



TABACO CASE STUDY

Bayinihan Local Humanitarian Leadership



The local workshop in Tabaco convened local women, LGBTQIA, and other gender minority leaders and groups in the humanitarian sector. It identified and mapped different local humanitarian initiatives and practices in their locality. It also encouraged and created a platform for peer-support and learning. The workshop was attended by 16 local humanitarian leaders who performed leadership roles in the local government, non government organization, civil society group, people organization, cooperative and other groups that contributed to the community's local humanitarian response.

As part of the bridging activities of the engagement, select fellows were re-engaged after the local workshop to further surface key elements of their humanitarian leadership journey. Key informant interviews was conducted in their communities where personal, familial, and communal dimensions of their lives will be explored. It centered on the intersectionality of their experiences on (a) social and gender norms, (b) humanitarian work, (c) leadership and gendedr, (d) defining leadership, and (e) humanitarian work and gender.

The interviews were conducted last November 8-9, 2024 across the communities of Tabaco, Albay. Their stories will be featured in case studies published in the WLHL microsite of Bayi.

The fellows to be featured are the following:

Borbor, Maria Floremel Vibar

Indigenous People Community
Buang, Tabaco City

Buella, May Jehan Boncolmo

President, Samahan ng Magsasaka at Mangingisda ng Hacienda
Hacienda San Miguel, Tabaco City

Urandig, Rahima Mala

President, Tabaco Muslim Women Organization
Pawa, Tabaco City

Villar, Rosita Almonte

Auditor Solo Parent Federation
Vice President, Persons with Disability
Matagbac, Tabaco City



RAHIMA URANDIG
Tabaco Muslim Women

*“Leadership is about serving others and making a difference.
Kung may puso kang tumulong, kaya mong maging leader.”*

Leadership comes with challenges, but for Rahima Urandig, being a Muslim woman leader adds unique complexities. In a society that traditionally limits women’s roles in leadership, Rahima has emerged as a trailblazer, advocating for empowerment, community resilience, and inclusivity. Her story reflects the strength of local humanitarian women leaders in breaking barriers and fostering meaningful change.

Leadership in Disaster Response

Tabaco City, home to Rahima’s community frequently faces disasters such as typhoons and volcanic eruptions. These events have tested her leadership skills and resilience. She had one of her most notable experiences when Typhoon Rolly devastated her community in 2020. As Typhoon Rolly approached, Rahima opened her home to provide shelter for community members whose houses were especially vulnerable to the storm. Wanting to ensure everyone’s safety, she welcomed as many people as possible into her residence. As the number of evacuees seeking shelter in her home grew, Rahima decided to move her children to a nearby hotel, believing it would provide them with more security and space. However, when the typhoon swept through the province, the hotel was hit harder than expected, bearing the brunt of the storm’s full force as strong winds and flooding battered the building, highlighting the unpredictable nature of disasters.

“Ang nangyari sa amin, sa amin, yung mga bata, na-expect ko, na-safe ako kasi nga nasa hotel ako... without knowing na mas malala pa pala yung mangyayari.” (“What happened to us, with my children, I expected that we were safe because we were in a hotel... without knowing that something worse would happen.”)

Despite her personal ordeal, Rahima returned home after the storm determined to assist her devastated community. Recognizing the urgent need for immediate relief, she mobilized resources from within the community, drawing on collective donations and leveraging local support networks to provide critical aid. Rahima also highlighted how Muslim communities all over the country come together during times of disasters. She coordinated with the **National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF)**, which played a vital role in amplifying the reach of her efforts. The NCMF sent shipments of relief goods and essential supplies who had lost their homes and belongings.



“Sa amin muna, and then humihingi kami ng tulong sa mga kapwa Muslim,” Rahima explained. (“We started with what we had, and then we sought help from fellow Muslims.”) *“Pag nalaman naman nila na may Muslim community na nasalanta, automatic naman itutulong sila,”* (“When they learn that a Muslim community has been affected, they immediately extend help.”)

