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FEATURE

Narrowing the Threat of Poverty Through Entrepreneurial Empowerment: The Experience of Rural Women Entrepreneurs

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Abstract. *Poverty is a world-wide social problem which has always threatened human life. It is structural or man-made; and as such, its threatening effect can be mitigated through empowerment efforts. Anchored on the theories of capacity approach, reinforcement, path-goal leadership, learned needs, and self-determination, this case study explored the consequences of the entrepreneurial empowerment interventions of government and non-government agencies, which worked in synergy to provide capability trainings, materials, and technical support to rural women entrepreneurs. Based on the information generated from in-depth interviews as triangulated using available data, it was disclosed that the multifarious entrepreneurial empowerment activities improved the economic and social life of the women entrepreneurs. The activities enhanced their entrepreneurial spirit and boosted their self-confidence to mingle with people. Additional interventions such as availability of process-specific technology, seed money, entrepreneurial will, and sustained managerial focus were identified to maintain and sustain entrepreneurial undertakings.*

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, rural women empowerment, capacity approach, poverty mitigation, extension education, qualitative research, case study, Eastern Samar, Philippines.

Introduction

Poverty mitigation has always been a development agenda of numerous service-oriented agencies working as development conduit. Efforts of such agencies along the development agenda are undertaken via the extension modality allowed by the agency. Such efforts are being pushed through in the context of social entrepreneurship. Yuzon (2009) emphasized that the investment for the development of human capital can be made possible with the support of a generous donor. Yuzon (2009) further emphasized that investment in human capital is worthwhile because it can increase the earning capacity of a person.

Entrepreneurial empowerment is a poverty-mitigating strategy, which is an important component in economic development. Tolentino (2009) averred that it is necessary to develop the small enterprises and their human capital for the rapid growth of the economy. He further averred that it is necessary for the government to provide accelerated support to small enterprises so that they will be capacitated to generate employment in the community. Sibal (2009) opined that an enterprise has to pursue its sociopolitical contributions to the society in terms of reducing unemployment, decreasing pollution, and other contributions on top of the monetary benefits.

With the intention to lift up the poor from poverty, a pool of service-oriented government and non-government agencies working within the province of Eastern Samar, Philippines dovetailed its physical and mental efforts and material resources to assist the members of the Eastern Samar Entre-Pinoy Workers Association (ESEP) in boosting their entrepreneurial capacity. ESEP, whose majority membership comprises women, is located in Barangay Napara-an, Salcedo, Eastern Samar, Philippines. It is a people's organization focused on the production, processing, and marketing of the farm products of the members. As documented in the ESEP Milestone (n.d.), the association was organized in October 18, 2003 with a start-up capital of Php800 (approximately \$16) collected from its initial members. Its first economic activity was to resolve the issue on low farm soil fertility by providing local farmers with access to organic fertilizers. Women members engaged in catering services during the trainings, conferences, and other occasions partnered by ESEP. In January 31, 2009, ESEP was registered with the Department of Labor and Employment. At this juncture, the association focused on resource mobilization and networking. After a couple of years, it became a beneficiary of the Rural Enterprise Promotion Program of the Department of Trade and Industry, and the members of the association were provided with business development training on food processing with kitchen utensils as training package component. In October 2011, the association focused on building a community processing center and was fortunate to receive the small grants program of the German embassy in Manila with counterpart from Salcedo local government unit and ESEP members. The association utilized the processing center as leverage to realize the following: enhanced common service facility funded by the Department of Agrarian Reform-Village Level Processing Center

Enhancement Project, community-based participatory action research site of the Department of Agriculture, acquisition of technical assistance and equipment for cassava processing from the Department of Science and Technology, and unification of convergence group from government agencies. After a couple of years of rehabilitating the crop and animal livelihood including housing and other facilities devastated by super typhoon Haiyan on November 8, 2013 with recovery and rehabilitation assistance from both government and non-government donors, ESEP members collaboratively took the initiative to restore their entrepreneurial activities. This time, the association received a heavy-duty tractor, farm tools, and facilities for vermiculture and liquid fertilizer production from various donors. All the assets of the association were transformed into community service facilities accessible by the rural farmers, food processors, entrepreneurs, and other sectors. On November 2017, as a registered multi-purpose cooperative, ESEP opened its membership to students as well as graduates of entrepreneurship degrees in preparation for business expansion. To attain its vision as a globally-competitive, sustainable, and resilient entrepreneurs' cooperative, it has launched the ESEP@workprogram to respond to the call of the members to cater the need for improved small farm productivity and livelihood and to secure and stabilize the members' households and the community. ESEP is in partnership with service-oriented agencies like the barangay local government unit, Department of Trade and Industry-Rural Micro-Enterprise Promotion Program, Department of Science and Technology, and Eastern Samar State University-Salcedo Campus defined through a memorandum of understanding duly signed by respective heads and acknowledged by a notary public (The ESEP Milestone, n.d.).

