



REPORT on FIRST WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND SOCIAL ENTERPRISE REGIONAL VISIONING AND ENGAGEMENT CONFERENCE (WEE-SERVE ASIA)

The First WEE-SERVE Asia Conference was held at the AIM Conference Center, Makati City, Philippines, on April 19-22, 2017. This Conference brought together a total of 83 participants from 51 social entrepreneurship practitioner organizations, networks, resource institutions, civil society organizations, inclusive businesses and companies practicing CSR in the agricultural sectors, government agencies and policy makers, multilateral agencies, social and impact investors and academe, from 5 countries in ASEAN (Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, Philippines and Singapore)

The Conference theme was ***“Promoting Transformational Partnerships and Women’s Empowerment in Agricultural Value Chains in ASEAN”***. The First WEE-SERVE ASIA sought to build a multi-stakeholder platform to promote agricultural value chain interventions and investments in ASEAN that would transform and empower women and men small scale producers as a contribution to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Relevant SDGs towards which the practice and advocacy of transformational partnerships in agricultural value chains are expected to directly impact on are reduced inequality and women’s empowerment, decent jobs and inclusive growth, zero poverty and hunger and sustainable production, consumption and communities.

The Workshop had the following general and specific objectives:

General Objective: Build an ASEAN-wide multi-stakeholder platform to promote agricultural value chain interventions and investments that would transform and empower women and men small scale producers as a contribution to achieving the SDGs in the region

Specific Objectives:

- a) Showcase social enterprise models in agricultural value chains in 4 countries that have had a significant impact in transforming the lives of women and men small scale producers.
- b) Validate and enrich the benchmarks for transformational partnerships that impact on women and men small scale producers in agricultural value chains as demonstrated by the social enterprise models.
- c) Set up an initial network of practitioners, advocates and supporters of social enterprises in agricultural value chains that would serve as the core group of a multi-stakeholder platform that would implement, support and advocate the benchmarks for transformational partnerships in agricultural value chains.
- d) Initiate dialogue with ASEAN agencies and member governments, multilateral agencies operating in ASEAN, the business community, and social/impact investors about the benchmarks.

This Regional Conference was a culmination activity of a two-year action research conducted in 4 ASEAN countries by ISEA under the project Promoting Social Enterprises in Gender transformative and Responsible Agricultural Investments in Southeast Asia (PROSE-GRAISEA) in partnership with OXFAM and with the support of the Swedish Government/SIDA. The



Regional Conference was also supported by the Peace and Equity Foundation (PEF) and the PRESENT Coalition. Partners who provided financial support for the WEE-SERVE Asia Conference were Oxfam GB and SIDA as part of the PROSE GRAISEA Project and the PEF, which provided for the travel and participation of 15 Philippine participants.

The two-day Conference was formally started with a Welcome Remarks by Ms. Lilian Mercado, Regional Director for Asia of Oxfam International. In her speech she explained that “inclusive growth cannot be achievable without women’s holistic empowerment and without addressing the systematic barriers that impede women’s access to economic opportunities”, such as adverse norms, unpaid care work, lack of legal protection and pervasive discriminatory laws and regulations among others. She enumerated a number of initiatives of Oxfam to engage and promote women’s economic empowerment, among which is the regional program called Gender Responsive Agriculture Investments in Southeast Asia (GRAISEA), of which this initiative was part of.

Ms. Mercado shared that Oxfam was proud to co-organize the conference with ISEA and the Government of Sweden. She added that Oxfam recognized the potent role of the social enterprise sector as a vehicle for reducing poverty and to women’s economic empowerment in the region. She said that a key approach to partnership was to build multi stakeholder networks of partners to make interventions in value chain segments and to create an enabling environment for women and smallholders, agribusinesses and SMEs. The cases to be presented aims to inspire and draw standards that positively impact on the poor and promote women’s economic empowerment. She hoped that the conference would inspire rich discussions and bridge partnerships that advance WEE in SE sector and in business. She ended her message with a fervent hope that the ripples created by the conference would make women and girls across Asia more confident on how far they can go.

Keynoting the WEE-SERVE Asia Conference was Honorable Loren Legarda, Senator of the Republic of the Philippines. She was on the third term in the Senate and chairs the Committee on Climate Change and Finance. She was responsible for a number of legislation in the country among which were the Climate Change Act of the Philippines, and its amendatory law; the People Survival Fund; the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act, the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act; the Environmental Awareness Education Act; the Renewable Energy Act; the Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act; the Universal Healthcare Act; the Anti-Violence Against Women and Children Act; and the Barangay Kabuhayan Act (or Village Livelihood Act). She was a co-author of the PRESENT Bill, a measure to recognize and support the role of SEs and SE development platform as a strategy to reduce poverty and inequality in the country.

