

KA PATRING, A WIDOW AND A  
FARMER, REAPS THE REWARDS OF

# Spirit and Spunk

by Marianita Villariba



If you are 53, a widow, have eight children, had reached only primary education and have a monthly income of a few hundred pesos, what will you do to keep your family alive?

Patricia or *Ka Patring*, as she is fondly called, organized a savings and credit group, starting with 10 women, on a simple formula. She got them to save five pesos individually a week. Every month, they saved around 20.00 pesos until they were able to raise P1,000. Then, P700.00 of this amount was then used to provide credit to members of the organization who wanted to buy and sell food to generate income. A capital of P100 for buying and selling mushrooms a woman makes P20-30 peso daily earning.

*Ka Patring* then earmarked the remaining P300 for the

group's emergency needs like illness or death. The women could borrow P100 interest-free for an emergency if they paid it back within the week. This P100 can pay for the P50 doctor's fee and a P40 antibiotic medicine. Whenever anyone was unable to pay after a week, she would pay P10 for every P100 she borrowed. Women who got loans for income-generating activities were asked to pay 10 percent interest after two weeks.

At first, many joined and there was a great demand for emergency loans. This made it difficult to collect from women who needed the money for emergencies and the members had to reassess the credit terms.

They decided that their capital was too small to accommodate both emergency

and capital needs. They changed their tack to offering credit only for farming needs. In this way, they were sure to collect, in kind, and replenish their fund. By this time, *Ka Patring* has already been able to raise the group's morale and now they have P2,000.

But this is not the only enterprise that *Ka Patring* has organized.

Being a farmer ever since she could remember, she joined a federation of farmers engaged in organic agriculture in Nueva Ecija called *Kalikasan* (Nature) in 1992. *Kalikasan* provided its members with credit and training opportunities in sustainable agriculture. She plowed her small land of 250 square meters, planted a special rice breed, and harvested from 12 to 30 sacks of rice, depending on how much rain was available. The land had no irrigation system and she could not afford to have it built. From her harvest, *Ka Patring* would pay *Kalikasan* immediately what she owes and sell all the rest to the organization. For every 50 kilos of rice seedling, *Ka Patring* paid 75 kilos of unhusked rice.

With *Kalikasan*, she was able to get into training workshops provided by the Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement (PRRM) and one of its partners, the Education for Life Foundation (ELF). She improved her skills in organizing and generating income.

ELF, as it is popularly called, is a folk school that promotes the education of grassroots leaders based on the Danish and Philippine philosophy of learning from

life. It was designed to develop the capacity of women and men in communication, organization and entrepreneurship. During the three days of life history workshops, which is a screening agenda and process for grassroots' readiness to pursue a participatory method of learning, *Ka Patring* would suffer from headaches because she was not used to sitting for hours in workshops, let alone presenting her life as the main agenda for learning. She did not pass the first screening.

When she found out that the leaders who took the course gained tremendous confidence in their leadership, *Ka Patring* persevered and was accepted to join the second batch. *Ka Patring* went through the six-week course and passed with flying colours. She literally sang her way during studies on culture, nationalism and gender. She became expressive and confident. *Ka Patring* even learned how to handle negotiations with government officials.

As *Ka Patring* developed her skills in communication and negotiations, she got involved in many activities in her community. Her most inspiring accomplishment is winning her bid to be recognized by the government as the sole tenant to the land she has tilled for more than 20 years. Her being widowed was an obstacle and traditionally, tenancy claims were only given to men. She fought hard and won. Now her children are secure that their small land will not be awarded to anyone but their mother.

But how does she feed her family if she is very active in

social and political concerns? She is very frugal and can stretch money. She uses ideas as pots for generating resources. For every five pesos she gets, she thinks of ways to make more. Recently, she got women to make aprons from flour sacks and sell them to market vendors. They can make an apron with many pockets for P3.00 and sell it for P15 to P20. They usually make around 50 aprons in one week. This apron business is expanding to several markets and they have been swamped with orders. Now their aprons sell for P25.

People in her community have initiated income-generating projects due to her persevering community work. With this fervour, *Ka Patring* does not worry about her daily needs because the organizations she relates with provides her credit. The people and groups she relates with are markets for testing her ideas and selling goods. The community she belongs to continues to give her security. In the folk school practice, *Ka Patring* is an effective leader, devoted to raising its members' level of education and income status. )

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