The idea behind the collective support of the government and non-government agencies by way of giving material resources, technical assistance, and entrepreneurial empowerment is to help the poor help themselves. A synergy of efforts and use of resources could be a necessity in building the entrepreneurial capability of the ESEP members who are poor farmers and housewives. The entrepreneurial empowerment intervention could assure the ESEP members that their products and services being offered for sale are demanded and patronized by customers. According to the human development legend Amartya Sen (as cited in Todaro & Smith, 2015), empowerment is building the capacity of a person to do with the things that he or she possesses or controls. It is a capacity to function which is a freedom of choice central to human well-being with the freedom to do and become. With the capacity to function and the freedom of choice of enterprise among ESEP members, this study revolved around the premise that social and economic transformations can be achieved by the same ESEP members and their families. The end goal of which is to narrow the threat of poverty and free them from the poverty trap.

Review of Literature

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The desire to alleviate the poor from the conditions dictated by poverty puts empowerment activities as a priority concern. Empowerment is capacity building. According to Lazo (1995), empowerment is enablement by changing the person, changing structures, replacing conventional institutions and/or rearranging the environment. It means building aspirations, hopes, and expectations, which keep the poor person going.

Poverty Issues and the Need for Entrepreneurial Empowerment

Poverty has always been identified and associated with low socio-economic status (Machica & Machica, 2017). It is a product of the absence of money to buy goods and services to satisfy basic needs, which also means deficiency in resources that significantly hampers participation in activities and relationships that give life its meaning. Extreme poverty “results to malnutrition, illiteracy, disease, mendicancy, squalid surroundings, high infant mortality, and low life expectancy” (Zulueta & Liwag, 2001, p. 63). Zulueta and Liwag (2001) further noted that poverty has devastating effects on families, often forcing parents to abandon their children and seek employment in other countries, unmindful of its social costs. Teodosio (2010) contended that “poverty diminishes the quality of life and erodes the legitimacy of democratic institutions” (p. 106). Coates (2011) averred that poverty is not just a choice that the poor themselves are called to make. Policymakers are also involved in creating poverty. In general, poverty is structural or man-made. It is a result of how people vote, who legislates, and how leaders govern. People can reset poverty in their own communities through organized economic activities that create employment with improved wages or salary (Coates, 2011).

Martin and Osberg (as cited in Cortez, 2016) connected social responsibility or social entrepreneurship to unjust situations in the society. They explained that the social entrepreneur usually recognizes socio-economic problems such as poor people being marginalized and excluded, inequalities due to lack of educational opportunities, health problems, and environmental problems, among others. Thus, social responsibility “is the approach that an organization takes in balancing its responsibilities toward different stakeholders when making legal, economic, ethical, and social decisions” (Cortez, 2016, p. 181). Concepcion (2012) contended that the purpose of social responsibility or social entrepreneurship is to help the poor and those who are victimized by the unjust social and economic order; it is doing something positive in order to effect change in the society; and it is giving hope to the people who are at the bottom status of the society.

Dungog-Cuizon (2014) disclosed that as far as social responsibility is concerned, the Ramon Aboitiz Foundation, Inc. takes pride in forging holistic development programs and projects which address multiple issues and concerns and aid groups in formulating solutions which are consensus-based, thereby moving toward empowerment. Medalla (2018) likewise disclosed that mentoring

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as a way of training for entrepreneurial skills development could promote the sense of value of a person and that social enterprise is a viable ethical mechanism for the inclusion of marginalized people such as the persons with disability in the economy leading to their empowerment. Pope Francis (as cited in Knights of Columbus, 2014) emphasized that alleviating someone from poverty is a great task, and he clarified that the measure of the greatness of a society or anyone is found in the way it treats those most in need or those who have nothing apart from poverty.

Entrepreneurial Empowerment and Poverty Mitigation

Entrepreneurial activity or entrepreneurship is any economic activity related to income-generation. Wilson (as cited in Barringer & Ireland, 2013) considers entrepreneurship as transforming a business idea into a business venture. The entrepreneur scam and choose among business opportunities and invest or operate a viable business. Todaro and Smith (2015) contended that entrepreneurship allows income and wealth accumulation that will enable a person to increase the range of human choice and to express this human freedom in the form of personal security and equality of opportunity. Todaro and Smith (2015) further contended that an entrepreneur or person with accumulated income or wealth will “gain greater control over nature and the physical environment, example through the production of food, clothing, and shelter, than those who are poor or without wealth” (p. 23).

Medina (2014) posits that in order to achieve success in mitigating poverty via entrepreneurship, there is a need to efficiently and effectively utilize various economic resources like human resources, natural resources, capital formation, and technology, and this happens when entrepreneurship is performed well by the players. Medina (2014) further posits that the abundance of natural resources like fertile land, minerals, good fuels, and favorable climate are plus factors but are not guarantees for positive economic growth. Barringer and Ireland (2013) consider assembling and then integrating all the resources needed to propel a profitable entrepreneurial undertaking. There is a need therefore for entrepreneurs to perform the function of harnessing the potentials of any or all of the various resources, determining the right quantity of resources needed, and applying the resources at the right time.

