

CHITA YALONG, FISH TRADER AND VENDOR: PROFILE OF A MICROENTREPRENEUR

On July 17, 2004, Carmencita Tañeca Yalong, a fish dealer and vendor from Mamburao, Occidental Mindoro, received the “Entrepreneur of the Year” award from the Center of Agriculture and Rural Development, Inc. (CARD).¹ The award came with a trophy and cash amounting to PhP50 thousand. Chita, as her family and friends called her, could not hold back her tears during the awarding ceremonies in Laguna when CARD recognized her as among the very few of its clients “whose economic status had improved significantly”. While relating her life story, Chita said with visible pride, “It is an honor for me to serve as an inspiration to those people who do not know of the hardships I have been through.” Back in Mamburao, the cash award was a big help in meeting the hospitalization expenses of Chita’s mother.

A typical market day for Chita

Accustomed to rising at four every morning, Chita set out from her family’s home in Tayamaan en route to the Kanluran public market in the *Poblacion* (town proper) of Mamburao, riding the “service” tricycle² driven by her nephew. With them was her sister who, with Chita, sold fish in the wet market. They brought with them packs of dried fish

¹ CARD is one of the pioneer microfinance institutions in the Philippines. It was registered as a non-stock, non-profit organization in 1987. By 1988, it carried out a community and livelihood assistance program for landless coconut workers in Laguna. In 1990, it adopted the Grameen Bank (GB) methodology that it found effective in its poverty-stricken target areas. Thus experienced, CARD eventually came up with a modified GB model that it replicated in its areas of expansion in 2001, among them Occidental Mindoro.

² Motorcycle with side car used as means of public transportation

This case was written by Antoinette B. Bolaños, Asian Institute of Management, based on a client profile she prepared for the Center for Agricultural and Rural Development, Inc. (CARD). All case materials are prepared solely for the purposes of class discussion. They are neither designed nor intended to illustrate the correct or incorrect management of problems or issues contained in the case.

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and a few dozen bottles of coco vinegar and *bagoong*³ that Chita's husband produced in their yard. Packed, too, were sacks of charcoal and other goods which Chita bought in bulk and then retailed. By her account, Chita sold just about anything even at small margins as these added up to a substantial income.

Upon reaching the public market (already abuzz with activities), Chita's sister stacked fish and condiment bottles in the stall while Chita unlocked her ice ceiling tank. By then, several fishermen were waiting for Chita to inspect, price and buy their catch. Two men in her employ were on hand to carry blocks of ice and to unload, sort and weigh the fish catch delivered by these contracted fishermen. Once Chita took note of the kinds of fish and their weight, she negotiated the prices per kind of fish and paid the fishermen. Meanwhile, the haul was repacked with crushed ice in 40x40x60 cm³ styrofoam boxes and then loaded in transport vehicles. While the repacking was going on, Chita got her cell phone from a pocket of her butcher's apron and checked the prices of fish in the other fish trading centers. A few minutes later, she arranged for the *viaje* (shipping) of 11 fish containers to Batangas. To reach the Batangas port, the transport vehicle went on an hour's drive northward, traveling on unpaved roads to the port of Abra de Ilog and onto a Ro-Ro⁴ ferry for a three-hour trip, more or less, across the Verde Island Passage. (Exhibit 1)

An early start in business

Selling fish was "child's play" for Chita who started selling while she was in first grade. Her father was a fisherman who went out to sea in fair weather. Any fish he caught in excess of what the family could consume was strung together by his wife, for Chita and her sister to peddle around the neighborhood. Their earnings of one peso per fish went to their mother who juggled income from various sources to meet household needs. Aside from fishing, Chita's father cultivated bananas, papaya and coconuts on their property of slightly over a hectare. During the rainy season, her father planted rice on a portion of the land, for consumption by their family of seven. Chita, the second of five children, was born in the town of Tayamaan, Mamburao on February 19, 1961. As far as Chita could recall, the family never experienced a shortage of food during her childhood. Her father's income and produce always seemed enough to meet the family's basic needs. They wore clean clothes, although these had occasional "tagpi"⁵. And their feet were at least shod in slippers.

Chita remembered playing *bahay-bahayan* (playhouse) and *tinda-tindahan* (shopkeeping) as a child. But she also recalled upsetting her mother over her dodging household chores. Looking back, she refused to concede that she was lazy. Rather, she reasoned, selling fish was so exhausting that it sapped her energy for house work thereafter.

³ Fish paste

⁴ Roll-on-Roll-off vessels offer ferry services for vehicles and passengers

⁵ Patch(es)

An abbreviated education

Through her sixth grade to first year high school, Chita also worked as a salesgirl in a local store. Sadly, her father decided to end her formal education, believing “that girls were bound to get married and stay home anyway”. Of the five siblings, Chita and one other sister reached first year high school. Another sister and their only brother graduated from sixth grade, while one sister went only so far as Grade 4.

