

# Organizations, opportunities and change: A study of the Kababaihang Barangay of San Miguel, Bulacan\*

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## Introduction

Change and betterment are the avowed aims of all development efforts.

But how is change to be brought about? What kinds of change occur? What is the nature of the change process? Is change always towards the direction hoped for? Is change always for the good of the intended beneficiaries or does it, in fact, leave them better off in some ways but, ultimately, disadvantaged in others?

One desired result of development efforts is the attainment of self-reliance of the people they work with. They train people to seize some measure of control over their lives and to exert influence on their natural or social environment.

Training for self-reliance and control may come in different forms and can focus on any one dimension of a person's life - be it the social, cultural, political, economic or emotional/psychological. No matter where change occurs, it will ultimately bring about change in all the other aspects. Thus, it becomes important to understand how to manage change and to identify the areas which more readily yield to change, so as to facilitate development goals and objectives.

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Development funds and efforts are usually channeled through groups which are specific and manageable units. This can also facilitate project implementation since the beneficiaries are known and their behaviors and progress can be more easily monitored and measured.

Women have also become the targets of development efforts as they have organized or have been organized into various types of self-help groups - formally into cooperatives or informally into the socio-civic-religious groups and clubs - which abound in rural areas particularly as they have sought support for various income generating projects (IGPs).

However, there is a dearth of studies which look systematically into the process whereby women organize (or are organized) into groups and which measure the effects of such groups on the women and their lives. There is also a need to examine closely the impact of development efforts and IGPs on the women beneficiaries.

### Objectives

This paper is part of a larger study whose many objectives could be categorized into two:

- 1) those which relate to the group itself and its projects and activities, its organization and management, its methods and techniques to encourage the women into greater involvement as well as to bring changes in them; and
- 2) those which relate to the women within the organization - how they perceive the organization, the extent and nature of their participation in the organization, the factors which may aid or hinder their continued active participation and involvement, and the resultant effects of their involvement on themselves and their families.

This particular paper looks into the role that organizations play in the lives of the women who take an active part in them. It takes the position that such groupings, particularly those which offer their members the opportunity to participate and succeed in livelihood activities, play a significant role in changing these women. Exactly how the organization does this - the mechanisms it develops to maintain the changes, the relation between the organization and the livelihood activity and the specific effects these have on the women - will be examined.

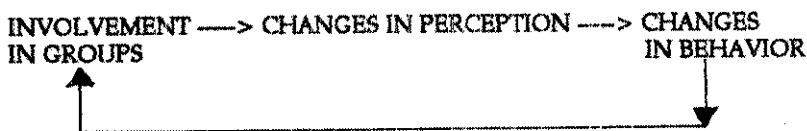
### Conceptual framework for the study

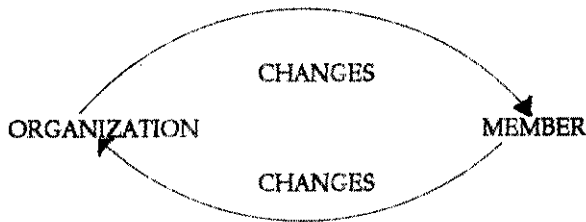
As women come together in self-help groups and engage in productive, i.e., economic, endeavors to better the lives of their families, they assume a new and more active role which will inevitably affect the way they perceive themselves. In turn, this new perception will affect their behavior within and towards the family and the community. There is, therefore, a development of the self towards self-reliance as opposed to the more traditional dependent role.

Such changes may come about because of the women's organizational involvement. Some groups may deliberately plan their projects and activities to induce profound and pervasive changes in the members, to raise consciousness, to change old patterns of behavior and to direct changes towards a specified direction. However, other groups may disclaim any interest in such changes and concern themselves only with training or funding the women.

However, change may very well be a by-product of involvement no matter what the concerns and intent of the organization may be. Such changes will be more specific, focused and quick to come about when they are deliberately planned for, but changes will occur even where none have been sought and intended.

The gathering together and linking of women who had previously led relatively quiet, isolated lives into a regular group with a definite purpose and helping them acquire needed skills will begin a process of change which may not be foreseen by the change agent. Moreover, providing them a measure of success and a sense of accomplishment will result in a new perception of self and in behaviors more congruent with this new perception. Should these changes be perceived positively by the individual and attributed to the organization, affiliation and participation will be valued, resulting in greater involvement and bringing about more changes. However, this greater involvement and change in the members will also result in organizational changes, highlighting the dynamic relationship between organization and member.





