deaño.

For the part of Mayor Deaño this could be the lasting legacy of his administration that could be handed down to the next generation. □



## *The vanguards* **OF THE SEA**

Brgy. Ali Alsree, Roseller T. Lim, Zamboanga Sibugay

**T**he local fisherfolk here stand vanguard to the vast regenerating fish sanctuary and the thriving mangrove forest expected to secure the communities food and livelihood.

“We will continue to watch over our fish sanctuary and mangrove forest until we gain back the bounty of our seas,” Roel Casan said, a local fisherfolk and a volunteer bantay dagat in Brgy. Ali Alsree.

“We learned that when these trees become big enough, fish will gather here for their food and protection and breed so we expect that sooner we don’t have to sail afar,” he added.

The 10-hectare mangrove forest rehabilitation project in the fishing community of Brgy. Ali Alsree is part of the total 100-hectare mangrove rehabilitation projected of the local government of RT Lim and MRDP.

The other areas are: Brgy. Pres. Roxas with 60 hectares; Brgy Magsaysay, 20 hectares and Brgy. Tupilac 10 hectares.

“These four contiguous mangrove sites out of the seven coastal barangays need to be protected and preserved,” said fishery technician Nolly Garcia.

Mangroves are important to many marine and terrestrial species that depend for protection shelter and food. It serves as required part as a natural

breeding and nursery for many economically known important marine animals like fish, crab, shrimp and other crustacean. It also protects the shoreline from big waves, wind and flood.

This town houses a total of 12 mangrove species including Lagiwiwi, Apia Api, Piapi, Bungalon, Tabao Pototan, Malatangal, Bakwan lalaki, Bakawan babae, Pagatpat, Tabigi and Saging-saging.

Garcia said that about a decade ago, fisherfolk themselves noticed the fast decline of fish catch within the municipal waters.

“Fisherfolk get farther and farther every time they put out to sea to do fishing reaching as far as Brgy. Vitali in Zamboanga City,” Garcia said.

He said this depletion of marine resources can be alluded to illegal fishing, activities like cyanide poisoning, use of dynamite, trawl, ring net and purseiner or commercial fishing.

“Before we had high value fishes like talakitok, budlisan and lagaw,” said Garcia.

While, the depletion of their mangrove forest was caused by illegal cutting of mangrove for its economic use like firewood, charcoal, tannin, light construction materials and rayon. Also prevalent was the conversion of mangrove areas for aquaculture and human settlement areas.

In 2006, the local government partnered with the USAID for the establishment of a 20-hectare fish sanctuary in Brgy. Roxas. Among others, USAID provided technical assistance for the sanctuary.

“Inasmuch as we wanted to protect our marine resources, we cannot really do it due to the limited funding of the local government. So we’re very much thankful when we were selected under the MRDP project,” said NRM focal person Rodrigo Sicican.

With the LGU’s partnership with MRDP, the fish sanctuary was further expanded with a bigger funding of Php 1 million to establish a new 100-hectare fish sanctuary in Brgy. Magsaysay and to rejuvenate the old one.

“We have already installed bouys to cordon the designated fish sanctuary and have planted over a 5000 mangrove propagules,” Sicican said.

“Since we were able to save some of the funds for mangrove rehabilitation, we expanded the project to another 50 hectares making the total mangrove rehabilitation to 150 hectares,” Sicican added.

“This time to fully implement and protect these projects, the local government has promulgated ordinances,” Garcia said, adding:

“With the ordinances, our bantay dagat and bantay gubat volunteers are given authority to enforce the law, arrest illegal fishers and reprimand violators”.

Casan, along with the other 30 bantay dagat volunteers, regularly patrol the hundred-hectare sanctuary and mangrove forest to make sure no one enters the prohibited fishing areas nor cut mangroves.

“We have caught illegal fishers mostly coming from other municipalities. We arrest them and impound their boats until they have paid the fine of as much as P1,500.00,” Casan said.

“As part of the ordinance, the volunteers get to share 50 percent of the of the fine paid by the arrested illegal fishers other than that its wholehearted service they render,” Garcia said.

Bantay dagat volunteers also help in the education and information dissemination in the community.

“ I personally ask our fellow fishermen not to use dynamite anymore as it's not just risky but it destroys the environment,” Casan added.