At 14, Chita was sent to Manila with a landed lady from Mamburao. As domestic help, Chita was paid Php65 a month. After a year, she was transferred to this lady’s friend, a flight stewardess. Chita’s wage improved to Php150. In time, the stewardess married the proprietor of a beauty parlor where Chita became the cashier. In addition to a monthly salary of Php300, Chita earned a commission from the sale of cigarettes and other imported items that the stewardess brought from her trips abroad.

The early years of marriage

In 1980, at 19, Chita married Juanito and lived with her in-laws in Bulacan. The couple earned a living from Chita’s dressmaking activities and her husband’s income from driving an operator-owned jeepney.⁶ Her sister-in-law, who sewed dresses for export, had taught Chita the trade. But as her husband gambled, they could barely make ends meet.

After five years, with two children (then aged five and three) in tow, they relocated to Chita’s hometown in Occidental Mindoro. Chita’s parents welcomed them to their house in Dungon, a district in the village of Tayamaan. Food was limited in Bulacan where rice was the only item that they did not have to purchase. In Mindoro, they could harvest fresh vegetables and fruits in the yard, and gather shellfish along the shore.

When their eldest son, Carlito was ready to go to school, Chita and Juanito decided to transfer to Tayamaan town proper. Although her mother dissuaded them from moving out, Chita’s reasoning prevailed. She told her mother, “We will not learn to provide for ourselves if we will not live on our own.” And so they did transfer to the town proper, a decision that made going to school easier for Carlito.

Meanwhile, for PhP250, they bought a bamboo hut and had it moved to the lot owned by Chita’s mother. The couple also saved up for an artesian well, and later on, for the renovation of the house. During those days, they did not enjoy the benefits of electricity. They did their laundry in the river. After accumulating more savings, Juanito and Chita had a water-sealed toilet installed inside their house.

⁶ Passenger jeepneys were usually rented out by an operator who charged a boundary (flat fee) per day. Gasoline expenses were on the account of the driver, whereas repair and maintenance were shouldered by the operator.

Before long, Juanito turned to rice farming and accepted jobs as a construction laborer. To augment the family income, Chita began buying and selling bananas. Whenever she lacked money to purchase bananas, her Aunt Makring would pay for these. Chita would repay her by using part of her sales proceeds to buy stocks for her aunt's *sari-sari* (variety) store. Chita recalled earning a net income of PhP100 to PhP150 using her PhP500-capital. However, there was not enough money left to save as selling bananas was not a very profitable venture.

Family income generating activities

In 1988, Chita went back to fish peddling in the public market. Her Aunt Makring gave her the initial capital of PhP250 in the form of an interest-free loan, payable under their old arrangements. The income from fish vending then ranged from PhP150 to PhP200 per day.

In 1990, a fish stall owner in the public market allowed Chita to share some of her space. Unfortunately for her, some stall vendors dumped her fish atop each other and hinted to customers that the fish Chita sold were not fresh. Far from being disheartened, Chita said, "On the contrary, it became a challenge to me that one day, I too would have a stall of my own."

As a stall vendor, Chita would sell till 10 a.m., occasionally till noontime, before heading for home to do household chores and be with her small children. One day, Juanito asked her to take pity on the children and to stay home with them. Instead Chita made Juanito a counteroffer: for him to stay with the children while she worked. "After all," she reasoned, "I earned more by selling fish in half a day than Juanito did from his backbreaking, eight-hour job." Juanito received a PhP35-daily wage as a construction worker. It took a while for Juanito to decide. Finally, he opted to turn to farming full-time, a decision that allowed him to be home more often.

A few years hence, Chita prodded Juanito to engage in the home-based production of coco vinegar and bagoong, condiments that Chita knew sold well in the market. And she was right. Wholesalers and stall vendors bought their products for re-selling.

Income and capital growth

Chita was determined to have her own stall eventually. Her dream materialized in 1992. With her cousin Vicky as business partner, she obtained the rights to a public market stall for a monthly rent of PhP100. The partnership called for Chita's providing the capital, while both of them did the selling. The net income was split in half. For additional capital, Chita borrowed PhP5,000 from *Lola*⁷ Deling, her father's aunt, to

⁷ Grandmother

whom she gave PhP200 daily until a total of PhP5,500 was repaid. Then she borrowed another PhP10,000 for which she paid PhP400 daily until she fully paid PhP11,000. Afterwards, she shifted to informal money lenders for her financing needs.

Chita's partnership with Vicky ended after 10 years when Vicky quit the partnership because of a heart ailment. Besides, misunderstandings had soured the partnership for while Chita was a risk-taker in fish trading, her cousin was the opposite. She had no qualms expressing her pessimism every time Chita took a risk, but was happy whenever Chita made money. A source of irritation persisted long after the cousins went their separate ways. Vicky had accumulated debts in Chita's name for buying fish to retail. Earlier, Chita had taken a loan for Vicky to be able to buy a parcel of land, but Chita had to pay the creditors.

