



## CASE STUDY

EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH  
RESPONSIBLE INVESTMENT IN  
AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SYSTEMS



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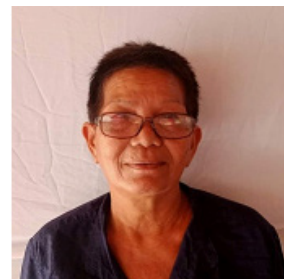
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### STAKEHOLDERS

**Mrs. Mela Gipanao** of Bulan, Sorsogon, is a farmer organizer and the founding President of the Bulan Women Farmers Association (BWFA), organized in 2018. She grew up in a farming family with her seven siblings to tenant parents in Bulan, Sorsogon. She is a widow who raised seven children and still resides in Barangay G. Del Pilar, the same village in Bulan where she inherited access to the land her tenant parents used to till.



In 2021, BWFA was reorganized, and Mela became Secretary. She is also the Chairman of the Municipal Agriculture and Fisheries Council (MAFC) of Bulan, Sorsogon.



### GEOGRAPHICAL COVERAGE

The study was conducted in Bulan, Region V, Sorsogon, Philippines (Philippines, Region V, Bicol), Sorsogon, 2nd District, Bulan (Municipality).

The initiative is about Responsible Agricultural Investment (RAI) with Integrated Diversified Organic Farming System (IDOFS) Technology for adult women & youth farmers.



### CONTEXT

It was 1988 when Sandigan ng Magsasaka (SANDIGAN) and the Pambansang Kilusan ng mga Samahang Magsasaka (PAKISAMA) started their groundwork in Bulan with the Women Farmers. The Bulan Women firmly acknowledged PAKISAMA as their mentor in learning not only sustainable agriculture but also the rights of women. PAKISAMA was active in their paralegal actions and introduction of the Integrated Diversified Organic Farming System (IDOFS) since

their arrival in Bulan in 1988. The learnings of Bulan Women Farmers mainly gained from PAKISAMA addressed the need for more knowledge in updated farming technology, especially the IDOFS.

The strength of the paralegal training led to their appreciation of their rights as women farmers, thus helping enhanced Bulan women, farmers, to speak and practice updated farming methods such as IDOFS. As a result, many women are free to attend meetings and training without their husbands' restrictions. Today, they share with their husbands in the front seat of Responsible Agriculture Investments (RAI).



## TARGET BENEFICIARIES

The target beneficiaries for PAKISAMA Lakambini and BWFA are the Bulan Women Farmers. Currently, BWFA members have a total of 506 members. Three hundred of whom are adults, and 206 are young farmers. The young farmers, all women, are 15 to 30, while the adults are 31 to 70.

During the pandemic, the adult women farmers were engaged in the project BIGKIS of the LGU (rolling store), Coco Coir making, repair of Chest Box (packaging boxes for transporting fish catch), and vegetable gardening. In addition, BWFA adults and young farmers practice the IDOFS technology of PAKISAMA on their farms using vegetable seeds provided by the Department of Agriculture.



## OBJECTIVE

The group aims for more community participation and meetings to learn and practice farming. Those who attended training learned how to speak and practice their knowledge of updated farming techniques as the IDOFS shared with them by PAKISAMA.

Similarly, the association still hopes to continue conducting a series of Gender Sensitivity Trainings (GST) for both husband and wife so they can understand their roles in the family, livelihood, and community.



## PROCESS / METHODOLOGY

During the PANDEMIC 2020, Mela Gipanao led the adult women in the formation process of BWFA. The young women were recruited during the pandemic and attended training on IDOFS of RAI in Camarines Sur. On their return to Bulan, the three young farmers trained in the RAI in March 2022 applied for IDOFS along with other young farmers (members of BWFA).

BWFA is engaging in some government projects as a partner implementer, such as the project BIGKIS, wherein they managed the rolling store initiated by LGU



Bulan during the pandemic. Selected BWFA members were tasked to buy and sell vegetable products of BWFA members and sold through the rolling store in the 63 barangays of Bulan.

## RESULTS / PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

After the RAI training in March 2022, the young farmers tried disseminating their learnings to their families and friends. Little by little, they progressed in developing their community garden by applying IDOFS technology. The young farmers tend their garden every Saturday-Sunday when they are off school.

Inspired by learnings on IDOFS brought home by the young RAI trainees, Rowena Gito, the incumbent president of BWFA, provided the young farmers with a 400 sqm model farm garden. However, when the young farmers are in school on weekdays, adult parents continue improving their gardens with vegetables such as squash, ampalaya, and okra.

