Training for Rural Economic Empowerment (ILO-USDOL TREE Project in the Philippines)

Brief Information Note on the Project Achievements and its Implementing Methodology (TREE)

Brief Background

Within the framework of ILO's decent work agenda, the ILO and US Department of Labor entered in 2002 into a Cooperative Agreement regarding implementation of a project to improve the social and economic status of vulnerable groups in Pakistan and the Philippines.

The Project has been funded by the US Department of Labor, Bureau of International Affaires (USDOL/ILAB) and was implemented by the ILO.

In the Philippines, the project addressed the needs in developing human potential and local economies in the post conflict and poor areas of Mindanao. More specifically, the Project enhanced capacities of national and local institutions in planning, designing and implementing skills training and post-training support programs as part of local economic empowerment efforts and decent work promotion.

This note aims at giving a brief introduction to the project and its implementing methodology-TREE. It also presents summary of the results achieved during almost five years of the project duration.

A more explicit description of the TREE project results can be found in regular project progress reports, and a description of TREE methodological concepts, implementation arrangements, strategies, instruments and processes, based on the accumulated field experience, can be found in the TREE Users' Manuals which has been elaborated by the project.
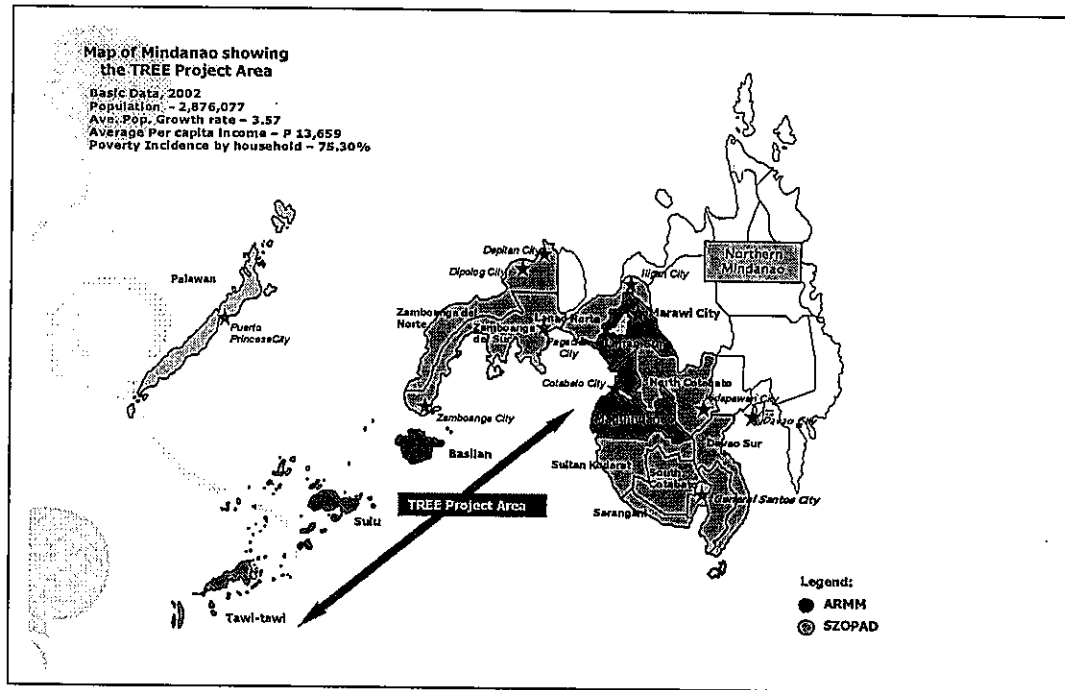
ILO-USDOL Project: applying TREE Methodology in the Philippines (Mindanao)

The project, which become known under the name of its implementation methodology - Training for Rural Economic Empowerment (TREE, RAS/02/M055/USA) set the ambitious task of creating an alternative model in skills development for income generation and employment promotion for the most marginalized groups in diverse, geographical areas in two different countries, the Philippines and Pakistan, where rural populations have suffered from security problems for a long time and where there were no jobs or foreign investment and limited government capacity to address poverty, particularly in rural areas.

In the Philippines, the project initially operated within the five provinces and one city of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, or ARMM (*Population about 2.8 Million.*). The ARMM is the poorest among the 16 regions in the country (*Poverty incidence - 75%*). Later on the project activities were also initiated in selected municipalities of the Region 12 and Davao City.

Mindanao, especially ARMM, is still besieged with problems caused by the continuing armed conflicts. It is widely recognized that the unstable peace and order situation is caused, among other things, by a vicious cycle of poverty and illiteracy among people.

The TREE project has a very specific assignment – training for rural economic empowerment. Hence, in order to be effective there was a need to formulate a practical skills development framework that is relevant to the situation of its target groups and communities.

