



# Farmer business schools in Bohol, the Philippines: A gender assessment

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Food Resilience  
Through Root and  
Tuber Crops in  
Upland and Coastal  
Communities of  
the Asia-Pacific  
(FoodSTART+)



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## **Farmer business schools in Bohol, the Philippines: a gender assessment**

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## Summary

Farmer business schools (FBS) were initiated in Bohol, Philippines in 2016 as part of the project: Food Resilience Through Root and Tuber Crops in Upland and Coastal Communities of the Asia-Pacific (FoodSTART+). Considered an important component for inclusive and equitable development implementation, FoodSTART+ established six mixed-gender FBS groups.

Having social diversity among FBS members was considered important in strengthening FBS activities through the sharing of different ideas and experiences. However, social diversity involves power dynamics, and careful analyses are required to understand whether and how members participated. This report evaluates FBS from gender and social perspectives to understand how women and men involved in and benefited from FBS. The report is based on fieldwork conducted in May 2019. The authors conducted participatory film making, focus group discussions, and in-depth interviews with three out of six FBS groups. All three FBS groups selected sweetpotato products for sale in the local markets. Complementary technical training on cooking, processing and packaging was provided in 2018.

Three key findings are highlighted. First, women and men play different roles in FBS. The majority of regular participants in FBS classes were women that were involved in both management and implementation. In contrast, a small number of men were given specific tasks such as growing sweetpotato and transporting the harvest to the processing site. Consequently, men and women had different experiences and lessons from FBS classes. For women, the greatest lessons from FBS were in relation to business planning, such as developing brand names and logos, understanding sweetpotato processing and packaging, and negotiating with potential sellers. For men, the FBS helped them see sweetpotato as a valuable cash crop for processing; something they had never considered before.

Second, women in Bohol played multiple roles as mothers, wives and breadwinners. Many women already engaged in small self-reliant income-generating activities to some extent on an individual basis. As such, they expected their FBS enterprises to be better than informal self-employment. They expected to upgrade their statuses to those of skilled professional workers and become full-time employees in professional working environments (e.g. working in air-conditioned rooms with electric cooking facilities and child-care services). However, the achievement of these outcomes would require further support through continued participation in FBS enterprises.

Third, many women and men participants were over 40 years old. While the FBS creates entrepreneurial opportunities for relatively senior people that had not previously received a chance to learn business skills, young people were missing from all three FBSs.

When FBS activities are resumed and a regular market secured, it is recommended that FBS members approach young people through relevant channels, such as youth and church groups, so that the FBS groups can learn new ideas from young people to improve their products and expand their markets.

The concluding section provides five practical recommendations to help immediately facilitate more meaningful participation of different gender and social groups.



# 1. Introduction

FoodSTART+ considers gender as a key element in facilitating the development and adoption of root and tuber crop (RTC) technologies to strengthen food resilience. Interventions are designed for both women and men to benefit, with neither being harmed (Kawarazuka, 2017). To understand how this approach is being implemented in practice, a rapid assessment of on-going group activities in Farmers' Business Schools (FBS) was conducted in Bohol in May 2019. In Bohol, six FBS groups were formed in 2016 under the Integrated Natural Resource and Environmental Management Project (INREMP).

The Philippines is a well-known country with a progressive level of female empowerment. It is ranked eighth in the latest Global Gender Gap Index and is recognized as one of the most gender-equal countries in Asia (World Economic Forum, 2018). However, issues associated with women and girls, such as vulnerabilities to violence and trafficking, remain (David et al., 2018). In general, women are active members of female-only as well as mixed agricultural and non-agricultural organizations in the community, and there are few barriers facing women taking leadership roles therein (Akter et al., 2017). Moreover, in the Philippines, women play central roles in the small-scale business sector (Guelich and Xavier, 2017). As such, women's participation in FBS is not a challenge. Therefore, merely counting the number of female participants is insufficient for achieving gender-responsive interventions. Rather, a critical lens is required to explore how women and men in different social positions play roles in and benefit from FBS. The literature on critical gender analyses in the Philippines suggests that although women have increasingly become secondary or even the main breadwinners in households, women's roles and responsibilities as mothers and household caretakers have not changed, resulting in increased pressure and work burden on them (Angeles and Hill, 2009). Furthermore, while there is a constant demand for Filipino women in the global labor market, men's main employment opportunities remain with small-scale family farming and fisheries (Albert and Vizmanos, 2017). Men's fear of the increased economic power of their wives is also a concern, as it challenges their masculine identities (Angeles, 2001). The Philippines is also a disaster-prone country that is affected by climate change. Women's increased participation in income-generating activities appears to be partly their response to an emerging practical need to cope with extreme weather, as it is women—not men—who manage household budgets for their families (Tatlonghari and Paris, 2012). Development interventions that support Filipino women's economic activities should thus not overlook women's increased burden and the effects of these projects on men, such as issues related to marital relations and masculine identities.

