

# Transferring women's know how on bamboo craft From Philippines to Nepal



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June 2011

In many years of working with bamboo materials to produce novelty, gift and houseware items of export quality right at her village in Lagangilang, Abra Province of Philippines, it never dawned on Memorada Bersalona Aberion, "Moring" for her friends and owner of *Aberion Bamboocraft Enterprise*, that her delicately woven bamboo trays and baskets would attract attention from overseas buyers and producers of bamboo products. Somehow, the information about her bamboo products reached faraway places like Nepal.



In the Philippines Province of Abra, bamboo-based enterprises constitute a primary industry. The estimated production volume is 220,000 linear meters, from various species such as tinik, kawayan, poser, bayog, bubo and bical. So remarkable is the growth of the bamboo industry in the Province that each village has created distinct weaving patterns of its own when it comes to the use of bamboo. Domestic sales of bamboo products come to about Pesos 17.9 million a year. In terms of export, the province averages USD 700,000 sales a year. This directly benefits about 1,700 people in different towns and barangays, which are all dependent on the bamboo industry. The town of Lagangilang, where Aberion Bamboocraft Enterprise is situated, is a community known for excellent and export quality bamboo products. The bamboocraft business of Moring remains small but it is going big in terms of reaching to new markets. Together with other bamboocraft producers in her town, this opportunity is not just within reach but already in their grasp.



The women producers in the remote mountain region of Nepal have been coming up with a variety of traditional souvenir products for tourists spending holidays in the high elevations of Nepal. Little did they know that the abundantly-growing bamboo in their mountains could be used to produce finely-woven bamboo products such as hats, houseware items, nested trays and bags that fetch handsome prices in the export market. When they were introduced to women in the Cordillera Mountains of the Philippines, they learned of new possibilities to make more products of the perennial bamboo. It took the participation of a group of Nepalese women in a Manila trade fair to get the

two women groups, which are worlds apart, to share experience with each other on the art and business of bamboo weaving.

The Nepalese women indicated the need to acquire technical skills as well as experience in developing business on bamboo craft. They showed interest in the Philippines as source of technology and business experience. *Aberion Bamboocraft Enterprise*, one of the enterprises that the WINNER Project supports in gaining access to markets, came out as the best choice for technology transfer consultancy to serve the needs of the Nepalese women.

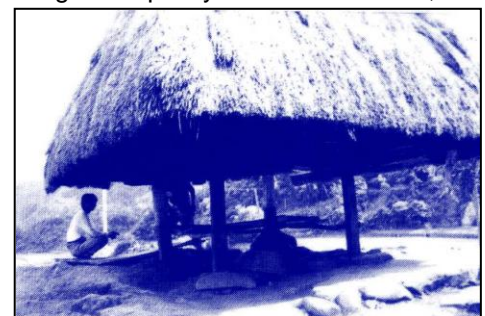


Several weeks after, the coordinator of the [WEAN - Women Entrepreneurs Association of Nepal](#) announced that two of its members would come to Manila to meet with *Aberion Bamboocraft Enterprise*, to open discussions on the terms of engagement. The meeting was hosted by the WINNER office in Manila. During the meetings, the main areas of interest were discussed and terms of engagement for a training consultancy were defined. Later, a contract was signed between the two organizations.

Overwhelmed by the prospects of working for one month in a remote village up on the slopes of the Himalayas to train 28 women from the communities, Moring, with the support of the WINNER office, agreed to take on this first-ever

consultancy work. More than the technical aspects of bamboo processing and weaving, Moring brought to Dhankuta, in Nepal, her business experience with the view to share with the trainee's insights on dealing with buyers from abroad and promoting the new products through trade fairs. "Exposure is important in order that people will know what you have. Before they make an order, even for a few pieces, the buyers have to see the products, talk to the producer and make some suggestions," Moring explained. "I have participated in trade fairs right at the community as well as in Manila, with the assistance of relevant government agencies and non-government organizations and I know the importance of getting the right exposure to market.

Skill in bamboo weaving, abundant bamboo materials, available labour in the communities are some of the competitive factors that help her bamboocraft business thriving through the years. Job orders from buyers in Baguio City and Manila come in volume, thus necessarily there's need to organize the production system to meet the product quantity and quality. In such situation, the people in her community are mobilized to engage in various stages of the production process. She divides the work by assigning some work to residents in her community while she and her husband would take care of the finishing and quality control. At times, the buyers would require a special type of bamboo weaving, thus in such case she would train the weavers. Training the new workers on the techniques and use of special hand tools takes time. "I had 10 workers when I and my husband started the business in 1978. Now, we have about 50 workers, each of them earns minimum of Pesos 200 per day," she recounted. Moring's husband, Felix Aberion, teaches the workers on how to do bamboo weaving. He is an expert and meticulous about quality and consistency of finished bamboo products. As former trainer, Felix shares his skill in bamboo weaving, which he has polished when he taught at the Holy Cross School in Abra.



The training of Nepalese women was focused on the processing of the strips of bamboo for weaving various novelty products. With the use of hand tools that Moring and her husband fabricated, the work became simpler, thus learning the technique went smoothly for the trainees. "I also noticed that the type of bamboo available in Nepal is suited for furniture, so I also showed the trainees how to put together the materials to produce bamboo furniture without the use of nails".

More than the new techniques and skills shared by Moring, the Nepalese women acquired entrepreneurial insights. Cooperative action on filling volume orders by dividing the work and putting together the final products with consistent quality are additional lessons learned throughout the month-long training. In her town, Lagangilang, the industry is dominantly bamboo-based. Clusters of families work on the ubiquitous natural materials to produce various household items for local markets as well as for buyers from Baguio City and Manila. Among the many home-based industries in neighbouring towns in Abra are hand weaving and dye making. Somehow these also blended well with bamboo craft. Some of the novelty items produced by the community folk are bamboo placemats, houseware items, wall decor, window blinds, etc. Occasionally, when the order from buyers requires the combination of hand-woven fibers with bamboo strips, such specified process is done easily by the community workers. The province is also known for natural dye, which finds application in some of the products in demand abroad.

The *Aberion Bamboocraft Enterprise* is managed as family enterprise, and Moring will continue to find new ways of improving the bamboo products in demand by buyers. With the support of the WINNER Project, which is a global network for access to new markets, the enterprise has started to have a fresh hope for new business on the horizon.

Moring wrote about her first-ever experience in sharing technical and business experience to the 28 mountain women in Nepal: "Personally, I feel enriched and happy that I have shared what I know with others, and that in the process I also learned some new things from them. I can say that the women's world is a small community indeed." Her training consultancy work in Nepal, benefiting women from mountain communities, reaped heartwarming expressions of thanks from the sponsor of the training and from WEAN President Chhaya Sharina herself. The Nepalese training coordinator, Shyam Shrestha, wrote: "Our women have started to formally go into business. Four have registered theirs and are now marketing their products to buyers in Kathmandu. I would like you to know that your training to these women is very much appreciated." It is a small step towards building international partnership. For Moring, this first-ever small step to reach other women, so far away from her community, is a leap forward to building her business in the new borderless economy.



**For more information about Wean and Aberion Bamboocraft:**

[http://www.winnernet.org/eng/portal\\_pub/noticiaswinner/noticia.php?noticialD=5716](http://www.winnernet.org/eng/portal_pub/noticiaswinner/noticia.php?noticialD=5716)

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