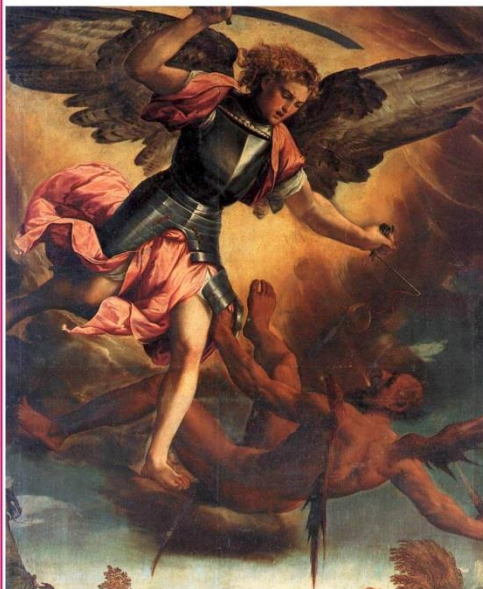


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Improving Livelihood Options via Agriculture: A Case Study of Social Entrepreneurship, Kedah

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Abstract

This study explores how cumulative impact creation and multitasks holder effort make it possible to overcome the struggles of social entrepreneurship via agriculture. Out of the desire to contribute in an evidence-based and demand-driven manner to the individual and economic empowerment of women living in Lunas and its neighboring town, Kulim. The result showed that the aim of the Community Needs Assessment Process is to create an interaction and a safe discussion place between representatives of the organization and the representatives of its target groups so to gain a better understanding the challenges of the target group and their communities.

Keywords: Single Mother Empowerment, Social Entrepreneurship, Agriculture, Cumulative Impact Creation

Mejora de las opciones de medios de vida a través de la agricultura: un estudio de caso de emprendimiento social, Kedah

Resumen

Este estudio explora cómo la creación de impacto acumulativo y el esfuerzo del titular de múltiples tareas hacen posible superar las luchas del emprendimiento social a través de la agricultura. Por el deseo de contribuir de una manera basada en la evidencia y basada en la demanda al empoderamiento individual y económico de las mujeres que viven en Lunas y su ciudad vecina, Kulim. El resultado demostró que el objetivo del Proceso de evaluación de necesidades de la comunidad es crear una interacción y un lugar seguro para la discusión entre los representantes de la organización y los representantes de sus grupos objetivo, a fin de comprender mejor los desafíos del grupo objetivo y sus comunidades.

Palabras clave: empoderamiento de madres solteras, emprendimiento social, agricultura, creación de impacto acumulativo.

1. INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship is today seen as an engine for economic growth and capacity building. Malaysia's transformation from a knowledge-based economy to innovation based economy as will require the support of quality and competitive human capital. An entrepreneur is someone who organizes, manages, and assumes the risks of a business or enterprise; they are an agent of change by the

process of discovering new ways of combining resources. Women make enormous contributions to the economy where in 67 economies worldwide, there are 126 million women involved in entrepreneurial ventures and employed at least one person in running the business.

Currently, most developed nations witness a substantial increase in the number of female entrepreneurs and their impact in economic growth and job creation (American Express, 2016, and Xavier et al., 2010; Tereso et al., 2018). The notable growth of women-owned businesses has caught headlines in many countries where the rate of new women entrepreneurs is double the rate of emergence of new men entrepreneurs (Hadary, 2010). This is also the case in Malaysia where women entrepreneurs are forming a significant portion of the SME entrepreneurs. The SME sector is a major source of new jobs. Women, however, continue to face barriers to entrepreneurial activity in comparison with men (Richard, 2013; Razdar et al., 2017).

As one of the keys to national development in Malaysia, the government has embarked on developing capacity building initiatives through various Ministries and agencies to create, promote and nurture more women entrepreneurs. This thrust aims to develop 4,000 women entrepreneurs by the year 2012. Thus, if Malaysia is to benefit fully from the female potential for job creation and economic growth, decision-makers at the local and national level must agree on measures to ensure the best possible framework to support women's entrepreneurship.

2. RESEARCH APPROACH

The qualitative research approach is used in this study. The Community Needs Assessment procedure took the form of a facilitated discussion forum, where the participating women were guided in their sharing process by a group of women facilitators and a set of questions assessing the daily hardships of the participants, their strives to alleviate these hardships, their views on their personal and professional future, their knowledge and skills needs to achieve the desired future, and their personal recommendations to ANB Agro Trainers and its future empowerment programmes. Focus group discussion and in depth interview were used to gather the data for the study.