This report builds on the existing literature on critical gender analyses. Three questions are addressed: 1) How do men and women FBS members contribute to FBS activities? 2) What are the gender-based experiences of, aspirations for, and challenges in participating in/continuing with FBS? 3) What are the opportunities for facilitating more active participation by men and minority social groups (e.g. young people in rural areas) in FBSs?

The findings are drawn from participatory videos, focus group discussions (FGDs), and in-depth interviews (7 men and 17 women) from participants in three out of six FBS groups in Bohol. During fieldwork conducted in May 2019, all three FBS groups were awaiting financial support from the government to continue their FBS activities. They were planning to resume their business activities when a new building with cooking and processing facilities was established. Therefore, at the time of data collection, their activities were not yet generating income for the members. Their experiences, documented in this report, are mostly from earlier stages of FBS, such as cooking/processing training and business planning activities.

This report consists of four sections. The following section describes the methods employed in the present study. Section 3 presents results and findings: 1) gender norms and roles in the household and the FBS; 2) gendered experiences of, aspirations for, and challenges in FBS. Section 4 provides some recommendations for the project team and FBS mentors to make FBS truly inclusive and equitable.

## 2. Methods

We visited three FBS groups in Bohol, namely LETMULCO, CLEAP and SCARED. The data collection included three methods, which are outlined as follows.

First, short films were produced by FBS members to document their real experiences of and challenges in FBS from their own perspectives instead of researchers'. The videos were designed to include both women's and men's voices more or less equally (see the videos for [LETMULCO](#), [SCARED](#) and [CLEAP](#)). A participatory video approach was also considered as part of a capacity building approach for FBS members to strengthen communication skills and increase self-confidence.

Second, an FGD was conducted to understand community-level gender norms and relationships. Each FBS group had one mixed-gender group FGD. The topic included gender roles in agriculture and domestic work, gender dynamics in household decision making, the characteristics of the community and the people, the history of people's organizations (POs), and the gender roles therein.

Third, in-depth interviews were performed with eight participants from each FBS to explore individual differences in aspirations for, experiences of, and challenges in FBS. Interviewees were selected by INREMP FBS facilitators based on the criteria that they were regular members of FBS and had the capacity to clearly describe their opinions. Given that the number of regular male members was much fewer than that of their female counterparts (approximately 10-20% of the total regular members), a larger number of female interviewees were included than males (see Tables 1-3).

**Table 1: The list of participants from LETMULCO**

	Gender	Age group	Marital status	FBS activities participated in
1	F	Above 50	Married	FBS classes,
2	F	Above 50	Married	FBS classes, market survey, business launch
3	F	Above 50	Married	FBS classes, market survey, business launch
4	F	Above 50	Married	FBS classes, market survey, business launch
5	F	40s	Married	FBS classes
6	F	30s	Married	FBS classes, market survey
7	M	Above 50	Married	FBS classes, business launch
8	M	Above 50	Married	FBS classes

**Table 2: The list of participants from CLEAP**

	Gender	Age group	Marital status	FBS activities participated in
1	F	Above 50	Married	FBS classes, market survey, business launch
2	F	40s	Married	FBS classes, market survey, business launch
3	F	40s	Married	FBS classes, market survey, business launch
4	F	30s	Married	FBS classes,
5	M	Above 50	Married	Some meetings
6	M	40s	Married	Some meetings
7	M	40s	Married	FBS classes, business launch
8	M	40s	Married	FBS classes

**Table 3:** The list of participants from SCARED

	Gender	Age	Marital status	FBS activities participated in
1	F	Above 50	Married	FBS classes
2	F	Above 50	Married	FBS classes, market survey, business launch
3	F	40s	Married	FBS classes, market survey, business launch
4	F	40s	Married	FBS classes, market survey, business launch
5	F	40s	Married	FBS classes
6	F	40s	Married	FBS classes, market survey
7	F	30s	Married	FBS classes
8	M	Above 50	Married	FBS classes, market survey, business launch

LETMULCO FBS members were all from the Eskaya indigenous tribe group, while CLEAP and SCARED were from the Visayan meta-ethnic group. Both ethnic groups are patrilineal in orientation, with men usually representing the households as the household head. The PO in each *barangay* (community) is a parent organization of FBS. POs were originally formed with representatives of each household; therefore, approximately 80% of current members were male. Notably, young men and women were nearly absent from the community activities. They were either still studying, working in other islands of the Philippines, or going abroad. Most female and male FBS members were in their 40s and 50s.