However, it is also believed that change may come not only as a result of group involvement but also because of economic success in a livelihood activity provided by the group.

While change could very well begin in any aspect of a person's life, the economic aspect is the most effective starting point. From a previously helpless, dependent and reactive position, the person begins to improve the family's condition. This sense of competence then generalizes to other aspects - from a sense of personal power and worth to behaviors that affirm this worth and which impact upon the environment outside the self.



Economic success results in a good feeling about the self, in confidence which translates to social interest and skill, a concern which broadens to encompass not only the family but also the larger environment in which the family is situated.



Thus, attempting to bring about change in the individual can most easily be accomplished through the economic route. The sense of being an effective agent will pervade all other aspects of the person, shaping attitudes and affecting behaviors. This, in turn, will act upon others in the external environment and feedback to the person, thereby maintaining the behaviors and attitudes.

This process is an extremely slow and cautious one, although it could be hastened by group membership and involvement. The factor of group involvement ensures that change will occur and will be maintained over time.

### **Participants in this study**

The *Kababaihang Barangay* of San Miguel, Bulacan (KBB) was the focus of this study. (While information on other women's groups was collected in the course of data gathering, attention was focused on only one group so that it could be studied both extensively and intensively, given the constraints of time and personal energy.)

The KBB is a rural women's organization which draws most, if not all, of its members from the lower income groups in the 47 barangays of San Miguel. It specializes in livelihood projects and activities such as swine breeding and fattening, knitting, garment sewing and stuffed toy making to help its members earn a small income supplementary to that of their husbands.

It is a loose aggrupation, open to all women aged 22 and above in San Miguel, so it is difficult to determine exact membership figures. However, the various chairwomen estimate that they can depend on about 25-35 women in their areas. Membership is classified into active (those who participate in at least one group activity or project) and inactive (those who choose not to participate at all).

There are two levels of active membership: the leadership (composed of the 54 chairpersons and a council of elders/advisers) and the members at the barangay level.

### **Methods and procedures employed in this study**

A multi-method approach was employed to gather data since the use of different methods and techniques to examine a phenomenon from several perspectives and the discovery of a convergence of data from these differing but complementary methods would mean greater confidence in the results. Thus, the following were used:

- 1) in-depth interviews and the use of key informants;
- 2) observation;
- 3) participant observation;
- 4) documents analysis;
- 5) survey questionnaire;
- 6) content analysis; and
- 7) informal group discussions.

There was regular attendance at meetings of the group (monthly, emergency, project, formal, informal) at the leadership level and several at the barangay level. Friendly visits were made to many of the leaders and

some members. Interviews (both formal and informal) were conducted and which often became group discussions as more women joined in. All the interviews were taped with the knowledge and consent of the women.

A study of all documents of or about the KBB was undertaken including minutes of meetings, financial records, project accounts, their newsletter, monographs and articles about them. Questionnaires from two surveys and their *talambuhays* (life stories) were also collected and analyzed.

Participant observation was conducted when the researcher lived with the family of a landless agricultural worker whose wife and daughter were active leaders in the KBB, in order to study more intensively the women in that barangay who were involved in a livelihood project.

### A brief history of the KBB and its projects

The KBB was organized in 1977 by Manny Collado, the Municipal Development Officer of San Miguel, when he failed to organize the men into *Samahang Nayons*. Seeing that the women were attending meetings in place of their husbands, he decided to concentrate on organizing them instead to help in the implementation of government projects such as the Green Revolution and the nutrition program at the municipal level.

However, at the formal induction of about forty chapters, a challenge was given by the town's vice-mayor to broaden the group's objective and to get the group involved in worthwhile projects such as livelihood activities.

Basically, then, the history of its projects became the history of the KBB.

Shortly after the induction, the organization had its first grant and project: a swine breeding project from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The women were given two piglets to raise with funding for feeds for two cycles (one cycle is four months). The basic concept was that the women were to give back two piglets from the first or second litters as repayment for the initial pig and feeds. These were in turn given to other women to start off their own backyard projects. The money realized from the sale of the rest of the litters as well as of subsequent litters was to be used as capital for other small projects of their own.

This concept served as the prototype for all subsequent projects.

Then in 1979, the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Women selected among seven project proposals submitted for funding the KBB's swine fattening proposal as their pilot project in the country.

