

Integrating Community Services and Research: A Livelihood Needs Assessment at the Countryside of the Philippines

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Abstract

This study assessed the integration of community services and research through the livelihood needs assessment of a countryside in the Philippines particularly Sitio Malanas, Lettac Sur, Santol, La Union as basis of the actions in addressing the needs. Specifically, the livelihood situation and needs were determined and proposed actions for the improvement of the livelihood situation of the community. Thirty five members of the community participated in the research. A focused group discussion was utilized in gathering the data. The residents of the community were found to be engaged in farming, sold agricultural products, and had only three variety stores getting its supplies from other places. They encountered livelihood problems mostly related to marketing and transportation. They wanted additional livelihood program, to improve sales, and be provided with seminar-workshops on business-related activities. The findings show that there is a need for a program to improve their livelihood needs. It is recommended that actions have to be taken for the improvement of the livelihood situation of the community in cooperation with the local government unit and the school extending relevant community services based on research.

Keywords: Integrating community services and research, livelihood situation, livelihood needs, proposed actions

1. Introduction

Communities at present encounter the threat of surviving without risking the potential for people in the future to meet their needs. They face challenges and struggle to take hold of their sustainable developments and projects. Communities are challenged by their ability or capacity to be maintained or even sustain themselves. (www.landlearnsw.org.au/).

Creating and maintaining the economic and environmental health, promoting social equity, and fostering broad-based citizen participation in planning and implementation greatly influence the sustainability of a community. Moreover, communities that engage citizens and institutions to develop sustainability principles and a collective vision for the future and that apply an integrative approach to environmental, economic, and social goals are generally likely to be more successful. (<http://www.sustainable.org/about>).

Conducting an assessment particularly in a community is imperative for a number of reasons. First is that the sustainability of the community is determined. Second is on the residents and local officials becoming alert on the impact of a proposed development on the community's social and economic well-being; and third is about the avoidance of the creation of inequities among the community groups. Thus, assessment encourages the positive impacts associated with the proposed development. (http://www.lic.wisc.edu/shapingdane/facilitation/all_resources/impacts/analysis_socio.htm). An assessment on the livelihood needs of the community is a particular economic need that requires attention.

Educational institutions in its role as a contributor to the economic development of a country have in its corporate responsibility the extension of services to needy communities. Higher educational institutions in particular advocates for the trilogy functions, namely: instruction, research, and extension. Because of this, the Commission on Higher Education gave importance to the integration of research and community services that can also affect instruction. Higher educational institutions then were mandated to include community services as an area for quality assessment. Research on the needs assessment of needy communities is deemed imperative.

Radhakrishna et al. (2014) claimed that integrating research, extension, and education is in order to have a common language for planning, discussion, implementation, and demonstration of the performance and accountability of a program. He cited Decker (2004) saying that the traditional model of Extension-Research was simple and worked somewhat well because the roles of extension and research faculty were rigid and clearly defined.

At the countryside of the Philippines, there are communities with the presence of most of the amenities and also with those lacking facilities and services. Others have agricultural products, however, with difficulty in marketing their products, thus encounter sustainability problems. In Region 1, the province of La Union was identified to have needy communities. And one of them is the Municipality of Santol, which is considered as a fourth class municipality that has a population of 12,007 in the 2010 census. It is located south of the Municipality of Sudipen, La Union; at the northeast is the Municipality of Balaoan, La Union, at its northwest are the provinces of Ilocos Sur and Benguet; and in the south is the Municipality of San Gabriel, La Union. One

of its 11 Barangays is Lettac Sur. (http://www.zamboanga.com/z/index.php?title=Lettac_Sur,_Santol,_La_Union,_Philippines).

Lettac Sur, from the General Profile of The Sangguniang Barangay 2010-2014, is about 7 kms away from Barangay Poblacion, Santol, La Union with an area of 986 hectares and a total population of 1,207 or a total number of household of 244 that is spread over its sitios including Malanas (east and proper) is experiencing economic difficulties. From the posted record of Sitio Malanas, Lettac Sur, it has 104 households with an average of three (3) children per household. There are only three (3) variety stores in the place.

A higher educational institution in La Union is Saint Louis College, having a missionary core value and an objective of social awareness and involvement, has an Extension Services Office that utilizes an integrated approach in extending assistance to communities in need in cooperation with its academic departments. The Faculty of Business Administration for one is in-charge of extending community services related to its field of expertise like the provision of livelihood programs. The Hotel and Restaurant Management program in particular has its expertise in cookery, bread and pastry production, and housekeeping that can be extended to needy communities for their livelihood needs. The Business Administration program can also be of assistance in proving training related to business management, such as financial, human resource development, production, and marketing management.