Banking on the support and cooperation of the community, Sicican have high hopes for the success of the project.

“Wth the community’s acceptance of the project through the support they are showing, we are expecting that this partnership with DA-MRDP will bring not just the bounty of our sea resources but the a more lively economic and tourism activity,” Sicican said. □





## *Greening* **LARAPAN RIVER**

Brgy. Napo, Linamon, Lanao del Norte

**R**esidents in this community are engaged in flood control project to rejuvenate the river as source of their food and livelihood.

“The Larapan River is a breeding ground for several aquatic resources such as shrimp, crab, tilapia, banak, and even the rare pikek which is highly-priced owing to its excellent taste,” said Barangay Captain Ambrocio de Asis, Jr.

“Today, fishing along the river is not as abundant as it was before as mangroves which serve as breeding ground for fish and crustaceans were already gone,” de Asis said.

He added that mangroves and trees along the riverbanks used to serve as their natural barriers against strong wind and waves from the nearby coastal area.

The negative impact of indiscriminate cutting of mangroves for lumber and firewood along the banks of the Larapan River was strongly felt in 1999 when flash floods hit their barangay.

“The disaster damaged P7 million worth of livelihood and properties and claimed 27 lives,” de Asis said.

“The incident was a painful lesson for us but at the same time made us aware on the importance of taking care of our environment,” he added.

Residents in the barangay were then mobilized to replant the riverbank with mangroves to control not only flooding but also to bring back the school of fish and other aquatic fishes that were once abundant in the river.

“However, our efforts of rehabilitating Larapan River did not come easy. We attempted to plant mangroves thrice but still they did not thrive well as regular flooding washed them out,” de Asis said.

The plight of residents was addressed when the municipal government partnered with the MRDP’s Natural Resource Management (NRM) component and embarked on river stabilization project to rehabilitate Larapan River.

Municipal NRM focal person Irenila Obenza said Larapan River was identified as critical area for environmental conservation it is a catch basin of two major rivers coming from Iligan City and the town of Poona Piagapo .

“We need to immediately control flooding along the river to prevent siltation in coastal areas which is destructive to our coral reefs,” Obenza said.

### **Bio-engineering technology**

Covering a 10-meter by 5-kilometer stretch of Larapan River, the riverbank stabilization project adopted a bioengineering planting technique using a combination of fast growing species, forest trees, and fruit trees.

Bamboos, vetiver grass, kakawati, mahogany, narra, durian, and jackfruit were planted along the riverbank of Larapan River.

“Bamboos help control soil erosion and stabilize riverbanks. Later, it can also serve as sources of food and livelihood such as materials for housing and furniture-making,” Obenza said.

Vetiver grass, on the other hand, grows fast with an extensive and thick root system that binds soil and makes it difficult to dislodge, making it effective in preventing soil erosion.

“We also included the planting of fruit trees to provide additional income for the community in the long term,” she added.

“The project site planted grasses, forages and trees now serve as buffer zone to control soil erosion and overflowing of water in the riverbanks and help minimize siltation of riverbeds,” Obenza said.

### **Interconnectivity approach**

MRDP program director Lealyn Ramos in her report to DA Secretary Proceso Alcala said the riverbank stabilization project is part of the



interconnectivity approach of linking interventions from the uplands, lowlands down to coastal areas.

“The program implements watershed conservation in the uplands, riverbank stabilization in the lowlands, and coral reefs restoration project in the coastal areas,” Ramos said, adding:

“Controlling soil erosion along Larapan River will further boost the coral reef transplantation project being implemented in the coastal barangays of Mago-ong and Samburon.”

Results of the project are gradually becoming visible. The planted bamboo seedlings now measure more than 10 feet with shoots underneath. Vetiver grass is now more than 3 feet while kakawati measures around 6 feet tall. The forest and fruit trees also show healthy stand and measures more than 10 feet.

Although it would take quite sometime before the resident can fully take advantage of the riverbank stabilization project, de Asis said he is satisfied not only on how the plants grow but more importantly the growing concern of his constituents in conserving the environment.

“Now that erosion and flood can be controlled, fishing may once again be thriving in our community,” a project volunteer said.

