



# Impact Story

## Success Through Resilience and Community Engagement in the Philippines

**Country:** Philippines

**Program:** Volunteer Cooperation Program 2020-2027

**Partners:** Boracay Women Producers Cooperative (BWPC) and Tropical Palm Herb Manufacturing

**Date:** January 5, 2023

**Key Themes:** Community Economic Development, Environment and Climate Action, Food Security, MSME Development, Tourism & Hospitality, Women's Economic Empowerment

# Context

Through the Accelerating Women's Empowerment (AWE) project, Catalyste+ aims to improve the economic and social well-being of the poorest, most marginalized, and vulnerable people in 21 developing countries, particularly women and girls. In the Philippines, Catalyste+ works with partners like the **Boracay Women Producers Cooperative (BWPC)** and **Tropical Palm Herb Manufacturing**, who are dedicated to improving the lives of people in their communities. These two female-led organizations demonstrate the impact that empowered women have in advancing economic and social well-being and supporting those who are in need. They also are examples of great resilience, having overcome challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and Typhoon Ulysses respectively, and bouncing back stronger with the support of Catalyste+.

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**Tropical Palm Herb Manufacturing** is an enterprise that manufactures herbal supplements from raw materials sourced from local farmers. It aims to deliver export-quality products using moringa, turmeric and other locally grown plants to the ever-changing market through state-of-the-art craftsmanship. The business is owned and managed by Maria Teresa (Teresa) Caja Santiano, a savvy entrepreneur and persuasive saleswoman who is curating products that cater to her clients' needs and highlight the value of local ingredients. Her mission is to contribute to the economic empowerment of her employees and suppliers through employment opportunities and benefits.



*Teresa Santiano, owner of Tropical Palm Herb Manufacturing, along with her staff and farmer suppliers.*

Similarly, the **BWPC**, a women's cooperative on the island of Boracay, provides livelihood opportunities to its members and promotes inclusive growth, conservation and biodiversity through the production of health and beauty products, including eco soaps, oils, herbal capsules, and fresh produce, and the operation of a Community Mart. The organization strives to be an example of female empowerment and sustainability in the community, a goal that was set from the beginning by its passionate Founder and Chairperson, Desiree T. Segovia.

In 2019, the BWPC faced the devastation of super typhoons Tisoy and Ursula, which struck the island at the end of the year. This challenging time for the organization was further compounded by the COVID-19 restrictions that were put in place in the country in March 2020, restricting tourists from entering the island of Boracay and ultimately, putting a hold on BWPC's business operations and jeopardizing their main source of income.

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Similarly, after months of struggling with the economic downturn caused by the pandemic, **Tropical Palm Herb Manufacturing** saw their factory flooded and their equipment and raw materials damaged in November 2020, when Typhoon Ulysses hit the Philippines, affecting the lives of almost 3 million people in the country. This too resulted in a pause in the partner's business operations for two months and impacted their ability to secure an income. In this context, both organizations connected with Catalyste+ to explore ways to restore their operations and develop their capacity to prepare for and manage future crises.

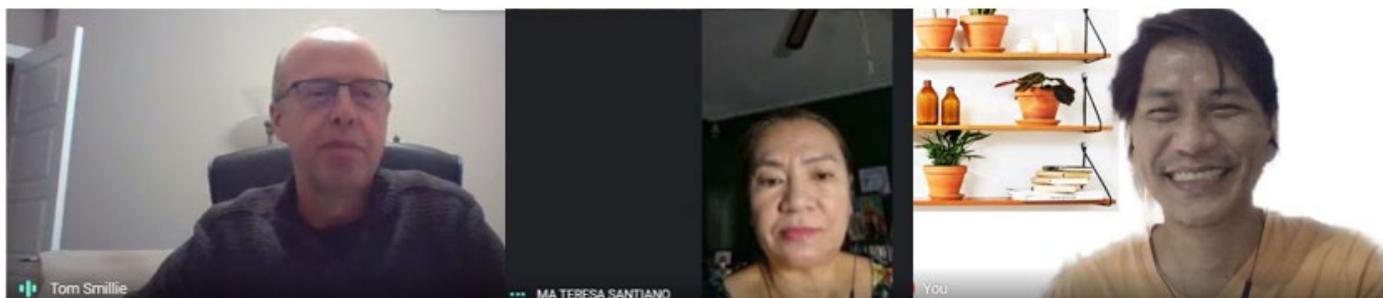


*Tropical Palm Herb Manufacturing's facility damaged by typhoon Ulysses.*

# Collaborating with Catalyste+

From the beginning, working with Catalyste+ facilitated out of the box thinking and helped the partners identify innovative solutions to their challenges. In the case of **Tropical Palm Herb Manufacturing**, Tom Smillie, a Catalyste+ Advisor (CA), collaborated with Teresa in identifying her weaknesses in financial analysis and preparing proper financial statements so she could gain a better understanding of her financial position and the losses she incurred after the typhoon. Together, the CA and Teresa worked to improve her capacity to monitor her financial records, which ultimately allowed her to reapply to and secure a PHP 1,000,000 ( $\approx$  CAD 23,000) loan from the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) to rebuild her factory and buy new machinery.

