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## The Noto Mechanic

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The municipality of Bangar takes pride of two exclusive claims in the province of La Union: as sole producer of abel, handwoven cloth, and as the home of the panday, blacksmith. Since 2005, Bangar has been celebrating the Abel-Panday festival, during the town's fiesta every December 26 and 27.

Bangar's renown as metal crafts producer, other than as blacksmith, is manifest in the shops of metal work, mostly agricultural implements that parade along the national highway. Skillful hands, responsible attitude, diligence, patience, belief in God. All of these are the fine qualities of 60 years old Teodorico Alcantara, Sr of Nagsangalan, Vigan City. Because of these beautiful traits he and his wife raised their six children until they graduated from college.

### Meet the Mechanic

A repair shop of agricultural machines stands out among metal entrepreneurs in the town. The notoriously commended **Noto Repair Shop** isn't even strategically located within or near the town proper. The shop is at Rissing, a barangay not so near the town's business district. But the shop's inaccessibility hasn't discouraged customers from other municipalities of La Union and even some provinces of Luzon to purposely find **Marcelino Noto**, the Mechanic.

Marcelino has spent 28 years of his 43 in a machine repair shop, hands coated in metal lubricants or oil most of the time. His family's income could no longer sustain his education compelling him to stop in the middle of high school and instead work for a living.

At 15, he quit school and worked at an uncle's machine shop where he learned the rudiments of the job. That was 1985. In 2007, he was elected Councilman in his barangay. And it was as a public servant that he came to know the life-changing programs of the Department of Science and Technology (DOST).

### In the beginning

For 25 years, his expertise in fixing engines and machines remained under the shadow of his Uncle's management. The Mechanic started to become in 2010, when he broke free from his kin's handling.

As a machine repair maverick, he launched his own business with only a handful of tools amounting to around P5,000.00.

*“Ako ang pinakapulubing mekaniko na nagsimula,”* beamed Marcelino as he pointed at the heap of hand tools in a corner, his buddies when he was starting Noto Repair Shop. These, plus a neighbor whom he paid a hundred pesos a day, helped the Mechanic put up the now flourishing agricultural machine shop north of Luzon.

## P50 thousand-GRANT

Marcelino managed to put up a small shop, a 25-square meter extension of his house. His little machine works started out from ‘scratch’ with not much tools to begin history.

During that time, he was serving his term as a Councilman in his barangay. It was in one of their public information projects that he came to know DOST’s good news.

That day he learned of the DOST Grants-in-Aid Program providing financial grants to Science and Technology projects. His shop was able to avail P50,000 which he used to buy a welding machine, air compressor, sander, and an acetylene set.

His shop sooner took a bold leap from limited services and products into more sophisticated ones. Aside from repairs, he started fabricating machines himself. His best sellers are the local hand tractor and trailer.



The hand tractor is locally known as “kuliglig” and the trailer is a welded metal cart attached to the hand tractor to contain sacks of agricultural produce. Marcelino said he does imported hand tractors from Japan. These have gears, unlike the local ones.

From a small workshop doing small-time machine works, *Noto Repair Shop* expanded into a 400 square meter work area for repairing as well as creating machines.

## The SETUP

The previously one or two hand tools stacked in a corner are now huge machines doing the difficult jobs that Marcelino’s men used to do.

The lathe machine came through DOST’s Small Enterprises Technology Upgrading Program (SETUP) in 2012 when the Mechanic subscribed to the program. The program assists small and medium entrepreneurs become more productive and competitive through technology

transfer and technological interventions to improve productivity through better product quality, human resources development, cost minimization and waste management, and other operation related activities.

Marcelino was granted P 201,600 worth of equipment – the lathe machine. The amount is refundable in three years with zero interest. The Mechanic has had work at his shop much easier and simpler with the lathe machine. It is used to resize and reshape metals, a limitation he and his men have contended with for years. The lathe machine stands towering over his workers stooped on the ground doing much simpler tasks now that the hard ones are taken care by the sophisticated equipment.

Part of the SETUP bundle are the interventions of DOST to the *Noto Repair Shop*. Marcelino and his men are replete with trainings and seminars necessary in their trade. All his mechanics take turn in availing of every technology and innovation DOST was only so ready to offer. Among these are trainings on Shielded Metal Arc Welding, Tungsten Inert Gas (TIG) welding, and Heat treatment; seminars on Occupational Safety and Health, Productivity and Quality, 5S and Values Formation, and Metals Identification and Selection .

## The good life

Farmers from as far as Sugpon, Alilem, Sta. Lucia, Tagudin, and Suyo in Ilocos Sur, Bakun in Benguet, not to mention those from the different La Union towns go to Marcelino for their agricultural machine needs. *Noto Repair Shop* does not have any advertisements nor signage displayed anywhere near the site, neither in town to attract clients. But the Mechanic has more than his own share of patrons, many of whom he doesn't know. He only has the quality of his work to brag about. This, according to Marcelino, is his biggest come-on, more effective than any size and design of posters or advertisements.

Walk-ins come knocking his door because they were referred by somebody who was satisfied by the Mechanic's work. They never go back to him with the same problem, he said. And this remark is passed from one satisfied mouth to another.

It was the start of the good life. For his wife Zenaida who has remained steadfast beside her husband and children Lenie Lyn, Rosalie, Cherish Joy, and Marc Jester who are all at school. But especially for Marcelino himself who had to scratch a living at such a young age until almost forever. Thanks to DOST who gave him the big break.

## The 'break'

It isn't luck at all. It was in fact a break. Big breaks come to those who work hard. Hard workers deserve a raise. And Marcelino had one coming.

From the P50 per week he earned during the 80s to P15,000 gross per month during his budding years in his career as a mechanic to a huge P140,000 gross per month now that he has DOST. *Noto Repair Shop's* workforce also increased. From the lone neighbor whom he paid a hundred pesos per day to his now seven workers who are paid a total of P 8,420 each week.

Marcelino, through *Noto Repair Shop* and the DOST, has assured his men and their families a future. The machine shop is now a sustainable resource where its mechanics are

guaranteed subsistence for their families and their children's education.

*“ Ang importante, di ko nabibitin ang sahod ng mga tao ko,”* the Mechanic said.

The shop has began to acquire more equipment through the DOST. With the lathe machine taking the lead, more tools for the metal works were procured: bench grinder, drill press, cutoff machine, welding machine, bar cutter, acetylene, and all others which are progenies of the DOST's SETUP.

The Noto enterprise is now one of the economic prides of Bangar, La Union, contributing amply to the town's coffers. The Mechanic, with only his hard work and skills in machine works, has successfully and single-handedly put up a business that now provides for a number of families and delivers to its patrons a quality and satisfying service.

On the other hand, the DOST's interventions through the SETUP have secured a sustainable livelihood for Marcelino and his family and employment for his growing number of men. With DOST on the watch, Marcelino's repair shop has no other way but up.

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