

Towards Strengthening Community Extension Services*

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Introduction

The University is mandated to perform three (3) functions -- Teaching, Research and Extension. Extension aims to reach out to other sectors outside the academe and impart benefits and learnings to the larger community.

Extension is in the lifeblood of CSWCD, having adhered to the theory and practice of participatory strategies, social action and people's empowerment for almost three (3) decades. Its emphasis on gender and ecological concerns resulted from its continuing pursuit of relevance and service in response to the people's agenda.

Historically, too, the Research and Extension for Development Office (REDO) has long struggled in redefining the traditional mold of what an extension office is, within an academic unit. In view of the current debate regarding the scope and limits of REDO's support functions, a review of its past involvements in community extension can assist in delineating its future programs.

This paper has three (3) concerns:

1. To reflect and identify lessons from REDO's experiences in undertaking community extension projects;
2. To synthesize these experiences; and
3. To share these views to other groups engaged in similar endeavors.

**A synthesis paper of three community projects conducted by REDO.*

Highlights of Activities

PREACH, Women CREATE and the Pasay Extension Project were all managed through REDO (OCEE in the case of PREACH). There were variations, however, in terms of program focus, mechanisms for implementation, and fund sources. This section focuses on the major community extension approaches and methods as culled from the project documents.

1. Establishing Partnerships

Local partners proved vital in ensuring program legitimacy and community acceptance. In all three (3) projects, the local government units, particularly at the municipal and barangay levels, provided the necessary support upon program entry.

In the PREACH project, however, the barangay connection was not enough to dispel suspicions regarding the program's "subversive" character. On the other hand, UNICEF's presence in the Women CREATE project was an advantage in formalizing linkages with the local governments of the different project areas.

For Pasay, partnership with the peoples' organization was pursued alongside giving due recognition to the barangay officials. This contributed in sustaining organizing work.

2. Social Preparation

The communities covered by the projects were at varying stages of organizing. The PREACH area was at the formation stage, while Pasay was already at the consolidation stage. Although the communities covered by Women CREATE had initial organizing experience, women organizing was a new arena for them.

The organizing stage of each community was the basis for the social preparatory activities undertaken. In all three (3) cases, these activities resembled initial steps in the organizing process -- i.e., community integration, consultations, identifying key lead-

ers, preliminary social analysis, and orientation/groundwork regarding project concerns. Although the projects started with specific focus, these were validated and refined as social preparation progressed.

3. Specific development interventions in response to community needs

Community needs were varied, complex and dynamic. Despite set project objectives, its operationalization had to be attuned to the situation-specific concerns. Using PAR as entry point, PREACH worked its way through community organizing, training and livelihood interventions.

Women CREATE started with ten (10) areas nationwide which was later reduced into five(5) areas. Its initial project focus on gender sensitization and training was later expanded to gender mainstreaming, establishing support structures and advocacy based on the mid-term evaluation results.

In Pasay, the work was first conceived as a grassroots training program. However, as needs became more evident, technical assistance also covered community publications, organizational building, waste management, cooperative and networking.

4. Organizational development

Community organizing was considered a core program component in all three (3) projects. At the outset, only PREACH incorporated direct organizing as part of its project objectives. For Women CREATE and Pasay, organizing work by other programs was deemed complementary to its project concerns. Though not directly involved in grassroots organizing, these two projects relied either on existing programs (Urban Basic Services Program for Women CrREATE) or on local organizations (Independent Movement for Pasay) to spearhead organizational development. Nevertheless, REDO still made additional inputs to assist in organizing activities.

The organizational forms were varied. The local groups PREACH worked with were either sectoral, area or project-based. In Women CREATE, the women were organized geographically, with loose linkages with other communities. These linkages, however, were largely project-based. In the case of Pasay, the umbrella organization was community-wide, with different affiliate organizations based on specific sector (youth), project (cooperative) or issue (land).

In all three projects, these organizations existed outside the formal barangay structure yet functioned alongside it.

5. Building Support Mechanisms

Each project had its own lifespan: PREACH took more than two (2) years; Women CREATE had a 5-year proposal but was extended for another year; while Pasay was initially a 6-month agreement and renewed several times upon request. Thus, support structures were necessary to sustain and follow-up project results after project completion. Support mechanisms took different forms, depending on the capabilities of the local groups and program projections.

