

## **Relevance and Sustainability of Master in Rural Development Projects in Improving Rural Communities in the Philippines**

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### **Abstract**

This is an analysis of the impact of the Master in Rural Development (MRD) program of Eastern Visayas State University (EVSU) to the quality of life of the local populace in the Philippines. Indigenous villages or barangays became the focus of two separate evaluation studies which looked into the relevance of projects and activities to the socio-economic condition of the stakeholders and their sustainability or the continued viability of programs after the implementers have detached from the community. This paper discussed the functions of the MRD program in the improvement of its adopted communities, at the same time making it relevant to global standards by undergoing a periodic assessment and accreditation.

**Keywords:** graduate school, rural development, program evaluation, Eastern Central Philippines

### **INTRODUCTION**

Implementing an academic program in a higher educational institution that will initiate rural development projects has been a complicated task. However, much challenging is the process of evaluating its impact to the target beneficiaries whether or not the intended purpose was accomplished. The United Nation's International

Fund for Agricultural Development drafted a mechanism that could be used to evaluate community endeavors substantially. The process involves a review of monitoring reports that most of the time met key problems such as a misperception that monitoring of projects is seen to be a policing exercise, which led to a lack of commitment, mistrust or even resistance to learning from experience (IFAD, 2011).

In the Philippines, it is necessary to analyze the proper approach to implementation and extent of the impact of a curriculum on rural development as a response to the worsening situation in local villages that led to unwarranted migration and downturn of agricultural production. Opiniano (2007) reported that an estimated 8.2 million Filipinos work and reside in almost 200 countries all over the world, making them one of the largest groups of migrant workers in the global economy. The children of these migrant workers are growing up without the presence of one or both parents. This brings to the forefront the adverse effect on family life brought about by labor migration. Problems related to this issue are the poor performance in school by children of OFWs, juvenile delinquency, the disintegration of family relationships, and other problems which counteract the economic benefits of working abroad (Parreñas, 2005). These problems arise because of the lack of the physical presence of one or both parents in the home. The migration of women workers in particular reveals how the uneven impacts of globalization have intruded into the micro-world of families and households (Asis, M. et al., 2004).

Since poverty is the overriding reason Filipinos leave the country for overseas employment, there is a need for interventions which will provide an alternative to seeking employment outside the country. Development programs initiated by both private and government entities are geared towards this purpose.

In the academe, a curriculum intended to help the countryside become progressive is of utmost importance. Beltran (2010) advocated for Eastern Visayas State University (EVSU) to strengthen the extension services and to expand its coverage area through the establishment of new community partners as recipients of the services, which vary depending on the needs of the community and the availability of technical expertise of the teaching and non-teaching personnel. This function is exemplified with the implementation of the MRD program.

### **The Master of Rural Development (MRD) Program**

The MRD program of EVSU Graduate School is designed to improve the professional and technical competencies of graduate students in their respective fields of endeavor, particularly in the administration of development projects. This course puts into perspective the nature of rural development, the different techniques, and approaches to rural development as well as the current trends and issues affecting the implementation of such projects in the countryside. It provides students with two options: Plan A requires the student to write a thesis while Plan B requires the student to undergo a one semester-long community immersion as fieldwork experience. Hence, the MRD Plan B provides students an opportunity to blend theory with practice.

The objectives of the community immersion are two-fold: 1) to hone students' skills in conducting and facilitating development projects, and 2) to help improve the living condition of the participating rural community. Thus, various activities and projects are implemented with the hope of uplifting the social, economic and cultural lives of the people in the barangay or villages where the fieldwork is conducted. The community immersion component of the MRD program had its first implementation in the year 2000, over a decade ago. Since then, it has undergone evaluation several times. The

program implementers employed both formative and summative evaluation to determine whether goals and objectives are being met, whether the projects undertaken have produced benefits on target beneficiaries.

### **MRD Studies**

The results of two separate evaluation studies are presented here, with focus on the relevance of projects and activities to the socio-economic condition of the stakeholders and their sustainability or the continued viability of programs after the implementers have detached from the community.

#### **Barangay San Isidro, Palo, Leyte**

An impact assessment was conducted by Amores, et al. (2005) on the community immersion program in Barangay San Isidro, Palo, Leyte. Among several variables, the study evaluated the projects' sustainability or continuity, and the effects of the projects on the levels of living of the beneficiaries. Heads of households or their representatives served as respondents in this study. A total of 128 respondents were selected by random sampling.

#### **Relevance of Projects and Activities**

Table 1 shows the respondents' perception of the significance of the projects in terms of contributing a sustainable increase in production and income and in bringing about a sense of self- fulfillment as a result of the interventions employed.