Map of Mindanao showing the TREE Project Area
Basic Data, 2002
Population – 2,876,077
Ave. Pop. Growth rate – 3.57
Average Per capita Income – P 13,659
Poverty Incidence by household – 75.30%

Project Concept and Strategic Tasks

While other internationally-supported projects in Mindanao, including ARMM, take care of building social infrastructures, assets re-distribution, and social welfare assistance to solve poverty, the TREE project was focused on skills development for income generation as the center of its mission. The simplest way could have been only to duplicate existing skills and enterprise training programs, then help the graduates find jobs or start their own livelihood. But in Mindanao this is not enough. In order to reduce poverty, income generation must not only come from skills development but must also be supported by relevant institutions, capital, social organization, and an economic system that works in the communities.

The project was directed to work out a parallel strategy that can allow disadvantaged people in rural areas to develop their skills and learn how to practice and enjoy the

benefits of a market economy within their rural environment, and in accordance with their culture, traditions and religious beliefs.
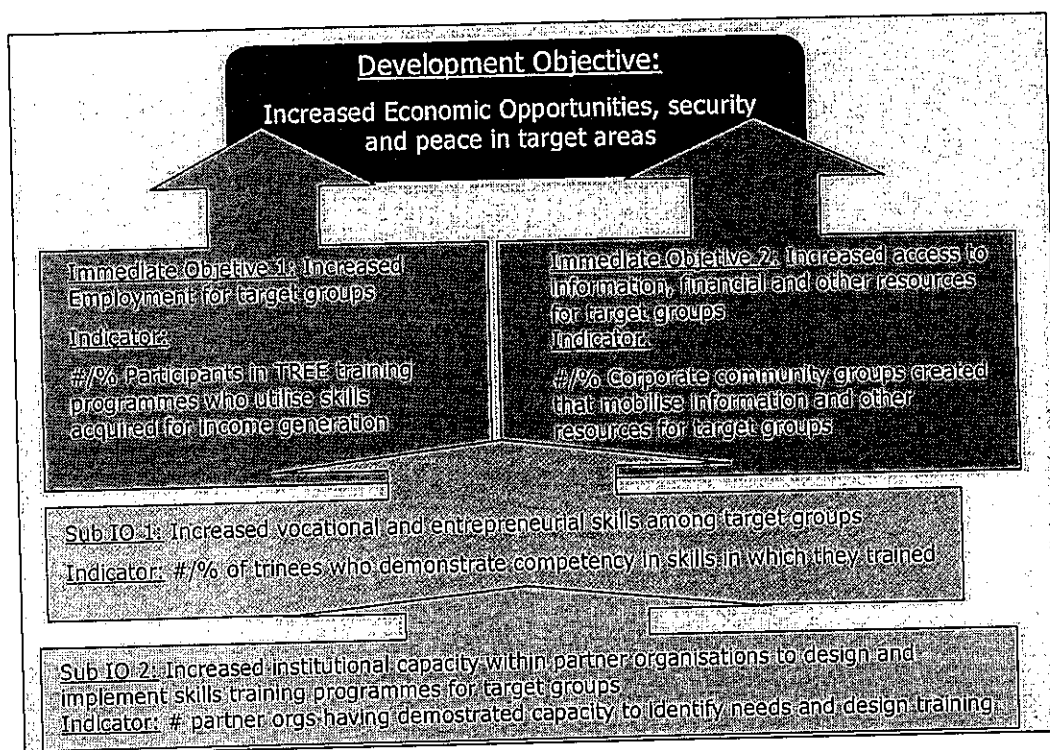
Project Objectives

The project has two immediate objectives (IO) and two sub-immediate objectives (Sub IO); all are geared towards achieving the development objective – Increased Economic Opportunities, security and peace in target areas of Mindanao, especially in ARMM. Based on these objectives the project has been assigned indicators of performance.

> IO 1 - Increased employment for target groups
>
> IO 2 - Increased access to information, financial and other resources
>
> Sub IO 1 – Increased vocational and entrepreneurial skills provision
>
> Sub IO 2 – Increased institutional capacity within partner organizations to design and implement skills training programmes for target groups

Development Objective:
Increased Economic Opportunities, security and peace in target areas

Immediate Objective 1: Increased Employment for target groups

Indicator:

#/% Participants in TREE training programmes who utilise skills acquired for income generation

Immediate Objective 2: Increased access to information, financial and other resources for target groups

Indicator:

#/% Corporate community groups created that mobilise information and other resources for target groups

Sub IO 1: Increased vocational and entrepreneurial skills among target groups
Indicator: #/% of trainees who demonstrate competency in skills in which they trained

Sub IO 2: Increased institutional capacity within partner organisations to design and implement skills training programmes for target groups
Indicator: # partner orgs having demonstrated capacity to identify needs and design training

Project Organizational Structure

In pursuing its objectives, outputs and activities and to secure active partnership the Project worked with and through local partners organized into the Project Executive Committee (EXCOM).

