

Community Engagement: A Continuing Partnership for Grassroots

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Abstract –Linkages and collaborative efforts of organizations, groups, or institutions are avenues for community development. The convergence of private and government organizations and educational institutions cultivate their nurturing pursuits for the community. One of the elements of good governance is the partnership of groups that results in benefits for the community. In this study, an institutional community extension project for a grassroots community in Naga City, Camarines Sur, Philippines was evaluated in terms of its processes, effectiveness of training for trainers/facilitators, and level of knowledge gained by beneficiaries after the training. The study used the descriptive method of research and weighted mean as the statistical tool to interpret data. Findings show that the adoption of the Governance Model may be replicated, training of trainers developed competent facilitators and trainers, and the beneficiaries gained high knowledge of Governance and very high knowledge of Entrepreneurial education. The partnership of an educational institution with a non-government organization positively influenced beneficiaries to engage in the extension project and equipped them with knowledge on managing their businesses. Capacitating the trainers on the project processes made them more competent. There is a need for an improved institutional procurement process and budget allocation for community extension projects to maintain the level of motivation and participation of the beneficiaries. The project team and the NGO's commitment to closely monitor the beneficiaries is highly encouraged. An assessment has to be conducted two years after the project to determine the impact of the project on the beneficiaries.

Keywords –Convergence, Evaluation, Outcomes, Partnership

INTRODUCTION

The global issue about poverty and inequality has been pervasive as presently experiencing by Ghana, South Africa, and United Kingdom [1]-[3] where multi approaches have been developed and initiated to alleviate its effect among the community members by their government and non-government agency. One of the poverty alleviation approaches is the Microfinance Institution (MFIs) and banks that offered financial services among the poor, provides a safety net, and help in the proper use of business capital. However, borrowers need to have business skills and marketing information about loans for business expansion and job creation [4]. Collaborative practice is one vital aspect of governance mechanisms that contribute to the behavioral changes among the community members and make them capacitated and fully developed to minimize the effects of poverty. The role of microfinance has become a more popular approach in the reduction of poverty by providing the poor with the opportunity for entrepreneurship [5]. Developing citizen's awareness, needs, and expectations go beyond public administration to address questions on how to strengthen the relationship between government and other institutions to meet societal challenges [6]. Building strong partnerships and linkages lead to good governance where it involves people-tool makers, tool users, and the processes through which they participate in the work of government [7]. These comprise public officials, civic leaders, business leaders, public policy consensus processes, community visioning, consensus rulemaking, collaborative network structures, roundtables, study circles, online forums, participatory budgeting, and large scale community meetings form part of governance practices [8]. Governance is termed as government effectiveness as it shapes political and economic institutions and affects overall economic performance.

In international data analysis, government effectiveness is related to the cognitive human capital of the society as a whole, of the intellectual class, and leading politicians. The importance of cognitive capital was reflected in the rate of innovation, degree of economic freedom, country competitiveness, all of which were found to have an impact on the level of productivity and wealth [9]. In the same scenario, there are three models of good governance such as that of Finland, New Zealand, and Singapore where developing countries can benchmark success stories and adopt good practices as well as approaches in their context. Singapore is a semi-authoritarian society that focuses on strong leadership and efficient anti-corruption that are necessary preconditions for successful policy and related cultural change. This process was justified by a promised reward in a place where economic growth is remarkable. In the cases of Finland and New Zealand, development follows a different logic such as a cultural background that facilitates non-corrupt procedures that rely on openness and democratic values [10]. Systems, models, and approaches as a whole are not worth for adaptation but rather a selection of particular practices that could match contextual conditions. Morality is a core element in creating good governance that consists of ethical leadership which empowers good governance practices. Good governance practices in policy formulation, shareholders relationship, and corporate dealings are practices and performances which express exemplary collaboration among its immediate members [11]–[14].