Entrepreneurship activities are open to any individual or group of individuals who is visionary, motivated, and risk-taker (Barringer & Ireland, 2013). Entrepreneurship, according to Mariotti and Glackin (2016), generates “sustained value and entrepreneurs seek opportunities that they envision as generators of incremental income or wealth” (p. 28). Mariotti and Glackin (2016) emphasized that viability is crucial for both short-term and long-term goals of any entrepreneurial undertaking and any activity of the enterprise should consider the requirement of viability in order to attain and sustain income-generation. Expectedly, poverty will be mitigated in households through the generation of sustained income from an entrepreneurial undertaking.

Women's Entrepreneurial Empowerment

Empowerment is being undertaken to address a developmental issue or concern. As regards women empowerment, to empower the women means to empower the family. Todaro and Smith (2015) averred that to make the biggest impact on development, the society must empower and invest in its women as they play the central role in development because more than their child-rearing and nurturing roles, they are expected to break the cycle of poverty transmission from generation to generation. Todaro and Smith (2015) further averred that the involvement of women in women-centered poverty strategies cannot be left as an afterthought but as first thought so that strategies will become effective and consistent as basis for action when addressing poverty.

Women are involved in the development transformation of the society. Teodosio (2010) contended that women who help in delivering the development gain more effectively and equitably, they are instrumental in crafting policies and strategies for numerous entrepreneurial undertakings, and they take the lead in pushing several cooperative entrepreneurial ventures. It is always expected that entrepreneurial empowerment efforts will bring something positive and beneficial to the society; thus, Molyneaux (2011) associated empowerment with "a personal journey that is based on an inner transformation of the self that in turn extend towards other aspects of life" (p. 63).

A women-specific entrepreneurial empowerment concern is being addressed by Ramon Aboitiz Foundation, Inc., a non-government organization in the Philippines. This foundation, according to Dungog-Cuizon (2014), gives priority on micro-financing to the marginalized women sector. Identified recipients avail of low-interest and collateral-free loans and attend seminars and fora to aid them in establishing and managing micro, small, and medium enterprises with the end goal of self-employment and financial independence.

Values and Empowerment

Values are internalized standards and rules of a culture that govern a person's thoughts, feelings, and actions (Mercado, 2009). Will (2005) emphasized the necessity of attitude and values as factors in attaining something valuable in life as these factors govern and dictate accomplishment. Will (2005) further emphasized that the values a person possesses such as physical values; social values or ability to situate and associate; and psychological values like patience, honesty, and humility are very important factors in attaining an empowerment goal. Thus, entrepreneurial empowerment shall be dependent upon the aforesaid values. The formation of values in life, according to Guilbert (2005), is founded on the philosophy which establishes culture and consequently guides the ethical, moral, and rational conduct of a person in accord with human standards and heritage.

Empowerment is an expression of social responsibility, and the culture of empowering other people is expressed by people with values appropriate for empowerment. In particular, the sense of responsibility, according to Mercado (2009), has many facets: accountability, which means looking after others; concern, which means worrying over something or someone; and solicitude or commitment, which means going through the trouble or pain of caring for others. In general, an entrepreneurial empowerment advocate possesses the value of a social entrepreneur who is driven by a passion to deliver positive outcome to his or her fellowmen and society. The advocate needs transformation focus to be attended to. More than a concern for personal welfare, the advocate is concerned with improving the condition of the community and the main criterion of success is a mission-related impact of positive change, inclusive growth, social transformation and not just the criterion of wealth or financial impact (Cortez, 2016; Dungog-Cuizon, 2014). The sustained success of the Bangladesh Grameen Bank founded by Muhammad Yunus in 1976; the secret of the success of Ashoka Foundation, a global movement and community of entrepreneurs which was established in 1980 by William Drayton; and the success of *Gawad Kalinga* (to give care) in building and awarding shelters to the poor and deserving Filipinos were traced to empowerment that was implemented with correct mixture of values (Cortez, 2016).

Medina (2014) identified self-confidence as one very important personal characteristic or value required for successful entrepreneurship. Accordingly, an entrepreneur cannot achieve much without sufficient confidence. In any undertaking, an entrepreneur's belief in his or her ability leads him or her to actual performance and eventual success. With self-confidence, the entrepreneur does his or her job without hesitation.

Theoretical Framework

This study is founded on five theories: capability approach, reinforcement theory of motivation, path-goal leadership theory, learned needs theory, and theory of self-determination. The capability approach of the human development legend Amartya Sen (Todaro & Smith, 2015) holds that the capability of a person is a necessity for human welfare and freedom. The concept behind Sen's capability to function refers to what a person does or can do with the things that he or she possesses or controls which is actually a freedom of choice central to human well-being. For a member of an association like the ESEP, this capability to function means being empowered or having the capacity to perform well in the association with the freedom to choose what to do and become.