Part of the support structures in PREACH was the formation of different activity-based and sectoral groups, linkages with concerned entities (i.e., church, NGO, DSWD, municipal government), and provision of seed capital for small-scale livelihood projects. In Women CREATE, the training of project implementors, strengthening of inter-agency committees, community advocacy, and networking were aimed at assisting the trained grassroots women to continue their efforts. In the case of Pasay, assistance toward further organizational consolidation and establishment of linkages with other service institutions were part of the effort to strengthen local mechanisms to respond to their needs.

6. Academic Concerns

As an academic institution, CSWCD's extension efforts

and its academic program had to be closely linked. PAR, gender advocacy and mainstreaming, and community-based training were considered pioneering areas for academic scrutiny as well as development practice. In all three projects, documentation and evaluation were built into the operations to draw experiences and lessons which became inputs to the theory -practice continuum.

Part of the project operations of PREACH and Pasay was the fielding of CSWCD students. In the case of PREACH there was a conscious effort to test out the feasibility of an integrated field placement for students across departments; in Pasay, the field placement and exposure program were incorporated only after the project stability was attained . It likewise assisted in specific community concerns.

7. Funding

The community extension projects reviewed were not funded under the regular CSWCD operational funds. PREACH and Women CREATE were special projects with outside fund support. PREACH was funded through UP-ORC while Women Create received UNICEF support. The Pasay project (originally focused on community trainings) was conceived to be financed through other resource generating projects of REDO, community resource counterpart, and services from other agencies/groups.

Reflections: Are We Moving Towards the Right Direction?

The call for greater relevance and service must not be addressed only through curricular concerns but must also encompass CSWCD's research and extension work. This section on reflections puts the practice of community extension of REDO into focus. It hopes to summarize major gains, gaps and prospects as we aim to move forward in our tasks.

1. Redefining Extension Work

The UP Charter has no clearcut definition regarding

the range of possible extension work which its different units can do. But community extension definitely has a place in the academe.

"Extension services shall include the conduct of short-term non-degree courses and similar programs. These activities may be initiated by the unit or in cooperation with persons or agencies, local or foreign..."(1984 Revised University Charter, Chapter 3, Sec. 4)

"(Extension includes) Proposals for conduct of community or similar extension services, in response to requests of other agencies and contracts for professional and technical services..." (Ibid., Sec. 12)

The concept paper on the merger of ORP and OCEE into REDO in the early 90's carried the concern for community extension a step further. At this juncture, community extension was considered as one of REDO's major tasks, and as a complementary concern alongside its academic programs.

"(Through the College academic programs and extension activities) various approaches and strategies have been introduced, tested out, and evaluated based on concrete experiences ... at the community level ..." (page 1)

"Research and extension programs provide a medium for integrating development theories and practice, validating its effectiveness and relevance ... at the grassroots level ... " (page 1)

Community-based Extension Services was thus named as one of the major thrusts of REDO.

In the mid-90's moves to transform REDO into the Center for Participatory Development started. As conceptualized, community extension shall be one of the four (4) core programs of the Center whose major functions include capability-building, advocacy and networking, and technical support services. This is consistent with CSWCD's avowed commitment to people's empowerment and social transformation.

The practice of community extension through the years,

thus, has veered away from its traditional notion which connotes expert consultancy or transfer of technology from professionals. It has expanded to include varying degrees of involvement in community organizing and other specific development interventions which are innovative, participatory and service-oriented. As community service within the participatory development framework, community extension is similar to a "problem-posing dialogue" which Freire had long advocated in place of extension as "cultural invasion".

2. Partnership with Marginalized Communities and Groups

Relationship with local groups tend to be characterized by partnership rather than dependence. Partnership requires sharing among equals, rather than a patron-client relationship. This is ensured through participatory and capability-building approaches.

The areas served by the community extension projects reviewed were selected based on the resource capabilities of the programs along with other considerations. Yet, CSWCD's partnership towards serving the most marginalized communities and groups continue to be a prime consideration in community extension. This is part of the effort to reach out to sectors who are most in need and are least served. These areas are in need. At the same time, they are also accessible, able to provide some community counterpart, and are beneficiaries of other development programs.

