

THE EXPERIENCES OF BUSINESS STUDENTS WITH MOTHERS IN FOOD PROCESSING AND MARKETING

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ABSTRACT

This article describes how the primary goal of the community activities of the Business students was realized, i.e. to promote self-help among the residents by teaching some ways by which they could improve their income. They first conducted a community resource inventory to identify available and existing resources which was used as basis for the development of a livelihood project. The students worked directly with mothers who decided to engage in food processing and marketing considering the available resources and skills in the community. The mothers were also organized into an association and eventually into a cooperative with the help of the Social Work students. This field work experience with the mothers taught the business students the values of developing will and perseverance, learning to socially adjust, understanding social realities, cultivating a positive attitude, and gaining a sense of satisfaction from their social engagement.

Introduction

The College of Business Administration conducted a community resource inventory with the help of students enrolled in the Economic Development course. The said community resource inventory identified available and existing resources which was then used as basis for the development of the livelihood project. The results of the inventory showed that the community of Maluay is rich in coconuts and that these constitute the main source of income of the residents. But the drop in the price of copra in the market has made it less economically attractive at present. Other sources of income of the community include banana and root crops that people consume or sell as raw products in the market. Incidentally, the survey also found that a large number of men, women, and young adults were not engaged in any productive endeavor, thus constituting wasted human resources.

The major problems in the community were low income and inadequacy of food supply. After considering available local skills and resources, enthusiasm, and the economic role of mothers in the home, the business students chose food processing as the possible livelihood project for the mothers. The students conducted a research on food processing in school and presented their final output in the class for critiquing. After some improvements made on the procedure, they conducted a community demonstration attended by the mothers. This demonstration became the basis for what the mothers are now doing: processing and marketing of food products using local resources.

Activities to Prepare the Involvement of Mothers

A number of interventions were made to break the idleness of mothers who decided to join the program. The faculty coordinator together with some students went to the community to conduct an inventory of resources as basis for the livelihood project. It took the group three hours to extract in a group session the needed information and at the same time awaken the mothers to the rich potentials in the area if harnessed for their benefit. This was followed by a lecture on work values and the economic benefits of work. Such a lecture gave the mothers a clear picture of the need for them to love work and take pride in doing it.

It was also an opportunity for the business students to share their knowledge of the products that they had produced utilizing the resources available in the community which they gathered earlier. Such activity provided a rich opportunity for interaction between the students and the mothers. To prepare them for the actual conduct of food processing, a lecture-seminar on capital and savings mobilization was conducted. Consequently, many were enlightened on the economic impact of capital and savings mobilization in relation to their future economic security. As a result, some of them began saving at a rate of PhP10 per month.

Finally, a sample session on planning and programming of activities was held with the Business students together with the

faculty coordinator. Outcomes of the said activities were to be realized during the two months of the summer period. Meanwhile, the mothers had fully realized the impact of the livelihood project when they were given the opportunity to implement all their plans. This project was geared to economically empower the mothers to become significant contributors to household income.

Problems and Accomplishments

Although there were problems encountered during the implementation of the livelihood project for the mothers by the College of Business Administration, these were easily managed with the assistance of the Social Work students who handled the organization of these mothers. As a result of this collaboration, the report of the accomplishments of the Department of Social Work may also reflect what the Business students had contributed to their community activities.

One of these problems was the availability of mothers who could be actively involved in the project when it started; the other was the needed capital to buy the necessary materials for food processing. This report will focus on the modest accomplishments of the Business students. But it might be appropriate to mention also that the Social Work students helped the mothers accumulate the necessary capital through solicitation.

Among other things, the most evident accomplishment that the project has done for the community is the realization among the cooperating mothers of work values and the need to mobilize savings for productive ends which they have started doing. At that time their capital outlay was still very small considering their rate of contribution and their very limited daily earnings from the existing income generating activities of their households. However, they realized that in due time this small amount will grow and will be of great help to them in bigger productive endeavors as well as in times of need.

The daily production of *tocino* made from pork, chicken, and hotdog, grilled banana, *torta* (local bread), ice candy and ice

water, *buko* juice, and peanuts for the summer term will give them a daily combined sales (all mothers involved) which range from PhP1,500 to PhP3,000. Meanwhile, the weekly production of rice stick and cocoa is equivalent to the amount of ten kilos of rice (about PhP200).