Breaking Barriers in Leadership

In 2021, her peers sought female representation in their Muslim community. Their experiences highlighted the importance of community-led relief initiatives in emergencies, especially when help was limited. Her peers in the local Muslim community advocated for a female voice to lead initiatives traditionally dominated by men. Recognized for her empathy and organizational skills, Rahima became the president of the **Tabaco Muslim Women** organization.

“Before, women were expected to stay at home. Dati kasi, mahiyain ang mga babae Muslim, kaya hindi talaga sila lumalabas,” (“Before, Muslim women were shy, and they didn’t really go out.”) Rahima explains. “I wanted to change that. I wanted women to realize their potential”

Beyond immediate disaster response, Rahima has implemented preparedness measures utilizing technology, such as early warning communication via group chats and community meetings. These initiatives ensure vulnerable populations, including children and the elderly, are evacuated safely before calamities strike.

“Resilience isn’t just about surviving challenges,” Rahima reflects. “It’s about coming together, supporting one another, and building a better future.”

Collective Empowerment of Muslim Women

The formation and her presidency of the Tabaco Muslim Women's organization were powerful symbols, breaking traditional expectations, signifying a shift in societal norms that often relegated women to domestic spheres. Central to Rahima's leadership philosophy is the empowerment of Muslim women. She seeks to dismantle stereotypes that confine women to household roles. Through the Tabaco Muslim Women, she spearheaded livelihood training initiatives in sewing and cooking, equipping women with skills for economic independence and community development. *“Ang goal ko talaga is ma-boost ko yung mga kababaihan sa Muslim,”* Rahima explains. (“My real goal is to uplift Muslim women.”)

Rahima’s efforts have had a ripple effect, inspiring neighboring communities to establish their own Muslim women’s organizations. These groups now collaborate on larger initiatives, such as promoting cultural awareness and building partnerships with local government units.



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Overcoming Challenges

Rahima's journey has not been without challenges. Discrimination and cultural biases remain significant barriers. In her early days as a leader, she faced skepticism from some members of her community and local authorities.

"Ang tingin dati sa amin ng tao, parang iba na. Ngayon, medyo nababawasan na yung discrimination," she reflects. ("People used to see us as different. Now, the discrimination has lessened.")

Rahima's efforts to bridge the gap between Muslim and non-Muslim groups have been instrumental in fostering mutual respect and collaboration. One of her most impactful initiatives involved actively participating in local government activities, where she showcased the contributions of the Muslim community.

"Nung in-involve ko yung buong community sa LGU, doon talaga na-appreciate nila kami," Rahima recalls. ("When I involved the entire community with the LGU, that was when they truly appreciated us.")

She often emphasized the value of collaboration in these gatherings, encouraging local leaders to view Muslims as equal partners in development. A pivotal moment came when local officials publicly acknowledged the significance of the Muslim community's contributions. *"Sabi nila, 'Ang mga Muslim pala, may alam sila. Marunong silang makisama,'"* Rahima shares. ("The mayor said, 'So the Muslims are knowledgeable and know how to cooperate.'")

Balancing her roles as a wife, mother, and community leader remains another challenge. However, Rahima credits her family for their unwavering support, particularly her husband, who shares her passion for humanitarian work.

"It's not always easy," she admits. "But when you have a supportive family, you find a way to make it work"

Transforming Communities Through Inclusive and Resilient Leadership

Rahima's leadership has profoundly transformed her community. Her disaster preparedness and response initiatives have improved safety and resilience, while her advocacy for women's empowerment has inspired neighboring communities to follow suit. Her efforts have not only improved lives but also challenged long-standing norms about women's roles in leadership.



Rahima's work has also changed perceptions of Muslim women, proving they can be powerful agents of change. Her vision of empowering women and uniting communities continues to guide her efforts.