Basically similar to the first, this new project included a forced savings component whereby half the proceeds from a cycle for a total of seven cycles was to be given to the woman to use as she wanted while the other half was to be deposited in a bank in her name with the organization head as co-signer. At the end of the agreed upon seven cycles, she could withdraw the money and use it to capitalize another project.

The KBB then began a backyard project called *Walang Gutom sa Likod Bahay* which involved the distribution of seedlings for fruit trees and vegetable seeds for planting in their backyards as well as classes and seminars on *tilapia* and/or golden *kuhol* raising, fruit preservation, etc. Each family could thus be self-sufficient regarding its food needs, freeing cash for other necessities and enabling them to earn by selling off any excess crop.

Their next venture in 1985 involved knitting children's sweaters for export to Europe. From an initial workforce of two knitters, the project gradually grew to a workforce of eight hundred.

Along the way, they acquired valuable lessons, apart from the basic skill of knitting, such as the method of "each-one-teach-one" (wherein each woman who eventually learns how to knit has to teach another woman), the knowledge that one can only attract others to a project if participation results in tangible benefits such as added income and new material possessions; and the realization that children do not have to be taught directly in order to learn something - all they have to do is watch others do it. The project also spawned a support industry for making bamboo needles since the Taiwanese needles previously used proved too expensive for the women.

In 1986, they sewed stuffed toys for export to the United States and finally went into the export of stuffed toys themselves. Unable to cope with the paperwork and the large capitalization this entailed, they decided to remain labor sub-contractors.

They then received a grant of fifty thousand dollars from UNIFEM for the construction of two sewing centers that would concentrate their workforce in a specified place and thus limit expenses. Today, both are devoted to sub-contracting the sewing of garments for export.

In 1987, a grant of 1.2 million pesos was obtained from the Department of Agriculture and the USAID for the Greening of San Miguel. This involved the planting of one million fruit trees in the town and the establishment of seed nurseries in its public schools under the care of the schoolchildren. Together with engendering a greater concern for the environment among the people and especially among the schoolchildren, the project was also seen to generate income as the people could sell the fruits and begin small industries making candied sweets and preserves.

Lately, the organization has entered into a joint venture with the Technology and Livelihood Resource Center (TLRC) and a Taiwanese to open a marblecraft factory meant to provide jobs for the townspeople. The project includes the concept of the family factory wherein 400 families will be loaned machines to finish small marble items within their own homes.

Finally, the most recent projects of the KBB are a return to their earlier and more successful activities of swine breeding and fattening. With a no-strings-attached grant of 100 thousand pesos from Eduardo (Danding) Cojuangco Jr. and a loan of about three million pesos from the TLRC, each qualified member received a dozen pigs plus support for the construction of pens and the purchase of feeds. Again, the concept of payback and the stricture to use the proceeds to begin a small business of their own was emphasized to start them off on the road to financial self-reliance.

### The benefits from participation

Participation in these projects brought the women the following benefits:

#### **The acquisition of new skills**

From almost zero knowledge, the women learned how to sew, to operate high speed machines, to knit and to care for pigs, that is, to observe and understand the animal's behavior, to diagnose and to cope with the pig's minor ailments and to aid in the birthing process.

But more important than these marketable skills, they learned how to schedule, to prioritize activities and to apportion their time so they could balance the demands of their various responsibilities. Furthermore, they learned to make their own decisions.

They became more flexible and adaptable, learning to accept what could not be done and feeling less guilt over tasks left undone. This was particularly in relation to their domestic chores which assumed less importance with their greater involvement in the organization and/or livelihood project.

#### **Increased income for the family**

The income from the livelihood projects varied, depending on the project itself as well as on the amount of work they did and the help the women had. While they gave different estimates (about 161 to 400 pesos weekly for knitting and about 600 pesos profit per pig sold), what was more important was that they acquired a regular source of support. Far from being the supplementary income envisioned by the organization, in many cases, it



became the family's primary (and sometimes only) income.

It paid for the daily expenses of the household, the children's school expenses, major household purchases such as a tricycle for the husband, furniture and kitchen appliances, as well as for the expansion or remodelling of their homes.

### **Opportunity to serve others**

This was especially salient at the leadership level. Involvement with the organization and its livelihood projects provided them the opportunity to reach out to others and to help in very concrete ways. They enabled other women to acquire a marketable skill and to have an income generating project to help provide for their families.