A community needs assessment is usually conducted by the school as an extension service action research before addressing the needs of the community. Needs Assessment researches were done in the different barangays of Santol, La Union. One of them is on the household and community needs of Barangay Poblacion, Santol, La Union (Garcia, 2013). Another research is on the needs assessment on grassroots leadership in selected barangays in the Municipality of Santol, La Union (Cabauatan, 2013); however, none yet was ever conducted on the livelihood needs of Sitio Malanas, Lettac Sur, Santol, La Union.

The needs assessment at the countryside for Sitio Malanas was started by the school in its preliminary focused group discussion with the community folks and local government officials on September 19, 2015. It was found out from the participants that they have agricultural products that are not marketed well because of the road to market problem and when sold are underpriced. Furthermore, they said that most of the time their agricultural products were wasted due to the limited consumption and marketing. They wanted to sell their products in other places, but because the place is mountainous, the road to market made it more difficult for them to sell their products. Moreover, they said that they wish to learn more livelihood strategies to fully utilize their agricultural products, as well as augment their income. They expressed livelihood needs as their immediate concern.

Cognizant of the difficulties on livelihood for sustainability and the absence of research on the mentioned community, this study is pursued by the Faculty of Business Administration in close coordination with its Extension Services Office to have a deeper identification of the livelihood needs of the community and plan for the appropriate actions to be taken in addressing their needs.

1.1 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The study is based on community participation theory by Arnstein. The particular importance of the theory stems from the explicit recognition that there are different levels of participation, from manipulation or therapy of citizens, to consultation, and viewed at present as genuine participation, e.g. the levels of partnership and citizen control. (http://www.sharedservicearchitects.co.uk/write/Documents/Citizen_Participation_Theoretical_Frameworks.pdf). This theory is used in the study on the participation of the members of Sitio Malanas Women's Association and the Barangay Council of the community in assessing their livelihood needs.

Another theory this study is anchored on is the Community Development Theory by Tan (2009). In which for him is a framework capable of bridging the micro-macro divide in social work; where the tenets of this theory have implications for the ways clinicians view and engage with clients as well as the ways social workers can seek to make large-scale change within a community.

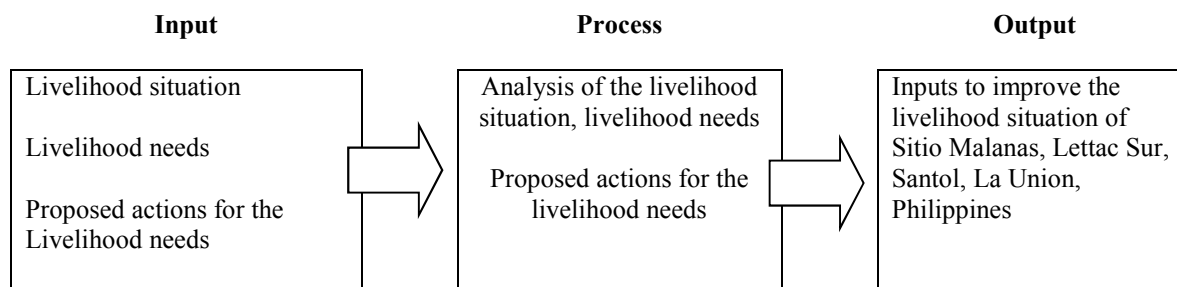
The concept on community needs assessments refers to the seeking of truthful information representative of the needs of a community. It is conducted before an action is done and is used to determine current situations and identify issues for action, establishing the essential foundation for vital planning. The process is an invaluable tool for involving the public in solving problems and developing goals. Furthermore, a needs assessment can be an excellent way for the public to become involved and contribute to the outcome (<http://www.learningtogive.org/resources/community-needs-assessments>). This concept is used in the study by specifically determining the livelihood needs of the people in the community of Sitio Malanas, Lettac Sur, Santol, La Union.

Another concept is on community development. For Mendes (2008) community development refers to the employment of community structures addressing social needs and empowering groups of people. He also discussed that when these structures and the community's people are appropriately engaged and empowered, the

role of the social worker in a community development framework lands heavily on the facilitator side of the expert-facilitator continuum. This concept is applied in the study in the formulation of an action or development plan based on the livelihood needs expressed by the people in the community.

