Training for Rural Economic Empowerment Project (TREE)

Some Success Stories

International Labor Organization (ILO)
United States Department of Labor (USDOL)

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Joe is a bachelor but head of the family of 7 in Barangay Sibakloon, municipality of Tandubas in the island province of Tawi-Tawi. “I used to borrow pump-boat before just to catch fish in order to earn but its very difficult knowing the expenses to be paid for rentals”. Joe tells the ILO and TESDA officers conducting follow-up studies. He joined a TREE training program in pump boat making facilitated by Omarkhayyam Dalagan of TESDA. In the training they learned how to make a small fishing boat and how to use it in shallow water fishing.

“Our lives have changed. We already have our own pump boat which was the output of our training. We no longer pay for the rentals and because of our new found skills our income increased significantly”, Joe added. At present Joe is earning a net income of P900 per month from his original income of P300. “An additional of P600 is already big enough for me and my family. I thank ILO-USDOL TREE Project for the trust and confidence that they have given to our community. We promised that the assistance given to us will be treasured” Joe said tapping his small pump boat.

Tindeli L. Buka and Unsa B. Datumanong

Earning money is no longer an impossible dream for Tindeli Buka and Unsa Datumanong. Coming from a poor rural community in Dasawao, Datu Piang, Maguindanao both of them expressed optimism in joining the Pottery Making training organized by the Federation of United Mindanawan Bangsamoro Women Multi-purpose Cooperatives, a partner of the TREE Project. The training was facilitated by CTEC Aisa Mokalid.

The training conducted by ILO-USDL TREE Project and TESDA gave them “hope to generate income to support the daily needs of our families”.

Upon completion of the training, Tindeli and Unsa immediately applied their newly acquired skills. They started producing flower pots, clay stoves, and other clay products that they learned in the training. Shortly, more buyers came. So the two new entrepreneurs decided to organize an outlet of their products in the Datu Piang Public Market. Today they claim to have a net income of about P400 per month, small but enough for them to say that earning money is not impossible. “As long as you love your job and continue to persevere, nothing is impossible. There are other people who will come to help”, the two said.
Musing Minongkil

Musing is a former operative of the MNLF. He is now the Fund Manager of the Co-Fund Board of a cluster of 3 Rural Workers Association or RWA composed of 75 members organized and trained by the TREE Project in Bago-Enged, Datu Odin Sinsuat Municipality in the province of Maguindanao. The place is popularly known as Camp Ibrahim Sema of the MNLF.

He often scratches his head every time a note reaches him from Mus Sema, MNLF Secretary General. These notes are handed to him by MNLF Cadres who are asking for livelihood assistance.

As a trained Community Training and Enterprise Coordinator (CTEC) Musing knows what he is supposed to do. Since under-going training in Community Assessment and Planning under the TREE Project he has already assisted 10 Muslim communities organize into RWAs and registered by the Department of Labor and Employment, a partner of the TREE Project. Some of these RWAs were already able to get assistance from other donor projects.

Kapatagan is a small municipality straddling Camp Abubakar, one of the rebel Moro Islamic Liberation Front’s (MILF) enclaves in the province of Lanao del Sur. After attending a workshop in Community Assessment and Planning conducted by the TREE Project, Racma Bansil organized a group of 20 Muslim women from the municipality. Using the TREE Methodology the group identified garments making as the most viable enterprise in their community. Finding their proposal meritorious, TESDA-ARMM recommended it for funding. During their training, Mayor Roaida Maglangit was so impressed with the group that she donated the building where they held the training as their production center.

The group is now getting orders for school uniforms and abaya (Muslim dress). But capital is a persistent problem for the group. After the training, the group decided to organize formally. Their registration as a Rural Workers Association was recently approved by the Department of Labor and Employment –ARMM.
Mokaliden Kido or Moks, as he is fondly called, is a former MNLF combatant during the war. He attended three modules of capability building workshops for CTECS offered by the TREE Project. After his training he immediately conducted community mobilization in his area. A group of poor women in Barangay Digal in Buluan municipality in the province of Maguindanao was one of the beneficiaries of his work. Through Moks, the group prepared a proposal for a Garments Training project. After the training the group is now engaged into garments making. Moks has been busy as a CTEC and a peace and development worker.