Table 1. Level of Relevance on the Different Projects/Activities

Activity/Project	X	Rank	Interpretation
<b>1. Education and Training</b>			
Livelihood trainings	3.21	1	Relevant
Computer literacy training	2.95	4	Relevant
Film showing of livelihood projects	3.10	3	Relevant
Establishment of reading center	3.19	2	Relevant
<b>Mean</b>	<b>3.11</b>		<b>Relevant</b>
<b>2. Social Services and Nutrition</b>			
Lecture on natural family planning, health and nutrition	3.43	3	Relevant
Medical and dental mission	3.36	4	Relevant
Anti-rabies vaccination	3.28	5	Relevant
Sanitary toilet project	3.66	1	Highly
Herbal garden	3.17	7	Relevant
Christmas cheers	3.62	2	Relevant
Seminar on awareness on child abuse	3.21	6	Highly
			Relevant
<b>Mean</b>	<b>3.39</b>		<b>Relevant</b>
<b>3. Community Organization and Training</b>			
Training in Barangay Administration, Local Legislation and Organization of Barangay Special Bodies	2.96	2	Relevant
Reorganization and strengthening of BARC	2.90	4	Relevant
Organization of 4-H Club	2.78	6	Relevant
Organization of Mother's Club	2.85	5	Relevant
Conduct/Reconduct of MBN Survey	2.91	3	Relevant
Lecture on cooperative management	3.04	1	Relevant
<b>Mean</b>	<b>2.91</b>		<b>Relevant</b>
<b>4. Infrastructure</b>			
Construction of waiting shed	3.54	1	Highly
			Relevant
Improvement of barangay stage	3.22	2	Relevant
<b>Mean</b>	<b>3.38</b>		<b>Relevant</b>
<b>5. Environment and Natural Resources</b>			
Tree-planting	3.50	1	Highly
Clean-up drive and beautification	3.43	2	Relevant
<b>Mean</b>	<b>3.46</b>		<b>Relevant</b>
			<b>Relevant</b>
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>3.25</b>		<b>Relevant</b>

### ***Sustainability of Projects***

Table 2. Sustainability/Continuity of Projects Implemented by MRD Fieldworkers

<b>Project</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>4-H Club</b>	Active and engaged in various activities	1	1
	Existing but inactive	18	14
	Inactive	34	26
	Not sure/not aware/no idea	75	59
	<b>Total</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Mother's Club</b>	Active and engaged in various activities	1	1
	Existing but inactive	22	17
	Inactive	34	27
	Not sure/not aware/no idea	71	55
	<b>Total</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Sanitary Toilet Bowl</b>	Installed and being used	73	57
	Installed but not being used	11	9
	With units not yet installed	27	21
	Not sure/not aware/no idea	17	13
	<b>Total</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Blood Pressure Apparatus</b>	Functional and being used by residents	35	27
	Functional but not being used	35	27
	No longer functional	3	2
	Not sure/not aware/no idea	55	43
	<b>Total</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Reading Center</b>	Often used by residents	19	15
	Seldom used	32	25
	Not used	26	20
	Not sure/not aware/no idea	51	40
	<b>Total</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Trees Planted</b>	Most plants growing and healthy	12	9
	Few plants are growing	81	63
	Plants all dead	1	1
	Not sure/not aware/no idea	34	27
	<b>Total</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Beautification</b>	Most plants growing and healthy	1	1
	Few plants are growing	85	66
	Plants all dead	15	12
	Not sure/not aware/no idea	27	21
	<b>Total</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Herbal Plants</b>	Most plants growing and healthy	26	20
	Few plants are growing	49	38
	Plants all dead	0	0
	Not sure/not aware/no idea	53	42
	<b>Total</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Backyard Fishponds</b>	Existing with stocks	29	23
	Existing without stocks	43	33
	Ponds no longer existing	33	26
	Not sure/not aware/no idea	23	18
	<b>Total</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>100</b>

The status of some projects established and developed by different batches of MRD students was evaluated as to whether they are still existing and functional, as an indicator of project viability or sustainability. A summary of the results is shown in Table 2.

The conclusion reached in this evaluative study regarding program relevance was very positive, wherein respondents rated all projects as relevant in terms of contributing to the socio - economic condition of the stakeholders. Sustainability of the projects, however, was rated low, leading the researchers to recommend for more effective management of the projects, from planning to monitoring, to ensure their continuity.

### **Barangay San Agustin, Babatngon, Leyte and Barangay Castilla, Palo, Leyte**

Aguirre (2004) conducted a study to determine management practices, program relevance and sustainability of the community immersion to enhance the community outreach agenda of the university.

### **Provisions for Program Relevance**

The summarized data for program relevance based on three dimensions is shown in Table 3. The beneficiaries perceived that provisions for People Empowerment were made to a great extent. Specifically, they believed that the projects had provisions for promoting conditions that would enable the community residents to feel competent and in control of their socio - economic welfare and to persist in the performance of meaningful tasks.

Table 3. Summary of Program Beneficiaries' Assessment of the Relevance of Community Programs as Perceived by the School Staff and the Beneficiaries

Dimensions	School Staff (N = 159)		Beneficiaries (N = 256)		Item Average	
	μ	Scale	μ	Scale	μ	Scale
People Empowerment	3.49	Great Extent	3.41	Great Extent	3.45	Great Extent
Leadership Development	3.55	Great Extent	3.32	Moderate Extent	3.43	Great Extent
Self Efficacy	3.54	Great Extent	3.31	Moderate Extent	3.42	Great Extent
<b>General Average</b>	<b>3.53</b>	<b>Great Extent</b>	<b>3.35</b>	<b>Moderate Extent</b>	<b>3.44</b>	<b>Great Extent</b>

On Leadership Development, the respondents perceived that provisions for promoting among the beneficiaries of the program the capability of influence group members to perform tasks and activities geared toward the attainment of group goals and objectives had been made to a moderate extent.