EXCOM's operational framework has been designed to be consistent with policies and mandates of the partners in training and socio-economic development areas.

EXCOM was composed of five ARMM government agencies (e.g. TESDA, DSWD, DOLE, RCBW, RPDO) and four non-government organizations: the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), the Federation of United Bangsamoro Women Multi-purpose Cooperatives, the women sector committee of the MNLF, and the SZOPAD Livelihood and Development Foundation, a foundation organized by some leaders of the MNLF after the Peace Agreement, and Rural Workers Association (RWA).
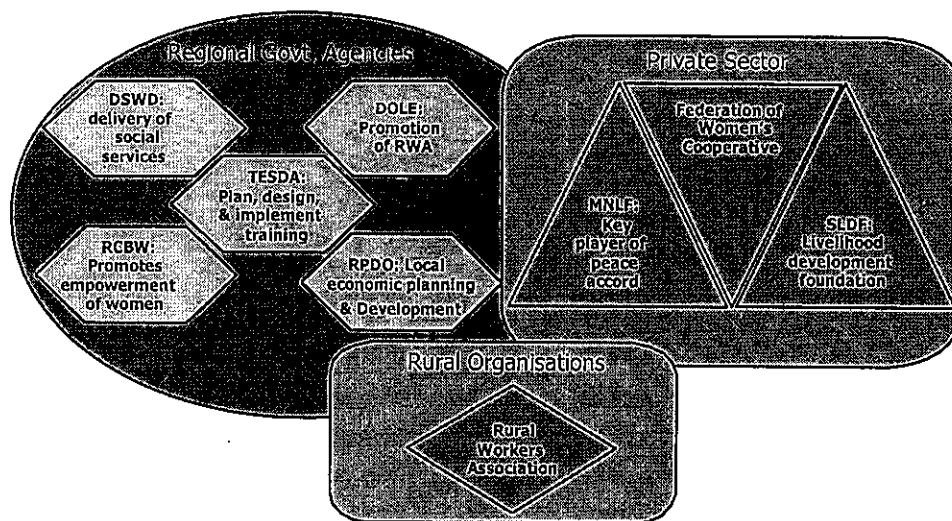
The project was supported by a Technical Working Group (TWG) and team of community training and employment coordinators (CTECs), members of which carry out work as prescribed by the TREE methodological approach at the municipal and community levels, and nominated by the agencies comprising the EXCOM Members of the TWG and the CTECs have been trained and up-graded by the Project on the concepts and practical implementation of the TREE-adapted methodology and on the use of its various tools and instruments.

The planning and implementing of the TREE steps and processes as well as project performance monitoring have been done through the institutional structure as presented in diagram below.

Technical Operation Structure TREE Philippines
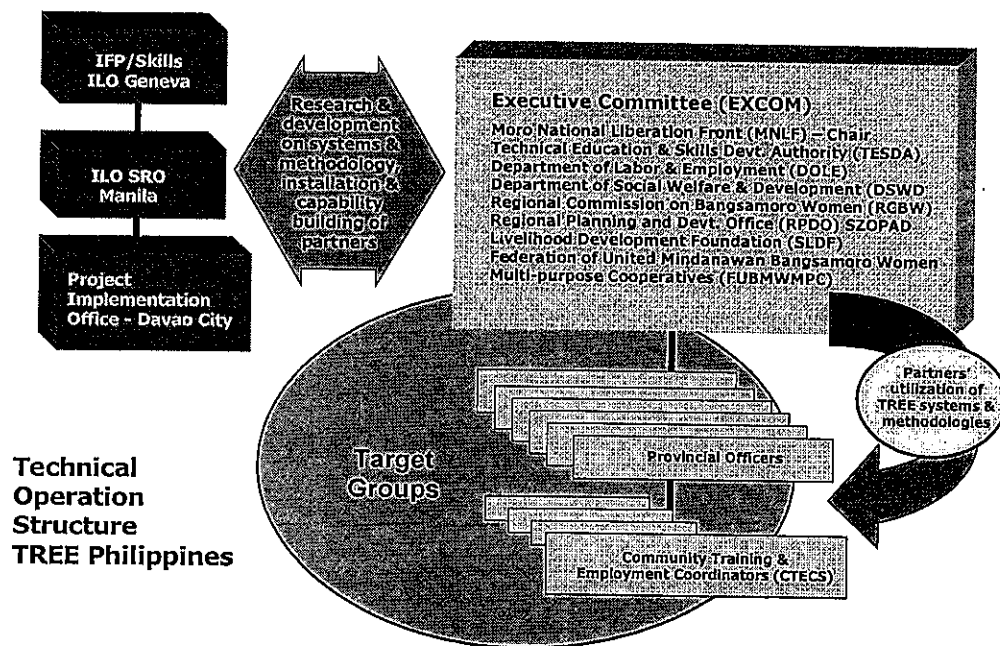
Project Operational Components