For his part, Linamon Mayor Noel Deaño said the Larapan river project is a showcase of the community’s and government’s commitment to protect and conserve our environment.

“It also signifies our commitment to promote a healthy ecology for our family and our children,” he said. □





## *Rising from the* **RELICS OF TSUNAMI**

Brgy. Kusiong, Datu Odin Sinsuat, Maguindanao

In August 17, 1976 huge tsunami waves hit this town, claimed thousands of lives and stripped nature of its copious resources.

The tsunami that followed a magnitude 8.2 quake affected 700 kilometers of coastline bordering Moro Gulf, affecting the coastal areas of Maguindanao, Sultan Kudarat and Lanao del Sur. Maguindanao posted the highest number of dead.

The aftermath revealed a horrible face of town. Hundreds of people were dead or missing. Scores of family, elderly and children were injured and left homeless. Verdant mountains turned nude and mud-splattered, coconut and other trees washed out; pulsating rivers went brown and lifeless; and the shores and undersea greatly devastated.

Seeing the place awash in wreckage and rubbles, a number of families left the town and went to Cotabato City and other nearby towns hoping to find better opportunities and start all over again. But many residents left with no other recourse had to stay, pick up the remains of the horror, and start from scratch, literally.

Thirty-three years after, people might have picked up their lives but the environment adversely devastated has remained lowly productive and in dire need to be revived.

The persistent clamor of the community for better environmental resources for food and livelihood has urged the local government under the watch of Mayor Datu Umbra Q. Sinsuat, Sr. to act with resolve to protect what remains past tragedy and restore the little pieces of what had survived.

The impassioned desire of the LGU is dampened by the little financial resources available to make into reality such a huge project. But luck and hope has to be found.

In 2008, the MRDP has identified the town to be one of the beneficiaries under its Natural Resources Management (NRM) component.

“This is the very first time since the 1976 tragedy that a project that aims to rehabilitate our environment is to be implemented here,” Manan Mondaragon said.

“We are truly happy that this program of the DA and the WB has come to us. It has given us more hope than ever before,” Mondaragon added.

A thorough participatory resource and social appraisal was conducted to establish the baseline data of the upland and coastal resources of the eight covered barangays of Labungan, Awang, Dinaig, Brgy. Mompong which comprised Dimapatoy watershed and coastal barangays of Linek, Badak, Kusiong and Tapian.

The local government has proposed four major projects amounting P7 million including: a 72-hectare forest plantation; 54-hectare agro-reforestation; establishment of a 15-hectare fish sanctuary; 15- hectare mangrove rehabilitation; eight hectare river bank stabilization and 15-hectare mangrove rehabilitation. The projects benefit mostly the indigenous peoples Teduray and Maguindanaons.

In February of 2010, they have completed the establishment of fish sanctuary and even exceeded their agro-reforestation project to 72 hectares.

“So far, the project shows promising results. It has been observed that many fishes started to swarm within the municipal waters after the successful implementation of the fish sanctuary,” said NRM head Dennis Paul Mijares.

Among the fish species noted were snapper fish like Maya-maya, siganid like Danggit, Balawis, Bulangin, and fusilier or *Dalagang Bukid*.

Recently, mangrove rehabilitation has been completed and the rest of the projects are close to completion.

“With environmental conservation activities, it would really take time to see the total impact of the project. But even to date, various indicators of the vibrancy of the environment are already sensed,” Mijares said.

“The low productive land and seas before have reversed. We believe we have done well and our efforts have paid off,” Mondaragon said.

The tragic event over thirty years ago is already a history written, but the people today and the greening environment are writing a story of its own. □





# Investment for Governance Reforms (IGR)





**IGR** aims to make more effective the decentralization process to further improve competitiveness of agricultural sector. It lays the groundwork before other MRDP component sets in by facilitating LGUs' preparation of the necessary enabling instruments.



## *The town rises into* **FIRST-CLASS STATUS**

### Bunawan, Agusan del Sur

**A**n increased funds in local coffers as well as better services and facilities are just some of the benefits this town now enjoys after it has improved local revenue generation.

The setting up of efficient revenue generation system was an offshoot of the series of trainings and workshops conducted in this municipality as part of the preparation for the implementation of the MRDP.