In the article by Gabriel and Gutierrez [14], has discussed that there was a congruence of governance principles and actual administrative practices in the local legislative chamber in Nueva Ecija. It further showed that there is a link between organizational effectiveness, legislative performance, and observance of good governance principles [15]. The Philippine public administrative system is about the government and its political divisions in the country such as the political hierarchy-central government, provinces, municipalities, and barangay. The Constitution ensures the separation of powers among the three branches (legislative, executive, and judicial) to prevent abuses and unbridled discretion of a branch of government [16]. Filipino people have always wanted to lead and rise from being a developing country where the idea of convergence is strongly upheld among organizations be it non-government, private and non-profit organizations as

well as educational institutions with the goal of collaborating and resource sharing for the development of grassroots communities and eventually contribute to nation-building.

Two of the important functions of higher educational institutions (HEIs) are research and community extension activities. This study is conducted so that findings may serve as a guide for future projects involving partnerships or linkages with different organizations with community development as its main goal. The results of this study may serve as a basis in the replication of the processes for future community engagement in other grassroots communities.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aimed to describe the processes in the implementation of knowledge transfer among beneficiaries in selected barangays of Naga City, Philippines. Specifically, it sought to evaluate the training processes, assess the effectiveness of trainers' training, and determine the outcomes of the project, along with knowledge gained in Governance and Entrepreneurship.

METHODS

This study utilized the descriptive research design where it evaluates the processes, determined and quantitatively described the processes, awareness, outcome, and realizations. The study involved 35 beneficiaries, and 16 project team members and trainers. Before the study, an intent to investigate the data was presented to the implementing team and respective NGO partners as well as the beneficiaries making them aware that whatever responses they have in the processes may be included in a future study

. Three (3) survey instruments were utilized to gather data for the specific objectives. To evaluate the Grassroots governance process from planning, resource mapping, community scorecard, interface meeting, and action planning and monitoring, a 15-item researcher-made questionnaire was used. Ratings were investigated following a 4-point Likert scale with the corresponding Verbal Descriptions (VD) to interpret results on the evaluation of the processes; 3.51-4.0 for Strongly Agree (SA); 2.51-3.5 for Agree (A); 1.51-2.5 for Disagree (DA); and 1.0-1.5 for Strongly Disagree (SD).

Cronbach's alpha (α) was used to calculate the internal consistency of the questionnaire based on the covariation among the items. Utilizing online

software [14], Cronbach's Alpha is 0.832. Coefficients above 0.80 are considered sufficiently high. [15]

The estimates of Cronbach's Alpha of individual items from the scale are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Reliability Coefficients (Grassroots process)

Item	Cronbach's Alpha*
1. Time for the planning of activities.	0.835
2. Budget allocation	0.806
3. Budget utilization	0.794
4. Beneficiaries availability in training	0.818
5. Partner-agency coordination with beneficiaries	0.803
6. Enough number of beneficiaries attended	0.827
7. Beneficiaries participation in resource mapping	0.847
8. Appealing and engaging community scorecard process.	0.837
9. Community scorecard process is easy	0.837
10. Availability of Service Providers during Interface Meeting	0.840
11. The service providers were able to provide relevant information	0.837
12. The service providers were able to respond to the identified needs of the beneficiaries as to services and information.	0.808
13. Action planning with service providers was conducted based on inputs.	0.808
14. Activities were conducted as planned.	0.798
15. There were monitoring and evaluation of the action plan in governance.	0.810

* if an item is deleted

For assessment of the trainers' training, an 11-item questionnaire was deployed to the trainees after the training to evaluate the activity based on logistics, program organization, and content, and speakers. It also used a 5-point Likert scale with the corresponding Verbal Descriptions (VD) 4.51 -5.0 = Excellent (E); 3.51 - 4.50 = Satisfactory (S); 2.51 - 3.5 = Fair (F)); 1.51 - 2.50 = Needs Improvement (NI); 1.0 - 1.5 = Poor (P).

Consequently, Cronbach's alpha (α) was also used to calculate the internal consistency of the instrument. Utilizing online software [14], Cronbach's Alpha is 0.929. Andis interpreted as sufficiently high [15].