A verbal informed consent was undertaken before the interviews to ensure confidentiality. While we had common guiding questions for interviewees, actual interviews were conducted as natural conversations so that interviewees could feel comfortable and be open with us. The first author took notes and the data was analyzed through thematic content analysis (Smith, 1992). All interviewee names were changed to protect their anonymity.



**Photos:** A pre-fieldwork meeting with INREMP staff (left), and a participatory video training (right). Photo credit: Relma Therese Teruel (INREMP).



**Photos:** A focus group discussion (left), and an in-depth interview (right). Photo credit: Relma Therese Teruel (INREMP).

### 3. Findings

The findings have two sub-sections. The first sub-section focuses on gender norms and roles in the household and in group activities. We start by describing gender norms and roles within the household. We then explain the process of forming the community group and women’s and men’s involvement therein. The general characteristics of FBS members are also described, and women’s and men’s general gender roles in FBS are presented. The second sub-section focuses on the influence of gender in individuals’ experiences of, aspirations for, and challenges in FBS. We present women’s and men’s most important lessons from the FBS. The specific value of FBS for people of the Eskaya tribe are also highlighted. We then describe women’s aspirations for future FBS as well as the challenges for women and men in continuing the FBS.

#### 3.1 Gender norms and roles in the household and FBS

##### Gender norms and roles in domestic work and farming

Gender norms and roles in the household influence women’s and men’s participation in community activities. Figures 1-3 (below) present the gender-based divisions of labor and decision making for typical households in three communities where FBS groups were located. Yellow cards describe everyday unpaid labor activities. Blue cards are associated with decision-making roles. Purple cards show income-generating activities including farming. The results show that women have many more tasks than men, and women are more involved in household decision making than men.



Figure 1: The gender-based divisions of labor and decision making (LETMULCO FBS).



Figure 2: The gender-based divisions of labor and decision making (CLEAP FBS).

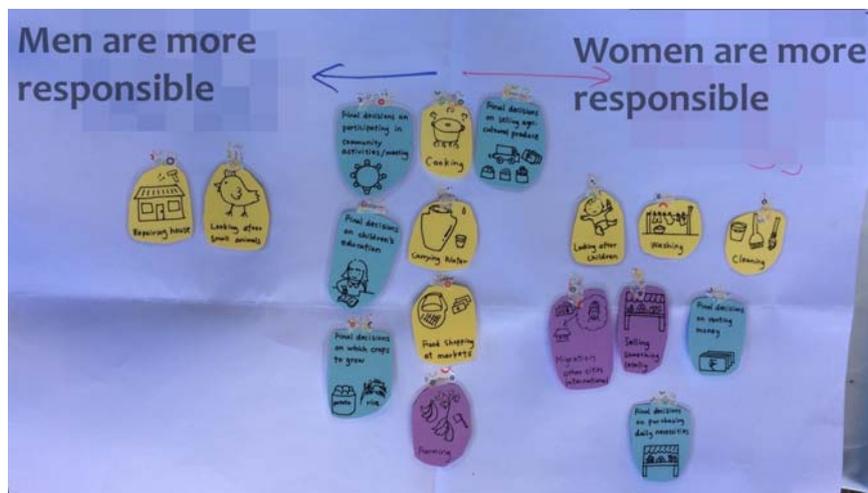


Figure 3: The gender-based divisions of labor and decision making (SCARED FBS).