Thereafter, Chita managed the stall alone for a spell. Then she employed a niece as vendor, and much later, her sister. In August 2003, Chita moved to the new public market called Kanluran. Having the rights over a stall required paying an unrefundable bond of PhP15 thousand to the municipal office, plus monthly dues of PhP135.

While still in partnership with her cousin, Chita herself became a money lender of sorts, advancing PhP400 to PhP500 to fishermen who needed capital to go fishing. While this practice raised the stakes as well as her fund requirements, it had to be made, nonetheless, because her contracted fishermen needed cash to buy supplies, food for the trip, gasoline—collectively called *konsumo*.⁸ When they returned from sea, Chita was obligated to buy the fish harvested by the fishermen. She paid them in cash at the negotiated price of the catch less the cash advance for their *konsumo*. Chita maintained this *suki* (credit-trading) relationship⁹ with the fishermen for years. Fishermen said that Chita always had the money to advance for their fishing trip and cash to buy their catch.

Inevitably, the loans she granted grew, sometimes reaching PhP50,000—enough to finance several fishing trips. Informal money lenders and lending investors readily provided this amount as they remained confident of Chita's creditworthiness. A single trip of a medium-sized boat could cost between PhP8,000 and PhP10,000. If the catch was particularly good, fishermen might haul in about 400 kilos of fishes. With the fish sorted, Chita could negotiate to a total price of PhP24,000 and pay the fishermen net of the amount she loaned them. As to gross income, Chita could expect between PhP5,000 and PhP6,000 from sales of fish to other fish traders, retailers and consumers.¹⁰ After deducting labor costs, her net income came to about PhP3,000.

As Chita's dependability increased and her fish dealing ability sharpened, the mutual trust between her, the fishermen and money lenders deepened. The volume of fish

⁸ Food, drinking water, groceries, gasoline and other inputs

⁹ Fish dealers are ensured of fish supply while fishermen are assured of capital they need to fish and a market for their fish catch

¹⁰ Price of fish depended on the supply and type of fish. When fish harvest was plentiful, the mark up could be PhP2 per kilo. However, when fish was scarce, the mark-up could go from as low as PhP5 to as high as PhP10 per kilo.

offered for sale to her increased. At certain points, the fish supply exceeded the demand of her retail buyers, leading Chita to turn down suppliers or to resell their catch to other fish traders and *viajeros*.¹¹ Viewing the excess supply “as an opportunity too good to pass,” Chita’s *kumare*,¹² herself a fish dealer and vendor, insisted that Chita begin shipping fish in bulk to Cavite or Batangas. After learning the basics right there and then, Chita shipped fish to Batangas using her *kumare*’s styrofoam containers.

In Chita’s first attempt to sell fish in a major trading center outside the island of Mindoro, fish prices dropped. She lost PhP2000. So dismayed was her cousin-partner at that time that she chided Chita no end. The initial loss did not deter Chita. “Mustering all my grit, I tried again and this time succeeded; I made a little over a thousand pesos in my second attempt.”

From then on, she rode the wave of shipping fish in bulk, “enduring the ebbs and troughs of fish dealing,” and effectively gained greater confidence. Buoyed by her experience, Chita self-assuredly affirmed that in fish trading, losses suffered in two consecutive trips were often offset by gains from a single trip. She made money more often than she lost it.

According to Chita, overall yield in trading transactions improved with the use of a cell phone which she bought through several “gives.”¹³ Through the cell phone, better market information on such matters as fish prices in the markets of destination gave her significant inputs in deciding on whether to ship out or not, and where. Wisely, if prices elsewhere were merely equivalent to buying plus transport costs, Chita opted to sell at minimal margins to Mamburao traders, instead of shipping the goods to that destination.

Over time Chita’s business grew. In 1999, she began to ship three to five boxes of fish outside Mindoro, three times a week. After five years, daily shipments to Cavite or Batangas averaged 10 to 20 ice boxes of fish. At times, the shipments consisted of as many as 20 to 30 boxes. Net income per trip ranged between PhP2,000 and PhP4,000 in 2004, although losses were sometimes incurred. Trucking fee was PhP150 per box. The *viajero* received a 5-percent commission on sales.

From experience, Chita estimated that the value of the PhP10,000-capital that she invested in 1994 would be PhP100,000 in 2003. She had sourced additional capital from an informal money lender and a lending investor then. When in need of cash, she would borrow PhP50,000 from each of them under different payment schemes. The lending investor would deduct the interest of PhP10,000 and an attorney’s fee of PhP500 up front so that Chita would end up receiving PhP39,500. For this loan she paid PhP500 daily for the next 100 days. The informal money lender, on the other hand, had the interest amortized with the principal. For this loan, Chita paid PhP690 per day for 90 days. She took pride in the fact that she paid those loans on time, a personal value imbued in her by

¹¹ The *viajero* is one who traveled with the boxes of fish to other fish trading centers. He decided the winning bid.

