

## Women's group making money from water hyacinths in the Liguasan Marsh

By [Keith Bacongco](#) | Saturday | August 21, 2010 |

DAVAO CITY (MindaNews/20 Aug) – While water hyacinths are being blamed for clogging and flooding some areas near the Liguasan Marsh, a women's group based in Gen. Salipada K. Pendatun (GSKP) town of Maguindanao is making money out of this aquatic plant that can be found in the marshy villages.

The water hyacinths, which are free-floating perennial aquatic plant, are commonly found in the towns surrounding the Liguasan Marsh that straddles the boundary of Maguindanao, North Cotabato and Sultan Kudarat provinces.



Hadja Sarika Pendatun with the woven products made from stalks of water hyacinths at the Mindanao Trade Expo 2010 in Davao City. MindaNews Photo by Keith Bacongco

Hadja Sarika Pendatun, chair of the Women's Rural Improvement Club Consumers Cooperative (WRICCC), told MindaNews that when water hyacinths accumulate, they clog the tributary streams of the marsh. Eventually, this often leads to the flooding of the low-lying villages because the water cannot directly flow to the Rio Grande de Mindanao.

Instead of simply throwing away the water hyacinths after cleanup drives, Pendatun said the villagers in their town are now collecting them to be used as raw materials in weaving bags, home decors, twines and even sandals.

“I saw on TV just last February that we can earn money from these water hyacinths,” said Pendatun, who is the wife of the late mayor of GSKP, Datu Saidona.

Pendatun cited a TV show that featured the Water Lily Livelihood Project that is being implemented in six of Taguig’s 18 barangays by Soroptimist International headed by Kaye Tiña, wife of Mayor Sigfrido “Freddie” Tiña.

“Their only problem is the supply of raw materials. They have no problems in terms of capital. But we, the women in the marsh, our problem is the capital because we have an overwhelming supply of water hyacinths,” she said in an interview.

The WRICCC is among 100 exhibitors who are currently showcasing their products at the Mindanao Trade Expo that opened here today.

### **Finding the master weaver**

Upon learning the potentials of the water hyacinths, Pendatun looked for the weaver of the bags and sleeping mats that she saw in a trade fair in Tacurong City last year. Although there are mat weavers in her town, Pendatun said she needs another weaver who specializes in weaving bags and other products.

Melinda Bonayos, an Ilongga in her early 50s, told MindaNews that it was Pendatun who visited her in her house and invited her to conduct weaving sessions in Badak.

Bonayos added that she did not hesitate to help Pendatun because she knew the potentials of water hyacinth and there will be no problems in procuring the raw materials.

She learned weaving from an informal education class in the 1980s and further enhanced her skills as she worked in a garment factory in Malaysia for more than a decade.

“I have my own store of handicraft items such as bags, purse, sleeping mats and other home decors in Tacurong City. My engagement with Pendatun and her cooperative is a partnership,” said Bonayos.

Pendatun said 40 of their members attended the weaving sessions in Badak but only 25 have qualified to work in the cooperative.

Organized in 1994, WRICCC started with catering services in the marshy town with a small group of women. Starting with a measly capital, the cooperative has now grown to at least 300 members coming from different villages of GSKP.

New members are only required to pay a one-time P115 membership fee.

The United Nations Development Program's Action for Conflict Transformation for Peace Program (ACT for Peace) donated 10 sewing machines, two of these heavy duty machines, which they used for leather and other upholstery materials.

### **Bakwits as coop members**

At the height of the conflict in 2000, 2003 and 2008, Pendatun said GSKP has been the refuge center of the internally displaced persons (IDPs, or bakwits) coming from towns of Pikit in North Cotabato, and Sultan sa Barongis and Pagalungan in Maguindanao .

"The evacuees had to endure the heat and even the rain as they crossed the vast Liguasan Marsh to avoid being caught in the crossfire," Pendatun recalled.

While the bakwits were at GSKP, Pendatun said some of them were able to join the cooperative and learned to weave. Some of these weavers opted not to return to their places of origin anymore.

Other members of the cooperative who are not into weaving are also earning money after selling the dried stalks of the water hyacinths at 10 centavos per stalk.

"Some members could earn as much as P1,000 a day," Pendatun said, noting that the raw material is practically everywhere in GSKP.

About 150 stalks of dried water hyacinths are needed to weave a handbag, which would cost at least P480 in the market.

The weavers can finish up to three bags a day and earn about P75 from each bag.



Water hyacinths are common aquatic plants that are in abundant supply in villages surrounding the Liguasan Marsh, like in this place in the municipality of Gen. Salipada K. Pendatun in Maguindanao. Photo: Ruby Thursday More / AKP Images for MindaNews

Pendatun estimates that the cooperative collects about 10 tons of water hyacinths each year. “This is our small contribution too in unclogging the waterways of Liguasan Marsh. When there are many hyacinths in the water, they blocks the sunlight and starve the water of oxygen, thus killing the fish,” she explained.

When the water hyacinths accumulate, its roots carry a lot of soil, contributing to the siltation in the Liguasan Marsh and its tributary rivers.

Bonayos the weaver noted that water hyacinths are smooth by nature and thus need no more additional treatment on the finish product.

### **Expanding to other villages**

Meanwhile, Pendatun said they are planning to reach out to other women’s groups, and individuals as well, in other villages of Maguindanao and Sultan Kudarat. But they need more financial support in holding the weaving sessions to pay the master weavers as well as for other logistical needs.

In an earlier interview, Romina Pendatun-Ali, head of the Department of Education’s alternative learning school, said she has been encouraging more women to learn weaving at the cooperative.

“We want them to learn this craft so they will no longer go fishing with their husbands at the marsh under the scorching heat of the sun,” she added.

Ali said that women can make use of many other indigenous materials found in the Liguasan Marsh.

Pendatun said this is already their third time to join a fair like the MTE. Previously, they had also joined the fair trades in the cities of Koronadal and Tacurong.

In Tacurong last month, they were able to sell P20,000 worth of bags, but only P5,000 during the T’nalak Festival in Koronadal during the same month.

Pendatun revealed that a certified product designer has already assured them that their products are already export quality.

“The product designer told us that we just need to add more designs since we already have mastered the craftsmanship,” she said. “We are hoping this MTE can help us find a market abroad.” (Keith Bacongco / MindaNews)

ref.: <http://www.mindanews.com/feature/2010/08/21/women%E2%80%99s-group-making-money-from-water-hyacinths-in-the-liguasan-marsh/>

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