Women are very busy with domestic work, as well as income-generating activities such as running sari-sari stores, selling home-made snacks, and working as nannies or cleaners in neighboring houses. Some women sell home-made sweets and sweetpotato snacks to school children. On the other hand, men have relatively few leading roles, such as repairing their house and farming (e.g. plowing). Some men also worked as hired wage laborers within or outside of the community. Decisions related to agriculture, such as which crops to grow on their family farms, are usually made by men, while everyday family expenditure is controlled by women. Both women and men make their own decisions regarding their participation in community activities, including the FBS. International and domestic migration is also an option, particular for young people. Notably, women (both married and unmarried) have more migration opportunities than men. A typical household in this region has one family member who works outside Bohol and sends remittances to their family.

What are the implications of the aforementioned gender divisions of labor for FBS? First, unlike many parts of the world, the women that participated in the present study were less likely to face constraints in participating in FBS because of their husbands' disapproval. In general, women have decision-making power not only over their participation in community activities but also in relations to various household management decisions such as household expenditure. Second, women face greater time constraints than men since they are

responsible for domestic work as well as earning incomes. This explains the difficulties in participating in FBS for some women who have young children and limited available support from other family members. Third, there are other options for earning income for women both within and outside their villages. Unless FBS offers a convenient and regular income source, the new FBS entrepreneurial activities may not be sufficiently attractive for women to engage in. Interviews were created based on the aforementioned findings regarding gender roles at community level; the details of which are discussed in the next sub-section.

### **Gendered processes of FBS group formation**

Having explored gender norms and roles at household level in general, we now look at how gender-influenced group formation occurs in FBS. The Philippines has a long history of building partnerships between governmental organizations (GOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and POs for the implementation of agricultural development and natural resource management (e.g. Duthy and Bolo-Duthy, 2003). In FoodSTART+ Bohol, FBS groups were established under the PO of each community, while POs have been working with INREMP for natural resource management for four years. According to FGDs, approximately 80% of PO members were men, as were all PO chairmen. FBS were initially established under the leadership of the PO chairman, and both male and female members were invited to become members.

There appear to be many advantages to using the existing community organization as a starting point in establishing a new FBS group. For example, a PO chairman knew the people in his community very well and had significant experience in organizing activities. Mr Santos, a PO chairman with five years of leadership experience, said, "Group activities often involve conflicts among the members over the distribution of benefits. Some people become jealous of others. In the past five years, I gained management skills such as taking a leadership role and mediating conflicts among the members". PO chairs' leadership experiences and transparent management systems appear to be contributing to the smooth formation of FBSs. Furthermore, people in the community get used to working together and thus know each other very well. They also have a strong and trusting relationship with INREMP. Therefore, FBS groups did not need to spend a lot of time on team building and establishing communications with INREMP.

While male leadership has continued in all three FBS groups, approximately two-thirds of male members eventually withdrew from their groups for several reasons. First, unlike other PO activities, the FBS does not provide an allowance for their participation or contribution of their labor. Some men found that it was better for them to spend time engaging in paid work instead of sitting in a classroom. Second, some men felt that FBS activities were feminine, focusing on cooking and selling home-made sweetpotato products, which were traditionally considered as culturally part of the women's domain. Some also felt that the topics were irrelevant to men, while others were interested but hesitated to participate in feminine activities. Third, after the business launch, many activities would wind down. Some men and women worried that the FBS would soon disappear and that participating in group activities could be a waste of time.

Through this process, women eventually became the majority across all three FBS groups and took on leadership roles in planning and implementation. At the time of writing this report,

approximately 80% of members were female. Those women and men who remained in FBSs were very active and motivated.

What are the characteristics of FBS members? In all three FBS groups, the majority of members were over 40 years old. For LETMULCO, there was only one woman in her 30s, while the remaining members were in their late 40s, 50s and 60s. This trend can be explained by the following reasons. First, the PO was established in the 1990s and many young families registered as members. Those who joined the PO at the beginning are now in their 50s and 60s and remain active members playing central roles in group activities. Second, in the PO's membership system, one representative from each household is invited. Therefore, young unmarried women and men are often not directly associated with PO activities. Since the recruitment of FBS was through the PO, it was difficult to invite young unmarried women and men. Third, married women in their 20s and 30s tend to be busy with their childrearing roles, and migration has become increasingly common among the current generation. Based on this context, the unbalanced age-distribution of FBS is associated with both internal factors (e.g. recruitment processes) and external factors (e.g. migration, time-constraints).

According to the FGDs, FBS members were neither the poor nor the rich in their community. Women and men from poor households worked as wage laborers within or outside their villages, and they did not have the time to engage in unpaid community activities. On the other hand, rich families often had children who worked abroad, and thus did not require or depend on reciprocal support networks within the community.