The study utilized the Input-Process-Output framework presented in Figure 1. The input is comprised of the livelihood condition and livelihood needs of the community. The process part is on the analysis of the livelihood condition and livelihood needs of the community, and the formulation of an action plan. The output is about the action plan to improve the livelihood condition of Sitio Malanas, Lettac Sur, Santol, La Union.

Figure 1. The Research Paradigm



1.2 Research Objectives

The study aimed to assess the livelihood needs of the countryside of the Philippines, specifically Sitio Malanas, Lettac Sur, Santol, La Union as basis of an action plan to improve the livelihood condition of the community.

The following are the specific objectives:

1. To present the livelihood situation of the respondents of Sitio Malanas, Lettac Sur, Santol, La Union;
2. To assess the livelihood needs of Sitio Malanas, Lettac Sur, Santol, La Union; and
3. To propose for the improvement of the livelihood condition of Sitio Malanas, Lettac Sur, Santol, La Union.

1.3 Importance of the Study

The study is deemed beneficial to the local government unit of Santol, La Union, Barangay Council, Sitio Malanas Women's Association, residents of Sitio Malanas community, researcher, and future researchers.

The local government unit of Santol, La Union will be able to refer to the proposed actions of the study in cooperation with the school in the implementation of the identified activities. The cooperation can be in terms of giving permission or even accompanying the school representatives whenever they provide extension services to Sitio Malanas.

The Barangay Council of Lettac Sur will be assisted by the school in improving the livelihood condition of Sitio Malanas. It will also be guided on what to provide as counter assistance to the said community based on the proposed action plan.

Sitio Malanas Women's Association will also be benefited by the study by cooperating and also assisting the school representatives in implementing the proposed actions. The officers will be guided on what they have to provide (e.g. venue and other materials) to facilitate the implementation of particular activities.

The residents of Sitio Malanas will be guided by the action plan on what specific activities can be conducted for them that will augment their income. They will be able to refer to what other specific livelihood assistance they can avail of from SLC.

The researchers belonging to the Faculty of Business Administration with the Hotel and Restaurant Management Department will be able to use the study as reference in the delivery of their lessons. They will also be guided in the roles that they have to take in the implementation of specific activities, such as the provision of livelihood trainings and management seminars to the residents of the community.

The future researchers will be able to use this study as guide in conducting similar researches. They will also be able to use the action plan as their guide in formulating their plans.

2. 2. Method of Research

2.1 Research Design

This research is a descriptive type mostly using the qualitative approach. This type of research according to Calmorin (2007) involves the collection of data to answer questions regarding the present condition of the research focus. In this study, the livelihood condition and needs of a community at the countryside of the Philippines known as Sitio Malanas are presented and analyzed.

2.2 Sources of Data

The primary data for this study on livelihood situation and needs are from the 35 members of Sitio Malanas Women's Association (SMWA) and Barangay Council of Sitio Malanas, Lettac Sur, Santol, La Union. A focused-group discussion (Appendix A) was held on September 19, 2015 at the Day Care Center of Sitio Malanas. It was attended by 35 members of SMWA including the Barangay Council officers, four (4) from the Faculty of Business Administration, two (2) Extension Services Office representatives, and 11 students.

2.3 Instrumentation and Procedures

A researcher-made questionnaire was used to gather data from the participants. It was based on a standard questionnaire being used by the Office of Research Management of Saint Louis College, City of San Fernando, La Union, Philippines. The suggestions of the Researcher Officer and the Program Head for Business Administration were sought vis-à-vis the questionnaire. It was suggested that the detailed economic condition questions be excluded and just include those that are relevant to the livelihood needs of the community. However, the questionnaire was not actually floated, instead it was used as an interview guide in the focus group discussion with the community folks headed by the Barangay Council. Creswell (2007) said that interview guides are important to structure the dialogue and ensure addressing of critical topics. Furthermore, this was done in order for the questions structured using the English language to be translated into the language of the community which was called 'Iloco.'

Coordination with the local government unit of Santol, La Union was done by the SLC Extension Services Office. Then the Administrative Officer of the municipality accompanied the school representatives to the Barangay Council and members of Sitio Malanas Women's Association.

The gathering of data was facilitated by the CCSA faculty members with the assistance of the students. The 35 participants were convened at the Day Care Center of the said community. Collation and analysis of the gathered data followed.