The estimates of Cronbach's Alpha of individual items from the scale are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of Reliability Coefficients (Trainers Training)

Item	Cronbach's Alpha*
1. Training Venue	0.931
2. Registration, Information, and Assistance	0.918
3. Hand-outs, Audio-Video	0.918
4. Organization of training Activity	0.919
5. Training content consistent with the stated objectives	0.919
6. Training content appropriate with the intended audience	0.913
7. Time allotted for the training	0.927
8. Observance of the time/schedule	0.944
9. Knowledgeable of the content	0.919
10. Quality of presentation and delivery	0.915
11. Clarified content in response to questions	0.919

* if an item is deleted

For assessment of the beneficiaries' training, a 6-item questionnaire was deployed to the trainees after the training sessions to evaluate the trainers and the mode of training. It also used a 5-point Likert scale with the corresponding Verbal Descriptions (VD) 4.51 -5.0 = Excellent (E); 3.51 - 4.50 = Very Good (VG); 2.51 - 3.5 = Moderate (M)); 1.51 - 2.50 = Needs Improvement (NI); 1.0 - 1.5 = Poor (P).

Effectiveness of the training in Governance and Entrepreneurship was assessed utilizing a researcher-made instrument that was translated into Filipino for a better understanding of beneficiaries of the questions. A 5-point Likert scale with the corresponding Verbal Descriptions (VD) 4.51 -5.0 = Very High 3.51 - 4.50 = High); 2.51 - 3.5 = Average; 1.51 - 2.50 = Low; and 1.0 - 1.5 = Very Low.

Table 3. Summary of Reliability Coefficients (Governance)

Governance Indicators	Cronbach's Alpha*
1. Benefits out of attending Barangay Assembly	0.779
2. Strategy in making attending Barangay Assembly worthy & useful.	0.794
3. Activities during Barangay Assembly	0.767
4. Understanding of the benefits of paying taxes.	0.760
5. Propose and amend ordinances	0.715
6. Roles, functions & Responsibilities of Barangay Officials	0.734
7. Roles, functions & Responsibilities of a member of Barangay Development Council	0.756

* if an item is deleted

The estimates of Cronbach's Alpha of individual items from the scale are presented in Table

3. Cronbach’s alpha (α) was used to calculate the internal consistency of the 7-item questionnaire on training effectiveness on Governance based on the covariation among the items. For utilizing online software [17] the Cronbach’s Alpha is computed at 0.787. According to experts, this result of cronbach’s alpha is at the acceptable level [18].

Cronbach’s alpha (α) was also used to calculate the internal consistency of the 7-item questionnaire on training effectiveness in Entrepreneurship based on the covariation among the items. Utilizing online software [17], Cronbach’s Alpha is computed at 0.644. The estimates of Cronbach’s Alpha of individual items from the scale are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Summary of Reliability Coefficients (Entrepreneurship)

<i>Entrepreneurship Indicators</i>	<i>Cronbach's Alpha *</i>
1. Listing down the daily transactions	0.587
2. Organize expenses for loan payment and savings	0.683
3. Maintain a good relationship with the customer and supplier.	0.671
4. Reserve a budget for the business needs instead of juggling it into other expenses	0.645
5. Explore sales and service online	0.465
6. Buy products & avail services online	0.540
7. Social Media utilization in business	0.585

* if an item is deleted

Data were tabulated and analyzed. Statistical tools used were weighted mean to explain the observations gathered from the respondents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Imperative in any community engagement is a sound approach or model to follow for its implementation. The development of approaches or models was highly encouraged and welcomed to lay possible improvement and positive change [14]. It is an advantage among organizational structures to adapt and develop any models that suit the various contexts of professionals and community members. Bicol State College of Applied Sciences & Technology (BISCAST), Philippines has partnered with the Partnership for Transparency Asia Foundation (PTFA) an international non-stock, non-profit and innovative organization based in Washington, D.C., that mobilizes expertise and resources to assist civil society organizations, including foundations, that

engage citizens in actions to promote inclusive growth, improve governance, increase transparency, and reduce corruption in developing countries. Its goal is to pilot and scale-up innovative, citizen-led approaches and social accountability tools. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are being recognized globally for their influential role in realizing the UN Millennium Development Goal of education for all in developing countries [13]. It marked a notable contribution in society when organizations are looking forward to more participative and transparent endeavors.