Aside from providing infrastructure and livelihood projects, MRDP through its investment for governance reform (IGR) component also provided assistance to local government units in preparing enabling instruments for improved governance and revenue generation.

“During the MRDP governance workshops in 2000, voluminous documents were scanned and we incidentally discovered that the Municipal Tax Code being imposed was outdated way back 1980s. Some regulatory fees are as cheap as five pesos,” said municipal planning chief Robert Floyd Salise.

In 2002 the local government revised their existing tax code and was fully implemented in the following year. However, increasing the tax dues do not necessarily result to increase in revenues. The need to encourage the public to religiously pay their taxes remains a challenge. To address this concern, then Mayor Gilbert Elorde introduced innovations that did not only compel but also inspired his constituents to support the drive to increase the local coffers.

### **Innovation in tax collection**

Since the bulk of tax collections came from business tax, the local business sector was among the first to benefit from improved tax-collection system. Through the introduction of One-Stop Business Licensing, the standard time for application and renewal of business permits was cut short from almost one week to a maximum of only four hours.

“We gathered the required signatories from various offices such as the assessors’ unit, health unit, engineering office, and fire protection office so that clients will no longer be hopping from one office to another just to get their clearance and comply with the requirements. Imagine the time saved and how it will be invested to other productive activities,” Salise said.

Another strategy to encourage public support in local revenue generation is the conduct of Government-on-Wheels where basic services are provided to various barangays.

“Similar to one-stop licensing, we also pooled representatives from various agencies to directly offer services in remote areas. We provide medical clinics, legal assistance such as settling of land disputes, provision of planting materials and fertilizers, to name a few,” he said.

“The catch here is that after the people in the community have availed themselves of those services from the local government, our treasurer will now conduct information drive for them to appreciate the value of paying taxes,” he added.

Barangay officials and school teachers were also tapped to help in information drive and as a reward, priority in terms of development projects were given to those with highest tax collections.

“It created healthy competition among our barangay officials for them to access funds for construction of much needed community and school facilities,” Salise said.

## More taxes, more projects

Municipal treasurer Myrna Hiponia said their local revenue collection has significantly increased from just almost P9 million in to almost P18 million in 2009.

“The convenience brought about by the improved revenue collection has encouraged our people to pay their taxes as the said obligation no longer hampers their daily economic activities,” Hiponia said.

“When people can see tangible projects and have availed themselves of the government services, it will no longer be difficult to collect taxes from them,” she added.

“The increase in local revenues has helped us a lot in improving the delivery of services to our constituents. In particular, it has helped us in raising the much needed equity to start the project implementation for MRDP,” Salise said.

“The municipal government was able to raise P50 million worth of infrastructure projects,” he said.

Salise said the need to increase local revenue has become more pressing now as they are beneficiaries of other development projects which also require counterpart funds.

Aside from implementing development projects, the local government has also achieved significant impacts, most notably, the reduction of the town’s poverty incidence from 60 percent to only 19 percent. Delivery of social services was also intensified which include the increase in Philhealth beneficiaries.

The improved tax collection has come a long way for Bunawan which not so long ago was classified as a third class town but now elevated into first class status as a result of more economic activities. □





## *From pilot site* **TO MODEL TOWN**

Alicia, Zamboanga Sibugay

**T**he coffers of this town went up surging barely two years after being identified as pilot for revenue generations.

The town had been adopting the age-old revenue collection code for a long time before the MRDP chose the local government to be among the pilot towns for Local Revenue Enhancement and Management training.

Comprised of 27 barangays with 32,289 constituents (NSCO 2007) in 183.08-square kilometer land area, this fourth class town has problem allocating its resources to basic services needed by the communities.

“With our IRA (internal revenue allotment) we cannot provide our constituents with all the services; we intend to give only the most basic,” Mayor Richard V. Tiu said.

“After the MRDP training of revenue generation and review of our tax code, we upgraded our revenue generation plan. We were able to strategize well and identify potential source of revenues,” Mayor Tiu added.

MRDP deputy director Arnel V. De Mesa said, the Local Revenue

Enhancement and Management training was aimed to be a platform to impose better tax code, identify revenue sources and potentials and improve resource mobilization while equipping local executives and municipal staff the knowledge of wise and efficient fiscal management.

