Identifying Barriers and Their Impact on Community Empowerment through Skills Training and Entrepreneurial Mindset for Poverty Alleviation

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to assess the barriers to community empowerment through skills training and developing an entrepreneurial mindset from creating sustainable business opportunities in Barangay Tejero, downtown Cebu City, to mitigate poverty. Poverty remains a pervasive issue globally, hindering opportunities, threatening futures, and impacting the lives of families trapped in its cycle. The United Nations has prioritized eradicating poverty within its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030, addressing economic well-being, environmental protection, and societal development. Despite these global efforts, many local communities face significant barriers to accessing the resources and opportunities needed for economic empowerment. This study uses descriptive statistics from surveys, observations, and interviews of the identified beneficiaries. Based on the findings, the conflict between household duties and training involvement creates unfairness, especially for women and those from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, potentially leading to further marginalization and limited prospects for advancement and there is a need for collaboration between national organizations, non-governmental entities, and industry partners to address these barriers. To address these barriers, setting clear learning objectives and providing free customized training on flexible schedules should be taken into consideration before conducting the community extension work.

Keywords: Barriers, Skills training, community empowerment, entrepreneurship, poverty

INTRODUCTION

Communities achieving control over the factors impacting their lives is known as community empowerment. However, numerous barriers may hinder communities from achieving true empowerment. Identifying these barriers is crucial as it allows stakeholders to develop targeted strategies to address specific challenges and promote sustainable development.

The primary aim of recognizing barriers is to enhance community engagement. Barriers such as poverty, social isolation, limited resources, and low education levels may make it challenging for people to actively participate in decision-making processes (Cornwall, 2016). Poverty remains a widespread issue globally, affecting numerous communities. It demands immediate and continuous attention as it continues to crush aspirations, imperil futures, and squander the lives of families trapped in its cycle. In response, the United Nations (UN) has prioritized the eradication of poverty in its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda. The UN's 2030 Agenda addresses various global issues related to well-being, economic prosperity, and environmental conservation, with poverty alleviation being a key focus of these initiatives (Pradhan, 2017).

Universities have a critical role in addressing poverty as part of their social responsibility, and they can achieve this through community extension programs and services. These efforts are typically aligned with the SDGs and aim to bring about long-term, sustainable improvements, especially in sectors like tourism, which can contribute to community development and economic growth. Community initiatives need to be inclusive of marginalized groups to effectively meet the diverse needs of the population. Power imbalances within and outside communities can hinder empowerment and lead to unequal distribution of resources and benefits. Recognizing and addressing these power dynamics can help communities attain more equitable outcomes.

Policymakers and community leaders should understand the barriers to develop appropriate responses. Interventions that fail to consider the political, social, and economic obstacles to empowerment are less likely to succeed. Programs tailored to address real-world community issues are more likely to be effective, as they are rooted in the actual challenges faced by the people they aim to assist.

Recognizing and addressing obstacles to community empowerment is essential for promoting equitable participation, resolving power disparities, developing relevant solutions, and ensuring accountability in empowerment programs. Addressing power imbalances within and between communities can help establish sustainable paths to empowerment that benefit all community members.

METHODS

This study utilized a descriptive research method as the primary tool for identifying the barriers and their impact on community empowerment. According to Pubrica (2023), and Researcher. Life (2023), a descriptive research design is a scientific method that involves observing and describing the behavior of a subject without influencing it in any way. This method was valuable because it was based on the premise that problems could be solved and practices improved through observation, analysis, and description.

Strategies of Implementation

This paper stems from the PAKABANA extension project and the research article "On the Way Out Public: Awareness to Mitigate the Impact of Poverty" (Secretaria & Pacubas, 2020), "Community Empowerment by Skills Training and Entrepreneurial Mindset to Mitigate Poverty" (Pacubas, 2022). To address the barriers the extension workers should consider the following:

1. Offering Flexible Scheduling and Timing

- Provide Multiple Training Sessions: Conduct the training at various times of the day, including morning, afternoon, and evening, as well as on weekends. This flexibility allows participants to choose the session that aligns with their schedule and household responsibilities.

- Implement Modular Training: Divide the training into smaller, standalone modules so that participants can attend at their convenience without missing important content. Each module should deliver clear takeaways, ensuring participants still benefit even if they are unable to attend all sessions.

2. Adopting a Blended Learning Approach (Online and Offline)

Implementing a Blended Learning Strategy (Combining Online and Offline)

- Embrace Technology: Provide online training or give participants access to recorded sessions they can watch at their convenience. This is especially advantageous for individuals with unpredictable schedules or those unable to attend in person due to family responsibilities.

- Utilize Mobile Learning Platforms: Consider using mobile-friendly platforms, as many people, particularly in rural or economically disadvantaged areas, may only have access to smartphones. Delivering course materials through mobile apps or social media

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to assess the barriers and their impact on empowering communities to improve their economic conditions through skills training and the entrepreneurial mindset to mitigate the poverty of residents in Barangay Tejero, located in downtown Cebu City. Tejero, formerly known as Villa Gonzalo, is a barangay in an urbanized area of Cebu City. According to the 2020 Census, Tejero had a population of 14,084, representing 1.46% of the total population of the city (philatlas.com). Despite its urban setting, many of Tejero's residents continue to struggle with poverty, unemployment, and limited access to resources.

Identified Barriers to Community Empowerment

Although the residents of Barangay Tejero have shown great interest in acquiring technical skills and business knowledge to improve their economic standing, several barriers hinder their ability to fully benefit from training programs designed to alleviate poverty.