"Leadership is not about power or position," Rahima says. "It's about serving others and making a difference. *Kung may puso kang tumulong, kaya mong maging leader.*" ("If you have the heart to help, you can be a leader.")

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ROSITA ALMONTE VILLAR
Federation Of Persons With Disabilities

*“Hindi ibig sabihin na dahil may sakit ka o PWD ka, wala ka ng magagawa.
Mayroon kang lakas at may paraan ka para makatulong.”*

Disasters test the resilience of communities, often exposing vulnerabilities and pushing people to their limits. As a breast cancer survivor living with disability, Rosita Almonte has not only embraced her role who champions disability rights but has also made significant contributions to her community through disaster response and humanitarian work

Facing Challenges from Cancer

In 2014, Rosita’s life took a transformative turn when she was diagnosed with breast cancer. Initially presenting as chronic mastitis, her condition progressed to stage 4 cancer, leading her through a journey of extensive treatment, including chemotherapy and surgeries. These experiences shaped her into a resilient advocate, and her physical changes became part of her identity as a person with disabilities, empowering her to lead with empathy and strength.

Amid these experiences, Rosita embraced her role as the primary provider for her two children after her husband’s passing in 2018. Drawing on her unwavering faith, the love of her children, and the support of her community, Rosita transformed these challenges into opportunities for growth and resilience, continuing to lead and inspire those around her. After completing her eighth cycle of chemotherapy, Rosita’s condition stabilized. While the treatments left her with physical changes that became part of her identity as a person with disability, she embraced this new reality with courage and determination.

Embracing Humanitarian Leadership as a Person with Disabilities

Rosita is no stranger to leadership, being a former youth leader and town counselor. Currently, she leads a local women’s organization for persons with disabilities, where she works tirelessly to create opportunities for them. Her vision is an empowered sector of person with disabilities who actively participate in community life.

“Hindi ibig sabihin na dahil may sakit ka o PWD ka, wala ka ng magagawa. Mayroon kang lakas at may paraan ka para makatulong.” (“Being sick or a person with disabilities doesn’t mean you can’t do anything. You have strength and ways to help.”)

Through the Persons with Disability Affairs Office (PDAO) under the City Social Welfare and Development (CSWD), Rosita became a key figure in disaster preparedness and relief. She



coordinated relief efforts, from managing warehouses to organizing the distribution of food and supplies.

“Kapag may disaster, lahat gumagalaw. Hindi puwedeng wala. Kahit hindi perfect ang kalusugan ko, hindi ko kaya yung hindi tumulong.” (“When disaster strikes, everyone moves. There’s no room for inaction. Even if my health isn’t perfect, I couldn’t just not help.”)

Rosita’s experiences underscore the critical importance of institutional support for women in humanitarian leadership, particularly those navigating intersecting challenges such as health issues, caregiving responsibilities, and community expectations. Through her work, Rosita highlighted gaps in systemic support and the urgent need for sustainable mechanisms to empower women in such demanding roles.

One key challenge Rosita faced was balancing her health needs as a cancer survivor with the physical and emotional demands of her work. While she demonstrated incredible resilience, her ability to lead effectively often relied on personal determination. This highlights the necessity for systems that provide flexible work arrangements, accessible healthcare, and mental health support for women humanitarian workers.

“Minsan mahina ako, pero iniisip ko na marami ang umaasa. Kaya kahit mahirap, pinipilit ko para sa kanila.” (“There were times I felt weak, but I thought of the people relying on me. That kept me going, no matter how hard it was.”)

Through all her challenges, Rosita’s faith remained her guiding light. She often turned to prayer and biblical stories like Job’s perseverance for strength and inspiration.

“Minsan, tinatanong ko si Lord, ‘Ano ang mission mo para sa akin?’ Kahit mahina ang katawan ko, alam kong may plano Siya.” (“Sometimes I ask the Lord, ‘What is Your mission for me?’ Even when I feel weak, I know He has a plan.”)