### Gender roles in FBS activities

The three FBS groups produced sweetpotato chips, ketchup, and candies with their own brand names. Men and women played different roles in FBS, and their levels of participation also differed significantly. We used the typology of participation (Agarwal, 2001) described in Table 1 (below).

**Table 4:** Typology of participation

Form/level of participation	Characteristics features
Nominal participation	Membership in the group
Passive participation	Being informed of decisions ex post facto; or attending meetings and listening in on decision making without speaking up
Consultative participation	Being asked an opinion on specific matters without guarantee of influencing decisions
Activity-specific participation	Being asked to or volunteering to undertake specific tasks
Active participation	Expressing opinions, whether solicited or not, or taking other types of initiative
Interactive (empowering) participation	Having voice and influence in the group's decisions

Reprinted from Agarwal (2001)

Men's participation tended to be activity-specific, as they contributed to FBS as sweetpotato growers and delivered fresh sweetpotatoes to the processing station. They also delivered the product to the market if they were asked to by women members. While some men actively participated in the sense that they were involved in decision-making processes for group management, actual activities were mostly implemented by women. Men's social networks were used to find buyers through male members or female members' husbands who worked in hotels, restaurants and tourist areas.

In contrast, women played central roles in implementing activities such as sweetpotato processing training, market surveys, and preparing for the business launch presentation. However, at individual level, the levels of participation varied from passive participation to interactive (empowering) participation. Some older women with limited education (primary education) participated in many activities but continued to participate in passive manner since the topic was very new to them, they had some difficulty following, and they lacked confidence. Some women from poorer households skipped some sessions because they prioritized their regular jobs (e.g. working as nannies or cleaners). Notably, there were a few very active women who took leadership roles in technical aspects (rather than administrative aspects that were led by the PO chairman). For example, Ms. Cruz supported older participants who had difficulty in understanding the business concept. She said, "Ensuring everybody's active participation and supporting their understanding was a challenge, but through this process I gained facilitation skills". Similarly, Ms Reyes interacted with many women during the preparation of the business launch. She said "We had sleepless nights for five days, but we were all excited and united. It was an extremely good experience." These women contributed to creating an enabling environment for women (e.g. safe and comfortable space to speak, respect other members), leading to their positive and active participation.

In this way, FBS were established through a male-dominant PO but eventually created a lot of space for women. There are clear differences in male and female roles in FBS, which makes experiences of FBS highly gendered, the details of which are discussed in the following section.

## **3.2 Gendered experiences of, aspirations for and challenges in FBS**

### **Experiences of business planning as a highlight for women**

What are the most important lessons from FBS for women? Many women mentioned their practical business planning experience, such as developing a brand name and logos, negotiating with potential buyers, and advertising their products at the business launch, as their most important learning experiences. These were very new and exciting experiences for many female FBS members. Women also made very positive comments about the female facilitator whose FBS lessons were very practical and easy to understand.

There are some women whose interests included learning about sweetpotato processing techniques. For example, Ms Martinez sold home-made sweets made from sweetpotato to school children. Her motivation for joining FBS was to learn new sweetpotato recipes and cooking methods so that she could apply some of them to her business. Similarly, Ms Concepcion earned an income

from selling home-made snacks and sweets. However, her methodology was not very professional, and she had limited recipes. She thought that by doing this job as a group business, it could be done more professional with the potential of generating a higher income. Both Ms Roxas and Ms Navarro hoped that FBS could be continued and that they could contribute to the group by utilizing their skills and experiences.

### **Discovering an economic value in root crops as a highlight for men**

The most important lesson from FBS for men was their new recognition that root crops could be a valuable cash crops. Men grow sweetpotato and transport sacks of sweetpotato by motorbike to sell them to collectors and traders. It is time-consuming and labor-intensive work. If there was sufficient demand for sweetpotato within their community, men could save a lot of time. While it would be ideal that sweetpotatoes produced in the community were utilized for processing in FBS enterprise activities, no regular orders for FBS products had been established to date. Mr Samson said, “There was a farmer in this village who wanted to sell his sweetpotatoes to our FBS. We had a plan to purchase them from him, but there were no orders for sweetpotato products (chips, candies, and ketchup) at the time his sweetpotato was harvested. He was disappointed”. Securing regular markets is an important next step for male members to apply their knowledge into practice.