¹² Godmother of one’s child in baptism, confirmation or marriage

¹³ Colloquial term for “several installment payments”

her parents' example and view that doing so shored up a social reputation of trustworthiness. As she consistently paid on time, the lenders kept convincing Chita to continue borrowing money from them. But Chita would reply firmly: "Only when the need arises."

Loans from CARD

Chita joined CARD in May 2002. For her, CARD's biggest help came in the form of collateral-free loans that did not have front-end deductions of the interest payable.¹⁴ Consequently, CARD members could immediately use the loan amount in full, as interest rates and principal were amortized per the repayment scheme. The CARD loan also bore lower interest rates than those charged by informal lenders. Installments were to be repaid weekly rather than daily. Given such features, many CARD members stopped borrowing from money lenders, and, instead, borrowed only from CARD. As required of all members, Chita kept a daily record of the fish trading business' cash flow, income and expense. She was also able to better track the amounts she borrowed, lent out, paid to creditors, and repaid to her in cash or fish.

Occasionally, when she ran short of cash, Chita borrowed small amounts from lending investors and other money lenders to bridge finance her fish dealership and other related businesses. She also enjoyed access to interest-free loans from trader friends as long as she returned the money the next day. "Of course, I give them *pang-ulam* (fish for their dinner)," she quipped. Given Chita's track record, lenders waived all collateral requirements for her and extended her a credit line renewable every 100 days. She hoped to stop borrowing from informal lenders as soon as she became eligible for the PhP50,000-loan from CARD.

At CARD, Chita started with a PhP5,000-loan like all new members. By her third cycle, her ceiling had gone up to PhP15,000 for a one-year term that ended in May 2004. Her 100-percent track record in weekly repayments and regular attendance in center meetings qualified Chita for the PhP20,000-loan amount by her fourth cycle, which she repaid without fail within the next six months.

Her fifth loan, released on December 15, 2004, amounted to PhP45,000, payable in 25 weeks. The yearly, two-week Christmas break of CARD deferred her first weekly payment of PhP2,250 to January 5 of the following year. This amount included loan repayments plus PhP40 for her forced savings account¹⁵ and PhP10 for her insurance

¹⁴ CARD NGO charged a 4-percent service fee upfront. In addition, a loan redemption insurance premium of 1.5 percent of the principal amount of the loan was charged per disbursement. In case of a client's death, CARD NGO would be paid the outstanding balance of the client at the time of death and the client's beneficiary would be paid the amount of the loan already paid off at the time of death.

¹⁵ Clients were required to add PhP40 weekly to their capital build-up account that earned 3 percent per annum.

policy premium and provident savings.¹⁶ The insurance package offered by CARD was a major reason behind Chita's decision to apply for membership. The only other institution providing life insurance covered only the member, and not the member's family.

Emergency loans came in handy each time Chita ran short of cash (to pay for the children's schooling needs and whenever a family member fell ill, for example). She just made sure that she did not add these borrowings to her capital needs.

Savings

Chita maintained a savings account with SAMVEMCO¹⁷ and kept track of the amount of the balance by stacking her receipts and updating her passbook. "It was convenient," she said. The cooperative sent a collector every day to collect her PhP100 savings; any amount was actually acceptable. When she needed some money, Chita could easily withdraw through the collector. The features of the SAMVEMCO savings account were important to Chita who had to manage the cash flow needs of her two children studying in Mandaluyong City.¹⁸

CARD's compulsory savings feature for Chita meant setting aside money for her old age. These savings were not withdrawable, however, unless she left the program. Chita knew that if CARD had a withdrawable type of savings scheme, she would have put her savings in the NGO.

The savings account with Land Bank¹⁹ served another purpose other than fund transfers to her children's account in Metro Manila. Chita had to bear the fact that cash transactions in the said bank took up a lot of her time due to its high client volume. It was to this account that Chita's viajeros deposited money from the sale of fish; a decision she had made to eliminate a repeat of the hold-up of one viajero who lost PhP8 thousand in cash in 2002.

Risks and returns

Climatic and lunar conditions affected the supply of fish. During stormy months and when the moon was full, fishermen failed to catch enough fish to cover the money the fish dealers advanced to them. In these situations, they could only afford to pay for the ice. Chita never insisted on collecting the money the fishermen owed her, fully aware

¹⁶ The Php10 weekly contributions paid for two products: Php5 for a life insurance policy that covered the client, legal spouse and dependents and included total and permanent disability, and Php5 for provident savings that the client would receive at age 65 as a lump sum amounting to total contributions and accumulated interest. These products were managed by the member-owned CARD MBA, a SEC-registered mutual benefit association officially licensed by the Office of the Insurance Commission.