Operational activities of the project were directed towards the achievement of the desired outputs and impact through carrying out on appropriate research and adaptation of the TREE generic methodology to suit local socio-economic requirements and through strengthening capacities of the partner organizations to implement the adapted methodology and its tools and instruments in practice. Hence, the project adopted a four-stage operational approach with the following components:

- Adapting and developing of the project-area-specific methodology, its tools and instruments (TREE methodology)
- Capability building of partner organizations in the use of the TREE methodology.
- Provision of skills and entrepreneurship training for target groups by the partners using tools and instruments of the methodology.
- Provision of post-training support services by partners, such as: assistance in corporate community group formation and community fund schemes.

What is Training for Rural Economic Empowerment?

Training for Rural Economic Empowerment (TREE) is an ILO methodology for assisting socio-economic development in poor rural communities. It emphasises the central role of knowledge and skills, as part of an integrated package of actions to create new economic and employment opportunities for the poor, the unemployed and the otherwise disadvantaged.

The TREE consists of a set of procedures for systematically identifying employment and income generation opportunities at the local level, designing and delivering appropriate training programmes and providing the necessary post-training support services, including organization of corporate community groups, credit provision, technical assistance and market information, to launch and sustain self-employment and income generating activities.
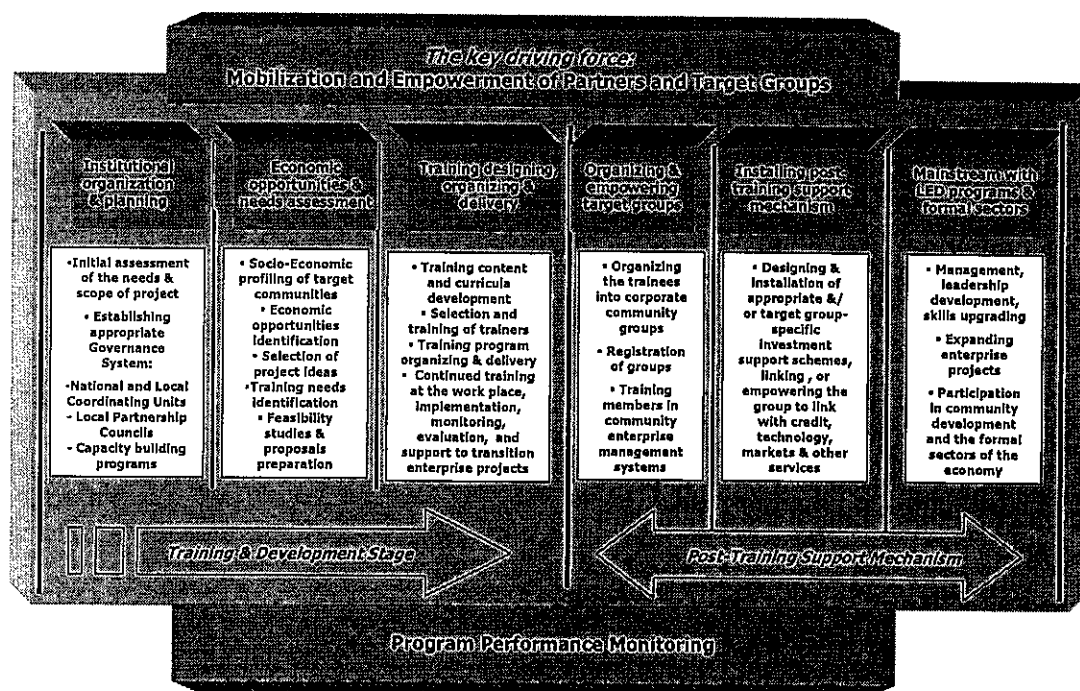
The TREE advocates coordination of efforts of participating organizations at the national, regional and local levels under specifically defined socio-economic development objectives, utilization of available local economic opportunities, needs and resources.

One of the major features of the TREE methodology is that it provides necessary tools for development of capacities of the national and local employment and training organizations and initiates working arrangements between tripartite social partners and other support institutions (NGOs, private, etc.)

TREE also mobilizes support for the programmes among population of communities.

