

**ENGAGING WOMEN EXCOMBATANTS AS VOLUNTEERS
FOR SOCIAL ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT IN THE PHILIPPINES:
THE *BINHI SA BWAS-DAMLAG* EXPERIENCE**

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Abstract

Women play an important role in promoting peace and development, especially in a dissident-infested municipality of Leon in the province of Iloilo, Philippines. Women who are excombatants had difficulty reintegrating in the Philippine mainstream society. They carry with them the stigma of being doubted of their sincerity in living even right within their own community. Between 2006 to 2010, UNDP implemented the Conflict Prevention and Peace Building Programme in the Philippines through the Office of the Presidential Adviser and Peace Process (OPAPP). OPAPP is the lead agency of the government at finding viable ways to promote lasting peace, especially in the countryside. Under the project, Community-managed Peace and Development Initiatives, the excombatants were organized. After the community organizing phase in the first year, the excombatants expressed their desire that their economic needs be also attended to. Women excombatants took the route of social enterprise called *Binhi sa Bwas-damlag* (Seeds for the Future) livelihood assistance project. UNDP granted fund that was used as seed capital for the livelihood projects proposed by each family.

In order to assure the success of the livelihood project, the households were trained first prior to the release of the funds ranging from P2,000-P5,000. Through this social enterprise initiative, the community of excombatants are able to pursue their advocacy on sustainable agriculture and slowly gained the trust and confidence of the community. From producing pesticide-free products in the mountains, they were slowly introduced to the big market in the city through the assistance of *Grupo Paghidaet* (Peace Group), a local initiative put up by advocates for peace to serve as back up support to the community of excombatants in Leon, Iloilo, Philippines. Today, these women are able to carry on with this role of helping fellow small farm producers through marketing support which they continue on their own.

Keywords: Philippines, Excombants, Peace, Binhisa Bwas- Damlag Livelihood Assistance Program