¹⁷ The Sablayan Market Vendors Multipurpose Cooperative also offered loans

¹⁸ One of the cities in Metro Manila

¹⁹ Interest rate on savings was 1 percent per annum

that they needed some fish for food, as well as some cash for the immediate needs of their families. Based on her experience, Chita was certain that “no fisherman experienced bad luck three times in a row.” The fact was that fishermen usually paid her within a month’s time; otherwise, there was no loan for them the next time. They eventually recovered, paid their debts, and earned some income. In the meantime, Chita’s investment was “*tulog*.”²⁰ By Chita’s estimate, in 2003, the total advances she made to fishermen went up to PhP100,000, of which roughly PhP50,000 was repaid, and the remainder, *tulog*. To fishermen or *viajeros* who duped her, she had this to say: “You just broke my trust in you so this will be the last deal.”

Informal fish dealers like Chita banked on trust and reliability of parties involved for the *suki* relationship to prosper. Before making deals with fishermen and dealers who ran to her for the first time, Chita seriously weighed how her trusted market associates rated these fishermen’s and dealers’ creditworthiness and dependability. As the creditor-trader, she was obligated to buy the fish catch of the fishermen she financed, just as the fishermen ought to supply only the one who financed them. Chita claimed to have built her business on this premise. But on her was the pressure to have cash available. The volume of her business attested to how well she developed strong business relationships with fishermen, fish dealers/traders, *viajeros*, stall vendors and end-consumers.

From October to December, strong *amihan* (northeasterly winds) caused bigger waves, making it difficult for small fishing boats to go out to sea. For this reason, Chita contracted bigger fishing vessels even as doing so required more capital. Periodically, PhP50,000 was not enough for the needs of about 10 to 15 big and medium-sized boats in one day. Bigger fishing boats needed PhP15,000 to PhP18,000 in capital for *konsumo*, plus two to three blocks of ice which were provided them for free. These larger boats remained at sea from three to six days, leading Chita to expect a bigger fish haul. Even more favorably for her, the low supply of fish commanded higher prices when the catch landed in the markets of destination.

In contrast, the months of January to March brought down the prices of fish as the fish harvests tended to be plentiful then. To compensate for lower margins, Chita usually contracted 20 to 30 boats—mostly small ones. That meant a capital of more than PhP20,000. Small boats usually needed from PhP150 to PhP700 each, and an eighth to a sixth block of ice. Fishermen in small boats fished all night and returned the next morning. During these peak fishing months, small boats sometimes brought in 300 to 400 kilos of fish, while big boats could haul as much as 1.5 tons of fish.

There were some fish dealers in the ports of destination who sometimes texted²¹ Chita to order specific boxes of fish without making any commitment as to price. Prevailing spot prices at the time the shipment arrived, sealed transactions.

²⁰ Tied up in debt, literally means “sleeping”.

²¹ Text messages sent through mobile phones’ short messaging systems (SMS)

While shipments were in transit, price fluctuations were a fact to contend with. Big suppliers such as ships from the island of Romblon sometimes docked in the same ports as Chita's and sold the same kinds of fish. When these happened, small suppliers like Chita lost money. Monitoring prices was therefore critical. Some instances called for Chita to text a viajero to divert shipments to centers that offered better prices. As dips in prices were beyond her control, Chita had to accept losses and try again. But it had also happened that prices were higher when her viajero reached the market. This meant making more money than expected.

An unforgettable risk

In October 2001, Chita bought five kilos of reef fish, a species she had bought in the past. As it was the fish's off-season, it sold easily. Unfortunately, people who ate them felt faint immediately, and worse, some were hospitalized for a week.

"It was depressing," Chita recalled, "so that I almost got sick myself." Feeling helpless, she prayed hard while chiding herself for buying the fish. Although keen to help those who were hospitalized, she dared not visit them. Compounding her anxiety was the denigration other stall vendors directed at her. While she endured this "humiliation" for inadvertently selling the harmful fish Chita claimed, "Even then I gathered all my strength. They were just envious because a lot of people buy fish from me." At the same time, friends reassured her that the incident was not her fault, it was an accident.

When the police came to investigate, they broiled the other fishes that Chita sold, and tested them for poison. The "test" exercise was more "taste" than "test", however. "Funny," she recalled, "but the *tikim* (taste test) became *kain* (eating)." The fishermen who sold her the fish were also interrogated, to find out whether or not they used poison to catch the fish. The results turned out to be negative. Some fishermen claimed that they, too, had bouts of dizziness after eating the same. Apparently, the species could ingest something that was poisonous to humans but not to itself.