The TREE methodology involves a number of components, some activities of which move in sequential fashion and others more in parallel mode.
The processes and activities of the TREE Methodology has been grouped in four major blocks of activities:

1. *Mobilization and empowerment of partners and target groups*
2. *Training and development stage*
3. *Establishing the post-training support mechanism*
4. *Programme Performance Monitoring Plan*

The key driving force:
Mobilization and Empowerment of Partners and Target Groups

Institutional organization & planning	Economic opportunities & needs assessment	Training designing, organizing & delivery	Organizing & empowering target groups	Installing post training support mechanism	Mainstream with LED programs & formal sectors
•Initial assessment of the needs & scope of project • Establishing appropriate Governance System: •National and Local Coordinating Units - Local Partnership Councils - Capacity building programs	• Socio-Economic profiling of target communities • Economic opportunities Identification • Selection of project ideas •Training needs Identification • Feasibility studies & proposals preparation	• Training content and curricula development • Selection and training of trainers • Training program organizing & delivery • Continued training at the work place, Implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and support to transition enterprise projects	• Organizing the trainees into corporate community groups • Registration of groups • Training members in community enterprise management systems	• Designing & installation of appropriate &/ or target group-specific investment support schemes, linking, or empowering the group to link with credit, technology, markets & other services	• Management, leadership development, skills upgrading • Expanding enterprise projects • Participation in community development and the formal sectors of the economy

Training & Development Stage → ← **Post-Training Support Mechanism** →

Program Performance Monitoring

Some Results of the Project
(for more detailed information please refer to the attached table – Annex 1)

Project Outreach

The project reached 81 villages in the ARMM and 23 in Region 12 and Davao City, or a total of 104 villages. These villages are located in 54 municipalities in the 5 provinces and 2 cities in ARMM and 3 municipalities in Region 12 and Davao City.

TREE Methodology Users' Manual

The project has developed and field-tested the TREE Methodology Users' Manual containing complete description of processes, activities and tools of the TREE methodology as it has been adapted to suit socio-economic conditions in rural areas of Mindanao.

The Manual is being utilized by the partners involved in skills training and provision of post-training support in Mindanao (TESDA, DSWD, DOLE, the RCBW and Federation of United Mindanawan Bangsamoro Women)

It is also intended that this area- and situation-specific Manual would support planners and practitioners of skills development programmes directed towards poverty reduction in rural areas in the Philippines.

The Manual is presented in the six Modules:

► Module 1: Introduction to TREE methodology and its practical adaptation in the Philippines

► Module 2: Institutional Assessment, Planning and Organization

► Module 3: Identification of Economic Opportunities and Needs

► Module 4: Training Design and Delivery

► Module 5: Post Training Support Services

► Module 6: Monitoring and Evaluation

Composition of the TREE Programme Users' Manual
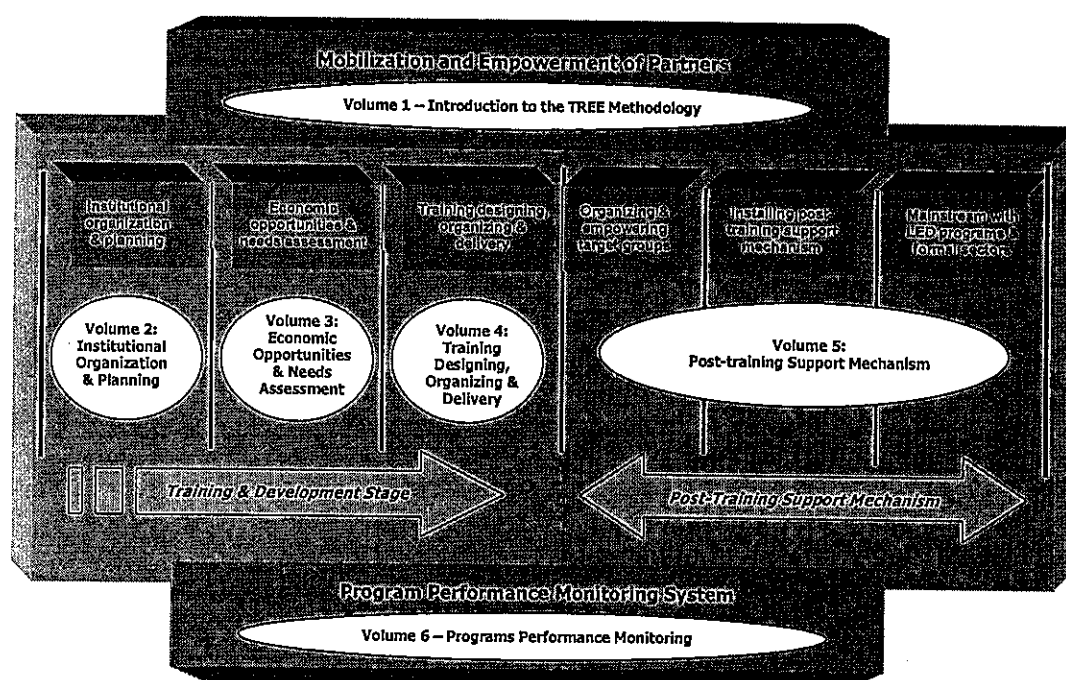
Training of partners in the use of the TREE methodology

The project conducted a total of 27 modular training workshops for officials and staff of the project partner organizations on various processes of the methodology, such as institutional organization and support, community needs and economic opportunities assessment, planning, designing and implementing skills training programmes, enterprise development, community group organizing, micro-finance, community enterprise system and trainers training.