The same rating is given for the dimension of Self-Efficacy. As perceived by the respondents, provisions were made to a moderate extent for promoting among community residents the feeling that they believe in their capability to attain the goals of programs of which they are the beneficiaries.

### Provisions for Sustainability of Projects

The study also assessed the extent to which provisions were made for ensuring the sustainability of community immersion projects. The dimensions of sustainability are continuous training, self-reliance, and self-direction. Table 4 shows the data on the sustainability of community immersion projects.

Table 4. Summarized Data on the Extent of Provisions for the Sustainability of Community Immersion Programs as Perceived by the School Staff and the Beneficiaries.

Dimensions	School Staff (N = 159)		Beneficiaries (N = 256)		Item Average	
	$\mu$	Scale	$\mu$	Scale	$\mu$	Scale
Continuous Training	3.53	Great Extent	3.33	Moderate Extent	3.43	Great Extent
Self-Reliance	3.60	Great Extent	3.31	Moderate Extent	3.45	Great Extent
Self-Direction	3.47	Great Extent	3.30	Moderate Extent	3.38	Moderate Extent
<b>General Average</b>	<b>3.53</b>	<b>Great Extent</b>	<b>3.31</b>	<b>Moderate Extent</b>	<b>3.42</b>	<b>Great Extent</b>

The respondents rated that provisions for program sustainability through the continuous training or formation of community members' skills for working toward their own socio-economic sustenance was made to a moderate extent. They perceived that provisions for program sustainability through the development of self-reliance were also made to a moderate extent. Self-reliance is the ability of community residents to work towards the attainment of their personal goals and socio-economic welfare after the project implementers have detached from the adopted community. The same rating was given to the dimension of self-direction or the capability to achieve the project goals without much supervision on the part of the program implementers.

### **Program Evaluation by an Accrediting Body**

Most recently, the MRD program was evaluated by the Accrediting Agency for Chartered Colleges and Universities in the Philippines, Inc. (AACCUP). The program has been undergoing periodic assessment and accreditation and last March 7 to 10, 2011; it was awarded Level III accredited status by a team of accreditors coming from all over the country.

The team evaluated ten (10) areas of the MRD program: vision, mission, goals and objectives (VMGO), Faculty, Curriculum and Instruction, Support to Students, Research, Extension and Community Services, Library, Physical Plant and Facilities, Laboratories, and Administration. All areas attained ratings above the minimum requirement and the Grand Mean for these areas qualified the program for the award of Level III certification.

Among the strengths cited by the team of accreditors was the Community Immersion component of the program. This led them to recommend for the adoption of the MRD model by the Office of Extension Services of the University to ensure the relevance and sustainability of its community outreach projects.

This status accords a good prospect for the University to strengthen the program's success factors affecting community immersion, specifically sustaining its skills and knowledge- based support to adopted barangay even after the implementers detached from the community. The good standing of the MRD program thru accreditation would also enable the University to convince international funding agencies and skills-provider institutions to grant financial and technical endowment and expertise that would improve the program's capacity to deliver effectively and efficiently its services to target clientele. The MRD program will be regularly submitted for quality assessment and evaluation to maintain standards in the conduct of rural development ventures.

### **Plans for the Future**

The MRD Program will be enhanced further by pursuing a policy of making its curriculum responsive to the complex and ever-changing society brought about by unstable political situations, economic difficulties, the

challenge of new technologies and an adverse upshot of globalization.

The mission of establishing a dynamic partnership with local communities will be highly pursued. Likewise, strong linkages with government agencies, non-governmental organizations and international funding institutions shall be initiated and be given top priority. To maintain standards, the MRD Program will be submitted for quality assessment and evaluation to local and international accrediting agencies.

## **CONCLUSION**

The MRD Program of Eastern Visayas State University enabled its graduates to acquire professional and technical competencies in administering development undertakings in local communities. The evaluation studies proved that all projects were significant in contributing to the socio-economic endeavors of stakeholders as perceived of being contributory to a sustainable increase in production and income and in bringing about a sense of self-fulfillment as a result of the interventions employed.

The MRD's relevance is anchored on such dimensions as people empowerment, leadership development, and self-efficacy while the extent of provisions for the sustainability of community immersion projects rests on continuous training, self-reliance, and self-direction. The program became a catalyst for improvement of the social, economic and cultural lives of the people in villages where the fieldworks were conducted.

The MRD model of EVSU, particularly its community immersion component, was deemed to be effective and could be adopted in the maintenance of development schemes in the country and in improving the quality of life

in communities as recommended by AACCCUP, a national accrediting agency for higher educational institutions. Therefore, this makes the University an agent for change and progress in the Philippines.

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