Senator Legarda focused her speech on grassroots and agricultural value chains that empower women. She narrated her visit to the Province of Antique in Panay and El Nido in Palawan where she saw how effectively and efficiently government programs were implemented at the barangay level. She said that despite having authored many landmark laws, she wanted to underline the importance of partnerships between women’s groups and the AVCs in ensuring the implementation of laws and policies.

In the pursuit of the path towards a single economic community, she saw the importance of looking at its effect on the micro, small, and medium including social enterprises (SEs). She noted that even the Philippine Institute of Development Studies (PIDS) pushed for a more enabling environment for SEs and have recognized the vital role of SEs towards the attainment of inclusive growth in the country. Despite this, the current regulatory mechanism is not



responsive to the growth of the sector. She also recognizes that ASEAN Integration has poses both challenges and opportunities for SEs and their small producers and the stakeholders in the AVCs. She noted that SEs and MSMEs have limited access to finance, technology and markers in addition to having limited capacities for compliance to standards and certification. Unless SEs and MSMEs are given the necessary support and interventions, these are likely to lose our in deeper competition.

She noted that according to the Philippine Commission on Women, women's domestic and household roles limit their earning ability. Other barriers include inadequate access to and control over production resources and markets, segregation of discrimination into lower-paying jobs and the lack of market-driven skills and knowledge. Women who want to engage in income earning activities, while still having adequate family time, usually start with traditionally women-identified activities with limited potentials. The WEE-SERVE Asia Conference provides and opportunity to examine these scenarios, to assess current trends, to exchange best practices, to generate solutions to promote AVCs interventions and investments in ASEAN that would transform and empower women and men small scale producers as contribution to achieving inclusive and sustainable development.

She shared the different laws she authored and the programs that was implemented thru these laws. Among which were GREAT Women Project, DTI's Sustainable Livelihood Program, the Magna Carta for MSMEs, Barangay KABuhayan (Livelihood Act), Agri-Agra Reform Credit Act, the Philippine Innovation Act, Climate Change and Disasters related laws and initiatives, and the PRESENT Bill. She said that if these small efforts in the rural areas could be replicated in every barangay, depending on the needs then these will create great impact.

She ended her speech by saying that "as we tread the path to ASEAN economic integration, we must make sure that no one is left behind ". "The outcome of this gathering must call our respective governments that social enterprises and MSMEs must not be left behind". She offered that if the above mentioned laws were not yet present in other countries, she can share with the participant copies of these laws. If these are already present in other countries, she wanted to know their best practice of monitoring these laws. The challenge facing ASEAN countries is to ensure that laws work for poverty reduction, resilience, building communities and micro enterprises that could alleviate poverty on the ground.

The WEE SERVE ASIA Conference served as a venue for presentation of the result of the 2-year research conducted by ISEA and its country partners through the PROSE GRAISEA project. As a starting point, Ms. Lisa Dacanay, President and Project Director of ISEA, elaborated on the overall context of the project. One, sustained economic growth in the ASEAN has not made much impact on poverty reduction. Two, that there is disconnect between the intent of poverty reduction at the national level and on the ground similar to what is happening in the other countries. Three, women and men small scale producers had not benefited in the process. Social entrepreneurship is one strategy for making agricultural investment contribute to transforming the lives of women and men small scale producers.

Dr. Dacanay highlighted that ASEAN economic integration poses threats and opportunities for SEs and small producers as stakeholders in AVCs. She pointed out that there is a tendency to further marginalize small producers if business is done as usual. The benchmarks and standards for responsibly engaging and transforming women and men small scale producers would be important in this context. She also made mention on the significance of PROSE GRAISEA project in relation to the sustainable development goals (SDGs) since the social enterprise sector could contribute significantly to the attainment of SDGS particularly on



addressing poverty and inequality, provision of decent jobs and inclusive growth, inclusive and sustainable industrialization and innovation, sustainable consumption and production, sustainable communities and women's economic empowerment.