A total of 193 coordinators, trainers, senior officials and heads of the partner agencies were trained. These capability building activities contributed much to the improvement of convergence in service delivery in relation to the respective mandates of the partner organizations. It also helped in the institutionalization of the methodology among the partners.

The Executive Committee of the project composed of representatives from 8 partner organizations had 6 quarterly meetings during the project duration as they performed their policy-making and oversight functions in the project implementation.

The partners were also able to observe similar TREE-related programs in Thailand and Malaysia during two study tours organized and backstopped by the project.

Outputs (produced by partners under backstopping from the project staff) as per training and employment promotion objectives

The above staff capability building activities resulted into the smooth implementation of project activities and the realization of project objectives and targets. The targets were highlighted in the immediate and sub-immediate objectives of the Project's Strategic Plan. The project has designed the Project Performance Monitoring Plan (PMP). As of 31 August 2007, the monitoring reports indicated the following:

Immediate Objective No. 1 – Increased employment of target groups

- Per training completion reports submitted **one week after completion of training**, 1,145 of the graduates were able to start 95 gainful activities through implementing various enterprise projects related to the pre-identified economic and market opportunities and skills training received. This proves the effectivity of the methodology to provide opportunities for immediate employment/ self-employment to graduates.
- On the other hand tracer studies conducted **3-5 months after training** for 586 respondents from 42 projects *(in mainland communities only because the island provinces became inaccessible due to security reasons)* revealed that 95% of the graduates traced were utilizing their skills acquired during their training.
- The average monthly income of the graduates traced has been increased by 105%. Furthermore, about 2,403 members of their families became indirect beneficiaries of their enterprise projects.

Immediate Objective No. 2 - Increased access to information, financial and other resources for target groups in the pilot communities

The project was able to organize/ strengthen 41 community groups (256% of the set target of 12). 72 training workshops in group management, enterprise system and micro-finance (known as Co-Fund Scheme) were conducted related to the objectives and targets of the Project.

23 (192%) of the 41 community groups were linked to micro-credit facilities of other donors or partners. Most of these groups were primary cooperative members of the Federation of United Mindanawan Bangsamoro Women Cooperatives and the Department of Social Welfare and Development of the ARMM.

23 community groups reported accumulation of a total of P 2,950,000 for their start-up capital. With the assistance provided by the TREE project they have been able to establish linkages with other local, national, bi-lateral and multi-lateral projects in Mindanao, accessed their information and resources in implementing their respective livelihood and TREE-related projects.

Sub Immediate Objective No 1 – Increased vocational and entrepreneurial skills among target groups

A total of 2,280 beneficiaries enrolled in 145 training programmes (133 community-based and 12 center-based) identified through the community and economic opportunities assessment process. Out of these enrollees, 2,128, (93%) passed the training requirements imposed by the project and its partners.

Sub Immediate Objective No. 2 – Increased institutional capacity within partner organizations to design and implement skills training programs for target groups.

30 new needs-related training packages were generated by the project based on community needs and economic opportunities assessments. They are now being utilized by TESDA-ARMM.

Other outputs

The project has produced peripheral outputs aside from those specifically called for in the immediate and sub-immediate objectives. These activities and outputs contributed much to the overall achievement of the project and its image as one of the contributors to lasting peace and development in Mindanao.

- The project assisted in establishing the Training Center for the Bangsamoro Women, the women sector of the MNLF. The training center now offers food processing courses (fist, meat, fruits and vegetables), and also soap making and its related products. It is being run by the Federation of United Mindanawan Bangsamoro Women Multi-purpose Cooperatives in Cotabato City.

- The project also enhanced the capacity of two vocational and technical schools in conducting skills and entrepreneurship training. The Marhardika Institute of Technology (MIT) in the island province of Tawi-Tawi was given training on enterprise development and micro-credit using the Co-Fund scheme developed by the Project. As a result of this, the school has now a special training programme on enterprise development and micro-finance for interested students. The school

provides micro credit to vocational students who are able to present good enterprise plans.

- The project trained some trainers from the Kutawato Institute of Technology Foundation, Inc. (KIFTI)in Cotabato City. The school is now offering basic computer training programmes in collaboration with the SZOPAD Livelihood and Development Foundation, another member of the Project's EXCOM.

Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA)

TESDA (ARMM) has initiated a new program called "Skills Training for Rural Employment in ARMM" or STREAM which in fact is based on the TREE Methodology and its instruments. Among other things this program developed four (4) Manuals for implementation essentially derived from the materials developed by the TREE project:
- How to conduct rapid community assessment
- How to teach transition enterprise project planning for CBT programs
- How to prepare skills training design and syllabus for CBT programs
- How to monitor CBT programs
- Basic training and instruction techniques

Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD)

A program called the "DSWD-ARMM Co-Fund Assistance Program", or DCFAP, has been developed essentially taken from the post-training component strategies of the TREE Methodology. The program is planned to enhance the current "Self Employment Assistance para sa Kaunlaran" or SEA-K program of the Agency in accordance with the need of Muslim communities in ARMM. The SEA-K is a micro-finance assistance program which is found to be incompatible with the teachings of Islam (e.g. charging of interest on credit). Hence, the DSWD proposed to their national office the adoption of the TREE approach on community fund scheme as the SEA-K counterpart in ARMM. The proposal has been provided with an initial financial support from the national office for pilot testing; hence, a Manual has been prepared.

The TREE Project and DSWD has jointly prepared a Manual on implementation of the DCFAP. Technical staff of the agency and the whole provincial staff of Tawi-Tawi have been trained on the utilization of the Manual, which is titled:

- Manual on Program and Implementing Guidelines for the new DSWD-ARMM Community Fund Assistance Program (DCFAP)

Federation of United Mindanawan Bangsamoro Women MPC

The Federation is being assisted by the TREE Project to become a training and micro-finance organization that will carry out the TREE approach and Methodology. It is composed of more than 120 primary cooperatives with almost 20,000 individual members. Aside from capability building programmes the TREE project has also

provided assistance for the establishment of the women training and enterprise center. The Project also facilitated in the formulation of the Federation's 5-year Strategic Plan which is now in operation.

A new program called the "Bangsamoro Community Fund Development Program" has been developed jointly by the TREE Project and the Federation. It is essentially based on the Co-Fund Scheme of the TREE Methodology. It is made up of the experiences of the Federation in pilot-testing the scheme in 20 of its member cooperatives. Skills and enterprise development training are incorporated in the program.

To implement the new Program, the TREE Project and the Federation worked together to prepare the manual which is now called:

- Manual of Policies, Rules and Implementing Guidelines for the Bangsamoro Community Fund Development Program

Regional Commission on Bangsamoro Women (RCBW)

The RCBW has more or less a comprehensive development mandate. Its focus is women and gender issues which cuts across the areas of skills training, enterprise development, organizing, micro-finance and social empowerment. Hence, the TREE Project has provided assistance for the development of a program strategy where the whole TREE Methodology can be utilized. RCBW is already partnering with TESDA where it takes charge of community planning while TESDA takes charge of training delivery.

Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE)

The TREE project has assisted DOLE on the expansion of the current and traditional labor union concept of Rural Workers Association (RWa) into Community Groups formation – During the operation of the TREE project there has been a huge increase in the number of RWA applying for registration. This augers well for the reform of the concept in organizing and registration policies for rural-based and informal sector workers.

SZOPAD Livelihood Development Foundation (SLDF) – The TREE project is providing assistance to the SLDF in the establishment of a Vocational Training and Economic Integration Center. The center will cater to the needs of persons with disabilities and other marginalized sectors. The Center will also utilize the TREE methodology. The center is currently attached to the Kutawato Institute of Technology Foundation Inc. and offering basic courses in basic computer operation.

Regional Planning and Development Office (RPDO) – The TREE Project concept has been included in the development agenda of the Mid-term Development Plan of the ARMM which is developed by the RPDO.

The wider impact of the project was in peace and order. Since the signing of the GRP-MNLF Peace Agreement in September 1996, the concern was how to convince the people to support the peace process. Providing poor and unemployed people who have been left out by progress with skills training allows them to take advantage of the economic opportunities thereby linking economic development to peace in the area.

Annex 1 – Table of Accomplishment

1. Area coverage/ outreach (ARMM and Region 12, Davao)

	ARMM	Region 12, Davao
No. of Villages/communities	81	23
No. of Municipalities	54	3
No. of Provinces	5	1
No. of Cities	2	1

2. Adapting Project Methodology & training of partners on its utilization

Activities	Outputs
Adaptation of the TREE Methodology & its tools, instruments and processes	TREE Users' Manual presenting each process & tools of the TREE Methodology
Training packages developed	30
Capability building workshops for the eight (8) members of the EXCOM: (TESDA, DSWD, DOLE, RCBW, RPDO, Bangsamoro Women/FUMBMWMPC, SLDF, and the MNLF)	- 27 workshops on the TREE Methodology (9 courses of 3 training modules each) - One workshop for training & employment for the Bangsamoro Women with a 5-year strategic plan as the output
Trainers, officers and coordinators trained	193
Planning meetings by the EXCOM	6 quarterly meetings
Study Tours for partners and representatives	4 partners to Thailand 4 partners to Malaysia
Partners involved in the implementation of the TREE methodology in ARMM	TESDA (community & economic assessment & provision of training) DSWD(post-training support) DOLE (registration of graduates into Rural Workers Association) RCBW (implementation of the whole process) MNLF/ Bangsamoro Women (implementation of the whole process)