Women learned to practice farming and use updated farming tools. They learned to understand their role in the family. Women who learned organic farming techniques earned money from the root crops to support their children. They also learned not to give up easily, even after a typhoon onslaught. They negotiated with the government, and 80% of BWFA received cash assistance from DA, which was used for rice farming to help address the destruction brought about by the typhoon.



## IMPACT

BWFA coordination spearheaded the access to government support for a potable water system in Brgy. G. del Pilar with an affordable monthly bill. Learning the IDOFS technology from PAKISAMA, BWFA farmers appreciated growing their food. They also receive free vegetable seeds from the Department of Agriculture, which they produce for their consumption needs, and the excess can be sold in the market.

The adult women farmers with knowledge of IDOFS were trusted to produce crops again. They did not give up crop production, even if their region is frequently affected by damaging typhoons, floods, arid seasons, and pandemics.

IDOFS (PAKISAMA) taught them how to use leaves/plants as compost and not burn them. It contributes to environmental protection.

Learning composting from IDOFS, women practice in their farms composting by refraining from burning farm cuttings like grass and twigs. They understood that composted greens are helpful as organic fertilizers.



## SUCCESS / FACILITATING FACTORS

PAKISAMA taught the adults Waste Management, Preparation of Organic Fertilizers, and Breeding of Palay Seeds. The positive attitude of farming households toward crop production is staying strong despite damaging typhoons and floods.

They acknowledged that food security would not be endangered and hunger would not prevail by growing vegetables for home consumption and the market. 80% of BWFA members grow vegetables, while 20% are in the coastal areas.

The strong leadership and the excellent coordination of Mela Gipanao built up the character of BWFA. The nature of the group established by their leaders is to be strong-willed and always keep looking for opportunities to feed their families and be resilient to rise after disasters. This leadership is exhibited by the excellent attendance of members during meetings and training, even if no material gains are expected.

The registration of BWFA as an organization is in progress, which is an attempt to gain their personality and to be able to access projects for women.



## CONSTRAINTS / CHALLENGES

There need to be more mobility funds to proceed with orientations of remaining clusters or zones to gain membership—many complaints or “reklamador” and impatience to receive gains from their membership contributions. The members who lost their husbands due to COVID-19 became inactive, and the continuous occurrence of typhoons in the region is perceived as a significant constraint for crop productivity.

Some married women, even those with young children, opted to leave their families for a job in Manila, like a domestic helper, to address poverty brought about by the pandemic. Men who lost income due to pandemic restrictions specific to fishing became depressed, while a few got separated from wife and children. Lastly, the lack of information and gender base awareness seminar brought about a lot of misunderstanding and complaints.

Such difficulties were addressed but remained in the pipeline, and formal registration of the group is pending.



## TESTIMONY

**Noimi, 46** years of age, joined BWFA in January 2018 and is currently the Vice President of BWFA/LAKAMBINI. She attended assemblies and training of SANDIGAN when she was still unmarried because her father was a member of SANDIGAN. Noimi claims to have learned a lot from his father’s traditional farming and is a model member of the organization who practiced her learnings from attending training and

meetings. She said in Barangay Bonga, whenever many members are interested in joining BWFA/LAKAMBINI activities, they gather their money to rent a ride. “Ambagan kami, kasama din ang maliliit na bata” (we share money, mothers with young children bring them to the activity”. Noimi mentions that she learned much about farming techniques when LAKAMBINI sent her to training. She enjoys attending meetings and activities, especially when learning about organic fertilizer production, which she considers timely due to depleted soil.

*“We share money, mothers with young children bring them to the activity”.*

**Josephine, 63** years old, is the Treasurer of BWFA/LAKAMBINI. She belongs to a fisherfolk’s household in Zone 2 (a coastal barangay in Bulan, Sorsogon). Unfortunately, she lost her husband in February 2022 but continues to be an active member, using her mobile phone for communication, including her 20-year-old granddaughter. She sends her granddaughter to BWFA activities so she can learn how it works. She is also a member of BWFA Young Farmers.

Josephine’s father is also a member of SANDIGAN since 1994. When he left SANDIGAN, Josephine replaced him. She attended a training of SANDIGAN along with Mela Gipanao. As Josephine said, the gains from being a member of BWFA/LAKAMBINI and SANDIGAN were exemplary: “natuto ako makisama” (I learned how to get along), and she valued learnings like other BWFA members. Joining and talking with other women taught her how to deal with her problems as a mother and woman.



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