### **Positive changes in themselves and in their lives**

Their lives have become richer, fuller and happier as a result of their organizational involvement. They discovered changes in themselves and in their lives for the better which they attributed to the group. Among these were the following:

#### *Changes in family relations*

Their families became closer and more cooperative as husbands and children took on more household tasks to free the woman for her livelihood activity and they even helped out in the activity itself. In the process, the husbands spent more time at home and assumed a more active part in caring for the children. The children were given more tasks and assumed responsibilities much earlier since they could no longer rely on their mothers to do things for them. Various family members acquired new skills as they assisted in the pig project or began to knit to help finish more pieces.

These changes did not come easily, quickly or smoothly. Adjustments were made on both sides and the women paced their activities and involvement according to the age of their children. With time and the women's persistence, new modes of relationship emerged in their families.

#### *Changes in their relationship with their husbands*

With greater involvement in and more exposure to the organization, renewed and stronger relations between couples were reported. The men described their wives as more interesting because of their varied experiences, more attractive since they took a new interest in their physical appearance and more lively since they were involved in something other than the home and domestic chores.

The women began to have a share in decision-making regarding the disposition of family finances unlike in the past when only the men decided how the money was to be spent. However, a closer look at the process indicates that while they claimed that the couple jointly decides on what is to be purchased, it is actually the wife who makes the decision and then refers the matter for approval to the husband or that the man leaves the decision entirely to the wife. In spite of this increased financial power, the women agreed that the men remained the heads of their households.

Another change emerged in the roles that the man and woman took vis-a-vis each other and the family.

In the past, the man was the provider while the woman took care of the children and the house. At present, the woman brings in an equal or, at times, a major share of the household income. A greater portion of her time is devoted to her livelihood activity. Consequently, she increasingly passes on many of her household chores to her husband and children. Thus, the male does what were previously considered female chores. In many households where knitting is the IGP, he has learned to knit and often sits with his wife and children to finish their quota.

Neither seemed aware of a reversal of roles in spite of all these changes. The women continued to insist that the men were the dominant partners while the men perceived their activities as helping out the wife. However, the men preferred to do their knitting in private, away from the sight of other males.

#### *Changes in the women themselves*

Best of all, the women reported changes for the better in themselves.

From a very narrow interest in the home and their families, their horizons broadened and expanded to include a wide range of interests and an enlarged circle of friends. Because of their new experiences and new knowledge, they had discussions with people they previously avoided because they were ashamed of their poverty and lack of education. Women gained in confidence which enabled them to address groups and to perform before large crowds, displaying talents they never dreamed they possessed.

They took more interest in their physical appearance, taking the trouble to dress up and to look well since they had an organization to represent. While this change may seem superficial, it is significant in terms of what it implies. The outward change and pride in themselves signalled a change in their self-perception. Feeling better about themselves, they took better care of themselves, all in all, demonstrating an improved self-image and a better concept of self.

### **Greater involvement in the community**

Because of their membership and involvement in a livelihood project, they were sought out by others in the community for advice. Their apparent success and the increasing fame of the organization won them respect as the KBB was given an active role to play in barangay activities and as the women were invited to assemblies and meetings. They started to perform liaison work.

While the women are prevented from taking active part in politics by running for public office, they have become a potent political force in their barangays, the town and even the province. Their leaders are repeatedly urged to run for elective positions while their membership are wooed every election. The frequent visits by various politicians have served to increase their political awareness, if not their political enthusiasm.

### **Resultant changes in the organization**

Because of changes in the membership, it was inevitable that changes in the organization would follow, brought on by the new attitudes and behaviors of the women.

Over the years, they have become more responsible for the organization and have played a more active role in shaping and in running its affairs. Not only have the organization's goals changed from those in the beginning but so has virtually everything else, save for the name.

The initiation of livelihood activities to enable women to earn a supplementary income for their families has become their main goal. Officers are freely elected by the members every two years. The group has been structured through a Constitution and By-laws along with a regular set of officers. The women have ensured that no one holds on to power and authority for too long by setting a limit of ten years to develop new leaders. However, they demonstrate their respect for the experiences of the old leaders by asking them to serve as advisers to the younger women. They run their own meetings, make their own decisions and monitor the organization's projects. With time and practice, the women of the KBB have developed into true leaders.