Note: DTI is a government agency in the Philippines which promotes economic opportunities in industry and services, and supports the access of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) to business advisory assistance, mentoring, and programs.



*CA Tom Smillie, Teresa Santiano (Owner of Tropical Palm Herb Manufacturing) and Vener Valerio (Catalyste+ Project Officer) during a Zoom session.*



*Tropical Palm Herb Manufacturing's facility rebuilt.*

In the case of the **BWPC**, the partner's work with the CA, Gerry O'Connor, helped them understand the need for a change in their business model from one that catered primarily to tourists to one that caters to the local community instead. The Advisor introduced the Balance Scorecard, a tool that analyzes past performance data and provides organizations with recommendations for making better decisions in the future, to assist BWPC in adapting to the post-COVID-19 context and provide them with a business framework to manage their organization. Thanks to these recommendations and tools, BWPC decided to produce and sell items like soap and coffee in sachets for local consumption, reducing the prices of these products to meet local needs and guaranteeing their affordability.



*CA Gerry O'Connor working with staff members from BWPC and the Philippines Catalyste+ team.*

They also chose to concentrate their efforts on community-focused projects such as their organic communal gardens and their Kadiwa stores, which sell major agricultural goods at low prices to low-income Filipino households. This approach proved to be successful for BWPC as members and locals continued to buy products from the co-op, providing them with the income they needed to sustain other projects throughout the pandemic, including providing milk and rice to members in need. Thanks to their collaboration with the Advisor, the partner found a new direction for the organization and became more resilient to the challenges brought about by climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic.



*Produce sold at the BWPC's Kadiwa store.*

# Engaging Communities

Community development and inclusion are the main pillars on which the two Catalyste+ partners have built their respective organizations. At **Tropical Palm Herb Manufacturing**, Teresa employs workers that come from marginalized communities and backgrounds, including an employee with disabilities. She also sources her raw materials from farmers in rural areas, who supply her with moringa, soursop, mangosteen and other local dried leaves. Once Teresa was able to rebuild her factory, she shared her increased earnings with her staff who not only provided her with support from the beginning, but worked long hours to keep her business afloat during the typhoon and the pandemic. Teresa's kindness and impact also extended to her network of suppliers through initiatives that ranged from providing smallholder farmers with turmeric seedlings, to teaching them how to plant moringa seeds as a means of generating more income and advancing their livelihoods. Thanks to Teresa and their increase in income, some farmers in her network, who used to live in shanties or small, crudely built shacks, were able to build stone houses.

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Likewise, Desiree believes that the needs of the community and its members are at the center of **BWPC's** work, mission and activities as members come from marginalized parts of society and most have low levels of education. When the CA recommended that the organization switch its business model to a more community-focused one, Desiree consulted with the co-op's members, and decided to focus on establishing 18 organic communal gardens in various areas of the island. The idea behind this initiative was to have members of the community plant produce for local consumption and promote the purchasing of local produce during the pandemic. It was meant to advocate for the consumption of healthy organic food as a means to preserve members' health and wellness, but also led to creating a bonding experience for families. Men, typically the husbands of female members, were in charge of land preparation and planting, while the women were in charge of crop maintenance, harvesting, and marketing. Once the pandemic restrictions were lifted and men returned to fishing, the women took charge of the communal gardens, resulting in an increased economic contribution of women in their households.

The success of BWPC's communal gardens reinforced the co-op's commitment to environmental sustainability and zero-waste philosophy and allowed them to secure PhP 500,000.00 (≈ CAD 11,500) in funding from the Department of Agriculture. These funds helped the co-op open their Kadiwa store, which now includes 1 main store and 17 outlets on the island. The shops serve as an income-generating venture that simultaneously provides affordable, organic vegetables to locals and allows female members to sell excess produce from their harvest that they are not able to consume. In addition, the co-op's success in operating the community gardens and the Kadiwa store, along with their ability to manage their finances responsibly, aided the partner in developing other income-generating projects, including a souvenir shop on the beach front.



*BWPC members and their children tending the communal garden.*

All their achievements enabled the organization to increase their visibility and gain the government's trust and support, which is reflected in the approval of a PhP 900,000 (≈ CAD 21,000) grant from DTI to purchase sewing machines for women in the community. These machines are now used to produce items such as bandanas and beachwear, and are then sold at the souvenir shop. Another sign of government confidence in BWPC is the PhP 1,000,000 (≈ CAD 23,000) grant received from the Department of Labor and Employment to operate a bakery, a project which is not only profitable but which also meets the needs of the local community.