Eventually, the victims who happened to be Chita's suki or frequent buyers recovered. They visited her in the market, worried over her losing customers due to the incident. Fortunately for Chita, it was not the season for reef fishes. Otherwise, no one might ever buy from her again. Since then, never did Chita buy that species of reef fish.

Progress in the fishermen's lives

After years of doing business with fishermen, Chita was happy to note improvements in their lives. Some of the fishermen claimed, "If not for Chita, I would not have this motor for my fishing boat," Others said that they would not have had more chances to fish. Quite a few had sold their smaller boats to acquire bigger ones using loans Chita extended. Many of them borrowed money from Chita for the repair of their boats. Sometimes, their payments were in the form of fish catch.

By 2004, Chita had financed about 100 boats, sixty of them big ones. Among the fishermen she dealt with were her long-standing suki of 12 years. Moreover, friendships fostered extended to their families as well.

Related income generating activities (IGA) and diversification

Selling all the catch proved difficult when fish harvest was plentiful, but Chita made sure that at the very least, she would break even or sell an amount equivalent to her daily investment. If necessary, she peddled whatever fish she failed to sell at her stall outside the market. To the remaining unsold fish she added fish that she bought at discounted prices from other stall owners and processed these into bagoong or dried fish in the family yard.

Bagoong processing usually took place from March to May. Juanito would put three kilos of salt per kilo of smaller fishes and allow the mixture to ferment in big containers. Every two weeks, the mixture was stirred. After four months, Juanito bottled the bagoong, in time for selling during the lean months of August to November, when fish catches were low, as was the rice harvest. Bagoong then became a prime commodity, with store and stall owners buying dozens of bottles from Chita and her husband.

Meanwhile, the bigger fishes like tuna frigate, mackerel scads and reef fishes were processed into dried fish. During her spare time at the public market, Chita, helped by her sister and niece (who also tended to retail customers and whom she paid Php100 a day) would clean the fishes. The following day, the cleaned fish were dried under the sun either outside the public market or in their yard under Juanito's supervision. Once these were ready, Chita sold the dried fish in the public market by the kilo or per pack. For Chita, sales of bagoong and dried fish were clean profit.

In 2003, Chita also began ice trading. For the purpose, she had two ceiling tanks built in one corner of the public market for Php30 thousand. The storage capacity of the larger tank was ten blocks of ice, while the smaller one could contain seven blocks. An ice plant that supplied the ice on credit at Php215 per block was paid every Friday and Monday. Chita retailed each block at Php250, and sold an eighth of a block at Php35. A fourth of a block, on the other hand, was sold at Php70. Three workers hired at Php200 a day took care of Chita's ice trading business. Chita usually sold 30 to 45 blocks of ice daily, some directly to consumers, but mostly to fish dealers. The rest of the ice became part of the "advance" issued for the contracted fishermen's *konsumo*. According to Chita, she always made money on ice trading as the demand for ice never waned. In fact, the price of a block of ice remained the same even if, towards the latter part of the day, its size was reduced by melting.

Other IGA

Chita also bought *tuba sa niyog*²² during its season of plenty, stored these in drums and allowed them to ferment naturally into coco vinegar for a month. Chita started with two drums. These increased to 12 drums two years later. Each drum contained 100 gallons, while every gallon could fill 12 bottles with vinegar. Juanito and other household members bottled the vinegar either as plain or spiced with cayenne pepper. The products were stocked until the rainy season when coconut extract production was low and fish was scarce. The rainy season, during which time vinegar was sold, was also the best time to reduce production as it meant avoiding the risk of rain's pouring into the fermentation drums and ruining their contents. In 2003, Chita bought tuba at PhP25 per gallon and sold vinegar at PhP50 per gallon or PhP6 per bottle.

Main motivation for working hard, a major trial, and Chita's faith

The couple's aspiration to see each of their children earn a college degree strongly motivated Chita and Juanito to keep long hours of active trading, fish dealing, vending and engaging in other income-generating activities. Their children's education took priority over their home renovation. As Chita graphically commented, "We crawl on our hands and knees to finance our children's education."²³

In 2000, the family had a distressing experience that almost broke Chita's resolve to work hard for their children's education. The Yalongs' eldest son, Carlito who was then taking Electronic Engineering at the Rizal Technological College in Pasig City,²⁴ suffered a mild stroke and had to take a leave of absence for a year. Eventually, he felt strong enough to resume his studies, but in his last semester of college, he died of a heart attack. Chita related how she had to rush to Manila with borrowed money from close relatives and friends. After she took care of her son in the hospital for four days, he died, making it necessary for his remains to be transported to Mamburao. Carlito would have been the first fruit of what the Yalong couple had worked so hard for. "Nothing could have been more painful," was all a distraught Chita could say.

To comfort Chita, Juanito told his wife, "Don't take it too hard. He was not really meant for us." Meanwhile, the rest of her four younger children urged, "Let go, Mother. He is now at peace. Let's just help one another."

