

Forged in Fire

Bongtiwon Farm Handtools Manufacturer

Roland Bongtiwon had a rough start in 2006, producing only five bladed tools a day. Now, the production rate has dramatically increased to six times—making 33 bladed tools per day—through the help of DTI's Shared Service Facilities (SSF) project.



PASSIONATE PEOPLE
Roland Bongtiwon (standing, leftmost) and his workers pose with their various sharp-edged products that showcase the hard work, patience, and craftsmanship of Ifugao blacksmiths.

The mountainous Kangan town that hosts Roland Bongtiwon's blacksmith shop in Ifugao province is remote by any measure.

Roland's place is much nearer to the peak of the Nagacadan Rice Terraces located in the same town than the 5.5-hour (192-kilometer) drive to Baguio City. Yet, his 33 metal products reach, not only Baguio, but also Sagada, Bontoc, and other parts of the Cordillera Administrative Region, and even as far as Manila.

The Bongtiwon Farm Handtools Manufacturer evolved from a family business run by Roland's father, who trained him since he was young.

BUILDING ON A LEGACY

When Roland took over the business in 2006, its maximum daily output amounted to five pieces of bladed tools, which he would sell at the public market. But seeing how the products were getting sold out early, he decided to increase production.

In 2010, he registered the business with the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and sought its assistance in increasing his output capacity to enable him to take advantage of the market opportunity.

Like the many micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), Roland was trained by DTI in managing his business and marketing his products.

Hence, the number of his workers rose from only two to ten, eight full-time and two part-time.



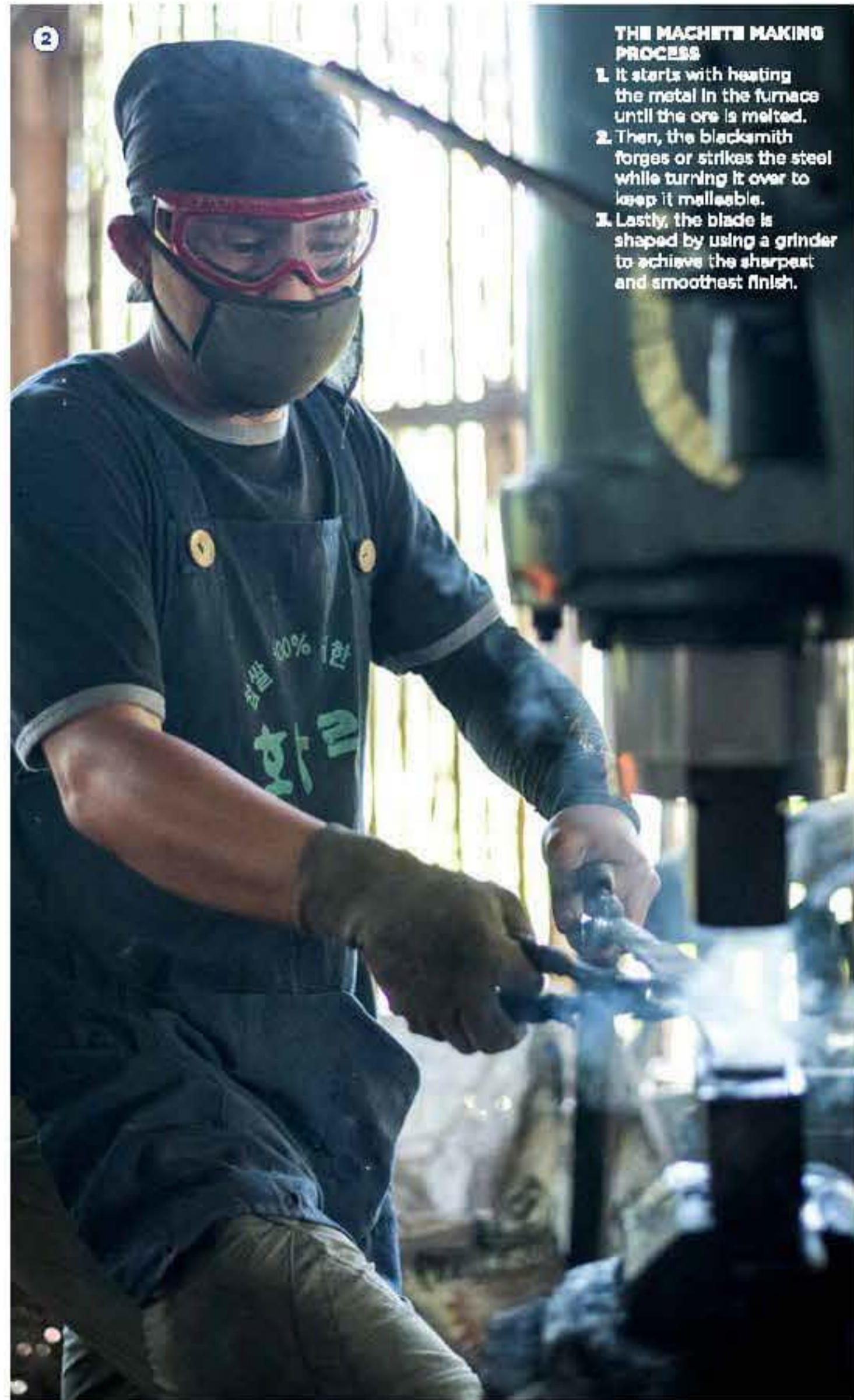
FRESH FROM THE FURNACE
A blacksmith melts steel from a coal blast furnace.