At the time the field work was conducted, the Social Work students were in the process of completing the requirements for the mothers to convert their association into a fully registered cooperative. Meanwhile, the Economic Development course whose students were involved in the service-learning program is now offered every semester including the summer term. This will allow the college to field Business students in community work to continue what was started and to monitor and assist the mothers until their livelihood project has become self-sustaining.

Experiences and Reflections of Students

As a whole, the reactions of participating students relative to their experiences under the service-learning program vary. A total of 21 students in the Economic Development course actually participated in community work for manageability. The rest of the students enrolled in the course were given other tasks but still related to the activities in the community. In order to capture what the participating students really felt when they interacted and worked with the women, excerpts of their journal of reflections submitted to the faculty coordinated are presented here according to themes.

Developing will and perseverance

- .. "This (program) is great because the bottom line is to help the people. I learned a lot... Yeah, burdens will be lighter if we try to lighten it together. We must have the will and we should not give up quickly. It's not the result that counts but the experience we gained from what we have done. Things will not be done overnight... but through a lot of nights which we call practice."

- “I’m glad I’ve been there and know a lot... I know its hard to go to the barrios (rural areas) ... to teach them or let them understand unfamiliar things or to change their lifestyle. But having perseverance, patience, and determination to be of service to others will surely help After all, the fruits of suffering are so much more rewarding and refreshing than not having done anything at all.”

Learning to socially adjust

- “I learned how to adjust and interact with different kinds of people. Frankly speaking, I did not expect an interactive kind of demonstration since I thought most of them were illiterate. But then, I was surprised by how they reacted to the whole situation. It was fun and full of learning experiences. The idea of demonstrating and teaching them... serves as an inspiration for me to share what I have learned in order for them to be productive to improve their means of earning.”

Understanding social realities

- “It is a rare opportunity for me to help others who are in need... It taught me, made me understand, and even made me a better student in facing my problems and trials.”
- “I learned to be thankful when I saw their situation that I’m living a comfortable life. I can eat more than three times a day. I also realize that there are people, who really need our help in our simple way. For them it’s a big help. I learned to save especially in our resources and everything that we have because there are people who don’t have.”
- “On our way home, I though of the people we met and the place we saw. I may forget their faces sooner or later, but I

will never forget the hope in their eyes in helping their families, neighbors and their community.”

Having positive attitude

- “I learned a lot of things... Instead of making non-sense conversations with their neighbors... they could engage themselves in small time business. I do believe there are a lot of possible things we can do to help other people enhance their living. I hope they will really apply those things... and make their time productive. As a Business student, the project made me proud of myself. We were able to give our best only to help other people.”

Gaining a sense of satisfaction

- “I’ve been in some community programs before because my father has some projects in my hometown. But this is one of my most successful activities because the people whom I helped are gaining lessons from what we shared them.”
- “I felt a sense of relief seeing them [the people] so happy. It made me so happy also. This activity was very appropriate for me because I really want to help our less fortunate brothers and sisters. This activity also motivated us to reach out to people who need help.”
- “I’ve learned that we can help other people in our own simple but unique way. I want to thank them for their hospitality and kindness. I would like to thank our teacher for giving us such a great opportunity to help the mothers in Maluay and to my group mates who made the presentation successful. For me, it was a great experience.”

Looking Ahead

The continuity of the program is a pressing challenge not only for the service-learning program but for the mothers as well. To be more realistic about any community intervention, it takes time to let go of a partner community knowing their level of maturity, the kind of intervention given to them, and the leadership roles assumed by some of them.

In order to ensure the continuity of their livelihood project, the mothers, upon the approval of the high school principal in the community, were to start to operate a canteen inside the campus in the opening of the school year June 2002. With the help of the students, a school community cooperative to support the activities of the mothers has been planned by the College of Business Administration. Moreover, the mothers themselves hoped to set up a cooperative store in the community that would centralize the marketing of the materials they needed in food processing and in the marketing of their products. As the results of this service-learning project reveal, these are obviously the areas in future community work in which the assistance of the Business students will be more significant.



Housewives having a hands-on in food processing