After the training in 2008, the town immediately fielded personnel to conduct advocacy and information dissemination of the new scheme of tax collection.

At various barangay forums, the new tax code was met with evident resistance from affected communities.

“So officials went back to the working table and integrated in the plan the comments from our constituents during our advocacy and information dissemination,” Tiu said.

### **Gains from improved revenue**

Municipal treasurer Luzminda B. Dayon said that barely a year the new tax code was implemented their revenue has increased from Php2.9 million in 2007 to Php4.0 million in 2008.

It went up to Php5.4 million in 2010.

With the increased local coffers, the town was able to invest more in priority infrastructures like road networks. They were also able to provide equity share for the projects of various agencies.

The town has allocated P500,000.00 counterpart for its poverty reduction initiative through MRDP’s livelihood component, CFAD.

“We were able to fund P1.2 million for the conduct of mobile meetings that happened twice in a month, free medicines for our medical and dental services, and the training of barangay officials for parliamentary procedures and fiscal management,” Tiu said.

Tiu added that the mobile meetings which included all the department heads brought the government closer to the community and eased the people from spending more time and money when they conduct business with the local office.

With the gains of higher revenue, Tiu said the people and the municipal office feel no qualms in paying and collecting the imposed taxes.

“We are at ease to collect fees and implement the new scheme of tax code as tangible results of these are evident,” the mayor said.

From being a fourth class town for many years, today Alicia went a notch higher, becoming a third class municipality.

Among the revised tax collection imposed included P1.00 pay for every 1 meter line of seaweeds planted; registration and coding of every fishing boats; business permits for every investor and trader that enters the town; transport



permit for every vehicle used; and road tax for “habal-habal”, the popular use of motorcycle as local means of transportation.

To fully enforce the new tax code, the municipal office hired collectors assigned in specific barangays and checkpoints.

“The Fishery Collection, Assessment and Registration Team (FCART) was formed to reinforce and respond to problems of collection in the coastal areas which posted greater challenge for us,” Tiu said.

Aside from MRDP, the Asia Foundation has also helped the town strategize tax collection particularly in the upland part of town.

“We did not meet a lot of problems in the uplands and even exceeded our target collection in the area,” said the mayor.

### **Sure measure**

“The three-year term of office of the local chief executive makes it difficult to fully implement tax code. But we are now on track with our target, slowly but surely,” said Mayor Tiu.

Mayor Tiu has been re-elected to office last year for another fresh three years of office at the helm of the town’s development.

“Upon our initial planning with MRDP, we set a Php 12million collection target but we failed to achieve it. However we have learned our lessons and have seen where we went weak and the pitfalls have been identified. This year we settle for Php7 million target and we are optimistic to hit the target following the trend of the previous years,” the mayor said. □



## *Island charts its* **ROAD MAP**

### Sarangani, Davao del Sur

**N**ow barangay needs were identified, priorities were set, and voices were heard.

This was the feeling of barangay officials in Sarangani, Davao del Sur who for the first time were able to formulate their own Barangay Development Plan. This development came after a three-day training/workshop on Comprehensive Barangay Development Plan (CBDP) was conducted in September in the said town.

The workshop was part of the preparation activities for the six Sarangani barangays enrolled for the Year 3 implementation of MRDP's CFAD subprojects.

MRDP IGR head Dr. Consolacion Satorre and focal person for Region 11 Miguela Edguila acted as the resource persons during the workshop. Topics covered include: social preparation, barangay profiling, and land use mapping.

"The workshop is a critical activity in mainstreaming the CBDPs with the

over-all thrusts and directions of the municipality and other higher level of governance,” Satorre said.

Since CFAD is a community demand-driven component, Satorre added that the CBDP will ensure that the subprojects identified are within the barangay’s priority needs and poverty reduction agenda.

Sarangani Mayor Jerry Cawa for his part expressed his gratitude to MRDP for enabling his constituents in coming up with their CBDP which he considers as a management tool for local officials and other developmental-partners to provide direction and focus to activities at the grassroots level.

“There were several agencies that signified to provide development assistance to our barangays but did not materialize as they require CBDP. Now that our barangay officials are equipped with CBDP formulation, we can expect more development projects will be pour in our communities,” Cawa said. □



## *Embracing MRDP's* **INVESTMENT PACKAGE**

### Linamon, Lanao del Norte

**T**he father of this town believes that a holistic approach to rural development will create more laudable impact.

Mayor Noel Deaño opted to implement all major components of the Program as it tackles all development agenda of his administration.