His problem is how to provide more economic assistance to his former colleagues in the MNLF especially those who have not been absorbed into the armed forces as a result of the 1996 GRP-MNLFF Peace Agreement. The need is big but the resources are too small. The TREE Project also shares his concerns but prods him to go on.

Maila Dondi

Maila is a member of the Sukran Bakeshop Cooperative she organized with her classmates after undergoing training in Halal bakeshop operation from the TREE Project in Barangay Katil in Datu Paglas municipality, Maguindanao province. The training was conducted by TESDA through the facilitation of CTEC Esmie Simpal of the RCBW.

“Having a halal bakeshop here in our community is already a big help for the residents. People don’t need to go to the Poblacion just to buy breads and cookies” according to Maila.

Being a member of their small cooperative, Maila is assigned in preparing the ingredients needed for baking. She also checks the cleanliness of their shop and equipments to assure their consumers of good quality breads and cookies. For her tasks, Maila is earning a net monthly income of P600 for a part-time work in the group enterprise. Together with other members, she is hoping that they can generate or get additional working capital to purchase another oven to increase their daily production.
After undergoing a TREE workshop on community assessment and planning, CTEC Arlene Matalam of the Regional Commission on Bangsamoro Women (RCBW) lost no time organizing and facilitating meetings of internally displaced women in her war-affected community in Pagalungan, Maguindanao.

Equipped with the new methodology, Arlene facilitated the preparation of three chosen training proposals (food processing, furniture making and dressmaking). She was also able to convince the Local Government of Pagalungan to shoulder some of the cost of the training.

Arlene thought that after the conduct of two training programs in furniture making and food processing her involvement with the groups will end. But it was not so. “After the training, the group again sought my help to generate working capital for the enterprises”. She complained.

During a recent visit Arlene was busy preparing for the dressmaking upgrading training for another group of Muslim women in an adjacent community. This time, however, RCBW will implement the training in cooperation with TESDA, another partner in the TREE Project.

The Matidto RWA, with 48 members, was organized by the TREE Project in Barangay Bago-Enged, Datu Odin Sinsuat Municipality in Maguindanao Province, a former battleground during the 30-years separatist war that ended in the signing of the GRP-MNLF Final Peace Agreement in September 1996.

Since its organization in August, 2003, it has already implemented several projects. Together with two other RWAs they organized a Community Fund project to help their members who are mostly marginalized farmers. Some 48 members, former MNLF Muhajideens, are now benefiting from their Co-Fund. On their own resources and initiatives, the Matidto RWA constructed a small multi-purpose building to house their Corn Sheller that they have sourced out from a USAID-assisted project.

RWA Treasurer Tuna Langalan lamented that they do not have solar drier. They might just receive it any day now from the DSWD-ARMM that promised to give them. DSWD is a partner of the TREE Project.
Adona is a newly-wed housewife. Unemployed and without income, she joined a training program in Halal Bakeshop Operation in their community which was facilitated by CTEC Ragah Datudacula of the Department of Labor and Employment of the TREE Project. Twelve of her colleagues in the Al Jadeed Rural Workers Association enrolled in the training. After completing the training six of them opened the Al Jadeed Bakeshop in Malabang municipality, Lanao del Sur. Adona is now a hyper-active bakeshop manager. “Thanks to the ILO-USDOL TREE Project for the training program”, she says proudly with her initial salary of P1, 100 per month.

Her latest initiative is the expansion of enterprise activities by diversifying into other related business ventures - selling cold soft drinks, mineral water and juices. The six new entrepreneurs are bound for expansion into other food related products, “if we are able to generate additional working capital and more training from TREE”; Adona told the monitoring officers.