3. Training outputs (per enrollment and graduation reports)

Training programmes conducted in communities		133
Training programmes conducted in training centers		12
Total number of training programmes conducted		145
Total no. of beneficiaries that enrolled in both		2,280
Training in communities	2,049	
Training in centers	231	
Total no. of beneficiaries who passed training		2,128
Percentage of passing		93%
Women	48%	
Men	52%	
Youth (18-32 yrs old) both women and men	44%	
Persons with disability or Differently Abled Persons (DAP)	18	
Average No. of family members or beneficiaries	2.83	
Secondary school graduates or dropouts	63%	
College dropouts	10%	
College graduates	18%	

4. Post-training Support (Community groups organizing)

Capability building workshops for community groups		72
Community groups organized/ capacitated		41
Targeted pilot groups	10	
DSWD-ARMM groups	7	
Bangsamoro Women Cooperatives	13	
Local Government Units groups	4	
Kadtabanga Foundation	6	
Association of Rural Improvement Clubs	1	
No of groups linked to capital (Co-Fund)		23
No of group members assisted/ benefited		1,313
Amount of funds generated by the community groups from other Donors		P 2,950,000

5. Project outcomes

A. *Monitoring reports* (one week after end of training)

No. of enterprises created by beneficiaries	95
No. of graduates monitored	1,897
No. of beneficiaries directly engaged in the enterprises	1,145
Immediate employment/ self-employment rate	60.3%

B. *Tracer Study* (3-5 months after end of training)

No. of beneficiaries utilizing skills acquired in training	586
Percentage of skills utilization (555 out of 586)	95%
Average monthly income BEFORE training	P 2,626.89
Average monthly income AFTER training	5,390.82
Average increase in monthly income	2,764.33
Rate of increase in monthly income after training	105%

6. Other outputs

Assistance provided to the establishment of Training center for women	Women Training and Development Center of the FUMBMMPC, Cotabato City
Voc-tech schools assisted and the TREE methodology is now being utilized by the schools	- Mahardika Institute of Technology Foundation, Tawi-Tawi (Co-Fund) - SLDF-Kutawato Institute of Technology Foundation, Inc. Cotabato City (Training)
No of public forums attended/ advocated the TREE Methodology: (*ARMM, Mindanao, National*)	19 forums with a total of more than 1,690 registered audience
Sharing of the project experience in the practical application of the TREE methodology with other national and international projects/ organizations	- Philippines – UN-MDP ACT for Peace programme in Mindanao - Indonesia – INDISCO Project in Jayapura, New Guinea province - Sri Lanka – CB-TREE Project, Ampara District (Post-Tsunami) - NPC attended as resource person in seminars on TREE-related methodologies (Turin Training Center, ILO Geneva, Chiba, Japan, Bangkok, Thailand)

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Annex 2 -

TREE Project Mid-Term Evaluation

A Mid-Term Evaluation Mission visited the project in Pakistan and the Philippines from 1 to 13 December 2004. The mission looked at the project implementation, its impact, or foreseen impact based on the current strategy, methodology and work plans. The objective was to evaluate validity of project objectives and strategy, the likelihood of achieving project objectives, stakeholders buy-in, support and participation in the project, elements hindering successful implementation and impacts/ benefits accrued to the beneficiaries thus far. In addition, to provide the project management team, ILO field and headquarter staff, project stakeholders, and the donor with the feedback and information needed to assess and possibly revise, policies, strategies, data collection methods, objectives, institutional arrangements, work plans and resource allocation.

The evaluation team comprised Ms. Anna Kathryn Webb, an Independent Consultant from Management Systems International, USA; Mr. Bruno Bui Project Manager USDOL, Washington DC; and Mr. Trevor Riordan, Project Director, ILO Geneva.

The mission findings were that the project has been very successful in providing benefits to the targets groups both economically and socially. Youth beneficiaries are now gainfully employed or self-employed and contribute to household incomes.

The mission recommended that – *"the project has succeeded in addressing the issues of poverty, unemployment, security and peace by means of skills training and local institutional capacity building. It has everywhere generated a strong demand for skills training and has the unqualified support of government, donors, partners and the target groups. It is recommended without reservation that the project continue beyond the scheduled closing date to ensure sustainability, and furthermore, that all concerned parties give serious consideration to the expansion of the project, whether by means of increased coverage in the present target areas or extended coverage into new target areas or both, for the purpose of scaling up a highly effective project-."*

The Mid Term Evaluation provided an excellent learning opportunity for the project team and stakeholders to reflect and review their progress, and especially analyze the strategies and the methodological approach (TREE) adopted for project implementation. These recommendations and views, in turn, have since been reflected in this paper.