Inspiring Inclusion and Empowerment


Rosita’s advocacy went beyond disaster response. She spearheaded initiatives that uplifted persons with disabilities and integrated them into broader community projects. One of her standout efforts was organizing a "Zumba for a Cause" event that brought together solo parents to raise funds for children affected by typhoons. The event raised ₱20,000, which was used to provide school supplies.


“Nag-sumba kami para makalikom ng pondo. Naka-raise kami ng ₱20,000 at binili namin ng school supplies para sa mga bata.” (“We held a Zumba session to raise funds. We raised ₱20,000 and used it to buy school supplies for the children.”)



Rosita remains a force for good in her community. As she continues her battle with cancer, she balances her roles as a mother, social worker, and community leader. Her story highlights that leadership is about the ability to inspire and uplift others.

“Kapag kahit isang tao lang ang ma-inspire ng kwento ko, sulit na ang lahat ng ginawa ko.”
 (“If my story can inspire even one person, then everything I’ve done is worth it.”)

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JEHAN BUELLA

Samahan Ng Magsasaka At Mangingisda Ng Hacienda

*“Masarap sa feeling pag nakakatulong.
“Kung ma-appreciate nila o hindi, tutulong ako.”*

Jehan Buella leads the "Samahan ng Magsasaka at Mangingisda," an organization of farmers and fishers in Barangay Hacienda, on the island of San Miguel, a 30-minute boat ride from the port of Tabaco City.

Jehan's drive to organize stemmed from the urgent need to ensure that farmers and fishers in her community had access to critical information and resources. Before organizing, the community was unaware of programs like free crop insurance and disaster relief offered by the government. *“Feeling namin, hindi kami napapakinggan kung wala kami ng asosasyon. (We felt we weren't being heard without the association.)”*

The turning point came when an officer from the Department of Agriculture encouraged Jehan's group to formalize and register, highlighting the opportunities it could unlock. In response, she took the initiative to organize a farmers' and fishers' group in 2021. Within two months, "Samahan ng Magsasaka at Mangingisda ng Hacienda" was registered with the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), enabling the association to access hybrid seeds, hand tractors, and even interest-free loans.

Challenges during Disasters

Jehan's community has been repeatedly tested by disasters, most notably Typhoon Kristine. The storm devastated crops, with some farmers losing up to 50% of their harvest. In the aftermath, Jehan mobilized her members, documenting damages and submitting reports for aid.

Their group utilized geotagging to document crop and property damages with precision. Members capture photos with their smartphones while their GPS is enabled, allowing the metadata of the photographs to specify where the photo was taken. This skill, initially introduced to them during an **African Swine Fever (ASF)** outbreak, was originally used to track affected livestock locations and assess the radius of infection. Recognizing its broader potential, Jehan and her team adapted geotagging to address agricultural disasters, capturing real-time data on affected fields and properties.

By geotagging damaged crops and farms, Jehan ensured that accurate and verifiable information was submitted to government agencies, which streamlined the aid process. This approach not only demonstrated the extent of the devastation caused by Typhoon Kristine but also validated their claims for assistance.

Jehan's efforts led to tangible benefits, including the distribution of financial aid to over 70 farmers following the typhoon. However, logistical challenges created significant obstacles. Limited mobile signal, lack of access to phones among some members, and strict deadlines meant that many farmers were unaware of the support available or unable to document their damages in time. As a result, they were excluded from government aid programs.

She also highlighted systemic gaps, such as the restrictive criteria for government crop insurance. For instance, unless weather agencies declared extreme conditions across the entire province, claims were often denied. This left Jehan and her community feeling unsupported during both droughts and excessive rains.

“Kung hindi nag-declare na buong Albay yung pag-init o sobrang ulan, wala pa rin po. (If the extreme heat or rain isn't declared across the entire province of Albay, we still don't get anything.)” Jehan laments.