The TREE Project was in the mind of Samsia, a bored retired government worker, when she organized a group of about 25 women in Barangay Gang, Sultan Kudarat municipality into a Rural Workers Association. With the help of Cherry Socul, a trained CTEC from DOLE, the women prepared and submitted a proposal for training in garments making. The training was conducted by TESDA in an old garage owned by one of the members.

Today the garage is a humming workshop. Samsia, who was a participant in the skills training, applies the concept of community enterprise system she learned from the TREE Project. Although she was elected the group’s President, she chooses to be an independent marketing agent going around establishments and offices to look for customers.

“I go to adjacent municipalities and to Cotabato City to solicit orders”. After getting job orders she buys the materials and delivers them to the group for sewing. “I enjoy what I am doing. Aside from earning for myself; I am also able to help some women who were otherwise idle earn incomes for their families”. Samsia has just been tapped by TESDA as part-time skills trainer in Garments & Draperies training projects.
Ampareta Butch

Ampareta Butch is the young and energetic manager of a newly created group enterprise located at Pagagawan, Maguindanao.

She shares the project with her classmates in the Bakeshop Operation Course of the TREE Project organized by Bai Myra M. Matalam, a trained CTEC from the Regional Commission on Bangsamoro Women or RCBW and implemented by TESDA-ARMM.

With her new job, Ampareta is receiving an additional monthly income of ₱1,000 for her family - and is proud of it. To further strengthen her capability, she participated in another TREE Project workshop in Community Enterprise Management organized and implemented by the Regional Commission on Bangsamoro Women. Now she finds time to share her learning on enterprise management to members of her group.

Sambas Hassan and his Mahardika Institute of Technology

The Mahardika Institute of Technology (MIT) is a booming private school in the municipality of Bongao in the exotic but poverty-stricken island province of Tawi-Tawi. Sam’s Mahardika Institute of Technology is the TREE project’s pilot institution for the Transition Enterprise Planning component of the TREE Methodology. The concept was specially prepared for formal vocational training students as an optional course for those who want to engage into self-employment after their training. The school is also pilot-testing the “Sharika” Fund assistance program for its graduates, a scheme also taken from the TREE Project’s Co-Fund Scheme.

Although Sam Hassan, school owner and Executive Director, is busy running his school he still finds time as a Community Training & Employment Coordinator (CTEC) of the TREE Project – a job that is close to his heart. This is partly because the school’s history is intertwined with ILO. In its first school-year graduation in 1999, the guest speaker was R. R. Baldemor, then the Project Manager of the Vocational Training and Enterprise Development Project, the first project of ILO in Mindanao after the signing of the 1996 GRP-MNLF Final Peace Agreement. From a one-program vocational institution MIT is now a full blown college with almost 700 enrollees per semester.
Virgilio A. Chiu

At age 23, Virgilio A. Chiu was definitely out of school, no job and no direction. But luck came one day when he joined the TREE Project’s training program in Halal Bakeshop Operation in Malabang, Lanao del Sur. The training program was proposed by the Al Jadeed Rural Workers Association with the facilitation of CTEC Ragah Datudacula of DOLE. It was implemented by TESDA.

After the training Virgilio joined six of the graduates to start the Al Jadeed Bakeshop. They produce breads, cookies and pastries for local consumption. He is the group’s mixer, a skill that he learned from the training which he treasures so much. Today he is now earning around P1,000 every month as a full time worker. The money is still small, but he feels happy and proud being “independent”.

Virgilio has got a new dream – that someday he will be able to run his own halal bakeshop and probably expand it to cover other Muslim areas in Malabang!

Aisha Delilah Malogka, got the knack for being political from his father who was an MNLF top gun martyred during the MNLF-GRP war. Before dropping-out of school, she was an active member of the Bangsamoro Student League in a local university in Cotabato City. She had to stop schooling due to financial problems. Aisha, together with some out-of-school friends from Barangay Tamontaka, Datu Odin Sinsuat Municipality, Maguindanao sought help from the MNLF-General Secretariat Office, a partner of the TREE Project.