The reinforcement theory of motivation (Stoner, Freeman, & Gilbert, 2000) emphasizes that the behavior of a person is a function of its consequences. This theory is based on the law of effect. It assumes that empowerment behavior with positive result will be repeated and those with negative effect will never be repeated.

Another theory on which this study was anchored is the path-goal leadership theory (House & Mitchell, 1975) which contends that the behavior of the leader who creates satisfaction causes the motivation of the subordinates. It is presupposed in the study that those in-charge in conducting entrepreneurial empowerment must motivate the attendees or participants by emphasizing the relationship between the attendees' own needs and the organization's goal and facilitating the direction that attendees have to take to fulfill their own needs as well as the organization's needs.

McClelland (1961), in his learned needs theory, categorized the needs of a person into three: (a) need for achievement, (b) need for affiliation, (c) and need for power. These needs serve as basis for behavior and motivation. Deduced from the theory that it is from any of these needs that a member of an organization, ESEP for one, will take reference as motivator in setting and achieving a goal in life.

The goal attainment of a member of an organization is likewise held in the theory of self-determination of Deci and Ryan (as cited in Tran, 2014). Deci and Ryan (as cited in Tran, 2014) contended that a person must control one's life, relate with the conditions around, and establish bonds and ties. The kind of motivation for the fulfillment of one's goal or needs can either be internal or external to the self that initiates, presses, or coerces one's action. If the ESEP member has a high internal perceived locus of causality, he or she feels to be the initiator and sustainer of his or her own actions and is self-determined because his or her behavior stems from personal choices or priority. On the other hand, when the ESEP member has an external perceived locus of causality, he or she considers behavior as being controlled by some external event, person, or force. It is thus interesting to discover this perceived locus of causality in relation to achieving the goals and priorities of the ESEP association members.

The purpose of this case study was to explore the consequences of the entrepreneurial empowerment interventions of the different agencies that worked in synergy to provide capacities, materials, and technical support to ESEP. The results of the study may serve as additional information to the existing body of knowledge on entrepreneurship, capacity building, extension education, rural women empowerment, and poverty mitigation.

Specifically, the study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the unforgettable experiences of the women-members of ESEP brought about by poverty?
2. What does entrepreneurial empowerment mean to the women ESEP members?
3. How adequate are the entrepreneurial empowerment interventions shared by the service-oriented government and non-government agencies?

4. What are the socio-economic transformations evident among the women ESEP members as a result of the entrepreneurial empowerment interventions?
5. What is the present need and appropriate intervention for ESEP?

Methodology

To have an in-depth exploration of the topic, qualitative research was preferred using case study. The participants provided the firsthand data for the study. Validation or cross-checking of the participants' data and analysis of secondary information were made to ascertain rigor. Researcher's observation and insights of extension workers were incorporated whenever appropriate for a triangulated presentation of data (Creswell, 2009) and results of the study. The methodology includes the research design, researcher's reflexivity, research instrument, and sampling and research setting. It likewise includes data collection, ethical consideration, and data analysis.

Research Design

Case study was the research design utilized to explore necessary data needed for the study. Case study is an approach to qualitative research that facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources. It ensures that the issue is not explored through one lens but rather a variety of lenses which allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood. (Baxter & Jack, 2008 p. 544)

It is an in-depth examination of a particular case or several cases (Lichtman, as cited in Wa-Mbaleka, 2016). A case study illustrates a problem and indicates a means for solving a problem (American Psychological Association, 2010).

Researcher's Reflexivity

We are teachers performing the triple function of instruction, research, and extension. We engage in community immersion activities and we are familiar with the situation of the rural women in our community. Our personal involvement in the extension activities of our university enhanced the perspective of this research and strengthened the giving of voice to the responses of the participants and the critical analysis of factual information for the study.

Research Instrument

The study utilized a researcher-made semi-structured interview guide which was validated by the research technical working group of the university. This interview guide written in English was composed of 13 open-ended questions and nine close-ended questions on the personal information of the research participants. A test-run of the interview guide (Wa-Mbaleka, 2016) was made with a member of another association existing in the locality. It ascertained whether or not the items in the interview guide were clearly understood and answered by the interviewees to ensure that once the instrument was used, it could gather the needed data for the study. Facial expression, reactions, and other important observations from the participants resulting from the interview (Wa-Mbaleka, 2016) were noted as inputs for the discussion of results.

Sampling and Research Setting

The study focused on women entrepreneurial empowerment. The selection of the research participants was purposive considering that the study opted to determine the consequence of empowerment on poverty mitigation. Based on the selection criteria, the earlier batch of women members of ESEP with more than five years of membership were qualified and were selected to be the participants of the study. Other women entrepreneurs representing the management of the association were also selected as participants. The officers of ESEP helped in the identification and selection of the eight research participants.

