



On the Way to Exports

Abundant Grace Livelihood Association

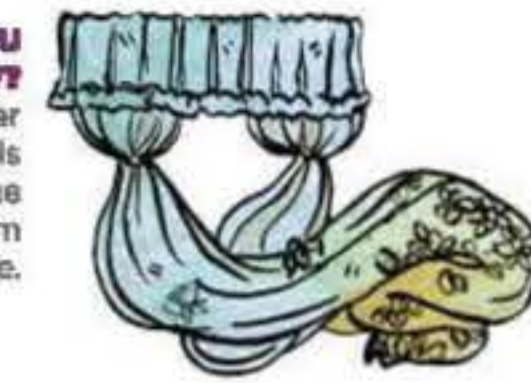
A mere livelihood venture of a wife and mother has blossomed into a community enterprise that now provides a source of income for the women in her barangay.

UNYIELDING EFFORTS
Through Monica's unyielding efforts, Abundant Grace Livelihood Association has been shared not only with her family but also with her community.



DOWN TO THE LAST DETAIL
The association makes simple yet elegant designs of shawls, curtains, and more. Their products look even more refined with embroidery, shells, beads, and pearls as design details.

DID YOU KNOW?
The higher the curtain is placed, the taller the room will look like.



Then 57-year-old Monica Gasilo of Barangay Agnocnoc of Tablas Island in the province of Romblon only wanted to help her family make both ends meet, but she ended up organizing a community association in 2014 to gain access to a capital grant from the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE).

Monica had to. The beaded curtains and shawls that she was peddling all the way down south to Boracay Island just could not earn enough.

Monica and friend Resilina Martin would walk nearly 21 kilometers to the town of Odiongan to seek financial help from government agencies.

"We had no money even for [our transport] fare so we wouldn't eat whenever we were in town," teary-eyed, Monica recalls.

STARTUP LOAN

Eventually, they found the Department of Labor and Employment office providing a grant, but only to livelihood associations. Monica promptly gathered other mothers in her barangay to form a group.

Thus, the Abundant Grace Livelihood Association was born in 2014, with Monica as president.

Currently with 11 members, the association makes and sells handmade curtains, canopies, shawls, and throw pillows out of cheese cloth and decorates them with embroidery, wooden beads, shells, and pearls.

The Php 340,015 soft loan from DOLE got them three sewing machines and raw materials, and a small nipa hut as a workplace, where Monica taught the mothers the craft of sewing, embroidering, beading, and designing.



EMPOWERING FELLOW MOTHERS
Abundant Grace Livelihood Association has helped the mothers from Agnocnoc to have a pastime while still being able to earn for their families. After undergoing trainings and workshops, the association has been making higher quality products that will surely reach the export market one day.



EXTRA INCOME FOR FAMILIES
Abundant Grace members get paid by piece, and according to the intricacy and the size of the product. A simple *tastas-buhol* (unravelling and knotting of threads) earns them Php 15 per shawl, Php 50 per curtain, and Php 60 per canopy.

HOW DTI HELPED

DTI linked Abundant Grace Livelihood Association to design consultants who introduced new designs to improve their craft and expand their product portfolio before joining several trade fairs including the **MIMAROPA Naturally Regional Trade Fair** and **Ellicit Pinay**, which helped the association find buyers from Manila and other regions.

BLESSINGS FROM THE DTI
Monica did not have to seek government help in marketing those products. It was the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) that sought her out and offered help.

DTI provided the association with all the services from its programs for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs)—from skills training to product development and all the way to marketing.

"DTI brings designers here to train us even though our place is so far from the town proper," Monica says of how Abundant Grace's product portfolio has since expanded.

Likewise, DTI introduced them to marketing their products through fairs.

"Since 2014, we've been to four of those [trade fairs]," says Monica. "Whenever there's a trade fair, DTI always includes us. Our products have reached SM Megamall, Baguio, even Malacafang."

The fairs enabled them to meet buyers from Manila and other regions, including the Southern Tagalog island

provinces of Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon, and Palawan (MIMAROPA).

For instance, at the MIMAROPA Naturally Regional Trade Fair in October 2016, a buyer for Rustan's Makati ordered a hundred pieces of shawls and promised to make a repeat order upon depletion of the stocks.

The assistance from DTI does not seem to end. This year, a managerial training is in the pipeline for Abundant Grace to help streamline its financial and personnel management systems covering costing, financial discipline, fund sourcing, cost-efficient production workflow, and brand development.

DTI is also helping Abundant Grace design its logo for its business cards, packaging labels, and promotional collaterals, among others.

The ultimate goal is export, for which DTI has been grooming Abundant Grace all along.

That goal may still be far down the road, but Abundant Grace is certainly on its way.

BUSINESS TIPS:

- 1 Develop customer engagement skills and apply them.
- 2 Learn merchandising techniques and how to display your products well.
- 3 Factor in all the costs of doing business and set aside savings for contingencies and expansion.
- 4 Exercise financial prudence and discipline. Keep records updated and organized.
- 5 Always keep the business on the right track to its goal.