She prayed to God to, "Teach me what I should do." Thereafter, she found solace and strength in what she believed to be God's response: "Earn a living once again and tend to your other children." As she ran the palm of her hand over her face, from her forehead down to her chin, she recounted how she was inspired by the thought that "God has better plans for me." As was her custom, Chita also turned to "Mama Mary" (Virgin

²² Liquor from coconut

²³ Translation of the statement: "*Ginagapang namin ang pagtutos sa pag-aaral ng mga bata.*"

²⁴ Pasig City is part of Metro Manila, which is about 130 km from Mindoro Island.

Mary) whom she believed guided her actions. After her son was buried, Chita went back to work with renewed vigor, and little by little paid all those who lent her interest-free money for the sad event.

A staunch Catholic, Chita attended Holy Mass on Sundays and refrained, as much as possible, from selling in the public market on those days. She instilled these Catholic practices and other acts of piety in her children.

Her children's education and early training in earning income

Chita also sent her eldest daughter and second son to the Rizal Technological University in Mandaluyong City for college.²⁵ By 2004, Christine was in her fifth year and expected to graduate an Instrumental Control Engineer the next year. Mark Alvin, on the other hand, was in the third year of Mechanical Engineering. The two rented an apartment in Mandaluyong City for PhP2,500 a month. Chita sent them PhP6,000 monthly and food was occasionally delivered from Mamburao. Additional money for their school needs was sent to them through a Land Bank ATM account.

The siblings made time to earn pocket money. Christine did some direct selling of Natasha products,²⁶ while Mark took on some painting jobs with his cousins. During their school vacations, Christine worked as a salesgirl in a grocery store in Mamburao, while Mark helped out in Chita's fish stall. Only Christine had a cell phone among the Yalong children. Chita had given this to her on her eighteenth birthday. Alvin, for his part, preferred to buy a VCD player with the money he received on his birthday.

Another son, Christian, was in fourth year high school. He assisted his father at home and in the farm. When he could, he picked up fish from the landing sites when the fishermen arrived at night. He arranged the fish in containers and iced these for delivery the next day. Christian made known his wish to sometimes accompany the viajeros, but it was a wish that Chita denied for fear that he might decide to quit school if he enjoyed making money more.

Chita was hopeful that her eight-year old, Crizza, then in Grade 3, would later qualify for a college scholarship. Crizza had been getting high marks and was acclaimed the best in Math in her class. Even at her young age, she served ably as cashier in her mother's stall. At home, she took the initiative of doing the dishes.

By Chita's account, never did the children ask for any kind of compensation whenever they helped out in the business. But she gave them money to buy their personal needs each time they asked.

²⁵ Mandaluyong City is part of Metro Manila.

²⁶ Natasha, one of the leading direct selling companies in the Philippines, sold mainly shoes, bags, and clothing, which it presented to customers through colored catalogs released every two months. Natasha dealers were present virtually everywhere: office buildings, schools, and communities.

The family's living conditions

The Yalongs' housing conditions had markedly improved from 1986 when they bought their first house, a bamboo hut. Eighteen years later, while the family still resided in Tayamaan on the 300-square meter lot of Chita's mother, they had a two-storey house with a floor area of 140 square meters. The second floor was made of plywood, and had two bedrooms separated by a closet. The ground floor was made of concrete, but was without "finishing."²⁷ At night, mats were neatly laid out on the floor of the bedrooms. In one part of the house was the bathroom which had a water-sealed toilet and a drum of water for bathing. On the other side of the house was the kitchen, still under renovation.

An artesian well in the yard supplied the family's water needs. So far, the barrio of Tayamaan did not have piped water, prompting Chita to vow that as soon as her children finished school, she would extend their water connection to the house. The family consumed between PhP300 and PhP400 worth of electricity monthly only, because, to begin with, they did not have a refrigerator. The family lived on a budget of PhP5,000 per month, more or less, broken down as follows: PhP150 per day for food and PhP500 monthly for grocery items.

The three regular meals a day commonly consisted of a kilo of rice and viands of fresh fish and vegetables. Fruit trees and vegetables were grown in the yard. Snacks were available in the morning and in the afternoon. Meat dishes appeared once a week, cooked as preferred by the children, either as *nilaga* (regular stew) or *sinigang* (sour stew). After dinner, the family sat around the TV set until 9:30 p.m. after which they went to sleep.

Members of Chita's family in Mamburao dressed in clean and simple clothes. Christine and Alvin, however, possibly influenced by life in Metro Manila, followed fashion trends. Chita was contented with the clothes handed down to her by an aunt. She bought new clothes only once a year, and Juanito even less frequently. Despite this propensity, Chita noted how the family's capacity to buy clothes had changed. She recalled how she could not afford to buy clothes when she was just starting her business. Now, 18 years later, money for clothes was no longer a problem. But the family remained frugal. Chita constantly reminded her children to avoid buying anything expensive.