“Being a fourth class town, we need all the help we can get from the national government. And MRDP is just the help we get,” Deaño said.

Under the Rural Infrastructure (RI) component, Linamon has implemented farm-to-market roads in the town’s key production barangays where livelihood projects were also be implemented through the Community Fund for Agricultural Development (CFAD) which included poultry production, aquaculture, vegetable

production, and livestock dispersal.

“Although the 50:50 counterparting scheme is a bit high but it’s already a big help. If have P1 million and the national government through DA provides another P1 million it’s already a big project,” the mayor said appreciating the financing policy under the RI component.

“Through the 50:50 scheme, we can maximize our resources and distribute it to other sectors such as health and education services,” Deaño said.

The rehabilitated Bosque farm-to-market road has served close to 200 households and a production area of 500 hectares. While farmers and women organizations have improved their incomes and family savings thanks to the well-managed investments of the POs. As the livelihood programs grow, the numbers of beneficiaries have folded to at least twice.

Realizing the need to protect the town’s marine resources, conservation measures were also implemented in the coastal communities. Residents within the conservation sites were provided livelihood projects to sustain their income.

This early, results of the project are already visible. Bamboos, kakawati, and fruit trees planted for the riverbank stabilization project has grown to six to 10 feet high. Fisherfolk have also noticed the increasing number of fish within the town’s local waters.

Mayor Deaño expressed his confidence that the projects being implemented under MRDP will provide a lasting legacy to his constituents.

The mayor said that aside from food security, his administration’s other top priorities are health, infrastructure, and education. To effectively implement all these programs, he underscored the need to institute governance reforms which MRDP will assist through the Investment for Governance Reform (IGR) component.

“Bottom-up planning could be one way of improving governance as this will guide the LGUs to prioritize their needs and implement effective fiscal policies,” he said.

Department of Agriculture (DA) Regional Technical Director for Region 10 Constancio Maghanoy said Linamon has always been an active partner of DA not only in MRDP but also in other agricultural programs of the Department.

Maghanoy who is also the MRDP coordinator in the region added that if more LGUs will adopt the program as a package of investment like Linamon, more rural communities will enjoy the impact of sustainable development. □



## *Platform for* **DECENTRALIZATION**

### Davao City

**T**he World Bank (WB) believes the antipoverty program of the Department of Agriculture (DA) could be the platform to make decentralization operational.

WB lead official for rural development Carolina F. Geron described the Program as such in the various regional consultation of the program held in the cities of Davao, Gen. Santos and Zamboanga.

MRDP is designed to achieve two things: improving incomes of farmers and institutionalize decentralization which promotes participation, transparency and accountability.

The decentralization mandate of the local government units (LGUs) through Local Government Code (LCG) is now 19-years old since it was enacted in 1991.

Decentralization is defined as the transfer of responsibility for planning, management and resources generation and allocation from the central government and its agencies to the lower levels of government.



Further the Program reinforces the mandate of RA 8435 known as the Agriculture and Fishery Modernization Act (AFMA) of 1998 which calls to modernize agricultural and fishery practices in the country to increase yield and incomes of small farmers and fisherfolk and at the same time become competitive in the global market.

LGC and AFMA mandate LGUs to deliver “frontline services” considering the advantages that LGUs have, being closer to the direct recipients and attain their fullest development as self-reliant communities, and make them more effective partners in the attainment of national goals.

Cesar Umali Jr., the Bank’s consultant for decentralization, said there is a need to repackage agriculture-based livelihood projects into agribusiness ventures to make it an effective way for rural folks to break free from poverty.

Umali said decentralization of agricultural services should be actively pursued for local officials to prioritize food-security program in their agenda.

“A decentralized approach can effectively increase food production, raise farmers’ incomes, and relieve the DA from sole responsibility for food security, at the same time, multiply its funds,” he said.

Umali also cited the importance of developing a business plan that will guide beneficiaries in making their livelihood profitable and sustainable.