Data Collection and Ethical Consideration

In order to collect data from the target participants, we solicited first the approval of the research technical working group of the university. A letter-request to conduct the interview with the target participants was solicited from the chairperson of ESEP. The approval of the participants for a face-to-face interview or their participation in the study was recorded through a mobile phone. Their informed consent was also documented. With the use of the interview guide, the conduct of the personal interview was in the Waray language or the native tongue of the participants. The use of the native tongue created a casual or ordinary mode of conversation. Asking of probing questions was made to establish certainty of information. The data elicited from the interview were saved in a mobile phone with due permission from the participants. To maintain confidentiality, the participants were coded as either Participant 1, Participant 2, up to Participant 8.

Data Analysis

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The analysis of data was done immediately after its verbatim transcription. Data were transcribed to English to fit the need for the study. In vivo coding (Saldaña, 2015) was adopted to keep the data in the participants' own language. The data in sentence codes were linked to categories. The themes were generated based on an analytic reflection of the codes and categories (Saldaña, 2015). All data were analyzed in conjunction with the presentation of the answers to the research questions and with the organization of information significant in defining the conclusion and recommendations.

Results and Discussion

The information in the results and discussion were derived primarily from the responses given by the research participants during our in-depth interview with them. These information aimed to provide a categorical perspective on empowering rural women. The information present the personal responses of the participants and other data collected for the study, constellated and interpreted through critical analysis and reflections.

Demographic Profile of the Participants

Almost all participants were officers of the association and almost all of them were married. The oldest was 54 years old and the youngest was 24 years of age. Their average number of dependents including their children was three. The approximate monthly income of the participants ranges from Php1,000.00 to Php23,000.00. Majority of them were self-employed: 1 was engaged in online business, 1 had a sari-sari or mini store, and 4 were engaged in food processing as their source of living. One participant was temporarily employed in a government office and one was permanently employed as teacher. Regardless of the source of living, all of them had attendance in entrepreneurial empowerment activities for at least five times. The trainings offered to the participants were skills training, leadership training, financial management, processing, networking and advocacy, bookkeeping, food safety, business planning, values formation, entrepreneurship, and orientation on food and drug authority.

Table 1.

The Demographic Profile of the Participants

Participant's name (optional)	Age	Civil status	No. of children	No. of dependents	Main source of living	Approximate monthly income	Role/ position in the association	No. of entrepreneurial empowerment trainings attended
P ₁	54 years old	Married	4	5	Self-employed food processor	Php 2,500	Member, board of directors	5
P ₂	28 years old	Single	0	1	Self-employed food processor	Php 1,000	Secretary	6
P ₃	35 years old	Married	1	2	Sari-sari store	Php 5,000	Treasurer	5
P ₄	36 years old	Married	4	5	Self-employed food processor	Php 10,000	Chairman, board of directors	7
P ₅	27 years old	Married	1	2	Temporary employment in government	Php 10,000	Member, board of directors	7
P ₆	50 years old	Married	2	3	Teaching	Php 23,000	Member	5
P ₇	43 years old	Married	0	1	Self-employed food processor	Php 1,000	Member, board of directors	7
P ₈	24 years old	Single	0	5	Online business	Php 6,000	Book keeper	7

The following are the results of the study. These results are provided with immediate discussion to offer readers with the information that they can reflect upon. Thematic presentation of information is made to relate them with the research questions.

Theme 1. Poverty-Based Unforgettable Experiences

Most experiences of the participants revolved around financial insufficiency resulting in their scanty basic needs. Most of the time, there was limited food for the family, poor access to medical procedure or assistance, poor educational opportunities, and misdirected life that brought depression and added to family turmoil. These experiences are documented as follows:

“I do not have enough money to buy basic needs. I mostly ate porridge with no viand. I experienced emotional anxiety that went to giving in to peer groups engaged in alcoholic drinks, cigarette smoking, and rebellious to parents” (P1).

“My viand is salt and I cannot buy basic necessities or material needs. I only live in a makeshift shanty” (P2).

“There is insufficient food for my growing family, no money for medical treatment, and cannot pay school tuition for my children on time” (P5).

“I am forced to borrow money for the hospitalization of a family member and I cannot send my children to school due to financial problem” (P3).

“Unable to send a member of the family for medical treatment due to lack of money and we cannot provide basic needs due to poverty” (P4).

“No money in times of sickness” (P8).

Thus, it can be noted that the culprit of basic necessities deprivation is poverty. The low socio-economic status of the participants had hindered them from acquiring basic services for education and hospitalization, led them to tolerate scanty household needs, and caused distress in their families. This finding is supported by Zulueta and Liwag (2001), highlighting that poverty is the product of the absence of money to buy goods and services to satisfy basic needs which also means deficiency in resources that significantly hampers participation in activities and relationships that give life its meaning.