The research instruments that were used to conduct this study are a semi-structured and unstructured questionnaire. The interviews were conducted in three languages which are English, Bahasa Melayu and Tamil based on the respondent's convenience and preference. The interviews and observations were organized to allow the respondents to describe clearly the answers themselves in detail and also provide other relevant social cues. Social cues, such as expression, inflection, and body language of the respondents provided the researchers extra information both verbal and non-verbal to show a hidden interrelatedness between the emotions of the respondents and events (Marley, 2013; Bahriddinovna, 2017). The project is built on the followings:

- In depth interviews: Semi-structured and unstructured.
- Focus groups discussion and activities,

- Non-participative observations and,
- Field work, document, discourse, case study and text analysis

In the format of small working groups, the process facilitators have asked the participating women to share information on the following questions:

This focus group discussion included questions on

- Basic demographics (education, income, number of households).

- What are your hardships?
- What have you tried so far to alleviate these hardships?
- What would help you to alleviate these hardships?
- How do you see your personal and professional future?
- How do you see the future of your children?
- How can you help the future become a reality?
- What would you need to know (knowledge, skills)?
- What would you recommend us to do in order to contribute?

The sampling frame of the respondent is retrieved from the Welfare Department of Kulim, Kedah and snow bowling sampling method are used. For the Need Assessment Process, 17 women ranging from ages between 24 and 68 that were selected. This included women abandoned by husbands or widows which is a single mother, on an average with three children, with little or no employment opportunities. The majority of the women are also head and main breadwinner of the household. The selection of the sample is based on the availability and willingness of the women entrepreneurs to participate in this study.

3. ANALYSIS OF DATA

The analysis used in the following instances allows us to understand the content and relationship between the key concepts of women empowerment and social entrepreneurship in Agriculture. Out of the desire to contribute in an evidence-based and demand-driven manner to the individual and economic empowerment of women living in Lunas and its neighboring town, Kulim, ANB Agro Trainers has developed and implemented a Community Needs Assessment Process. This process enables the interaction and a safe discussion place between representatives of the organization and the representatives of its target groups. The process enables a better understanding and insight into the needs and challenges of the target group and their wider communities. This study involved a total of 17 women beneficiaries of the programme. Table 1 shows the profile of the respondents involved in this study.

| Item | Description | Percentage (%) | Total Number |
|------------------------|---------------------|----------------|--------------|
| Age | 20-30 | 5.87 | 1 |
| | 30-40 | 23.53 | 4 |
| | 40-50 | 17.65 | 3 |
| | 50-60 | 35.30 | 6 |
| | 60-70 | 17.65 | 3 |
| Academic Qualification | No formal education | 17.65 | 3 |
| | Primary School | 29.41 | 5 |
| | PMR / SRP | 23.53 | 4 |

| | | | |
|----------------|--------------------------|-------|----|
| | SPM / MCE | 23.53 | 4 |
| | STPM/Certificate/Diploma | 5.88 | 1 |
| | Degree/Master | 0 | 0 |
| | | | |
| Marital Status | Single | 0 | 0 |
| | Married | 17.64 | 3 |
| | Divorced | 41.18 | 7 |
| | Widowed | 41.18 | 7 |
| Race | Malay | 23.53 | 4 |
| | Chinese | 5.88 | 1 |
| | Indian | 64.71 | 11 |
| | Others | 5.88 | 1 |
| Religion | Muslim | 23.53 | 4 |
| | Buddhist | 0 | 0 |
| | Hindu | 29.41 | 5 |
| | Christian | 41.18 | 7 |
| | Others | 5.88 | 1 |
| Children | 0 | 17.64 | 3 |
| | 1-3 | 47.06 | 8 |
| | 4-6 | 35.30 | 6 |
| | 7-10 | 0 | 0 |

Table 1: Respondent profile

Based on table 1, the majority of respondent are between the age 50-60 years old (35.30%), hold a primary academic qualification (29.41%) divorce and widowed (41.18%), most of them have children. Majority of them are Indian (64.71%) and Christian religion (41.18%). Based on the focus group in depth interview and observation I have conducted. The main findings of the assessment process, along with some personal stories of the participating women Assessing the hardships shared by the women (Table 2).

