Journal of Business Research 63 (2010) 639–642

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Business Research

The Village Network™: Partnership and collaboration to alleviate poverty in subsistence marketplaces

Krista Crawford-Mathis [a,*], Stephen Darr [b,1], Amy Farmer [c,2]

[a] Capella University, c/o 6270 Mount Chestnut Road, Roanoke, VA, 24018, United States
[b] Stephen Darr, Executive Director, Peacework Development Fund, 209 Otey Street, Blacksburg, VA, 24060, United States
[c] Margaret Gerig & R.S. Martin, Jr. Chair in Business, Sam M. Walton College of Business, Department of Economics, 301 Business Building, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR, 72701, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Accepted 1 April 2009

Keywords:
Subsistence marketplaces
Service learning
Experiential education
Multidisciplinary
Interdisciplinary
International development
Poverty alleviation
Collaboration

ABSTRACT

The Village Network is a unique model of poverty alleviation involving the collaboration of a host subsistence market community and a nonprofit organization, typically a university, with a multidisciplinary academic module. All parties in this partnership stand to gain from collaboration. The subsistence market benefits from the skill set and labor provided by the university. The university benefits by placing their students in a position to apply theory guided by the social and economic development experience and insights of the indigenous village leadership. The coordinating organization improves relationships and fosters growth in developing communities. The discussion then focuses on insights about subsistence marketplaces that emerge from this initiative.

© 2009 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

An elementary student in rural Belize not only eats her own garden peppers but also sells them to the local hot sauce manufacturer. She is aided in this effort by students from the University of Arkansas, who are there with the Peacework Village Network. The peppers were grown with the assistance of engineering students who guided her in the development of an irrigation system, education students who taught her key terminology to bring her product to market, and marketing students who collaborated with her to negotiate the contract.

The Village Network is a model of learning and catalyst for development in a subsistence market environment. Offering a comprehensive, integrated approach to community and student development, the Village Network program creates partnerships for faculty and students across disciplines with an entire developing community. A learning institution can create an essential development resource for alleviating poverty as well as a valuable opportunity for students and faculty to explore their role in the global economy by applying business theory in emerging subsistence economies (Andrews, 2007). This learning model draws from theory and uses the fundamentals of business skill development to benefit both the developing community and the academic participants involved.

Peacework, a nonprofit development organization that provides cultural expertise and facilitates local relationships as well as infrastructure and logistical aid, implements this program. Peacework's effective and sustainable projects help to alleviate poverty and economic disparity through the partnering of a subsistence community with an academic, corporate, or community entity that has the necessary resources and expertise, such as a university, and where local community leaders have the capacity and commitment to implement a shared vision. These innovative partnerships promote the strategic application of educational, financial, professional, technical, and human resources across cultures. Helping to alleviate poverty, these partnerships also build bridges across international barriers and foster equality and human rights.

The sections that follow discuss the Peacework organization, the Village Network concept, the pilot research program with the University of Arkansas in Belize, insights about the value of working beyond the traditional classroom in subsistence marketplaces, strengths and weaknesses of the pilot program, recommendations, and concluding remarks.

2. Peacework

Peacework was created in 1988 at the end of the Cold War when a proposal was made to a member of the Soviet Peace Fund to collaborate on a joint U.S.–Soviet volunteer effort in Nicaragua, site

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 540 520 7676.
E-mail addresses: kristacm@aol.com (K. Crawford-Mathis), steve@peacework.org (S. Darr), afarmer@walton.uark.edu (A. Farmer).
[1] Tel.: +1 540 953 1376.
[2] Tel.: +1 479 575 6093.

0148-2963/$ – see front matter © 2009 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.
doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2009.04.023

of the then proxy contra war going on between the two superpowers. This first project was a one-time effort to mitigate the effects of the political conflict that was devastating the people and social fabric of this Central American country.