1. **Uncertainty about the Value of the Training**

Residents are skeptical about whether the training will provide practical skills and whether these skills will lead to actual income-generating opportunities.

2. **Concerns about Training Costs**

Many residents are worried about the financial cost of attending training sessions, fearing that fees may exclude them from participating.

3. **Conflicts with Household Responsibilities**

Many beneficiaries, especially women, face conflicts between the training schedule and their household responsibilities, preventing them from attending sessions.

4. **Skepticism about Post-Training Economic Opportunities**

Residents are doubtful that the skills they acquire will lead to sustainable income or improve their quality of life.

5. **Lack of Confidence in Their Abilities**

Some residents lack confidence in their ability to learn new skills or start businesses, fearing failure or difficulty in mastering the content.

6. **Limited Access to Resources Post-Training**

After completing the training, residents may lack the financial resources, tools, or equipment needed to start a business or apply their skills.

Barriers to Community Empowerment
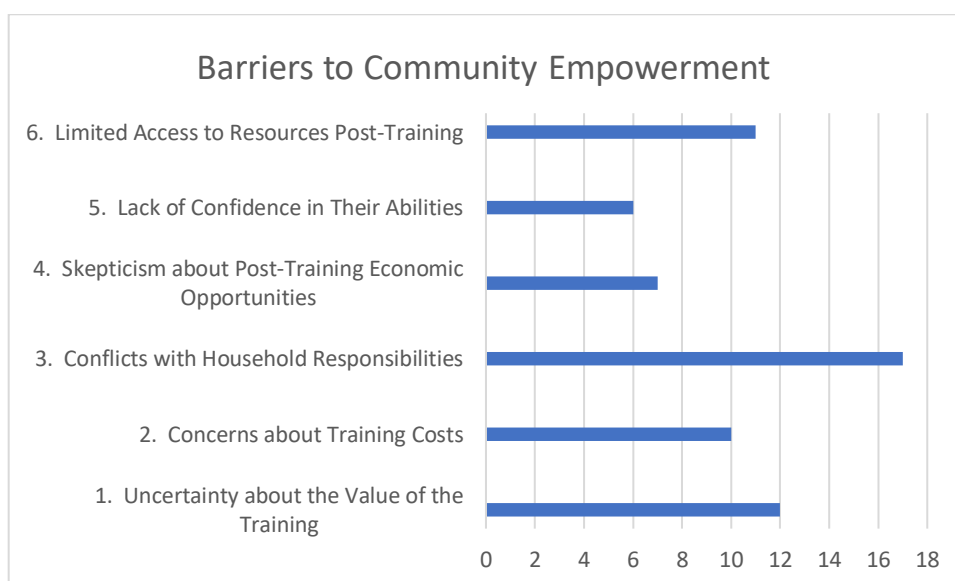
The training program may not achieve its objectives if a significant portion of the target audience cannot participate, resulting in wasted resources and the need for reassessment or restructuring to better address the needs of the intended demographic. The conflict between household duties and training involvement creates unfairness, especially for women and those from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, potentially leading to further marginalization and limited prospects for advancement. According to a study in the Journal of

Gender, Work & Organization (2019), the allocation of time between men and women and its impact on participation in professional development programs was examined, revealing that women, particularly in low- and middle-income households, spend more time on unpaid domestic tasks, reducing their availability for career-focused learning opportunities. The results indicate that if training programs do not take into account the family and caregiving duties of individuals, especially women, the initiative might struggle to appeal to and keep its intended participants. Potential solutions may involve adjusting training timetables to be more flexible, providing assistance with childcare, or incorporating training into community environments to accommodate the multiple responsibilities of participants.

CONCLUSION

Addressing these barriers is critical to the success of poverty alleviation efforts in Barangay Tejero. By providing targeted support, flexible training programs, and resources, the community can empower its residents to break the cycle of poverty. Collaboration between universities, corporations, NGOs, and government agencies will be essential to overcoming these obstacles and fostering long-term economic and social progress. Ultimately, these initiatives will contribute to the broader goals of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Agenda, helping to build a more equitable and prosperous future for all.

RECOMMENDATIONS

These barriers greatly impacted the skills training program which can significantly enhance community empowerment, ensuring that participants not only gain skills but also have the means and support to apply them effectively in their daily lives, leading to poverty alleviation. Identified below are highly recommended.

Clear Learning Objectives: Before the training starts, outline the specific skills and competencies they will gain, demonstrating how these are aligned with local business opportunities or job markets.

Free or Subsidized Training: Partner with local governments, NGOs, or private companies to offer the training for free or at a subsidized rate to ensure that financial barriers do not prevent participation.

Customized Training Programs: Tailor training content to match the current skill levels and needs of the beneficiaries. Start with foundational skills and gradually progress to more complex topics.

Flexible Training Schedules: Offer flexible training sessions, such as evening or weekend classes, to accommodate participants' household duties.

Success Stories: Share real-life case studies or testimonials from past participants who have successfully applied their skills and improved their livelihoods.

Post-Training Support: Provide mentorship or follow-up programs that assist participants in applying their skills in real-world settings, helping them turn the knowledge gained into income-generating activities.

Job Placement or Business Startup Assistance: Partner with local businesses or microfinance institutions to provide graduates with access to job opportunities or resources (such as seed funding or equipment) for starting their ventures.

Market Linkages: Facilitate connections between participants and local or regional markets to help them sell their products or services. Training should include components on marketing, business networking, and customer acquisition.

Access to Microfinance and Grants: Work with financial institutions or development organizations to provide low-interest loans, grants, or microfinance options to participants who wish to start small businesses.

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