### **The function of the organization**

The changes which have been identified by the women themselves were attributed to their organizational involvement and their livelihood project. Thus, both these factors (active organizational involvement and success at a livelihood activity) are the significant variables in transforming the women's

position from a previously passive, dependent and economically powerless one, to one of relative activity, independence and economic power.

Both these factors, on their own, will produce changes but together, change is more certain and defined.

While active membership made the livelihood project possible and economic success and the acquisition of skills proceeded to bring about changes, the factor of active membership maintained and nourished these changes.

This was done through various organizational methods and techniques such as the following:

### **The regular monthly meeting**

These meetings served many purposes including:

- 1) making the discussion of problems and the sharing of experiences possible and facilitating the giving of advice and reassurance;
- 2) enabling the exchange of news and information among the women and keeping each other abreast of what was going on in the group;
- 3) identifying chapters and chairpersons with problems so that these could be attended to immediately thus averting a crisis situation;
- 4) emphasizing the strength of the collective/group; and
- 5) reminding the women of their ability to achieve and accomplish certain goals.

### **The emphasis on the establishment of close personal ties among the women**

In its monthly assemblies and chapter meetings, through its practice of celebrating special occasions together or of creating social rituals and its emphasis on the group, the organization fosters the establishment of social/emotional bonds among its members. More than any other factor, it is possibly this which accounts for the attendance at meetings and activities in spite of the distance, expense and difficulty of transport involved.

### **The creation of role models and recognition given to outstanding performance**

Special awards and prizes are given to members who have rendered outstanding service or performed well in their livelihood projects. They are

honored at meetings; their accomplishments are presented at the various barangay meetings as worthy of emulation, and they are introduced to and praised before visiting dignitaries.

### **The holding of regular social activities**

Apart from their meetings, efforts are made to organize outings and excursions to which everyone is invited. Regular meetings and seminars always make time for socials where every member can be called upon to sing, dance, recite a poem or act, thereby encouraging the release of inhibitions and of latent abilities and talents. These activities are eagerly anticipated by the women who may rehearse their parts ahead of time.

### **The nurturing of a small but devoted core group**

The existence of a small but totally committed core group is essential to the life and functioning of any group. In the KBB, such a core of about 8-12 women is readily visible at the leadership level with other core groups at the barangay level. These women can be relied upon to support all group activities and to drop everything in response to a summons. They form the backbone of the organization and its activities. It is their positive attitude and total commitment which dominate during meetings, pervade the group and give heart to those still wavering in their commitment to the group.

### **Sustainability and replicability confronted**

Looking over the tremendous impact which membership in the organization and success at a livelihood activity has had on the women and their families raises questions of sustaining and replicating these gains. This is important in its implications for organizing rural women, for organizational development and for assessing development efforts and IGP's.

Sustainability has two aspects:

- 1) sustaining the organization; and
- 2) sustaining the participation and commitment of and the changes in the members.

Sustaining the organization includes: 1) loans and grants to finance new and/or on-going livelihood projects; and 2) maintaining the interest and enthusiasm of the women, which in turn may be a function of the tangible benefits they receive from the organization. But while initial interest and involvement may be motivated by what they can get in material terms from the organization, the more intangible, social-emotional benefits slowly take

over and, with time, are what keep the women going.

Can the organization survive and continue without the numerous loans and grants it has enjoyed in the past? The question is timely in that the organization is now in the process of re-assessing its ties with the TLRC which has funneled a huge amount of funds into the KBB. Anticipating a period of hard times ahead, the women believe that they can maintain themselves, given their long and sometimes lean history, their learning from past experiences and their present resources and capabilities.

But a critical factor to consider in sustainability is the importance of the leader, in this case, *Ka Emma Sta. Ana*, who serves as KBB Coordinator and is the acknowledged leader, guiding spirit and center of the group.

Now seventy-five years old, *Ka Emma* has given herself to the group from the very beginning and by constant example, direct teaching and guidance has shaped the group and strongly inspired the current leadership and core group into a similar devotion. But age and failing health have forced the group to confront the fact of *Ka Emma's* mortality and of the life and character of the KBB without her.

In anticipation of this, *Ka Emma* has selected and trained a successor and has given close attention to the development of the leadership and the core group, while increasingly taking a less visible and active part in group activities. At the moment however, *Ka Emma* and the KBB are too closely identified with each other that to consider one without the other is nearly impossible. And that, more than any other factor, may be the crucial consideration in any question concerning the group's sustainability and replicability.