

Jagna *Nata de Coco* Community Enterprise : Social Transformations in Process Jagna Municipality, Bohol

Community Economies Collective Kioloa Writing Group¹

“*Sa nata ... nagmata*” : Awakened through *nata*

Visitacion Galgo, or Venie as she is fondly called, was one of the four Community Enterprise Researchers (CERs) recruited by the Jagna Community Partnering Project (JCPP) in 2005. “Nang Venie” worked hard to communicate and reach out to the members of the Small Coconut Farmers Organisation (SCFO) to get ideas about the potential livelihood activities they might start from the town’s primary crop, the coconut. Together with JCPP staff, Venie visited several *barangays* of Jagna to get information until, eventually, she took on the project activities on her own.

For Venie, it was a big accomplishment to gather together people from different *barangays* and take the lead in managing a small community enterprise. She gained more and more confidence as she dealt with different kinds of people, first members of the SCFO and *barangay* officials and then even business people. Through her work as a CER, Venie developed her skills in facilitating meetings, negotiating, communicating and producing and processing the *nata de coco*. As a CER, she displayed great leadership potential. Now the rest of the members follow her as a good example, to the extent that they call her “Ma’am”, locally a title indicating tremendous respect. Says Venie, “I am very happy that I’m called Ma’am because it shows that people respect me”. For Venie, her new outlook started with *nata* and the realization that she had the potential to do something for community development.

Sesinio Madera, Jr is 36 years old and the only single member of the Jagna *Nata de Coco* Community Enterprise Organisation (Jagna-*Nata*). He lives in a village within Jagna municipality with his parents doing farm work. At the start, Sesinio was very silent and shy, a bit untidy and had no leadership skills. He seemed to be a ‘typical’ Filipino farm worker with less exposure to the world and to interactions with people around him. He was the type of person who never cared to get involved in village activities until the JCPP started and the *nata* enterprise group was organized.

Sesinio’s regular attendance at meetings, training, the exposure trip, production and other organizational activities helped him develop his personal and professional skills. He recognized his potential as a leader. As the vice-president of the *nata* group he developed his public speaking abilities to the point where he can actively talk and share his ideas. Sesinio now is the head of the production committee to ferment *nata de coco* before it is brought to the town for processing and marketing.

These two personal stories of Venie and Sesinio illustrate transformations that have occurred as a result of the Jagna *Nata de Coco* Community Enterprise Organization in the Province of Bohol, Philippines.

Origins and Philosophy

¹ The Kioloa Writing Group includes Maureen Balaba, Amanda Cahill, Michelle Carnegie, Jayne Curnow, Benilda Flores-Rom, Katherine Gibson, Ann Hill, Joy Miralles-Apag, Gerda Roelvink and May-an Villalba. The writing and reflection workshop that produced this story was held in December 2007 and was funded by a grant from the Australian Research Council’s Asia Pacific Futures Research Network (PA030703_Gibson).

The enterprise group was founded with the assistance of the JCPP. It produces and processes *nata de coco*, a white gelatinous and jelly-like food made from the bacterial fermentation of coconut water. *Nata de coco* is a favourite Filipino food, best served as a dessert and an excellent ingredient for fruit salads, pickles, fruit cocktails, drinks, ice cream, sherbets and other recipes. It is a nutritious and healthy food that contains high fibre and zero fat and cholesterol.

The organisation underwent capacity-building activities such as a fact finding trip to small communities with related enterprise activities, visits to the Department of Science & Technology (DOST) and Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA) and technical training on *nata de coco* production and processing. The group conducted a feasibility study on marketing, technical aspects of production and processing, financial and organizations management and socio-economic benefits. Following this they conducted experimentation to produce prototypes and product samples. Market testing was done in the locality of Jagna and the group found that their product was very saleable and profitable. The only other supplies of *nata de coco* came infrequently from Mindanao and were quite expensive. The group found that it was easy to produce *nata* in the unique environmental conditions, that is, the humidity and temperature in the upland areas, of Jagna municipality. Inputs for production could be easily accessed—appropriate mixtures of coconut water, refined sugar, water and glacial acetic acid. With the assistance of JCPP the organisation accessed funding support from the Jagna LGU (P21,107.10) to be used as start-up capital and an experimentation fund for processing the *nata*. The DOST provided initial and ongoing technical assistance and the Technical Education Skills Development Authority (TESDA) provided training. The Agricultural Training Institute provided the *nata*-starter (the agent for bacterial fermentation).