In the Grassroots Governance Extension delivery, BISCAST has adopted the partner agency's model which resulted in the following data:

Grassroots Governance Model

To accomplish the project’s goal, the following components were done: conduct of the two-track capacity building consisting of *Governance Education* and *Entrepreneurial Development* for IMP (Ikabuhi Microfinance Members) and the communities where LBF operates. 2) Development or expansion of innovative community-based activities that would contribute to the improvement of the local economy or community welfare in collaboration with government service providers and other institutions, including LBF. 3) Development of university-accredited/based program for LBF’s ESP scholars that provide volunteer service to their respective or selected IMP communities.

Based on the evaluation of the Grassroots Governance Project, the following data were gathered:

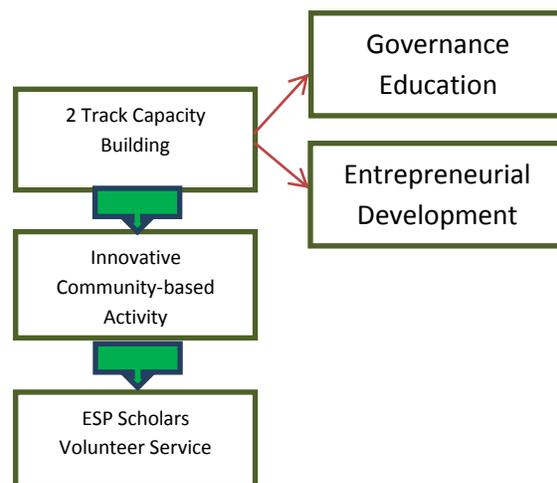


Figure 1. Grassroots Governance Model

As reflected in figure 1, component 1 is a two-track capacity building consist of Governance Education where it utilizes the community scorecard to determine beneficiaries' available resources and availed services through the conduct first of a resource mapping that tracks beneficiaries' demand for resources and services to expand/diversify their businesses. It also tracked service providers' services that help members expand/diversify their livelihood.

Table 1. Grassroots Project Processes

Process Indicators	Mean	VD
Time for the planning of activities.	3.62	SA
Budget allocation	2.94	A
Budget utilization	2.19	DA
Beneficiaries availability in training	2.94	A
Partner-agency coordination with beneficiaries	2.94	A
Enough number of beneficiaries attended	3.38	A
Beneficiaries participation in resource mapping	3.5	A
Appealing and engaging community scorecard process.	3.75	SA
Community scorecard process is easy	3.75	SA
Availability of Service Providers during Interface Meeting	3.06	A
The service providers were able to provide relevant information	3.75	SA
The service providers were able to respond to the identified needs of the Beneficiaries as to services and information.	3.5	A
Action planning with service providers was conducted based on inputs.	3.69	SA
Activities were conducted as planned.	3	A
There were monitoring and evaluation of the action plan in governance.	3.19	A
Average	3.28	A

The implementation of the Grassroots Governance Project was evaluated by 16 trainers and facilitators along 15 indicators. Overall, the project and processes were rated agreeable, with an average mean of 3.26. The evaluators strongly agreed that the community scorecard process was easy for the facilitators (3.75) and was appealing, engaging, and participative for the beneficiaries (3.75); the service providers were able to provide relevant information to the beneficiaries (3.75); there was sufficient time for planning of activities (3.62). On the other hand, the evaluators agreed on the sufficiency of the budget for activities; coordination between area managers and their

clusters; and availability of beneficiaries during scheduled meetings. All these had a weighted mean of 2.94. The evaluators also agreed that the activities were conducted as planned (3.0) and the service providers were readily available for interface meetings (3.06).