| Needs and Challenges | Total people |
|----------------------|--------------|
|----------------------|--------------|

| | mentioned |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|
| Financial constraint and support | 14 |
| Poor health condition | 12 |
| Family commitment and responsibility | 11 |
| Training and Skill needs | 7 |
| Children future | 6 |
| Transportation and Mobility | 5 |

Table 2: Needs and Challenges of the respondent

The personal stories presented during the assessment show the viciousness of the circle these women find themselves in on a daily basis. There is little or lack of economic of poverty and deprivation welfare possibilities and decent livelihood options for the women demoralize the individual, and contribute to worsening and deepening of health and family problem. Based on our data, almost all respondents had corresponding answers on financial constraint and support, Poor health condition and family commitment and responsibility. The next section of the report contains the main findings of the assessment process, along with some personal stories of the participating women. After carefully analyzing the response, we found that the respondents encountered financial hurdles for their livelihood and they shared about the needs and challenges they face on a daily basis as follows:

Similarly, another respondent shared that the biggest issue she encountered was related to family and financial needs. The income they earned monthly is insufficient to run the family and their basic daily expenses. After the family struggle that they have been through, some of them sell their pieces of jewelry (Gold) to survive and try to find another source to cope up with the financial situation faced. Good health is essential for our body to keep moving as we know health is

wealth. The poor health condition and the health problems that they face affect their financial status. They need some other family member to take them for the regular medical check-ups. For instance, it is easy to maintain the business if they have transportation or if the business is being operated from home. Transport is to make their business operate purpose and mobility around.

4. FINDINGS

We find the major categories that disempower women: personal, human strife and economic, livelihood strife. The deepening health and family crises diminish the personal capacity to do work outside the home. It also puts additional pressure on the women from the point of view of child and family member care, supporting children's education, financial sustainability, and balanced family and personal time. In what the personal, human strife is the concern, we may distinguish two major aspects like the feeling of being burdensome for the family, and the lack of having a personal vision of the future. While the first aspect is mostly prominent with the older participants who face precarious health situation and total lack of income sources, the second aspect is noticeable across the board, the vision of the future is limited to offering better perspectives to the children, and managing to the payment of monthly expenses.

Assessing the women's opinion on the knowledge and skills needed for a better livelihood two aspects stood out: the need to

practical knowledge in different activity areas they desire to pursue and the need to guidance and support. On the practical side, the knowledge areas mentioned were sewing, small scale agriculture, cottage industry management, and childcare and the knowledge of training avenues in these areas. But what stood out mostly is the desire to the benefit of the support of such women groups, where the participants are able to share their experiences and find understanding without being judged. A place where a perspective change may happen seeing the struggle of other women, where cooperation can be developed among the women to help each other. And if these support groups can be accompanied by informed financial and personal empowerment guidance, the group’s transformation potential would be even higher.

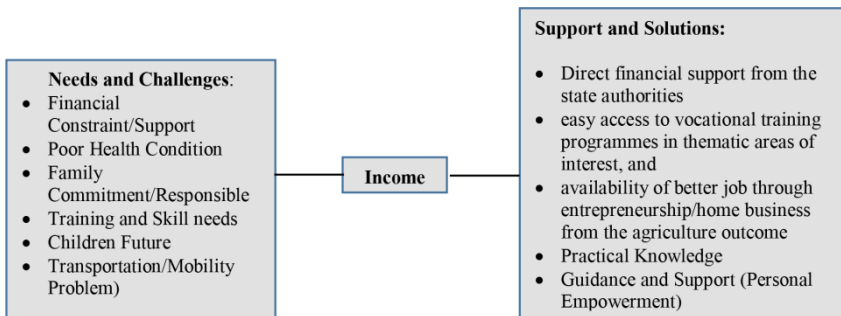


Figure 1: Needs assessment model developed from the finding of the study.

During the first half of the project, the teams have carried out some useful research to inform the design of the training programme and have established a pilot site to test out organic farming techniques

that could be introduced to the farm. They are also helping to establish a training center (a physical space) for AnB Agro. The impact of this work on end beneficiaries is as yet low since the project is still in the early stages of design and testing. However, there is potential for significant impact if the project succeeds in scaling up over the coming year. Success will depend on establishing a viable business model for the chilly farm or cottage industry and together with human capital development center.