In response to these challenges, the organization is also exploring organic farming methods, which reduce costs and enrich the soil. According to her, these practices help improve yields and strengthen the community's resilience to market and environmental fluctuations.

“Nakakapagbigay pa siya ng nutrients sa lupa. Sa tingin ko, mas maganda. (It even adds nutrients to the soil. I think it's better.)” Jehan explains.

Personal Sacrifices

Jehan's leadership is characterized by selfless commitment to helping others. She works without recognition or compensation but comes at a personal cost. Balancing her unpaid leadership role with her responsibilities as a mother of two often meant late nights and strained family dynamics.

As a mother and wife, Jehan wrestles with the tension between her passion for helping others and her responsibilities at home. Late nights spent attending seminars, documenting disaster damages, or advocating for her community mean less time for her children and husband.

“May time na nagagawa ko yung obligation ko bilang leader. Pero may pagkukulang din sa pamilya ko. (There are times I fulfill my obligations as a leader but fall short with my family.)” she shares.

However, Jehan's guilt is tempered by the unwavering support of her husband and children, who have become active participants in her mission. Her husband takes on much of the day-to-day work at their farm and small store, ensuring that their livelihood remains stable while Jehan



focuses on community needs. She notes how her children, even at a young age, have taken on responsibilities beyond their years.

“Sila na po yung naka-bantay sa tindahan, ako lang po ang namamalengke. (They manage the store now, while I handle the market errands.)” she explains.

During Typhoon Kristine, her children played a significant role in helping document crop and property damages. By assisting with geotagging and compiling reports, they eased Jehan’s workload and ensured that more farmers could be included in aid requests. This family-wide effort became an essential component of the association’s disaster response.

For Jehan, the guilt is both a challenge and a reminder. It pushes her to strive for balance—an ongoing process of finding ways to be fully present as both a leader and a mother. While she grapples with the weight of her dual roles, her family’s unwavering belief in her mission reassures her that her sacrifices are not in vain. This deep sense of purpose allows Jehan to carry on, even as she works to reconcile her feelings of guilt with her profound commitment to both her family and her community.

“Kahit na alam ko may pagkukulang ako, alam ko din na ginagawa ko ‘to para rin sa kanila. (Even though I know I fall short sometimes, I also know I’m doing this for them too.)” Jehan reflects.

Transformative Grassroots Leadership

Jehan finds fulfillment in knowing her work creates a lasting impact. *“Masarap sa feeling pag nakakatulong. (It feels good to help.)”* she says. *“Kung ma-appreciate nila o hindi, tutulong ako. (Whether they appreciate it or not, I’ll keep helping.)”*

Her journey highlights the critical role of community organization, innovation, and persistence in overcoming adversity. Jehan envisions a future where farmers and fishers have reliable access to government support and where women leaders, often overlooked in rural decision-making, are empowered to drive systemic change.

“Bilang babae, gusto ko maramdaman nila na kaya rin natin mag-lead. (As a woman, I want them to see that we can lead too.)” Jehan asserts.

Jehan’s advocacy focuses on building resilience and fostering inclusivity, paving the way for sustainable and equitable development in her community. Her legacy is a testament to the transformative power of grassroots leadership. Through her compassion and determination, Jehan continues to inspire her community and other leaders facing similar challenges.

FLOREMEL BORBOR

Indigenous People Mandatory Representative Of The Agta Tabangnon Community

*“Hindi po talaga ako pumapayag kapag alam kong mali.
Ilalaban ko talaga ang community namin.”*

Floremel Borbor serves as the Indigenous Peoples Mandatory Representative (IPMR) of the Agta Tabangnon community in Tabaco City, Philippines. Her role encompasses representing her community in decision making, advocating for their welfare, and ensuring disaster resilience. As a woman leader, Floremel has navigated cultural norms and systemic challenges, proving her resilience and dedication to her community.