3. Merging Community Service and Academic Concerns

Curricular programs and community service go hand in hand, as CSWCD programs have proven through decades of practice. In fact, without community service, the three academic programs (Community Development, Social Work, Women and Development) would also lose its reason for being. There have been varied arrangements for carrying out this merger:

*Placement of fieldwork students in project areas

- *Testing-out and evaluation of specific development strategy
- *Project documentation as part of teaching materials development
- *Establishing linkages with POs, NGOs and GOs
- *Community practice and actual social service assistance to communities and programs

4. Managing Community Extension Programs

The three (3) community extension projects practiced flexibility and inductive learning. They did not rely on packaged development process and expert knowledge. On the contrary, a greater part of its program scope as well as management mechanisms were influenced by participatory approaches and resource maximization.

*For program development, the bottom-up planning processes were validated and proven responsive to community needs. The project-based and issue-based approach seemed common to the three projects. However, its strategic implications to community welfare and organizational consolidation were considered imperative. Aside from organizing, experience had shown that livelihood and networking concerns were equally important amidst poverty conditions (as part of sustaining factors for community initiative).

*Resource complementation was resorted to by tapping inter-unit involvement within the College and by linking with other service institutions. The College alone cannot respond to emerging community needs. Thus, mechanisms for coordinating with other groups need to be systematized.

*Mechanisms toward institutionalization were also worked out at two levels:

>At the community level for project continuity (i.e.,

leadership development, organizing, linkages with other agencies)

>At the unit level (REDO) for possible follow-up and/or expansion efforts (i.e., program development, fund sourcing)

At present however, gains have been minimal due to limitations in long-term strategic planning, insitutional support and resource generation. Advocacy efforts are imperative even within the University bureaucracy.

5. Micro Solutions to Macro Issues

One of the recurrent questions in community extension practice is: *To what extent have we made a difference in the lives of the poor?*

There were outputs, all right. But, these remained at the local level --- small-scale and short-term in terms of impact.

With the increasing demands and complexity of development issues and community needs, how can an academic-based extension program be maximized? Do advocacy and networking efforts beyond the community level make a difference (i.e., policy advocacy, campaign support, etc.)? Do we, as part of the academe, have the capacity to move on to this task? And, do we have the political will to take sides with regard to particular issues and gear our programs along these concerns?

Challenges and Recommendations

Community extension offers a lot of significant opportunities for service learning and grassroots capability-building. CSWCD, drawn by its social commitment and curricular concerns, is being challenged to maximize this potential. Alongside other CSWCD units, REDO finds itself amidst this call to assist marginalized communities and groups in the context of its pro-

grams. However, specific areas need refinement.

1. Developing adequate community support mechanisms to provide better chances for project continuity:

- *Provision for project turn-over to the local groups
- *Capability-building towards self-management of projects
- *Referral mechanisms with local agencies and LGUs

2. As an extension unit, resource build-up should be addressed as support to long-term planning instead of short-term community assistance:

- *Resource complementation with other agencies
- *Fund assistance from funding institutions
- *Maximizing community counterpart

3. Institutionalizing community extension services would require more systematic efforts on the part of the College. Several possibilities could be considered:

- *Regular University fund support
- *Advocacy within the University system
- *Joint projects with other UP units and development institutions (which are strategic/purposeful in nature)
- *Program development, complementary to other College programs

4. Sustaining development efforts imply strategic planning in terms of defining priority issues and program scope:

- *Formulating medium and long-term plans
- *Networking with the larger social development community (national, ASEAN, international)
- *Focusing on specific development agenda

Through the years, REDO has developed its capabilities to respond to varied extension opportunities. Community extension provides the necessary balance between theorizing and

networking at the macro level, on the one hand, and field practice and responding to specific community needs on the other. Indeed, without community extension, "practicing what we preach" and "learning from the people" become mere rhetoric.

Or worse: if REDO is confined to being a mere support entity to the College academic programs ----- its potential to channel community extension into the twin purpose of theorizing and service may be negated. Perhaps, what is called for is focused programming for each unit to strengthen its capabilities within a unified vision.

References:

1. Project documents:

PREACH
Women CREATE
Pasay: Grassroots Training Project

2. REDO Concept Papers

ORP-OCEE Merger
Center for Participatory Development

3. Proceedings: CSWCD Strategic Planning, 1996 & 1997

4. 1984 Revised University Charter (Draft)