“Having a business plan will be an ideal way for beneficiaries to look at their livelihood as a business. It outlines strategies, objectives, resources at hand, and the best methods for the livelihood to become viable and generate desired profits” he said.

Geron said national agencies like DA should act as technical adviser and not the providers, since it should be the LGU who has the responsibility to provide the extensions services.

“DA’s research should be demand-driven and it should respond to the needs of the community,” she added.

Further she added MRDP establishes infrastructures like roads irrigations and postharvest facilities and livelihoods not just to respond to the needs of our community but also to promote decentralization of delivery of services to LGUs.

With MRDP, she said, “we let LGUs conduct the bidding, implement, monitor and ensure maintenance of the project. With this, we capacitate the LGUs and not just for them to wait for funds from the national government.” □



## Transparency thru **CYBERSPACE**

### Davao City

**A**iming to uphold transparency in governance, the Program taps the utility of the cyberspace by launching its own website.

Launched in 2009, *www.damrdp.net*, was cited by the World Bank as it is aligned with the Bank's transparency and open data policy.

Maryse Gautier, the WB's portfolio and operations manager, said the development of MRDP website was a proactive approach towards promotion of greater transparency which is one of the bases of good governance.

"I visited the MRDP site and (I find it as) the same logic with the Bank's

access to information [AI] initiatives and we hope other projects of the Bank will also follow,” Gautier said.

The AI policy is one of the several major reforms that the Bank is undertaking to improve its effectiveness, efficiency, and accountability.

“Since 2007, we’ve been wanting to establish our own website and we are glad that we have realized it and even happier with the feedback of its users,” deputy director Arnel de Mesa said.

“Apart from being a promotional tool, we are also using our website in promoting transparency to our stakeholders. For instance, interested bidders can inquire about on-going bidding as well as download bidding documents,” De Mesa said adding that printable instructional materials, forms and document templates including news and program updates are also available and accessible for its site visitors.

Aside from available public documents, the website also highlights news and feature stories of the most recent activities and feats of the program, the performance of the regional coordinating offices as well as the accomplishments of participating local government units (LGUs).

It also contains anti-corruption hotline direct to WB headquarters in Washington, DC, projects status, downloadable brochures and other education materials and links to attached agencies.

WB rural development specialist Carolina F. Geron said the website has been very effective in terms reflecting of the programs activities as well as its policy.

“I congratulate the program for establishing its own website making the program and the Department of Agriculture transparent to the public and to all its stakeholders,” Geron said.

Further, WB procurement specialist Noel Sta. Ines added that the website leads other agencies in promoting transparency.

“I appreciate the (MRDP) website as there is an updated posting of projects for bidding and even the bidding documents are made available in a downloadable format. I hope other agencies follow suit,” Sta. Ines said.

De Mesa said with very minimal investment on web development, responses from the bidders had been encouraging as bidders participation increased and widened not only within Mindanao but as far as Cebu in the Visayas.

The MRDP website is also linked to various government website better collaboration as well as to strengthen the program’s feedbacking mechanism.

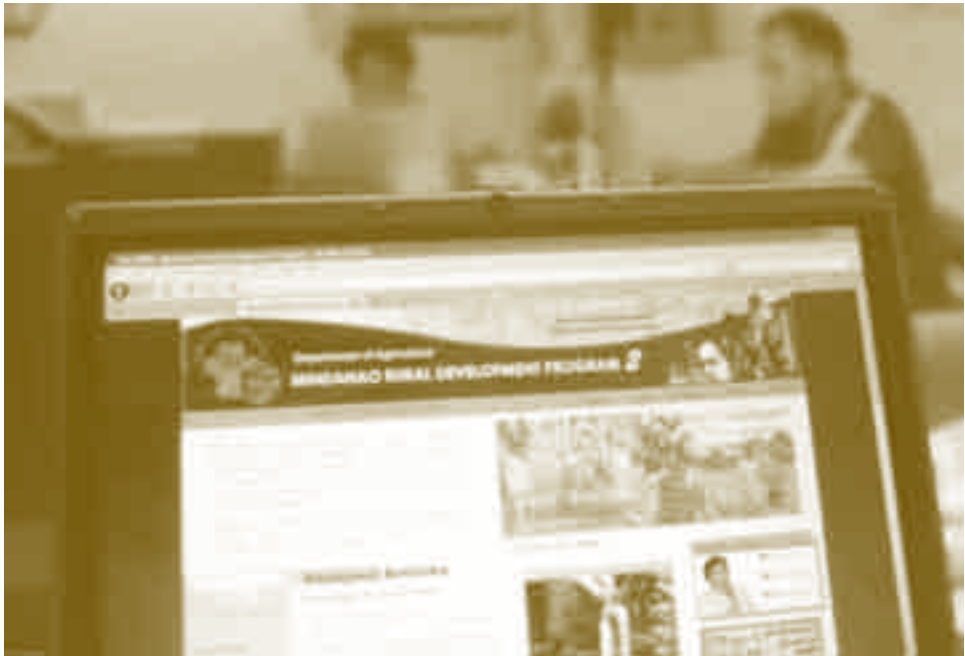
“We hope to make a dent in making a government program like MRDP as transparent as possible to the public,” he added.