2.4 Data Analysis

Most of the responses of the participants in the focused group discussion were counted and converted to percentage as seen in the discussion of the findings.

3. Findings and Discussion

This chapter presents the findings and discussion on the livelihood situation, livelihood needs, and proposed actions for the improvement of the community known as Sitio Malanas, Lettac Sur, Santol La Union, Philippines.

3.1 Livelihood Situation

3.1.1 Livelihood Activities

The main livelihood activities of the participants in the focus group discussion held in September 2015 with Sitio Malanas Women's Association were farming, selling agricultural products, and merchandizing. The participants said that they are all engaged in planting and selling agricultural products. They usually plant and sell sweet potato and rice. The excess vegetables that they produce are also sold.

They usually sell their agricultural products in the Green Market of Barangay Poblacion, Santol, La Union. It is where ambulant vendors including the sellers of Sitio Malanas, who are members of Santol Ambulant Vendors Association sell their produce.

Some participants revealed that they are also engaged in merchandizing. They said that there only three (3) variety stores in the place catering to 104 households with an average of 3 children per household. The store owners are Teresita Orte, Francis Balino, and Rosalie Apilado. They sell convenience goods like shampoos, soap (bath and detergent), canned goods, junk foods, breads, beverages, and others. For their other needs, the participants still have to go to Barangay Poblacion, which is around 20 minutes ride, in order to buy other necessities not available in the existing variety stores. They also go to Balaoan town proper, which is around 45 minutes ride, for their other needs.

Agricultural Products. They sell two major types of crops – sweet potato and rice. They produce white, yellow, and violet sweet potato at a price ranging from P20-P30 per bundle or "limon." Rice production is also of different variety, such as white (plain), glutinous (sticky) and husked rice (brown) at P180 per can (standard size can for than a kilo). They also plant mungo, cabbage, string beans, pechay, eggplant, squash, and also vegetables for "Pinakbet and "Dinengdeng." The vegetables are usually produced for their own consumption. However, excess vegetables are also sold either to their neighbors or to the market. They have fruit bearing trees like mango, in which the fruits are seasonally produced. They also sell the excess fruits in the market.

Bread Products. One of the merchandizes sold in the three variety stores is bread. They sell local assorted breads, which are usually cookies packed and sold at P5.00 each. They buy breads from Barangay Poblacion of Santol, Municipality of Balaoan, and City of San Fernando, La Union. Barangay Poblacion has a

public market named Green Market where they can buy already packed cookies and other goods. They also buy at the market place of the Municipality of Balaoan, which is at the western side of La Union and is adjacent to the Municipality of Santol. In the City of San Fernando (an hour and thirty minutes away from Sitio Malanas), the variety store owners usually buy breads like loaf bread and “pandesal” from Danish Baker, which is located at the heart of the City.

3.1.2 Problems Related to Livelihood Activities

The participants revealed the difficulties they encountered in their livelihood activities, in which one of them was on transporting their agricultural products. They then encountered the road or farm-to-market problem. This is because of the nature of their place which is mountainous. They plant their crops at the slope of the mountain; while the flattened side provided for the one-lane road. The schedule of the main transportation means called “jeepney” is only twice a day (morning and afternoon). The participants said that others made use of big motorcycle to be able to travel anytime. So, when it is rainy season, transportation becomes very difficult.

Another problem related to livelihood was low sales or marketing. Aside from the limited market or few buyers, the products are underpriced. This can be explained by the factors affecting demand and supply sides like the market size, distribution, and transportation costs (Bonanno, 2012). Further, for buyers to buy more goods, price has to be lowered when supply is more than demand. Moreover, because participants produce more agricultural products, the tendency was to give in to the request of the buyers for a lower price, notwithstanding the fact that transportation is difficult the sellers would like their products to be sold right away in big volume. So, even if the price being bargained is lower, there was no choice but to sell their products especially when the sellers are about to go back home.

3.3 Livelihood Needs

Based on the encountered problems related to livelihood activities, the participants were also asked on their particular livelihood needs. Various needs were identified, such as improve sales or marketing, another livelihood program, and seminar-workshop or training.

Some of the participants said that they have to improve on marketing to be able to sell more. However, one participant said that the root cause of the problem is not the supply of goods but the demand for goods due to limited market or buyers. He accepted that they may have adopted a good marketing strategy, but if there are no buyers, still the low sales problem would be there.

Another proposed for another livelihood program. The participants wanted an added or a honed skill like cooking their agricultural products. They wished to also sell processed goods, so that excess unprocessed agricultural products will not be sold anymore at a lower price due to the absence of choices for their business endeavors.