5. POLICY RECOMMENDATION

The study shows that there is a need to improve policy making and implement action part of the project to achieve the objectives of the social projects. The women entrepreneurship program that is more practical and hands on need to develop their entrepreneurial skills and knowledge. Sustainable change requires the engagement of stakeholders at all levels for example government, activist, social entrepreneur, change maker, women empowerment activist plays a different role by tackle the social problem. For instance, from this finding of the study there are few policy recommendations as follows:

- More help is needed for women personal development assistance financial and non-financial like mentoring, counseling, leadership, financial aid and skills. Where the support should be easily accessible without any bureaucracy from the government or related organizations. This program also should provide regular and long term

initiative to ensure the positive impact out of it. Women must have an environment that removes physical and social barriers to their participation so they may realize their full potential through their participation in the project. There are a lot of women programs that are developed by the Department of women development, but women do not feel that the project is reliable and is easily accessible geographically and personally. Thus, most of the programs have not been reviewed and evaluated systematically to measure the effectiveness of the programs. Furthermore, the finance and non-financial aid should suit the needs of women beneficiary group because it may vary from one to another one. There is a need to ensure the assistance reflects local needs and priorities.

- Collaboration between government and social entrepreneurship (SE) is limited or is terminated prematurely. This can be an overview if the government and selected social entrepreneurs have the same objective and vision. There is a lot of benefits when mutual collaboration is involved in the formulation of the project. Working towards a common goal in collaboration with the organization affords an unparalleled opportunity to build affinity, cascade knowledge and ensure the solution are adequately assisting the population that they aim to engage. The quality of the outcome is more important and valuable than the quantity of the project focus.

- Promote Digital literacy is a strategic pathway for women empowerment by promoting the effective use of mobile or digital technology by the project participants. In Malaysia, mostly everyone has accesses to smart phones and internet which is 89.4 percent

making the country a mobile oriented society. This will catalyze a meaningful culture of use through public access and benefit them through education (e-learning), a startup without borders, with easy access to free education, skills learning and leadership training.

6. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that the sizeable number of the women faced social problems like divorce and family setbacks both 41.2 percent respectively, low income opportunity (82.4 percent), and some of them suffer from health problem (70.6 percent). They are in the extreme poverty trap and to take them out of the trap is possible, but it is hard as their social demographic background are very limiting. Based on the response from the participant in the study. We find the most of the respondent are age between 50-60 (35.3 percent), honing of the skills is necessary to give them opportunities. However, the big challenges in the 21st century are to create new knowledge, skill and ability requirements and procedure for this group of people unparalleled with their age, health, education status of the respondent. The rapid pace of technology innovation and the transition to a knowledge based economy is future demands significant of working life transition.

This implies that the participant in this study who are mostly older women, and they may not have been exposed to changes in technology will have to continue to engage in agriculture training

through social entrepreneurship support. But providing income opportunity through participation in agriculture activities is one of the solutions to the problem. They need to find the right model, and it is not easy because of the many challenges they face. Overall, it is clear that the age, social problem, education and health are not the only needs and challenges face by these people. Rather, both individual and situational characteristic is vital as well to ensure the success of this project. Pre-project (participation decision and ability), during the project (involvement process) and post-project (sustainable performance), are all important. Participants who believe that they are capable of improving and learning new skills are more likely to participate in the project and are also those who perceive a potential benefit from participation.

7. CONCLUSION

This case study provides a contribution to the existing literature on how to address the livelihood challenges and social start up hardships to empower women especially in the rural area of Malaysia. In a developing economy like Malaysia, the rise of socio economic status give a positive impact on the women entrepreneur, especially among single mother. In doing so, this study focused on the social, financial and human capital of single mothers in the poverty group in Kulim, Kedah. Based on the findings and deliberations above, it is challenging to judge or evaluate livelihood outcome conclusively. It seems that for

several women it was difficult to achieve high income because of needs and challenges they are going through. Essentially, supplementary information is required to assess the overall inclusive livelihood outcomes. It can be concluded that to gain an acceptable livelihood outcome, women micro entrepreneurs should meet the requirements of all the assets and resources because they are connected to and impact each other. Increasing women's access to microfinance has wide-ranging benefits, not just for their well-being but also for the welfare of their families, the communities in which they live and for society at large for better future.

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