

# Muslim farmers helping rewrite the script of femininity

Nonviolent Peaceforce Philippines spoke to seven Muslim women who are helping dismantle the culture that enables violence based on gender to flourish.

By Denise Rafaeli Cadorniga



In peacebuilding, women are key players to its progress and success. As peace begins at home, the education and empowerment of women and girls hold such importance in fortifying and widening the reach of peacebuilding initiatives.

As a response to the growing concerns and threats of violence and intolerance amidst the pandemic, Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) initiated Women-STRIVE or Women Supporting the Transformation and Institutionalization of Local Initiatives on Violent Extremism—a women-led initiative that utilizes a whole-of-community approach and nonviolent solutions for building community resilience against radicalization, violence, and conflict.

Through the Women-STRIVE project, a group of women from Lanao del Norte, including members of BIWAB or Bangsamoro Islamic Women Auxiliary Brigade were able to attend trainings such as Capacity Building on Gender and Conflict-Sensitive Peacebuilding, Peace Advocacy, Capacity Building on Gender and Culture-Sensitive Conflict Resolution, Women-Led Peace Dialogues, and Women’s Rights.

The group expressed that prior to these trainings by NP, they were completely unaware of women’s rights. In the face of abuse, they did not know how and where to get support. Through the training, they learned that they can uphold their rights as women, and that they can seek and receive the help and support they need.



*Said’s eye’s changed as she talks about the toxic traditional parenting in her community.*

Through the trainings, the group also learned that early child marriage is finally banned in the Philippines—a change they agree with, as this arrangement exposes children to abuse. They reject the notion of marrying off minors, understanding how this brings their children suffering, which in effect, is also their suffering. They add, however, that they understand

why other people agree with early child marriage—it has been a long-standing tradition in their culture, and often it is a means for their children to escape a life of poverty.

The group shared how the trainings were able to shed light on the nature of emotional and psychological abuse—how it is often occurring and hiding in daily norms, and how it adversely affects people, especially children. They became aware of how seemingly harmless remarks made to their children affect their development. Upon reflection and realization, they tried to become more self-aware of how they speak and what they say to their children, noting that once they started speaking to their children in a gentler and calmer manner, they immediately noticed how they were responding better to their parents.

It takes a village to raise a child—perhaps this is wisdom built-in with women. The group tends to think not only for their own family unit, but also for the whole community. They impart that that they find value in relaying what they’ve learned with other people who are willing to listen, as they believe and they have seen first-hand how these have impacted their lives in a positive way. With the whole community participating, change is magnified.

***“Yung mga role ng babae, hindi lang nakatigil doon sa traditional way,” they added. [The role of women in society is not confined to what tradition dictates.] Through the trainings with NP, they learned that they are able take on more roles as women.***



*The Bio-Intensive Farming and Enhance Livelihood for a Safe and Resilient Community Advocates for Women and Youth Group enjoys going to the field every day and doing their garden chores.*

Traditionally, the role of Muslim women is confined to the home. With the help of their trainings, they became aware that they could do something more, not just for themselves and their own family units, but also for the community. Apart from NP’s training, this group of women were able to establish and organize Bio-intensive Organic Farming as an Approach to Food Security—a livelihood farm made for the benefit of their community. They share that it was fulfilling for them to see everyone working together towards the same goal—this way they can all see the fruits of working together as a community.



***They remark that, “Imposible na isa lang ang nagtatrabaho, dapat tulong-tulong, para mas mapabilis yung trabaho at mas maganda ang takbo ng grupo.”*** *[It’s impossible for only one person to do the work; we need to help each other towards the same goal so we can achieve that goal more efficiently.]*

When there is food on the table, when there is proper livelihood for everyone, where there is a sense of unity and caring for the community, peace is more present in people’s minds.



*Said, Sapina, Dayang, Rohanisan, Naima, Amina, and others showing off their organically grown bitter melon crops.*

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*These women are among the beneficiaries that received trainings of the WOMEN- STRIVE Project funded by the Government of Australia in partnership with Nonviolent Peaceforce. Women- STRIVE or Supporting the Transformation and Institutionalization of Local Initiatives on Violent Extremism is being implemented in Lanao Del Norte and Basilan to contribute in preventing and countering violent extremism through women empowerment in local peacebuilding, community-based conflict transformation and peace advocacy.*

*Tag: Australia in the Philippines*