

The background features several sets of concentric circles in a light teal color. A larger teal rectangle is positioned in the upper left, partially overlapping the circles. The text is overlaid on this rectangle and the circles.

# **Social Economy Stories**

February 2010

**Expanding Cultural Horizons in Canada  
with Marichu Antonio**

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**Created by the Canadian CED Network**

# The Social Economy Stories Project

The Social Economy is made up of civil society organizations that deliberately address social objectives through economic action, often aimed at creating greater social and economic equality and opportunity for people and communities most disadvantaged in our current economy. Co-operatives, credit unions and non-profit community organizations, are all part of the Social Economy. The blending of social and economic objectives is taking root across the world as the best means to replace dependency and exclusion with self-determination and self-sufficiency. Canadian CED Network is a member of the global movement (RIPESS) that has formed to promote the Social and Solidarity Economy as the vehicle to transform global poverty and inequality. In Canada, Canadian CED Network and its partner organization in Quebec (le Chantier de l'économie sociale) have advocated for investment in a major national research program to generate evidence and understanding of the impact and potential of the Social Economy. This led to the creation of the Canadian Social Economy Hub with funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. The program is co-led by Canadian CED Network and the University of Victoria's BC Institute for Co-operative Studies, with several hundred research partners and projects throughout Canada.

This is one of ten stories we are publishing in 2009/10 to provide practitioner perspectives on what the Social Economy means to them and their communities in the context of building an inclusive movement for social, economic and environmental change. In this phase of the project, we are particularly highlighting the voices of Aboriginal, women, and immigrant practitioners and those representing rural and northern communities, to help focus on the importance of the social economy (through its non-profit, cooperative, credit union and civil society organizations) to creating solidarity across Canada and internationally for an alternative people-centered movement for sustainable socio-economic development.

Phase one Social Economy stories can be found on the Canadian CED Network website, [http://www.ccednet-rcdec.ca/?q=en/our\\_work/socialeconomy/stories](http://www.ccednet-rcdec.ca/?q=en/our_work/socialeconomy/stories). These "stories" capture the human face of the sector and demonstrate the Social Economy as a real movement that is addressing the social, economic and environmental challenges of today in integrative and innovative ways.

## Acknowledgements

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# Expanding Cultural Horizons in Canada

with Marichu Antonio



*“Before I left the Philippines, we were able to train almost four hundred community leaders across the country. Some have now become mayors and elected officials in different provinces and villages.”*

*Marichu Antonio is the Executive Director of the Ethno-Cultural Council of Calgary (ECCC), a community-based organization comprised of more than twenty associations that make-up the collective voice of Calgary’s ethnically and culturally diverse communities; the ECCC creates social, economic and political change through collaborative action.*

*Marichu is also one of the founders of EthniCity Catering, which offers high-quality, authentic multi-ethnic foods, and employment and training for immigrant women in transition. Newcomers participate in key workplace skills training in a commercial kitchen, from math and record-keeping skills to the process of finding work.*

Marichu Antonio came to Canada in 1994 and, like most newcomers, she brought with her a wealth of experience which she hoped would be as valuable in her new country as it was at home. Marichu, a committed community facilitator, works with community members to meet community needs by assisting participants in building capacity through developing skills and securing resources employing both the knowledge and experience she accumulated over 25 years working in the co-operative and social economy movements in her native country of the Philippines.

Her interest in community work began as a young engineering undergraduate student, setting up community health cooperatives in poor urban communities, as a response to a need for accessible and affordable health care.

In 1972, following Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos declaration of Martial law, which saw her university close, Marichu began devoting more time to community work. During that time, thousands of students and community leaders were detained, tortured and disappeared; and democratic freedoms were seriously violated. When the university reopened, instead of returning to her studies in engineering, Marichu continued her service to both urban and rural communities.

For twenty-five years Marichu worked with a number of community-centered organizations and initiatives in the Philippines. Most notably, she was founder and Executive Director of the Education for Life Foundation, a community-based leadership school established in 1992.

“It was a mobile school that would go all across the country developing community leaders from various walks of life, including farmers, fisher folk, women, youth, the urban poor, and indigenous peoples. We would bring leaders together for six weeks and provide interactive training in a wide range of disciplines like popular economics and politics, community planning, negotiations with policy makers, and media relations,” she explains. “Before I left the Philippines, we were able to train almost four hundred community leaders across the country. Some have now become mayors and elected officials in different provinces and villages.”

*“My own understanding of the social economy is that it works with the marginalized and disadvantaged,” she explains, “and aims to raise their level of capacity, not only economically, but also politically, culturally and socially. So I see the social economy as one aspect of building an equitable society for everyone.”*

As the decision to move to a distant country is usually complex and full of challenges, immigrants require a readiness to navigate an unfamiliar culture, but also benefit from a willingness to bring one’s own culture and experience to the enhancement of one’s new community. For Marichu, this work came naturally.

“I actually did not want to come to Canada” she explained “but my kids really begged for us to be with their cousins – my five siblings and my parents were all in Calgary, so we decided to move here and I don’t regret doing that now.”

Since immigrating, she has shared her talents by helping other newcomers participate in the economic and social benefits available in Canadian communities.

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Marichu explains that newcomers to Canada have a very important role to play, not only as beneficiaries, but also as active participants and drivers of the movement. However, she says “there are still many obstacles that hinder newcomers from reaching these goals: social challenges and barriers – often in the form of racism, discrimination and oppression that most Canadians do not experience.”

In her work with the ECCC as well as in her own free time, Marichu works to create opportunities for newcomers to overcome barriers. One of the ways she has done this is by helping to establish EthniCity Catering, a Collective Kitchens Program, a program where immigrant and refugee women can speak their first language and come together to cook their traditional cultural foods.

“We developed ten language groups of women, and when we started to do multicultural potlucks and invited other people. A demand was created for these authentic ethnic foods,” she says. “So, that’s how we started thinking of building a catering business, which has grown into a social enterprise, selling around 200 thousand dollars a year, employing forty women, and contributing to the local economy by creating jobs, and raising awareness about these immigrant women through what we call the language of food.”

Marichu says Ethnicity Catering gives these women the space to share and celebrate their diversity and, at the same time, to participate in their communities in a meaningful way.

For more information about the Ethno-Cultural Council of Calgary visit: [www.ecccalgary.com](http://www.ecccalgary.com)

For More information about EthniCity Catering visit: [www.ethnicitycatering.ca](http://www.ethnicitycatering.ca).