Another important lesson for men involved encountering new sweetpotato varieties. As part of FoodSTART+, they received planting materials of purple and orange-fleshed sweetpotato varieties to grow on their farms. Men’s perceptions and preferences regarding the new varieties varied. Some men liked the purple variety, while others preferred their traditional varieties (yellow fleshed). There was no difference in price based on color or size in local markets. Moreover, the planting materials for those new varieties had been shared through men’s social networks, such as relatives and neighbors.

FBS thus contributed to increasing men’s recognition of sweetpotato as a potential crop. Men are household decision-makers on crop planning; therefore, influencing men’s perceptions was important. Men’s participation in various parts of FBS activities should be encouraged so that they can have new experiences outside of their gender domain (farming), which is a first step toward transforming gender norms and also empowering men.

### **Eskaya tribe identities and increased self-confidence**

LETMULCO FBS members are all from the Eskaya indigenous ethnic group. Their experiences in FBS differed from those of the other two groups. The business launch was a very special event for Eskaya women, as they had opportunities to demonstrating their songs and dances with tribal dresses. Ms Lacson told us, “We were very proud of ourselves when we were dancing (during the business launch). It was a great opportunity for us to show traditional Eskaya dances, songs and dresses. We were very happy”. Eskaya people also recognized the advantage of their tribal brand from a marketing perspective. Ms Barlis said, “our brand has an additional value as products produced by Eskaya women, which is a selling point—especially for international tourists”. Mr Duterte, the PO chairman said, “We, Eskaya people are very poor. If we can succeed with FBS to generate income in this community, it would really helpful to increase livelihood options in this village”. Furthermore,

FBS challenged Eskaya gender norms. The older generation of Eskaya have more restricted gender norms than the younger generation. Mr Ramos said, “In our generation, women are always at home and doing domestic work. FBS was good for women in this community so that they had a chance to engage in new activities outside the household”. Thus, the FBS with indigenous people had positive impacts both on their added-value product and on strengthening their ethnic identities, increasing self-confidence, and challenging gender norms.

### **Women’s aspirations for FBS toward empowerment**

During the in-depth interviews, we found that some female participants’ aspirations for FBS were very high. So far, the FBS remains a volunteer activity with manual labor using a kitchen at a member’s house. This discourages many female participants not only in terms of unpaid labor but also an unprofessional working environment and uncertainty in terms of sustainability. The women had a strong desire to build a multi-purpose processing facility that included an air-conditioned clean processing kitchen, electric fryers, training/meeting rooms, and child-care services. This is because if their FBS remained informal activities, it would not make a difference to their current working conditions for women in this community, and their social and economic statuses would remain the same. If FBS activities were upgraded to a professional business and the women could work as skilled professional workers; this would contribute to increasing women’s status in the community.

Ms Sanchez said, “If FBS can employ many people, young people and mothers do not need to go far away from home to earn incomes. I really want FBS to continue and create employment opportunities”. This indicates that the women’s desire for FBS involves having better working conditions than their existing employment conditions, which involve low and unstable incomes, hard physical work, and travel far from home.

While many women and men stated that if FBS generated incomes they would like to use the money to fulfil their immediate needs (e.g. their children’s school expenses), some people have ideas of pooling their resources and contributing to the community. Ms Lopez said, “If our FBS can generate incomes, we can pool our resources to use for other PO activities. For example, when our community forest was damaged or needed maintenance, we could cover the costs by first pooling our resources. Currently, it takes a lot of time to receive funds from the government. If we pool our resources from FBS profit, we could use it for forest maintenance instead of waiting for the government’s slow response. In this way, we can be more independent”. This idea presents an additional advantage to forming a FBS under the guise of an existing organization in which the profit can be used for collective actions.

### **Challenges experienced by women in FBS**

In many parts of the world, approval from husbands is a common issue that constrains female participation in agriculture interventions (GENNOVATE RTB-HT, 2017). This problem was encountered in FBS groups in Indonesia (personal contact, Agus Rachmad Nurlette, February 2018) and India (Kawarazuka and Karchandy, 2019). However, in FBSs in Bohol, this was not the case—at least from our observations. During the interviews, two female FBS members told us that some

husbands were unhappy with their wife's participation in FBS. In one case, the husband told his wife, "It is up to you", implying that he intentionally would not pass his opinion to her because he knew that even if he disagreed, she would proceed with her own decision anyway.