Using the TREE Methodology, they prepared a training proposal on T-Shirt Printing and Signboard Making. The proposal was assessed and implemented by TESDA-ARMM with TREE Project funding. The group does their work temporarily in Aisha’s house. They were able to solicit job orders during the local election.

Their group is planning to establish a permanent shop in Upi Municipality. With enough working capital and further training we hope we can expand our shop in the near future”, Aisha said.
Whenever Monier visits Sumisip municipality in war-torn Basilan province he only wishes that someday, his area could also receive assistance from project donors to help lessen poverty in the island province. Having such great desire to help, the former MNLF combatant religiously participated in the TREE workshops for CTECS. Acquiring the skill in community assessment he facilitated a meeting among local residents on a possible enterprise needed in the seaside municipality. The community identified Ice Making to help preserve fish catch by small fishermen. The group prepared the training proposal and Monier submitted it to Hamid Salahuddin, the MNLF chairperson in Basilan.

Now, Monier is very ecstatic. His dream has become a reality as his proposal was approved by the TREE Project and implemented through the MNLF. The training, as planned, is expected to result into a group enterprise that will serve the need for short overnight storage of small fish catch for better selling price in the market. The trainees may even go into fish trading if they are able to get capital, according to Monier. Monier believes that in a small way his work has touched the heart of some people in Sumisip making them believe that development can be achieve through work and perseverance inspite of armed conflicts.

Noraiha Bandal wakes up early to see to it that pastries and breads have been baked and ready for the day. Noraiha is the Chairman of the Biniruan PDC Women Organization composed of 44 members that runs the only “halal” bakeshop in Barangay Biniruan, Cotabato City.

The community was the most ravaged area in the city during the MNLF-GRP war. But the small bake shop is not enough to earn income for all the members. They approached the City government headed by Mayor Muslimin Sema, the Secretary General of the MNLF and Chairman of the TREE Project Executive Committee.

Noraiha Bandal and the Biniruan PDC Women Organization

TREE immediately trained the women on the concept and operation of the Co-Fund Scheme. The group then tapped the ILO PROCEED Project under the GRP-UN Multi-donor Program for their start-up capital. Now twenty-eight (28) members are engaged in various small enterprise activities. The group has started to identify other skills training needs to improve their economic projects. The TREE Project is definitely on their minds.
Tarhata M. Salendab is a student member of the Bangsamoro Women Rural Workers Association organized by the TREE Project in Barangay Digal, Buluan in the province of Maguindanao.

Her group has undergone training in Dressmaking in their community organized by Mokaliden P. Kido a trained Community Training and Employment Coordinator of the TREE Project from the MNLF.

Tarhata prides herself with a monthly income of P400 which adds to her school allowance, a starter in working part-time in her group’s dressmaking shop in the Barangay. At present Tarhata looks forward for more job orders from customers so that they could generate savings to add to their small working capital.

Tuna Langalan

After his chores as a volunteer teacher in the only public primary school in Barangay Bago-Enged, Datu Odin Municipality in Maguindanao, Tuna Langalan, a former MNLF cadre, dons another hat - that of a CTEC. With the help of the TREE Project, Tuna together with Musing Minongkil, organized three community groups in Camp Ibrahim Sema, a former MNLF military camp during the 30 years GRP-MNLF war.

“After three modules of training on TREE Methodology, my development paradigm completely changed”, Tuna said. Now I completely believe that peace and development must start from economic empowerment”, he added.

According to Tuna, most of the projects implemented in their community failed to directly address the real needs of the members. So, the three community groups heeded the advice of the TREE Project to become a pilot for the Co-Fund Scheme. With financial assistance from private and foreign donors the three groups started their Co-Fund Operation. Now about 75 members have already benefited from short-term financing assistance.