These evaluation results are consistent with the actual experiences of the trainers, facilitators, and beneficiaries in the conduct of the project. One of the reasons for the delay in the implementation of activities is the release of the budget due to processes that need to be followed. Another is the difficult work for area managers to coordinate with their cluster members because of personal reasons of the beneficiaries such as family concerns and work/livelihood that are usually in conflict with the scheduled training sessions. The availability of service providers for interface meetings with the beneficiaries is very important for the successful implementation of the project. The service providers are important sources of information to the beneficiaries. However, it was observed that it was difficult to seek the commitment of service providers for interface meetings with the beneficiaries. The interface meetings could have been an opportunity to educate or inform the beneficiaries of requirements, processes, and opportunities for their respective livelihood/businesses.

The positive aspects of the project which were reflected in the evaluation were the sufficient time for planning and the competence of the trainers and facilitators to provide relevant information to the beneficiaries. Regular meetings were conducted by the Project Leader to plan for the next activities and to evaluate those that were conducted already. The readiness and competence of the trainers and facilitators to conduct the training could be attributed to the trainer's training conducted before the implementation of the project.

The trainers and facilitators assessed the effectiveness of the trainers' training along with six (11) indicators as shown in Table 2. Overall, the training of trainers was rated excellent (4.78). The trainers and facilitators observed that the training or advisory services were able to meet their immediate and long-term goals and service was promptly delivered. Both training indicators were considered as Excellent (5.0) in the assessment such as training venue, organization and training consistency, appropriateness, timeliness, observance of schedule, speakers' knowledge, presentation, and questions were

clarified. Registration, information, assistance, and hand-outs/audio-video were rated satisfactory (4.35). These findings imply that the training provided was responsive to the needs of the trainers and facilitators for the project implementation, knowledge transfer, and acquisition was due to the competent trainers.

Table2. Effectiveness of Trainers’ Training

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>VD</i>
Training Venue	4.47	E
Registration, Information, & Assistance	4.35	Sat
Hand-outs, Audio-Video	4.35	Sat
Organization of Training Activity	4.65	E
Training content consistency	4.82	E
Content appropriateness to audience	4.82	E
Time allotted for training	4.94	E
Observance of the time/schedule	4.88	E
Speakers knowledge on the content	5.13	E
Quality of presentation and delivery	5	E
Clarified content in response to questions	5.25	E
Average	4.78	E

Table3. Assessment of Level of Knowledge (Governance)

<i>Governance Indicators</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>VD</i>
Benefits out of attending Barangay Assembly	4.64	Very High
Strategy in making attending Barangay Assembly worthy & useful.	4.57	High
Activities during Barangay Assembly	4.39	High
Understanding of the benefits of paying taxes.	4.21	High
Propose and amend ordinances	4.46	High
Roles, functions & Responsibilities of Barangay Officials	4.21	High
Roles, functions & Responsibilities of a member of Barangay Development Council	4.64	Very High
Average	4.45	High

Table 3 presents the assessment of the project beneficiaries on the level of knowledge gained from the different topics on Governance. Of the 7 topics, the beneficiaries gained very high knowledge on benefits from attending Barangay Assembly (4.64); duties and functions of barangay development council members (4.64); and strategies to make barangay assembly useful (4.57). The beneficiaries got a high level of knowledge from the other topics such as barangay assembly (4.39), taxes (4.21), ordinances (4.46), and responsibilities of barangay officials (4.21). Overall, the beneficiaries gained very high knowledge from the training on Governance.

The findings further revealed that the project beneficiaries significantly expanded their knowledge on the barangay assembly and barangay development council. Before they participate in the training, they do not appreciate the significance of these issues in their community life, but upon taking the governance course, their sense of community involvement is already underway. This improvement has also correspondingly influenced their business positioning in the local community as this forms part of their social responsibility. As entrepreneurs, they started to interact with the various sectors in their community, particularly the service providers that assisted them in their business operation.