This finding resonates among people of low socio-economic status like the participants of the study. Thus, the research participants defined poverty as deprivation and deficiency of basic needs and standard living. This claim of the participants is supported by Teodosio (2010), who emphasized that “poverty diminishes the quality of life and erodes the legitimacy of democratic institutions” (p. 106).

Furthermore, poverty invokes crisis on financial stability. Poverty was the prevailing condition of the participants and this is reinforced by their critical experiences as each of them said, “I have a family that belongs to the low class level in the society. I cannot buy basic needs or other necessities of standard living” (P1). “My income is not enough. With no permanent and sustainable work, we hardly eat three times in a day” (P2). “I can’t buy the things needed by the family—food, shelter, clothing, and education” (P3). “I don’t have permanent source of income” (P4). “I cannot buy enough food, we live in a deficient shelter, and my siblings did not obtain education” (P5). “My siblings cannot go for schooling, we lack food, our house is not conducive to live in, we lack of material things, and my basic needs are not met” (P6). “I feel the scarcity of basic needs, we feel financial crisis, we lack materials things or assets” (P7 & P8).

As the participants expressed their respective unforgettable experiences on poverty, which they encountered in one way or another, it can be deduced that the same participants were aware of their state of poverty and thus may also be aware of ways to get out of this situation. In addition, the participants elaborated the main cause of these undesirable experiences when they defined poverty as follows: “Nothing was left for us after super typhoon Haiyan or Yolanda” (P7). “Poverty brings problems in the family” (P6).

Theme 2. Entrepreneurial Empowerment: The Women Entrepreneurs' Perspective

Entrepreneurial empowerment, according to some research participants, is “adding something.” Others said that it is “learning something” so that it will result to change in their lives. This meaning of entrepreneurial empowerment is evident in their responses, such as the following: “Empowerment is giving a person with strength to become stable in life” (P6). “It gives strength” (P5). “Empowerment is to learn from others and help others learn” (P7). “Empowerment helps or supplements in filling up the gap in a person’s status and perception” (P1). “It is adding more learning, to stabilize, to have good life, and have a better business” (P3). “Empowerment is to teach good ways and to buildup one’s capacity to change into something better” (P2). “It is about product promotion, personnel encouragement, sustainability, to be strengthened, and to be resilient” (P8).

The participants’ perspectives on entrepreneurial empowerment demand its realization because nothing will happen to them. With the entrepreneurial interventions coming from the service-oriented government and non-government organizations working in the community after the onslaught of super typhoon Haiyan or Yolanda, the participants’ entrepreneurial aspiration could be possible. Cortez (2016) and Dungog-Cuizon (2014) support the participants’ contentions with the idea that an empowerment advocate possesses the value of a social entrepreneur who is driven by a passion to deliver positive change to others and to the society in general. Accordingly, more than a concern for personal welfare, the empowerment advocate is concerned with improving the condition of the community and the main criterion of success is a mission-related impact and not just wealth or financial impact.

Being positive towards empowerment intervention, participants were able to attend seminars or trainings. They were able to acquire knowledge and skills needed for entrepreneurship and at the same time change their life perspective, switching on a desire to make their lives better as captured in their reasons. “The trainings enabled me to gain knowledge and skills on food processing that will bring income to the family” (P3). “The lessons from the seminars were added to my learning and it motivated and inspired myself to have a wide perception on business” (P4). “My attendance in the training made me knowledgeable about processing activities and I have to share the knowledge I gained from the training” (P7).

In addition, engagement in empowerment activities had given some participants an opportunity to enhance their social well-being and helped them find these empowerment activities to be fitting in their current enterprise. Thus, the participant said, “The empowerment activities provided the sense of belongingness, enhanced my sense of responsibility, and developed my leadership skills on community servicing” (P8). “It answered my clamor for capability building and it

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made me strong enough to face any responsibility being member of ESEP association” (P5). “I learned about entrepreneurship. I would not be uneducated anymore” (P6). “It gave me the opportunity to grow and to socialize” (P1). “It helped to develop myself to be exposed to others and to experience participation in different business aspects” (P2).

From these findings, it is inferred that entrepreneurial empowerment is a powerful strategy for transformation. It did not only improve the economic status of the participants but also improved their social well-being as evidenced by the fact that the level of their self-confidence became higher. Likewise, their perspective towards entrepreneurship or business management widened, thereby narrowing their current state of poverty.

Theme 3. Adequacy of Entrepreneurial Empowerment

In this research theme, the participants acknowledged the interventions and activities provided by the service-oriented agencies in an attempt to empower them. Nonetheless, they articulated the benefits of the activities. However, not all participants had directly answered whether these interventions and activities were adequate for them. Most of them enumerated the empowerment interventions, to wit:

“The service-oriented agencies provided grants and donations, such as, common service facilities for food processing; labor cost; facilities and equipment for cassava processing; building renovation or improvement with water system and electricity; licensing; and, capability building seminars or trainings” (P5).