The founding vision of Jagna *Nata* was to establish a community owned and operated producer enterprise that would provide an opportunity for group members to earn income and improve the quality of their lives. The original group members (23 in total) are mostly economically marginalized men and women who are farmers, local government workers or housewives. Once the group has secured a rise in personal incomes of group members, they then have a longer term vision driven by a desire to invest the profits of the organization into health insurance for members and providing scholarships to the members' children. In this sense, the members of Jagna *Nata* are budding social entrepreneurs as they have social objectives as well as business objectives.

Critical Success Factors

Value adding to a local crop: Diversifying and producing *nata de coco* as a by-product of the coconut has created a new local production chain in Jagna that did not previously exist. *Nata* gives higher returns than other more traditional coconut by-products such as copra meat. Jagna *Nata* is the only organization that produces *nata* locally, with all other *nata* imported from other provinces. This means they can market the *nata* as a uniquely local product, and if people buy it they support local producers.

Local demand: *Nata* is in demand because it can be used for so many different purposes and is a popular snack item. For example, *nata de coco* can be mixed with different fruits to make desserts and low sugar versions can be produced for diabetics. It is also said to have health benefits such as aiding digestion for adults and children.

Educational background of members: Unlike other small community organizations in the municipality, many of the *nata* group members have college level educations. Each has his own expertise that he can share with the group. Rosalie, for example, is a third year college level

Bachelor of Science in Commerce. She has a background working as an accounting clerk in the municipal hall and in one of the private companies in her hometown in Mindanao. Her experience with accounting made it easier for the group to work as she is the one assigned to financial management and marketing.

Good team work: Over time the group members have formulated effective ways of working together and have decreased the amount of time required to produce *nata*.

Challenges

In its formative stages Jagna *Nata* relied on the JCPP to give them support and guidance. Since the end of the JCPP the group has engaged with Bohol Dev, a local NGO formed with staff from JCPP, that has provided technical consultative advice on the group's business trajectory, and general advice and mentoring, as well as assistance with accounting and financial management. The ongoing challenges relate to logistical issues. One issue arises from the dispersed geographic location of the members. The organization is not village based but municipality based so the members come together from a wide geographic area. Coordinating, communicating and organizing meetings and production has proved difficult. Another logistical issue is that the key ingredient (mother-*nata* or *nata*-starter) became unavailable due to spoilage and had to be sourced from Mindanao. The different production phases are in different places with fermentation and processing in the upland *barangay* of *Cambungaan*, and packaging and marketing closer to the *Municipio* (centre of Jagna) and this can create logistical problems. The lack of available equipment in the right place sometimes hinders the production process.

Where To Now

Jagna *Nata* is currently preparing funding proposals to access new processing sites where all members can meet and work together as well as to secure more equipment such as cuber, sealer, cooler, trays, fridge, thermometer, etc. They have become registered as an association.

For a community enterprise organisation to succeed it is important that the members have a sense of belongingness as part of the group as well as ownership over the enterprise so that there will be no hesitation on their part to contribute their time, resources, energy and ideas.

Details of Enterprise

Name of Organization: Jagna *Nata de Coco* Community Enterprise Organization (Jagna *Nata*)

Location: Boundary of Lonoy-Cabungaan (Riverside), Jagna, Bohol

Contact Numbers: 09264144531 / 09218226668

President: Juan Balaba

Home Address: Malbog, Jagna, Bohol

Type of Organization: Community and Food Processing Enterprise

Year founded: January 2005

Total Number of Members: 12 (3 men, 9 women)

Participating *Barangays*: Lonoy, Cabungaan, Tubod-Mar, Malbog, Canjulao, Nausok