Table 4. Assessment of Level of Knowledge (Entrepreneurship)

<i>Entrepreneurial Indicators</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>VD</i>
Listing down the daily transactions	4.81	Very High
Organize expenses for loan payment and savings	4.89	Very High
Maintain a good relationship with the customer and supplier.	4.79	Very High
Reserve a budget for the business needs instead of juggling it into other expenses	4.71	Very High
Explore sales and service online	4.46	High
Buy products& avail services online	3.82	High
Social Media utilization in business	4.29	High
Average	4.54	Very High

The level of knowledge on Entrepreneurship of the project beneficiaries was also evaluated. The project beneficiaries gained a very high level of knowledge on topics such as saving money (4.89); keeping a daily record of financial transactions (4.81); good relations with customers and suppliers (4.79); and saving money for the business. (4.71). A high level of knowledge was gained on scanning the internet or social media for goods and services (4.46); selling goods and services through the internet or social media (4.29); buying goods and services through the internet or social media (3.82). Overall, the beneficiaries gained a very high level of knowledge from the training on Entrepreneurship (4.54).

The results indicate that the project beneficiaries impressively acquired knowledge on savings, keeping records of business transactions, and even customer relations. These areas were found to be lacking among the participants, but after taking the courses, they admittedly acquired knowledge on these essential

areas in operating business enterprise. The training on entrepreneurship heightened their interest and motivation in monitoring daily business transactions, leading them to become more aware of the uncertainties of their business. Such practices had made them become more abreast of their operation; thus, adjustments and creating solutions to business difficulties have become more usual to them.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Adopting the NGO's governance model in the institutional endeavor for community engagement is a remarkable practice to sustain community linkage and knowledge transfer. The conduct of training of trainers has contributed much to making facilitators and trainers competent in performing their roles and functions to the beneficiaries thereby enjoining them to actively participate in the various activities related to governance and entrepreneurial education. Training sessions facilitated by the project team have improved the project beneficiaries' knowledge and provided them with more insights, ideas, and strategies on how to be financially literate thus making them equipped to improve their status and way of life. However, results implied that there is a need for coordination with the NGO partner to assist in closely monitoring the beneficiaries' participation in all activities. Based on the findings, it could be inferred that institutional financial processes be revisited to come up with a local policy to expedite financial transactions needed for the project implementation. An inclusion of budget per activity should be well allocated so that members of the team and the beneficiaries will be satisfied and motivated to continue their involvement and commitment to the project. The disbursement of the budget needed for every activity should be prompt and efficient, yet complying with audit procedures. The importance of NGOs in supplementing and complementing government services to the community could not be discounted. The role of the academe in bridging the services of these organizations to the community beneficiaries was highlighted during this project. The extension functions, as well as the expertise of the faculty of colleges and universities, have provided the much-needed arm for NGOs to reach a wider scope of beneficiaries. Thus, the continuation of the implementation of this kind of project is timely and relevant. It is expected to attract more beneficiaries to engage in similar activities to instill in them the entrepreneurial spirit that they can use to improve

their quality of life. This project may be replicated to other beneficiaries of the NGO, as well as other similar organizations that have provided financial assistance to small entrepreneurs. Continuous monitoring of the beneficiaries should be done, as well as mentoring if needed. An impact evaluation may also be conducted after 2 years to determine if the training resulted in an improved status of living of the beneficiaries.

However, there are some limitations noted in this study. First, the evaluators of the program should not have been limited to the trainers/facilitators and beneficiaries but could have involved also the representatives of the NGO and service providers. This would result in a more comprehensive evaluation of the project. Second, the beneficiaries' evaluation may include not only the level of knowledge gained from the different training topics but also the training process such as the competence of trainers and training environment. Finally, the findings of this study could not be generalized to the same project conducted in a different barangay since there is a different set of beneficiaries with different backgrounds, attitudes, and values.

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