“The empowerment intervention was adequate as it gave additional knowledge and encouragement” (P1).

“It was nice. It encouraged and changed my perception, I can use it, and I can help others as well” (P2).

“The intervention was good” (P6).

“Lots of knowledge were given” (P7).

“The intervention was almost excellent. It provided fund, updated or new technologies, leadership trainings, capability building seminars, and market linkages” (P8).

On the other hand, two participants found inadequacy in the empowerment interventions. The interventions were lacking specially the financial aspect as the participant verbally said, “The empowerment intervention was inadequate in terms of financial support” (P4). “We cannot go further to venture on similar business due to lack of capital” (P3).

Analyzing the foregoing transcripts, it can be deduced that the participants obtained plenty of good things or benefits. They were capacitated as they were

exposed to the numerous seminars or trainings offered to them. In fact, the capacity trainings were not only conducted by government agencies but also by the non-government entities which engaged in a recovery response in the community after the onslaught of super typhoon Haiyan or Yolanda. However, not all were satisfied by the empowerment interventions, and this particular finding of the study is braced up by the theory of self-determination (Tran, 2014) and the fact that the result of the empowerment intervention can be strengthened by no less than the self. The self or the ESEP member himself or herself can become self-determined to accept whatever is offered and sustain and manifest his or her behavior as a result of empowerment based on personal choice or priority.

Theme 4. Entrepreneurial Empowerment Transformations

All participants found that the entrepreneurial empowerment activities provided by the government and non-government agencies had transformed them economically. These activities likewise transformed their social condition or situation. These claims were expressed by their accounts:

“The entrepreneurial empowerment trainings provided the avenue for me to be able to mingle with local raw materials producers. It built my self-confidence to socialize with same age level and different age groups” (P1).

“I am not shy anymore, I can face and converse with high profile persons in the society. It made me became an active advocacy monitoring team member” (P2).

“It gave additional interaction to others as needed in my business” (P3).

“It allowed me to socialize in the society as needed in my small business” (P4).

“The empowerment intervention did great. The association started with negligible asset. At present its assets are worth Php5 million (approximately 100,000 U.S. dollars)” (P5).

“I was a plain housewife with no source of income before, but now, I’m a bit progressing and having a processing business of my own aside from being part of the association. My small business gives me income” (P6).

“I am no longer shy talking and being with friends or other people” (P7).

“I learned the processing technology” (P8).

It could be asserted that not only the social condition or situation of the participants had changed. The boost on their self-confidence was imminent. With this, there was only positivity in the minds of the participants after having been empowered. Furthermore, the participants conformed unanimously that the entrepreneurial empowerment activities had provided them self-employment and income-earning capability. Needless to say, the entrepreneurial empowerment activities uplifted the socio-economic conditions of the participants. They also

became interested in business as they had acquired positive socio-economic outlook in life.

Two participants answered “yes” (P3 and P8) directly to the question on whether there was a difference between their present and previous socio-economic situations. The rest of the participants narrated the changes in their socio-economic situations as they commonly engaged in root crop processing business. The participants willingly shared their accounts with mixed emotions:

“In my previous socio-economic situation, my life has no direction. At present when I became a member of ESEP, it brought my dream to a path where I can plan for my future, widen my knowledge, and gained confidence” (P1).

“Before the entrepreneurial empowerment trainings I have no income so I have no savings. At present as a member of ESEP association, I earn daily wage as a laborer of the association. I gain knowledge in my work and I apply it in my own processing business. I also earn income in advocacy monitoring” (P2).

“Before the trainings I was not interested in business. Presently, I am determined on my business especially that it has support from other members” (P4).

“I used to be a plain housewife before with no source of income. But because of trainings or seminars that I have attended, it mold me to be an entrepreneur. It gave me knowledge on business operation and I became stronger to put up my own business” (P5).

“Before, I am working as sales lady earning only P1,500.00 a month. At present, I am now able to buy things I need in school and some personal needs as I can earn P200.00 per day” (P6).

“Before, I am not concerned with other people. At present, I am able to relate to other people’s behavior and now I am a bit uplifted economically” (P7).

The entrepreneurial empowerment made a deeper challenge among the participants. Their entrepreneurial capacity was put to the test. As members of ESEP, they had to pursue with product processing and marketing activities to showcase that they were empowerment. They utilized root crops and similar raw materials readily available in the community. They were, however, confronted with the challenges in their production. “I can process the products like banana chips, cassava chips, vegetable pickles, squash catsup, and peanut butter. The challenge I face is the absence of the certification coming from the Food and Drugs Authority” (P1). “My processed products are cassava chips, cassava cake, squash cake, and catsup. Present market condition is that the production of cassava cake is occasional” (P2). “I make squash tea, cassava cake, cassava chips, banana cake, banana chips, squash catsup. There is a problem on our market because of the product quality, that is, oily and short shelf life” (P6). “I make cassava cake,

squash cake, cassava chips, banana chips, and others. These products have occasional market. These are made only per order basis” (P7).