Investments

Chita invested in land, buying three parcels valued at: PhP23,000, PhP16,500, and PhP75,000, respectively, all paid on installment. Two lots measured 230 square meters each, while a third measured 190 square meters. One parcel had a land title, while the other two did not, although the rights to them had been transferred to Chita. Still she

²⁷ Finishing on walls was done by first smoothing the walls with *macilla* or putty before paint was applied on them.

expected the land titles to be issued to her once she paid the government dues. Ironically, the land on which their house stood remained untitled as its title was being disputed.

Business advice from a CARD awardee

When asked for advice by fish vendors and prospective fish dealers, Chita said:

To survive in fish trading, win the trust of customers. There should be neither cheating nor short-changing because customers are likely to find out sooner or later that a supplier had cheated them and will not deal with this supplier again. Your weighing scale should be accurate. Be honest with your customer. It's better to give a little bit more than the actual weight, than to give less than what they paid for.

Furthermore, Chita said, one should be determined to sell, to the extent of actually peddling the fish to potential customers. "You really need *sipag at tiyaga* (hard work and perseverance)." Chita stressed that payment of debts is a must and she advised borrowers to "pay on the day you promised to pay." While acknowledging that the inability to pay could be due to grave reasons, Chita nonetheless warned, "Do not hide but instead ask for consideration from your creditor." Those who have the ambition to grow their business, Chita claimed, would find "it easy if they can be trusted." If one is trustworthy, she said, "lack of capital is not a hindrance to becoming wealthy."

"Selling is a service," Chita maintained. A vendor "should always smile and not be snobbish." She advised: "Never snub to a customer, and for sure, they will buy from you again." As Chita believed that being busy should not be an excuse for rudeness, she always politely acknowledged her frequent buyers' presence and asked them, "Do you mind waiting?" Aside from that, she consistently offered to clean the fish before packing them.

Where her children were concerned, Chita often issued the following reminder: "Do not forget the fishermen. For the length of time that we've worked together, they never left me." Chita was the preferred dealer of most fishermen in Mamburao who would rather sell to her than to anyone else, even if this sometimes meant lower prices. Chita had matched their loyalty with her honesty and gratitude because as she kept telling her children, "Without them, none of you would earn a college degree."

Late at home one night, Chita gazed at the "Entrepreneur of the Year" trophy that CARD had awarded her. She recalled how a fish retailer from the next town, who was also a CARD member, remarked thus only that morning: "How were you able to do it? If you can, then we also can do it."

To that fish retailer and others who conveyed similar remarks, Chita had this to say, "I hope this will serve as an inspiration to you. Do not weaken in your resolve. Rather, continue working hard for your dreams."

EXHIBIT 1



Mamburao, the capital of Occidental Mindoro, a western province in the island of Mindoro, is a coastal town in the northern part of the province. Mindoro itself is located in the MIMAROPA region in Luzon, Philippines. To the west of the province is the South China Sea, while Palawan is located to the southwest, across Mindoro Strait. Batangas is to the north, separated from the island of Mindoro by the Verde Island Passage. Mindoro Island is about 130 km south of Manila and 14 nautical miles from Batangas City.

EXHIBIT 2

Year	Pesos Per US Dollar Rate	Consumer Price Index	Inflation Rate
1967	3.92	4.0	5.3
1968	3.92	4.1	2.5
1969	3.92	4.1	0.0
1970	6.02	4.8	17.1
1971	6.43	5.8	20.8
1972	6.67	6.5	12.1
1973	6.76	7.5	15.4
1974	6.79	9.9	32.0
1975	7.25	10.6	7.1
1976	7.44	11.7	10.4
1977	7.40	12.9	10.3
1978	7.37	13.8	6.9
1979	7.38	16.1	16.7
1980	7.51	18.9	17.4
1981	7.90	22.3	18.0
1982	8.54	24.3	9.0
1983	11.11	25.5	4.9
1984	16.70	37.5	47.1
1985	18.61	46.2	23.2
1986	20.39	46.0	-0.4
1987	20.57	47.4	3.0
1988	21.09	53.2	12.2
1989	21.74	59.3	11.5
1990	24.31	67.1	13.2
1991	27.48	79.5	18.5
1992	25.51	86.3	8.6
1993	27.12	92.3	7.0
1994	26.42	100.0	8.3
1995	25.71	108.0	8.0
1996	26.22	117.8	9.1
1997	29.47	124.7	5.9
1998	40.89	136.8	9.7
1999	39.09	145.9	6.7
2000	44.19	152.3	4.4
2001	50.99	161.6	6.1
2002	51.60	166.4	3.0
2003	54.20	171.4	3.0
2004	56.04	180.9	5.5

Note: All figures are averages of the year

Sources: Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas, National Statistics Office