The Conference served to showcase social enterprise models with significant impact in transforming the lives of women and men small scale producers in AVCs. These social enterprises models or best practices were:

- Alter Trade Foundation and the Negros Organic Fair Trade Association (NOFTA) in the Muscovado Sugar Value Chain and Beyond, Philippines;
- Bote Central/Philippine Coffee Alliance in partnership with the Sultan Kudarat Coffee Ventures Inc/ TRICOM and RIC Maramag, Philippines;
- Green Net Cooperative and Earth Net Foundation's Fishery Project with Community Based Organization, Thailand
- Lemon Farm and the Association of Thai Fisherfolk Federation's Fisherfolk Enterprise Blue Brand Initiative, Thailand
- KSU Jatirogo's Organic Coconut Sap Sugar Intervention, Indonesia
- KMM's Green Mussel Intervention, Indonesia
- HITEACO and their Partnership with Tea Growers, Vietnam
- DRAGON and their intervention with Indigenous Peoples in the Ginger and Gac Value Chains, Vietnam

This was followed by Dr. Dacanay's presentation of the benchmarks for transformational partnerships that impact on women and men small scale producers in AVCs. She noted in her presentation that the paper is an attempt to synthesize the rich insights coming from the cases. Further, the benchmarks could be seen as an aspirational standards that raise the bar on how social enterprises and other stakeholders in AVCs could sustainably impact on small-scale producers, their households and their communities. These benchmarks are the following:

- Transformational partnerships promote appropriate technology and community-based/oriented innovations that are friendly to small producers and women, and contribute to sustainable consumption and production.
- Transformational partnerships progressively position women and men small scale producers to reap a more substantive share of value created over time, while building their resilience to natural, social and economic disasters.
- Transformational partnerships pave the way for the empowerment of women and men small producers to become actors in their own development and that of their community and sector and to become stewards of the natural resource base that sustain their livelihoods.
- Transformational partnerships provide a combination of transactional and transformational services among women and men small scale producers to more effectively participate in value chain and community/sectoral development that is both equitable and sustainable.
- Transformational partnerships proactively choose value chains and invest in value chain development practices that enhance women's participation and empowerment.
- Transformational partnerships are transparent and accountable and produce significant, measurable outcomes of transformation at the level of women and men small producers, their households and communities and the value chains and subsectors where they are situated.



This was followed by a Workshop on the Benchmarks and the First WEE-SERVE Asia Conference Declaration. The latest version of the Benchmarks as well as the final WEE-SERVE Asia Conference Declaration are attached.

Two plenary sessions followed the workshop. First, was the Dialogue with ASEAN/ ASEAN Member States on the Benchmarks where the panelist were: Usec. Zenaida Maglaya of the Department of Trade and Industry- Philippines, High Excellency Lily Purba of ASEAN Committee on Women and Children, Ms. Elaine Tan of ASEAN Foundation. The second plenary session was a Dialogue with the Business Sector and Social/Impact Investors on the Benchmarks. The panelists include: Mr. Pranay Samson of Shujog IIX, Ms. Edilee Omyoen of Philippine Women Entrepreneurs Network/ AWEN and Mr. Oskar Haq of Oxfam.

The conference proper was closed by Ms. Anette Andersson of the Private Sector Collaboration and Decent Work Development Cooperation Section of Asia and the Pacific of the Embassy of Sweden in Bangkok.

All the power point presentations during the conference, together with the Conference Declaration and complete list of participants have been uploaded to the ISEA website (<http://isea-group.net>).

During the conference, there were 2 side events organized:

- a) Briefing Session on Engaging the UN High Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment where Oxfam share the paper on "Leave No One Behind, Taking Action for Transformational Change on Women's Economic Empowerment" including updates on what has transformed since the December 2016 Conference in Bangkok.
- b) Presentation/Workshop of Tools for Measuring Impact on Women's Empowerment and SEs where WOCAN and Dompert Dhuafa shared the tools they are using in measuring impact at the community level.

On April 22, 2017, around 30 participants from the conference participated in the field visit to social enterprises (Gandang Kalikasan/Human Nature, Casile Ginting Upland Marketing Cooperative and Bote Central 18 Days Coffee Kiosk). The field visit was designed to showcase some models of social enterprises in the Philippines that have practiced transformational partnerships with their workers and women and men small scale producers.

Even with very limited budget for the conference, the WEE-SERVE Asia Conference was able to achieve the intended mix and level of participants and speakers from among the key players social enterprise sector. There were a total of 83 individuals coming from 51 organizations/entities in 5 countries of ASEAN (Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam and Singapore).

It was observed that engagements with government, the business sector and social/impact investors on the benchmarks need to be followed through and broadened.

The conference became a venue for networking and contact building among stakeholders present. It was able to provide a platform for the different stakeholders to come together and unite on the following agenda:



- Build and grow a learning community of practitioners and advocates towards mainstreaming the benchmarks for transformational partnerships in AVCs in, and beyond ASEAN.
- Expand opportunities and increase engagement for women's inclusion, leadership and empowerment in agricultural value chains;
- Work together to develop the tools and support programs to innovate and improve practice and advocacy of the benchmarks for transformational partnerships in AVCs.
- Initiate multi-stakeholder platforms with governments, multilateral agencies, businesses, social and impact investors and other sectors to develop enabling policies, programs and investment mechanisms to mainstream these benchmarks in agricultural value chains.