Theme 5. Interventions Needed

Taking into account the following responses of the participants, it is with certainty that the specific interventions needed by the association are mostly equipment and facilities. The need for additional capability trainings and seminars that would further enhance the technical know-how of the association’s human resource was also a must for the association. This is justified by the following responses of the participants:

“We need additional equipment and tools like oven, grated cassava mixer, kitchen utensils, baking pans, stainless mixing bowl, big ladles, measuring cups, spoons, set of knives, cooking apron, hair net, pot holder, and disposable gloves.” (P3).

“In processing we need storage room. We also need trainings on product quality assessment” (P2).

“We need additional processing building for vacuum fryer, staff quarter or office, and transport vehicle for product marketing in case of market expansion” (P8).

“We need capital build-up, efficient and functional machine, and kitchen tools” (P4).

“There is a need for detailed training on proper equipment usage, quality processing of products, raw materials production, and training on marketing including packaging and label designing” (P1).

“Entrepreneurship enhancement seminar and additional stock room are lacking.” (P5).

On the other hand, one participant had a different view of what ESEP still needs at present by mentioning, “financial capital, including well-defined policies to be implemented by the association” (P7).

By taking a closer look at the whole context of entrepreneurship being undertaken by the association or cooperative, we considered a different intervention perspective. What we see as lacking in the association to be able to function and operate uninterruptedly are entrepreneurial will and sustained managerial focus. Deficiency of capital, facilities, and tools; low-quality processing technology and policy definition; and lack of market as claimed by the participants could be provided or facilitated through management-adaptive initiatives and strategies. With strong entrepreneurial will and sustained managerial focus, businesses would be carried on, resource availability could be assured, and quality processing operations with corresponding market linkages would be sustained. Koontz and Wehrich (2012) reminded that it is the function of the *December 2018, Vol. 21, No. 2*

management to propel the association and its entrepreneurial endeavors toward success. Barringer and Ireland (2013) emphasized that entrepreneurial will requires creativity, drive, and willingness to take risks to be able to seek opportunities and generate sustained monetary and non-monetary value for the association.

Conclusion

From the findings of the study, it can be concluded that poverty hindered the participants from acquiring basic services for education and hospitalization of their household members. This led them to tolerate scanty household needs and brought distress in the family. The different entrepreneurial empowerment interventions provided by the service-oriented government and non-government entities capacitated and transformed the participants into economically and socially able members of the society. Their attendance in entrepreneurial empowerment trainings and seminars freed them from their current poverty situation. The entrepreneurial empowerment activities did not only provide them with technical and social capacities but also boosted their self-confidence and widened their knowledge resulting to positive outlook towards managing own entrepreneurial undertakings. These findings of the study are parallel to the capability approach of Amartya Sen (Todaro & Smith, 2015) as the participants had acquired the freedom of choice and control over the resources available and accessible to them for their advantage. The same findings are corollary to the reinforcement theory of motivation (Stoner et al., 2000), path-goal theory (House & Mitchell, 1975), learned needs theory (McClelland, 1961), and self-determination theory (Tran, 2014) as the participants yielded to what had been taught to them. The participants were motivated to attain the affirmative transformation resulting from the entrepreneurial empowerment interventions. The goal attainment by the ESEP members was justified by high internal locus of causality as they were self-determined and motivated to learn from the entrepreneurial empowerment activities.

Recommendations

On basis of the results of the study, the following recommendations are offered.

1. The need to dovetail efforts. While the members of the association can run and manage their own processing business, they are not separated from their association. They need to dovetail their efforts towards attaining high productivity and efficiency. The growth of their business is directly proportionate to that of the association's vision, mission, and goals. They need to operate and work in solidarity to attain the desired growth and advancement as it is expected that the association's growth and development have to transcend individual entrepreneurial requirements. It

may be necessary for the management of the association to attend capability training on organizational growth and development to ensure the association's continual advancement.

2. The need for entrepreneurial aggressiveness. To sustain entrepreneurial viability, a clear market is needed. The management of the association must find commercial linkages for their processed products. With an established market linkage, there will be an increase in the processed products turnover. The processing cycle will be faster at lesser cost, and income generation will increase. The management or its authorized sales agents must advertise their products not only through local media, word of mouth, or during agri-industrial fairs. They must go outside of the locality to market their processed products in the national and international arena for wider product dissemination and bulk marketing.
3. The association must level up its qualification requirements for hiring of officers and product quality controllers as it expects business growth and development ready to overcome business challenges and market competition. In addition, business permits including certification from the Food and Drug Authority have to be provided by the association to back up a reputable public image.
4. A similar study may be explored to provide similarities or differences of results; serve as reference for future studies aiming to provide information on poverty mitigation, women empowerment, and entrepreneurship; and answer the questions which were beyond the scope of the study.

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