*BWPC members working at the bakery.*

Thanks to Catalyste+'s emphasis on the importance of adopting gender-sensitive practices and processes, co-op leaders also realized that they needed to develop a more holistic mindset, and stop focusing only on generating money. As a result, the co-op started empowering women through education and regular informational campaigns for the community on women's rights, laws protecting children, responsible parenthood, mental health, and gender-sensitivity training, etc. These initiatives, in turn, resulted in women learning to fish and process fish, which was originally only done by men. Likewise, men have started working at the bakery and souvenir shop alongside women, challenging traditional gender roles. BWCP's work with Catalyste+ also improved the perception of women's abilities on the island as members were able to pursue new ways to ensure the cooperative's survival and secure their families' well-being.



*BWPC members participating in a Women's Rights Forum.*



*Men working alongside women at the BWPC souvenir shop.*

# Enhancing Business Sustainability

Throughout their work together, the partners and Advisors focused on cultivating business sustainability and resilience in the face of challenges. The collaboration encouraged growth and innovation for **Tropical Palm Herb Manufacturing**, who will take advantage of their existing machines to produce and develop their own products under the brand, Tropical Blend. In addition, Teresa put the knowledge she gained from the Advisor to good use by redefining her mission and reorganizing her vision to improve her position in the market and make her business more appealing to her customer base. To do so, she followed the 4Ps rule, which enabled her to create and sell her own branded products, including herbal capsules, coffee, tea, and juices, and to plan the launch of this new business line. Her children now help her run Tropical Blend, which has been registered with the FDA and is set to launch in the coming months. Following the recommendations from the CA, Teresa also plans to relocate her factory to a higher altitude to ensure sustainability and mitigate the effects of any potential natural disasters. For the time being, she has built a second floor for her plant and relocated all expensive machinery as part of her contingency plan to strengthen her resistance to floods and typhoons.



*The 4Ps of Marketing.*

Overall, Catalyste+'s support allowed the partners to overcome difficult times and build back stronger. Tropical Palm Herb Manufacturing became a thriving business that produces its own variety of

supplements and supplies products to large companies in various industries including food and pharmaceutical, among others. Teresa was not only able to recover and rebuild, but her experience became an inspiration for many other entrepreneurs in the Philippines, who are now inviting her to host seminars and conferences to share her story. Her business is now operating at full capacity. She is getting partnership requests from different national companies and is working on expanding her market reach by launching her products in Africa.



*Teresa Santiano (center) with two Tropical Palm Herb Manufacturing staff.*

As for **BWPC**, even though tourists have returned to Boracay island, the co-op remains focused on their members in order to ensure sustainability, whilst still maintaining a souvenir shop that is open to tourists. Despite some challenges brought about by the reopening of the island to tourists such as an increase in employee salaries and in the rent for the souvenir shop, co-op members still feel prepared to face price changes and manage their finances by saving while earning. So far, they have been able to use their newly acquired financial knowledge to come up with the funds needed to pay for rent and keep the souvenir shop running.

In addition, BWPC strengthened and further expanded its communal gardens project from 18 gardens in May 2021, to 22 gardens across the island as of July 2022. During the same period, the co-op was also able to increase its membership from 250 members prior to Catalyste+'s assistance to over 1,212. As part of their expansion, BWPC also negotiated a deal with the United Nations' Development Program (UNDP) and the Local Governmental Unit (LGU) to supply the whole island with lemongrass, moringa, and chilis. They went from having Kadiwa stores that supply agro-fishery products to locals, to supplying produce to hotels, resorts, and the entirety of the island.

To further ensure business sustainability in the future, BWPC created a more defined role structure for their co-op, which has given them the ability to perform more efficiently thanks to their improved understanding of different roles and responsibilities. They are also using a new business plan as a roadmap to guide their long-term plans and business operations. Currently, the partner is looking for professionals in policy planning, accounting, agriculture, and other fields of expertise to be part of their Board of Directors and help them oversee the organization and guarantee future success for the co-op.

Undoubtedly, the hardships that the partners went through and the support they received from Catalyste+ helped them understand the importance of good business practices, self-sufficiency and community involvement as a means to ensure sustainability and socio-economic wellbeing. Looking forward to the future, both partners expect to continue applying their improved business skills, prioritizing the needs of their communities and fostering self-reliance and improved livelihoods for their members and stakeholders.

*“The Catalyste+ direction really taught us that our community is very important; the members' needs are supposed to be the enterprise and the essence of the cooperative and we grow and achieve success together.”*

- Desiree T. Segovia,  
Founder and Chairperson of BWPC



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