The last specific need was expressed by the participants on the provision of seminar-workshop or training related to business activities. They wanted to have additional and even enhanced skills in cooking. The school representatives gave them choices on seminar-workshops like cooking, marketing, operations, and financial management in accordance with the expertise of the Faculty of Business Administration particularly those that can be extended by the Hotel and Restaurant Management Department.

3.4 Proposed Livelihood Improvement

Four choices were suggested by the participants and the school representatives for the improvement of the livelihood situation, such as cooking, selling or marketing, baking, and planting. Planting was chosen by all of the 35 participants. This is because they wanted to learn the modern methods of farming or planting. However, the Faculty of Business Administration does not have the expertise that can be extended along this field.

Baking was chosen by 23 or 66% of the participants as the next best livelihood program. The participants wanted to learn the skill of baking and pastry production. This is because only few of them know how to bake. They wish the school representatives to teach them baking and pastry production.

Cooking as another livelihood program was chosen by 22 or 63% of the participants. The participants wanted their cooking skill to be enhanced. They also wanted to learn new cooking techniques and new foods to cook especially using their agricultural products.

Selling or marketing as another livelihood program was the least chosen by the participants. This is because the low sales problem was already identified as a livelihood problem and not an additional livelihood solution.

Seminar-Workshop or Training. The school representatives proposed choices for the seminar-workshop or training for the participant. The choices given were: accounting, bookkeeping, financial management, marketing management, tour guiding, personality development, housekeeping, baking and pastry production, cookery, and others.

Most of the participants or 66% wanted to have baking and pastry production for their training. The participants were aware that SLC representatives coming from the Hotel and Restaurant Management

Department of CCSA can extend baking and pastry production training to them. However, the participants do not have the necessary baking tools and equipment. The other topics related to business like accounting and bookkeeping, marketing management, financial management, and others can be provided by Accountancy and Business Administration Departments.

The participants suggested catering and table-skirting trainings. These trainings can also be provided by the Hotel and Restaurant Management (HRM) Department of CCSA. This is because the department has courses on Catering and Applied Arts where table-skirting is a part of the activities.

Schedule of Seminar-workshop or Training. The participants were also asked on the most convenient time for the seminar-workshops or training. Likewise, the SLC representatives were also asked on their availability. Both faculty and participants chose the weekend as their availability. A consensus was arrived at that Saturday is the most appropriate day for such activity. This is because the faculty members of HRM, Accountancy, and Business Administration departments do not have classes on Saturdays except for those enrolled in their graduate studies.

4. Findings, Conclusion, and Recommendation

This study assessed the livelihood needs of a countryside in the Philippines identified as Sitio Malanas, Lettac Sur, Santol, La Union. Specifically, it determined its livelihood situation and needs using focused group discussions with the community folks and their local government officials.

4.1 Findings

It was found that the residents of the community were engaged in farming or planting, selling or marketing of agricultural products of mostly sweet potato and rice, and merchandizing with three variety stores where bread products were purchased from nearby barangays and adjacent towns. They encountered livelihood problems mostly related to marketing and transportation.

The community wanted additional livelihood program, to improve sales or marketing, and be provided with seminar-workshops or trainings on baking, cookery, catering table skirting and other business-related activities. Activities were proposed as initiatives of the community and the school extending its community services to improve the livelihood situation of the community.

4.2 Conclusion

The study is based on the economic situation of the countryside of the Philippines, which can represent the condition of the rural areas in other countries of similar characteristics particularly in Asia. The rural community like Sitio Malanas, Santol, La Union is basically an agricultural area where the source of living mainly comes from their agricultural produce. Root crops like sweet potato, as well as rice, corn, and fruits can be used as ingredients of processed food products that can be sold to augment the income of the community. The findings show that there is a need for a program to improve the livelihood needs of the community.

The school that engages in extension services can make use of its programs or courses in cooperation with its Faculty of Business Administration to maximize the use of its human resources to conduct not only outreach programs doing dole out activities but also extension programs that can assist the community folks answer their livelihood needs and, therefore, improve and sustain their economic condition.

4.3 Recommendation

The proposed livelihood improvement should be implemented by the school in cooperation with the local government officials of the community; the implementation of the proposed improvement plan should be monitored not only by the school but also by the local government of the community; and another study should be conducted in the countryside of the Philippines and also in other countries regarding their livelihood needs.

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