Despite this freedom in decision making, some women withdrew from FBS or became less active. Some issues also came up through in-depth interviews. Ms Estrada from SCARED said that FBS had made little progress over such a long time. Some female members started questioning the FBS approaches, some left the group but promised that they would come back to FBS when it resumed, while others left the group completely. The business manager of SCARED FBS said, "the problem that we encountered in the FBS was bringing the members together and knowing how to inspire them. So far, we are doing trials only (not a real business yet). It discourages other people to participate in our activities". Similarly, Ms Marcos said that there was a group of women who left FBS. They sometimes asked her: "Are you still hoping for FBS? It is a waste of your time and it's better to quit soon". The FBS members tried to ignore these negative views and hoped to make success of the FBS.

The issue of maintaining participants' motivation was mentioned by FBS group leaders in Meghalaya too (Kawarazuka and Kharchandy, 2019). It was difficult for female FBS members to wait for a long time without progress, especially after the business launch was organized since women represented the group to which they had voluntarily contributed their time and labor while also being very busy with their household chores. While members understood the financial problems were beyond the control of PO and INREMP, there was a need for continuous support and monitoring with backup options for FBS to move forward without interruption.

### Challenges experienced by men in FBS

While our observation confirms that female FBS members are very active in implementing FBS activities, men (including young men) had fewer opportunities to contribute their labor and utilize their knowledge and skills. Apart from growing new varieties of sweetpotato, male participation was limited. It would be ideal for FBS to have some additional components led by men which reflected their interests, such as developing a new market for fresh sweetpotato (purple and orange). The CLEAP PO chairman said, "My current concern as chairman is that some members may leave FBS and won't participate in activities anymore when we resume". Providing roles for both genders is very important to everyone feeling comfortable as part of the group.

Another challenge for men was that FBS was reinforcing rather than transforming existing gender norms in which cooking was a women's domain. As a result, men missed opportunities for learning cooking and processing. Mr Garcia said, "I was interested in sweetpotato processing. On the first day of processing training, I visited but all participants were women, so I went back to home without attending". A gender-sensitive approach was thus required for facilitating male participation in female domains; for example, creating a men's cooking day and/or male-only training sessions.

Given that Filipino men in Bohol are used to group activities and many men are farmers, there is a great potential to utilize men's knowledge, labor and social connections in expanding the market and diversifying activities.

## 4. Recommendations

Having discussed gender-based relations, opportunities and challenges in FBS group activities, this final section proposes three practical recommendations for making the FBS more inclusive.

First, while the FBS provides opportunities for older age groups who have more time to participate in community activities, it lacks participation by younger age groups (i.e. those in their 20s and early 30s, both women and men). The younger generation is more familiar with information technology and are also closer to the target consumers. They may also have different ideas for designing packages, potential markets and advertisement methods. Young women and men can also provide their gender-based feedback regarding the taste of products. It may be useful to identify social channels to reach young people, such as youth groups in church associations.

Second, gender-sensitive monitoring systems are required to evaluate the satisfaction levels of FBS activities for men, women and young members so that gender-based opportunities and challenges can be identified and addressed. In the Bohol case, FBS modules could be improved by reflecting men's voices regarding their interests, needs and capacity. Providing significant roles for men could also lead to the empowerment of Filipino men, which could reduce the burden borne by Filipino women in relation to household chores, community work and paid employment.

Third, providing continuous financial and mental support to the groups is important. We should try to avoid FBS groups from facing financial challenges that are outside their control. Options for financial support are required for them to continue FBS activities so that the women who initially contributed their unpaid labor and time can be rewarded while their social and economic status is improved.

Fourth, it may be useful to organize learning exchange opportunities among FBSs from different regions and countries. For example, Bohol FBSs have certain strengths, such as female leadership and transparent group management. Moreover, there are some common issues in both Meghalaya and Bohol, such as challenges in maintaining the motivation of team members while they face financial uncertainty. It would be useful to have peer learning and sharing opportunities between facilitators across regions and also between partners (e.g. INREMP and Megha-lamp) through online communication such as participatory videos and online live discussions.

Overall, FBS groups in Bohol have certain strengths and could be role models for new FBS groups in other regions, particularly their approaches, such as powerful female leadership and presence, excellent facilitation skills, transparent management, and trustworthy partnerships. When these points are addressed, FBSs have great potential to not only establish successful local enterprises but also to empower both men and women.

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