

## **Zamboanga Farmer earns Php40k monthly from a small garden**



**Garden of prosperity.** *Felipe Abni tends to his garden, which thrives on the fertile uplands in Zamboanga del Norte. Abni was once a beneficiary of TVIRD's sustainability program, which he took forward and converted into an even more lucrative agricultural business.*

**Canatuan, Zamboanga del Norte / September 2013** – “Wrong procedure!” The lanky man with a moustache barks after inspecting the demo vegetable farm of bell peppers developed by neophyte government technicians. The people from the Department of Agriculture in this town could only shake their heads in humility while seriously digesting his reasons.

After all, the man directing them the proper way to plant vegetables is the legendary Felipe Abni – the town’s vegetable guru; the man with a green thumb and green bucks.

“From time to time before, people from the agency invite me for consultations at their demo farms,” said Abni, who is only a high school graduate, said.

Abni is a resident of Sitio Ocho in Barangay Kilalaban, Baliguian town in Zamboanga del Norte. He practically had nothing when he came to the village in 2006. But he pinned his hopes on a two thousand square meter parcel of land, which a moneyed friend let him use as residence and garden without charging him rent. He planted tomatoes, cabbages, bell peppers, Malabar nightshades (*alugbati*), lady’s fingers (*okra*) and many others.

Now, with his income from raising vegetables, he was able to send his three children to college as well as own five hectares of farmland, one house and lot in the neighboring RT Lim town, two motorcycles and other well-earned possessions.

In Sitio Ocho, he has two houses; one is near his garden and another in the village proper. His family enjoys modern conveniences like high definition satellite cable TV, a laptop with wifi, an electronic organ and a videoke machine in their small store, which serves ice cold beer.

Last August, he earned forty thousand from farming bell peppers.

“Actually, (I had) a much lesser income that month because I was busy with a project for my organization. Besides that, I delivered (peppers) to the town market where prices are lower. But before, I earned around sixty to seventy thousand a month,” Abni claimed.

### **Skills and hard work**

Abni said that he acquired his skills from his parents while growing up in his native village of Buenavista, Sergio Osmeña, in the same province. Buenavista is considered the Little Baguio in the South where its fertile land, climate and elevation are very suitable for high-value vegetables.

When he transferred to Baliguian town, he knew he could do what his parents did back home. “The land is very fertile here, notwithstanding that it is near a large-scale mining (operation),” said Abni.

Sitio Ocho is just a few kilometers downhill from Canatuan where TVI Resource Development Philippines Inc. (TVIRD) has been operating its copper and zinc mining facilities for the past eight years.

After high school, Abni also gathered some experience in automotive mechanics. When he migrated in 2006, he was offered a job at TVIRD, which he declined. In his mind, he can earn better despite the fact that the Canadian-affiliated mining company pays well.

He began by listening to lectures of the company's agriculturists. With a little capital, free seedlings from the company and hard work, he started his garden.

### **Sustainable livelihood**

Lope Dizon of TVIRD's Community Relations and Development Office said that they have been teaching people in Sitio Ocho along with many other villages.

"He just upped the level by making a profitable business out of it," Dizon said, referring to vegetable growing through the company's Food Always in the Home (FAITH) sustainable livelihood program. To date, the company has invested significantly in its FAITH Program, which has benefited over 1,500 people in neighboring barangays.

"With skills and hard work, he became very successful in vegetable farming," said TVIRD Agriculturist Salbina Bullo. Since 2010, TVIRD conducted its FAITH project in demo vegetable farms. The following year, the company mandated that vegetable demo farms should be translated into individual family based FAITH gardens.

Development programs established by the company are geared towards the overall long-term sustainability of the community beyond the life of the mine, including the indigenous Subanon tribe, which hosts its operations. These initiatives under its Social Development and Management Program (SDMP) umbrella also aim to foster self-reliance, skills development and financial independence through livelihood among its beneficiaries.

### **Vegetable farming and the national greening program**

At 58, the successful Abni now wants to help others. With assistance from the company, he organized and leads the Sitio Ocho Subanon Bisaya Organization - a group of 26 farmers in his village who help each other improve technology in farming.

"Given the village's rolling hills and sloping terrain, the most the farmers can do is focus on upland farming," said TVIRD Senior Agriculturist Doods Tuerco.

The farmers now plant vegetables and rubber. For the last month and a half, the group got the collective earnings of Php63 thousand (not including Abni's).

"Among the villages around TVIRD that we are helping, they are the top earners," Tuerco added.

But the government may just leap-frog every farmer-member to earn like Abni. Lately, the group was contracted by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources to grow the rubber seedlings needed for the president's National Greening Program (NGP). Last month, the group was just downloaded with Php109 thousand as seed money for the program.

Abni used his newly-acquired five-hectare land as a nursery site for NGP's rubber tree seedlings. His target is to raise 50 thousand or more plantable rubber seedlings.

When asked how much share his group will get from the NGP, he said that he hopes to get Php600 thousand by May 2014. He would then buy a cargo delivery truck for the use of his garden. In this case, he said he would be earning double - approximately Php80 thousand a month – from a garden less than one-fourth of a hectare.

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**Press photos:**



- 1 **Coexistence of agriculture and mining.** *Abni attests that the land is very fertile, notwithstanding TVIRD's large-scale mining operations nearby – proof that agricultural livelihood and mineral development can coexist and thrive.*



- 2 **Upland farming.** *Largely agricultural towns, Siocon and Baliguian flourish with rolling terrain and fertile land that are conducive for upland farming. With help from TVIRD, more local farmers are able to imbibe on a lucrative livelihood.*

**About TVI**

*TVI Resource Development (Phils.) Inc., is the Philippine affiliate of TVI Pacific Inc. (TSX: TVI), a publicly-listed Canadian mining company focused on the exploration and production of precious and base metals from district scale large system, high margin projects located in the Philippines.*

*We are committed to exploration and mining practices that promote transparency, responsible stewardship of the environment, and the inalienable rights to life, dignity, and sustainable development of our host communities.*

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