



Asian Productivity Organization “The APO in the News”

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Woman-entrepreneurs share best practices on sourcing

Features Entrepreneur by Rizal Raoul Reyes - February 10, 2015

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A group of Filipino social-entrepreneurship advocates recently attended a workshop on “Development Models for Women Entrepreneurs in Rural Communities” in Tehran, Iran.

The Asian Productivity Organization (APO) and the National Iranian Productivity Organization (Nipo) organized the event, which was participated in by eight Asian countries. Host country Iran had six attendees.

Pacita Juan of ECHOstore and Women’s Business Council of the Philippines (WomenbizpH); Luvy Villanueva, Philippine Commission of Women; Rebecca Corman; Department of Trade and Industry; and Reena Francisco, ECHOstore, represented the Philippines.

Juan presented the Great Women Brand, ECHOstore's experience in sourcing from rural women, as well as the various opportunities for women in Asia Pacific and Asean. She also discussed the International Trade Center's Global Platform for Action on Sourcing from Women Vendors.

Meanwhile, Villanueva, Cormanes and Francisco presented the Philippines's country paper.

"We shared our best practices in ECHOstore for allowing women to have access to specialty markets through our retail stores," said Juan, a regular speaker in many social enterprise conferences, such as Harvard's Social Enterprise conference and also on Women in Value Chains at Oxford University in the UK. "Even India wants to explore being a partner in our Great Women Program," she added.

Iran has among the lowest women participation in business. But in rural Iran, many community enterprises are run by women. It may be a surprise, however, to know that Iranian women have benefits, such as a six-month maternity leave. The fathers get two weeks of paternity leave with pay.

Further, the APO also invited speakers from Thailand and India.

Through the APO, DAP and groups like the WomenBizPH, ECHOstore, ECHOsi Foundation and the Philippine Commission on Women, it is hoped that more women will have access to finance, marketing and new technologies both using Information and Communications Technology and improved processes in food production as well.

APO is planning a series of workshops and country visits to expose women and other SMEs to specialty food markets like the "summer fancy food show" in New York, among others. More workshops for rural women are also being planned in member-countries like Malaysia during the year.

The five-day workshop presented many case studies shared by APO Agriculture Department Director Joselito C. Bernardo, who showed the best practices he learned from visits to Japan, Malaysia and Vietnam, among others.

The group also visited a rural cooperative named ShabahangShariyar that has 3,000 members. It owns hotels and buildings, making it a good example of a progressive association benefiting many farmers. Each member is given a plastic card with a smart chip that tracks the purchases from the coop store, which also becomes the basis for the member's patronage refunds.

Many APO members are looking for shared ideas and best practices to give the rural women “a leg up” to boost their income and make their small businesses sustainable. Women are known globally to bring home 70 percent of their earned income, while men bring only 40 percent back to their families.

The Development Academy of the Philippines (DAP) is APO’s local counterpart—the venue where Filipino women will now get training courses and seminars using a gender lens. There are new practices in “Gender Investing, Gender Financing” and these are just some of the necessary ingredients for increased productivity.

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