

## WEAVING PEACE AND EQUALITY IN CONFLICT: THE HANDLOOM WEAVING ENHANCEMENT PROJECT OF THE WOMEN OF DAYAWAN, MARAWI CITY

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The handloom weaving project is an undertaking of the women of Dayawan, Marawi City of Philippines, implemented by the Philippine Foundation for Resource Management (PFRM) with financial support from the Philippines-Australia Community Assistance Program (PACAP) in cooperation with the local government and the Department of Trade and Industry. The project is a unique venture strengthening both the private sector development and women's empowerment. It has also contributed to the peace and development initiatives in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao. Handloom weaving has now become the center of today's thriving local economy of Dayawan.

### Background of the Project

PACAP is a 21-year-old bilateral development program of the governments of the Philippines and Australia, under the auspices of the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA) and the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), and managed by Hassall and Associates, International (HAI). It supports community-initiated, economically sustainable, ecologically sound, and gender-responsive development efforts. It also provides financial assistance and multilevel capability building for the strengthening of civil society organizations to improve local economies, services, and participatory governance.

PFRM is a local nonstock, nonprofit, service-oriented organization working with the Muslim communities in the southern Philippines. Established in 1993, its programs focus on livelihood and micro-enterprise development, micro-financing, and women in development.

Dayawan, Marawi City is a poor barangay in the conflict-affected Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao. Populated by the ethnolinguistic-cultural group of the Maranaos, it is known for its intricately designed woven products, which serve as a cultural heritage. Through centuries and generations, handloom weaving has remained a home-based industry of the Maranao women. In times of conflict, it is the Maranao women who carry the task of raising the family in all aspects, economic as well as nurturance.

### Project Description

This 18-month project helped the Maranao women loom weavers of Dayawan, Marawi City increase their income and develop their home-based handloom weaving industry through the provision of revolving capital, equipment, technology and product upgrading, promotions and marketing assistance, training and capacity building, and organization and project management.

#### Project Conceptualization

The idea of a focused project for the handloom weavers of Marawi City was conceived in January 2005 after sharing-discussions of the PFRM with the women and elders of



Dayawan. This was seen to be an ideal project. Inasmuch as the Maranao women needed a livelihood project to increase their income and alleviate their poverty; they already possessed the necessary skills as a part of

their culture. The project would also assist in the peace initiatives. More community consultations were undertaken to flesh out the concepts and ideas into a project design and proposal. Perceived problems were the raising of “working/additional” capital, product quality, and market linkages.

### Project Funding

In March 2005, PACAP received PFRM’s project proposal, *Handloom Weaving Enhancement Project*. The project appraisal processes included desk appraisal and site appraisal. Further project development was done by the PACAP Project Officer with the project proponent and the beneficiary communities. This included ensuring the project financials such as the budget breakdown, business plan, production and marketing strategy, and credit portfolio management. The gender and development objectives pointed to the optimization of women’s talents and skills, provision and /or increase and control of their income, and strengthening of the women’s organization.

### Project Implementation

- A PFRM project implementation team was organized to oversee and ensure the management of the project. It was responsible for ensuring the project systems, policies, and procedures as well as the capacity building components. The systems and training covered all levels and components of the projects, including finance, gender, design, value formation, product development and management, and quality assurance. It also had links with the government and other groups for training and marketing.
- On the community level, consultations and orientations continued. A three-member committee was formed to help screen the initial weaver-beneficiaries. Working capital was provided on credit, and machinery was purchased. Savings were also mobilized. The weavers also profited from the training and capacity building sessions on product development, women and development, as well as entrepreneurship and business management. In February 2006, the Dayawan Handloom Weavers Association was born.
- PACAP provided financial and management systems training for the project. In the monitoring and evaluation sessions, the PACAP Project Officer continued to provide input and guidance. PACAP likewise commissioned an external auditor to do a financial review of the project. This became another mentoring session.
- The local government unit provided opportunities for marketing such as promotions and assistance in trade fairs and exhibits. The village local government unit established a display center in the town so that the weavers could display their products. The Department of Trade and Industry assisted in the design, quality assurance, and technology upgrading.

### **Results**

1. Maranao women control their own income and savings. Many have expanded their handloom weaving, and some have even established new livelihood endeavors.
2. Some women beneficiaries have influenced their husbands to start new businesses.
3. The products from the Maranao handloom weaving have been diversified.
4. Women’s economic organizing came forth with the Dayawan Handloom Weavers Association.
5. The cultural heritage of the Maranao home-based handloom weaving industry is not only preserved; it is now revived and strengthened.
6. The local economy of Dayawan has expanded with the establishment of other livelihood activities and more outlets for Maranao goods.
7. Normalization, peace, and development in this conflict-affected area have been hastened. The project also provided opportunities for healing wounds, rebuilding lives, and organizing the community.