WIDE RANGE OF PRODUCTS
The foundry produces bladed tools of various sizes, such as machetes, katanas, shovel blades, and other metal tools.



DID YOU KNOW?
The bolo was the primary weapon used by the Katipuneros, making it the symbol of the Philippine Revolution.



THE MACHETE MAKING PROCESS

1. It starts with heating the metal in the furnace until the one is melted.
2. Then, the blacksmith forges or strikes the steel while turning it over to keep it malleable.
3. Lastly, the blade is shaped by using a grinder to achieve the sharpest and smoothest finish.

SHARED SERVICE FACILITY

Roland's production increased through the DTI's Shared Service Facilities (SSF) project, which enabled him to access equipment and expand his design portfolio.

The SSF is part of DTI's development program. It provides machineries, technical knowledge, and skills to MSMEs under a shared system.

With increased production, Roland goes to public markets and bus terminals to hang his posters that widen his product visibility.

He also joins DTI's trade fairs where his sales are so good that he always runs out of stock.

TIME IS GOLD

When asked about the difficult challenges he had encountered in business, Roland could hardly remember any.

"There are hardships, yes," he says. "But we love so much what we do that we don't waste time on anything else."

In a day, the workers have to produce various volumes of 33 product items, including katanas, shovel blades, and other metal tools.

VALUES AT WORK

To Roland, patience and honesty constitute the work ethic that gets the job done, meets the clients' expectations, and keeps the company in business.

"We never take advantage of customers. If an item is priced at Php 500, then it is sold at Php 500, not more, even when I'm not here," he says. "No one is allowed to sell them at Php 600 or Php 700."

With the tools from DTI's SSF, the blacksmith could produce metal products at standardized sizes, shapes, and quality with utmost precision and the least wastage.

The tools are forging hammers, sanders, grinders, polishers, acetylene, and circular teeth saw, and router for making scabbards for the blades, to name a few.

With the SSF tools and equipment, the cooperative can produce more than Php 100,000 worth of goods a week from the previous Php 20,000 to Php 40,000 at most.

GIVING BACK

Now he gives people jobs, and amply provides for his family. He has also bought a piece of land as an investment.

In giving back to the community, Roland trains out-of-school youth and willing college graduates in his craft. He wants to expand the business even further to enable him to employ as many people in his town.

"Hopefully, we will be blessed with more equipment so we can increase production further," Roland says, hinting at his expanding market, where distance is no barrier.



FINISHING TOUCHES

After the forging processes, a handle and a holder—usually made of rattan and hardwood—are made to complete the piece.

PRIDE WITH HIS PRODUCT

Roland Bongtiwon, a blacksmith, poses with a machete at his workshop in Ifugao.

HOW DTI HELPED

Under DTI's Shared Service Facilities (SSF) project, Roland Bongtiwon was able to acquire forging tools and equipment that dramatically increased his production from Php 20,000 to Php 100,000 worth of goods a week.

