



Christie Marasigan



MARCCO

Matulatula Agrarian Reform
Community Cooperative

FARMERS' ORGANIZATION

Story

“Harvesting the fruit of partnership to serve” - Christie Marasigan



Bothered farmers come but leave with hope after a brief exchange, which is a usual setup almost the whole day at work. Walk-in, no appointment is how it works for Christie, or “Madam” is what their farmers call her.

Matulatula Agrarian Reform Community Cooperative (MarCCO)’s office is open to run the business of producing calamansi and dalandan juices and extract. Its doors also welcome farmers seeking assistance with their credit and farming needs. MarCCO has faced countless obstacles, surpassed and continues to face Cooperative challenges. Christie Marasigan, the *General Manager*, remained one of the actors in these encounters and feats, and she courteously opened space to discuss their story with us.



Christie during the open forum on KLMPE

AsiaDHRRA: *What were the major challenges the Cooperative had to overcome during the project implementation?*

Christy: One of the most crucial challenges the cooperative experienced during the project implementation was the **market expansion** of our farmers’ products. The reason was the lack of staff in the cooperative suitable enough to negotiate and process business dealings and propositions to engage the clients on contracts. In addition, the cooperative is in a remote area, and the products have difficulty reaching the

market consistently at the right time. Then we employed support staff who eventually established networks with various national and local government agencies that offered information and invitations for free market participation and business matching. This opportunity has provided a space for our products to be placed in the local, provincial, and national markets, including using social media as an online market channel. The fruitful collaboration with the government has led to receive grants for vehicles like cargo and pick-up trucks, suitable enough to bring the products to the market in wholesale volume.

However, MarCCO still needs **expanded market outlets** to improve its profitability and serve more members, and employing advertising and promotion strategies will help achieve this.

We are still trying to support the farmers to **earn profit** and collectively market their harvests, mainly the primary product, calamansi, and dalandan juices. Our financial status for 2021-2022 has reflected an increase in net income, and we are hoping to continue to make the agri-business sustainable.

Another recurring challenge is our need to **procure raw materials** during the peak season which is sufficient to supply for the rest of the year. There are two problems related here: 1) capital to procure large number of raw materials and; 2) technology and facilities to keep and



Seminar on Agricultural Processing in Beijing, China

preserve the concentrate extract with a quality that will last for the remaining part of the year.

Some of our farmers still need to be more adaptive to **new technologies** or other learnings offered by the cooperative. An example of this is the pruning technique applied to calamansi trees. Despite the benefits of the process to the tree's health, some farmers still do not employ and continue with their traditional approach to managing their calamansi trees.

Organizational problem remains a challenge too. Only one-third of the 520 members are active and in good standing. These members actively participate in cooperative and farmer cluster meetings, are good loan payers, regularly save their income, and invest in capital shares.

To address this concern, we hold monthly cluster meetings to encourage other farmers to join and contribute to the cooperative's discussion, planning, and resolving farming issues.

There should be more strategic interventions to encourage members' participation: 1) incentive – the cooperative offers a minimum price ceiling for calamansi sold to the cooperative; 2) patronage and return to capital, and 3) expanded market, which results in increased purchases of calamansi from the members.



Sharing MARCCO's experience in developing citrus processing enterprise in local radio guesting

AsiaDHRRA: *What are the most significant changes for the Cooperative thanks to this project?*

Christy: The Farmers' Organization for Asia (FO4A) project has provided capacity building for farmers' organization (FO) leaders. Due to this, the partnerships with the national and local governments and other agri-related agencies/confederations have improved. As a result, we acquired grants to have storage facilities, vehicles, computerized accounting, technical farming training (pruning), and an improved operation system. These accomplishments were also made possible due



Training on proper recording and preparation of monthly financial report per business unit

to having the required and skilled human resources to support the day-to-day operations.

The project delivers business and financial mentoring and secures funding/grants from governments to improve the cooperative further. Lastly, one of the best practices the cooperative possesses is proper documentation. This process pertains to having an organized filing system maintained by our financial and administrative staff, where they can easily store and retrieve important documents to prepare reports and apply for government grants/funding.

AsiaDHRRA: *What worked well, and what would the Cooperative do differently next time?*

Christy: Presently, the cooperative manages the daily operations, from providing low-interest loans to offering technical farm training to building more partnerships for grant opportunities to sustain and support the agri-enterprise and member farmers. However, someone still needs to champion business planning, accounting, and extensive training in financial systems to deal with credit programs effectively. There is still room to understand agroecology and actively campaign for organic agriculture and bio-compost use to grow crops. Moreover, having a succession plan or shaping

“..the partnerships with the national and local governments and other agri-related agencies/confederations have improved”



Recipient of Philippine government support/funding

“.. having a succession plan or shaping future leaders for the cooperative’s business continuity is essential”

future leaders for the cooperative’s business continuity is essential.

AsiaDHRRA: What are the significant changes regarding the role of women and youth in the cooperative thanks to the project and key factors in successfully empowering women and youth?

Christy: The cooperative has more active participation from women than men, similar to leadership board members. However, there is still a need to increase youth memberships by engaging them in farming activities and cluster meetings.

The cooperative must develop specific livelihood and capacity-building programs for youth and women. Most women and youth perform critical roles during the calamansi harvest peak season by helping clean and sort

the fruits before processing them into juices. Since FO4A encourages the role of women in agriculture, they provide these post-harvest farming opportunities to women and youth members to earn income.



Peak season sorting of calamansi

AsiaDHRRA: Can you discuss more relevant matters?

Christie: The FFP (AFOSP and FO4A) initiatives improved the cooperative in agri-business and building farmers' technical capacities. Likewise, the program shaped the cooperative into a farming mentoring body as other calamansi farmer groups on the island paid visits and observed the farming practices. An example of this was the training we conducted recently for youth and farmer leaders of the island's indigenous group on 8 September 2023. We taught approximately 60 farmers about farm production and processing, e.g., rejuvenation, nursery management, and propagation of calamansi.

One of the critical help of FFP (AFOSP and FO4A) to MarCCO was the support provided, especially during the initial operation of the business, which enabled the cooperative to employ a full-time manager and conduct travel of the concerned staff and leaders to mobilize additional resources from local government and other partners and develop partnership linkages.

The FFP and FO4A initiatives improved the Cooperative in agri-business and building farmers' technical capacities



MARCCO products in the 1st F2C2 Regional Cluster Summit by the the Department of Agriculture.

MarCCO has all the staff dedicated to running its calamansi and dalandan businesses and serving the needs of its member farmers. From market access to finances, the management team and board members are all primed and equipped to keep the balance and solutions for the cooperative.

The program AFOSP and FO4A has opened the door for everyone to realize the possibilities to improve, learn, know their roles, and understand their duties to collaborate. From farmers to MarCCO staff and people from the government, Christie fastened the rope of partnership and benefits from what to build upon from the trust.

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