Challenges and Advocacy

Floremel’s leadership journey is deeply intertwined with the struggles faced by her community. The Agta Tabangnon are no strangers to underrepresentation, bureaucratic challenges, and the ever-present threat of natural disasters. One of the community’s most pressing issues is the issue of outdated master lists, which exclude many Indigenous families. Floremel took it upon herself to update these lists, reconciling historical and current data to ensure accuracy. However, her efforts to prioritize genuine members of their community were met with resistance as some families who were excluded accused her of bias.

“Ang problema po ay, ang karamihan, hindi naman po talaga totoong IPs,” she recalls. (“The problem is that many listed are not IPs.”)

Through the help of the National Commission on Indigenous People, Floremel crafted a resolution that would formally recognize all the names in their master list as members of their IP community.

“Sa buong Albay, sabi nila, first time na mayroong IPMR na gagawa ng resolution,” (“In the entire province of Albay, they said it’s the first time an IPMR drafted a resolution.”), she recounted with pride, underscoring her success in navigating governance systems effectively.

This initiative not only formalized community membership but also set a precedent for participatory governance within the IP community. Despite facing criticism and resistance from various sectors, Floremel remained steadfast, driven by her commitment to her community’s welfare and her vision for a more cohesive and recognized IP society. Her efforts resulted in the validation of over 130 families, securing their rightful place within the community’s legal and cultural framework.

Balancing tradition with modern governance was another delicate task. Floremel ensured that all major decisions were rooted in consultations with elders and the broader community while

aligning them with formal policies. This approach respected cultural values while addressing contemporary challenges.

“Pagdating po sa decision-making, ang chieftain po... pero dapat po consultation din sa IP community,” she explained. (“In decision-making, it’s the chieftain... but there must also be consultations with the IP community.”)

Leadership during Disasters

Natural disasters amplify the challenges faced by the community, especially during frequent typhoons. Floremel’s role as IPMR placed her at the forefront of disaster preparedness and response. She ensures that each household has their own “e-balde,” or emergency bucket, as prescribed by the local government. Each bucket was pre-packed with essentials such as hygiene kits, making them a practical tool for families during emergencies.

“Dapat po, meron tayong e-balde na tinatawag... naka-ready na yun para kung sakali, bibit-bitin yun na lang,” Floremel explains. (“We must have what we call ‘e-balde’... it’s ready so that in case of emergency, we just grab it and go.”)

After disasters, she documents the damage to homes in the IP community and advocates for fair allocation of aid.

As the IPMR, Floremel attends barangay council meetings, a critical space for local decision-making, and ensures that the needs of the IP community were part of discussions about disaster preparedness and response. *“Dapat po alam ang lahat na nangyayari sa barangay,”* she said, emphasizing that her role as IPMR mandated her to be informed and involved in all community activities, including those related to DRR. (We should know everything that happens at the barangay level).

Floremel also recognized stereotypes that often disadvantage her community, noting that IPs are perceived as naturally patient and tolerant. While she sees this as a strength, this can also be exploited, when officials assume that IPs will unquestioningly abide by their decisions. This perception, however, did not deter her from standing her ground during critical moments, such as Typhoon Rolly. Her efforts during the disaster showcased her unwavering dedication as she fought to ensure that aid was prioritized for those genuinely affected. She actively advocated for transparency and fairness to ensure that financial assistance reached those in true need.


Inspiring Future IP Leaders


Floremel’s leadership journey is a testament to her resilience and unwavering commitment to her people. Her work in disaster preparedness, community advocacy, and governance has not only



improved the lives of the Agta Tabangnon but also highlighted the potential of empowered Indigenous women to drive meaningful change.

While she acknowledges the challenges that accompany her work, Floremel approaches each of them with determination. Her story is a powerful example of how inclusive leadership can transform communities, making her an inspiration for future generations of Indigenous and women leaders.

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