Tuna, who acts as Treasurer of the group, has been constantly approached by residents of adjacent communities for assistance. But he is busy preparing for the conduct of training on basic building construction in their community. They will construct a small building that will become the groups’ headquarters.
Esmie is a member of the Technical Working Group (TWG) of the TREE Project representing the Regional Commission on Bangsamoro Women. Equipped with the methodology she learned from the TREE Project, she facilitated a community assessment meeting among groups of women evacuees who were displaced by the armed conflict in Pagalungan municipality in Maguindanao. The women identified Food Processing as a viable group enterprise in view of its being a daily consumer item. The proposal was assessed by TESDA and approved for funding assistance by the TREE Project. The group is now registered as the Pagalungan Women’s Kauyagan Association. Their food processing enterprise is slowly but surely reaping incomes and benefits.

Not content with the project, Esmie again assisted another group of women in preparing a project proposal for upgrading training on dressmaking in the same municipality. The new group is composed of home-based marginal sewers who wanted to improve their skills and gain more knowledge about entrepreneurship. The training has just begun. Esmie is happy and proud that she was able to make an impact on the lives of the poor in the community.

**Pagalungan Women’s Kauyagan Association**

The Pagalungan Women’s Kauyagan Association is a group composed of 25 women, most of them are internally displaced persons or IDP. Their communities have been affected by armed encounters in the municipality of Pagalungan in Maguindanao province. They were organized by CTEC Bai Arlene Matalam from the Regional Commission on Bangsamoro Women. The group got assistance in Food Processing training from the TREE Project.

Immediately after their training the women started producing processed foods such as corned beef, beef tapa, beef and chicken balls, tocino and other local delicacies. The small undertaking grew into a busy enterprise. In a few weeks’ time demands for their products increased. With only a very small rolling capital the group experienced their first difficulty - meeting the needs of walk-in buyers. This has been a frustrating experience for the new entrepreneurs.

They approached the Chairperson of the Regional Commission on Bangsamoro Women, Bai Tarhata Maglangit for the problem. Immediately they got P15, 000 in financial assistance. But good business opportunities are being lost. The groups’ enthusiasm on their enterprise and the buyers’ interest in their products is not being met by enough working capital.
A lady dentist is doing non-dental work in far-flung communities - organizing poor people for skills training. Only in the municipality of Kapatagan in Lanao del Sur. Dr. Racma P. Bansil is a practicing dentist with a big heart. In her desire to reach out to the poor families in her community in Daguan, Kapatagan, the doctor attended the TREE Project’s workshops for the Federation of United Mindanawan Bangsamoro Women MPC. Immediately after the workshop Dr. Racma was able to achieve her dream of organizing a Dressmaking Training for a group of poor women in Kapatagan. Now the group operates their own enterprise from a shop constructed through the courtesy of Mayor Roaida Maglangit and the local government of Kapatagan.

Dr. Racma constantly monitors the women from her clinic in Cotabato City. The women are now earning income producing garments such as pillow cases, Muslim dress, and school uniforms. The project, though, spawned more and more demands for similar assistance from other women groups – and the lady dentist is in a quandary.

The Tandubas pump boat makers and fishermen

Barangay Sibakloon is a sea-side village in Tandubas, an exotic island municipality in the Province of Tawi-Tawi. Most of the residents are marginal fishermen that usually rent pump-boats in order to engage in daily fishing. A group of this fisher folks submitted to the TREE Project through TESDA a training proposal in pump-boat making and how to use the small sea crafts in fishing. Today 10 small colorful boats adorn the seashore of Barangay Sibakloon every morning with their happy and proud owners.

The boats are products of the training. The operators are trainees of the TREE Project. 10 of the 15 trainees have organized themselves. Joe Avial, their president is working on the group’s registration as a Rural Workers Association. Their goal is to help each other in maintenance. Part of their plans is not only to continue fishing but also to produce more pump boats for sale or rental to other fishermen in nearby Barangays. But their problem is capital.