“The internet world is the new highway of information source and information exchange and we don’t want to be left behind of the fast-paced and modern mode of communication,” De mesa enthused.

The InfoACE (Information, Advocacy, Communication and Education) unit of the Program maintains the website.

Gautier who is also the WB’s focal person for AI initiative said the MRDP website shows that the Bank’s AI policy can happen on the ground and hopes that the same thing could happen to their other funded projects.

“As a development finance institution, the Bank strives for greater transparency about the projects and programs it is supporting to enhance the quality of its operations. As an intergovernmental organization owned by member countries including the Philippines , the Bank is accountable for public money and has the obligation to be responsive to the inquiries and concerns of its shareholders,” Gautier said. □



# Acknowledgment

Writing and documenting MRDP2's mid-term impact stories could have not begun without the help of a lot of people. Our sincerest gratitude to the following for their invaluable support and assistance in making this book published:

Hon. Proceso J. Alcala, Secretary - Department of Agriculture;

MRDP Program Advisory Board headed by Usec. Joel S. Rudinas;

The officials and staff of the local government units who provided us valuable assistance during the interviews and photo documentation;

MRDP Program Support Office – Management Committee: Program Director Lealyn A. Ramos, Deputy Program Director Arnel V. De Mesa, Consolacion G. Gasacao, Nelly L. dela Cruz, Ma. Fe P. Gabunales, Basila M. Siago, Dennis Paul C. Mijares, Consolacion E. Satorre, Joseph D. Rico, and Thaleya G. Roque for her assistance in editing the final draft;

DA Regional Executive Directors: Dr. Carlos B. Mendoza, Region 9; Dir. Lealyn A. Ramos, Region 10; Dr. Oscar O. Parawan, Region 11; Dir. Amelia J. Datukan, Region 12; Dr. Edna M. Mabesa, Region 13; and Sec. Lomala M. Balindong, ARMM;

MRDP Regional Program Coordinating Offices heads: RTD Constancio G. Alama, RTD Constancio C. Maghanoy, Jr., RTD Norlito P. Agduyeng, RTD Jimmy M. Olivo, Mr. Eliseo T. Tila, and Dr. Paisal M. Abdul;

MRDP Consultants: Dr. Roger Chio and Ricardo Regis;

World Bank Team headed by Ms. Carol F. Geron and Mr. Joey K. Virtucio and to Ms. Ning Bondoc for giving us the lead on noteworthy stories for governance reform;

DA-RFU/RPCO staff who facilitated our field documentation particularly: Vivian Andalahao, Remai Alejado, and Mark Laride of DA 9; Evangeline Sabellina and Loelyn Charisse R. Moralde of DA 10; Romeo Buhayang of DA 11; Edgar Allan Pasaol of DA 12; Ms. Becky Atega, Wilfredo A. Abrea, John Gamboa Sr., and Edilmira Luminarias of DA 13; and Susan Ungel, of DAF-ARMM;

To DA and MRDP drivers who brought us even to the most remote areas just to get our stories: Elmer Barro, Totong Buenafe, Dodong Curada, Rene Gecale, Arnel Ligan, Rey Montaldo, Junie Piodos, Tony Veloso, Nanding Alvarez, and Ronald Caburnay; and

Above all, to MRDP beneficiaries for sharing their stories. Were it not for them this book would never be completed.