## Issues and Concerns

Implementation of this project was not without challenges. There were initial negative reactions, especially from the men, because the project was focused on women weavers. There was mistrust among weavers, who were wary of the project at first, since in the past, they had experienced many empty promises about the development of their craft. Some beneficiaries were reluctant to accept certain provisions in the “Project Policy, Systems and Procedures.” These included, among other things, the screening process, service fees (interest), savings mobilization, and disclosure of personal information.

With respect to the market, hand-loomed products are generally more expensive than modern textiles and have cultural and artistic value only. Therefore, they are prized souvenirs for art collectors, visitors, and tourists but lack domestic demand.

The area is often affected by conflicts brought about by hostilities between the government and Muslim rebels, as well as clan feuds, or “rido.” When there is conflict, practically all social activities stop. Children stop going to school, and clan members become very wary. Family life is disrupted, and even governance comes to a standstill.

## Lessons Learned:

1. **Focus on a specific women’s sector to push a particular home-based micro-enterprise.** PFRM has designed its microfinance intervention to focus on women’s skills in which they have a comparative and cultural advantage. PFRM believes that the country, particularly Marawi City, will be richer if opportunities that consciously value women’s experiences and contributions are integrated into the development process.
2. **Engage men in women’s empowerment programs.** At the start, the men were wary of the late-night project consultations and questioned the benefits these would bring to the family. But the women persisted. When asked how they cope with their domestic responsibilities now, and how the project has impacted their gender relations, the women laugh, as they find the question quite amusing. They say that they are the ones who control their own earnings as well as the family’s income (which is mostly from them, anyway.) While they weave, it is their husbands and children who do the chores. The whole family assists in processes like threading or fixing the handlooms. With their additional income, some have also started other economic activities for their husbands such as variety stores and hollow-block making. For the widows, it has provided them with a new lease on life.
3. **The PACAP Project Officer served as mentor, project consultant, and technical advisor.** After 21 years as a small grants donor agency, PACAP has learned many lessons about project development, management, and sustainability. It believes in passing on these lessons to its partners in all the stages of project development and implementation.
4. **Rigorous systems and processes are taught by doing.** This was complemented by the training that provided education on best practices. Discipline has to be practiced. The breaking of bad habits means consistently following good systems and procedures. Once internalized, this paves the way for sound management. Both PACAP and PFRM ensured the rigor as well as the capacity building of the beneficiaries. It was to the best advantage of the Maranao women and their organization, the Dayawan Handloom Weavers Association, that they assimilated both the discipline and the learning.
5. **The government provided assistance in product development and marketing.** The local government opened marketing opportunities, and the Department of Trade and Industry provided guidance on the technical and quality requirements.
6. **Ensure sustainability and the women’s voice.** The organization of the Dayawan Handloom Weavers Association does just this. Women’s organizing is a breakthrough in this community. Making it even more significant is the economic nature of women’s organizing. This is one sure way of ensuring women’s empowerment.
7. **Peace building and conflict prevention play a significant role in the project.** With relative peace in the community, the women meeting and organizing paved the way for families to again get together and

for community life to be restored. The training on values and community visioning became a good venue to understand better what they are as a community and what their common aspirations are.

## Conclusion

This home-based handloom weaving project has revived, preserved, and further developed a centuries-old tradition and industry. But in order for this cultural heritage to guarantee a living, concrete economic benefits should be felt by the weavers and their families. This project has proved its economic viability and financial profitability. Slowly it is being mainstreamed into the market. It has diversified its products and mainstreamed its product base to more utilitarian and consumer items such as bags, wallets, envelopes, conference kits, among others. While still maintaining its unique intricate designs, it has also improved its textile quality. Alternatives have come with the use of less expensive threads.

Markets are fast expanding. In the past, the women used to talk to their woven products, imploring them to attract buyers. They had also very limited options, since because of a lack of capital, they could not weave another item until the first one was sold. Today, it is the customers who seek them out, and they have stock to sell and accept bulk orders.

Individually, they are earning. More important, they are now initiating their own economic organization. The Dayawan Handloom Weavers Association is learning the ropes to ensure that their enterprise will sustain and that it can cope with the higher demands of business and management. As PFRM stated, "Sustaining the momentum earned during project implementation is just as tough."

The project has provided opportunities for these enterprising Maranao women to improve their lives and those of their families. As women, it has improved the level of their own material welfare and provided them with access to the factors of production such as credit, training, marketing, and organization. The women were the ones who conceptualized, planned, and implemented, and now they are the ones who are organizing and managing the whole project. This high level of empowerment has not really reached the community level but may yet have an impact on community affairs in a few years' time.

The revival of this age-old tradition of handloom weaving did not just revive the tradition of Maranao weaving but opened up possibilities for community members to work together, trust each other, and revive their sense of community. What some thought was nothing more than "weavers' stories" or "women's talk" became a healing process for the Maranao women and their families, whose lives had been interrupted or even ripped apart by the various conflicts.

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