Peacework now manages projects involving hundreds of client universities, civic organizations, medical associations, and other entities. Over the past twenty years, Peacework has managed programs for over 14,000 participants in about twenty countries. With headquarters in Blacksburg, Virginia, Peacework also maintains offices in Belize, Vietnam, Washington, DC, and the University of Arkansas, with offices staffed by one or two field directors or host partners.

Despite its lean organizational structure, Peacework manages partnerships in developing countries around the world, between local communities and sponsoring institutions such as universities, corporations, and churches. Peacework provides services for these programs ranging from simple passport and visa processing to the detailed planning of extensive construction projects in collaboration with indigenous partners.

3. The Village Network™

The Village Network has become the focal point of Peacework's programming. The fundamental principle of the Village Network is matching one university (or other sponsoring institution) with one community or village in a developing country, i.e., a subsistence context. Through this direct relationship, sponsors and the host community are able to apply broad development resources while also attending to the social, economic, political, and cultural dynamics at play.

The uniqueness of the Village Network model is the partnership between a community in a developing country and an entire academic institution that makes use of expertise across many disciplines to support a wide array of the community's needs. While numerous prior projects have involved academic programs in developing communities, for example, MBAs Without Borders, Doctors Without Borders, and Engineers Without Borders, the Village Network model makes use of the tremendous breadth a university can bring to bear to simultaneously address multiple challenges faced by a community. This comprehensive resource has yet to be applied by others in this manner.

The primary goal of the Village Network is to foster sustainable economic development in a subsistence community while providing students a classroom within which to understand the challenges faced by such a community. This model serves as an enhanced learning experience for the students who are invested and involved in it. The resulting skills and knowledge help students not only to conduct business in an emerging economy but also to transfer skills such as leadership, creative problem solving, and cross-cultural sensitivity.

Many disciplines interact throughout the instructional process. For example, educational expertise and experience is applied in local schools and literacy efforts; engineering is applied through community infrastructure; medicine is applied in areas of public health and clinical services; business is applied in marketing, entrepreneurship, commerce, education, and other areas of economic capacity building; agriculture is applied in school gardens, small family farms, and agribusiness. And every discipline is applied in the community so that jobs support education, education supports jobs, and health care is expanded. Once underway, the Village Network partnership becomes an instant catalyst for regional development.

A critical component of the university's participation and continued support is the involvement of the community leadership. Village leaders provide essential insights into their own particular development needs, obstacles, and opportunities. They are an unparalleled resource for students to apply theory to real world issues. The Village Network program follows the advice of King (2004) in that the relationship between the parties involved is egalitarian rather than hierarchical, thus creating a long-term, dynamic partnership. The opportunity for instruction, experience, and structured reflection increases the likelihood that students will value and learn from the perspectives of those they are serving.

4. UA's Belize Community Development Program

The pilot project for Peacework's Village Network is UA's Belize Community Development Program. The five-year pilot began in 2007 through a partnership of the Peacework Development Fund, the citizenry of Belize, and seven colleges and departments at the university. This innovative educational experience engages university students in applying their knowledge and skills to effect sustainable local development along with social and economic change in the city of Dangriga and the Stann Creek District of Belize.

The university and the host community are key partners and resources for each other in this network as UA students apply integrated academic resources to the area's poverty-related issues. For example, English majors are working with low-literate parents of students to allow them to interact with their reading children; engineering students are designing a water purification system for schools; business students are supporting entrepreneurial efforts, sharing business development skills, and managing a microfinance project for high school continuation; agricultural students are working with community members to not only grow a school garden but also to market the produce to a local manufacturing plant; and social work students are involved with self-esteem and family violence workshops and counseling. This interdisciplinary approach addresses the interrelated challenges a community faces while allowing students to recognize the synergies that result from utilizing their skills in tandem with other disciplines.

The Village Network project highlights the inefficiency of attempting to promote economic development in the absence of complementary resources. Experts engaged in the social and environmental challenges of a subsistence community recognize the central role that economic and business development plays in the ability to effectively impact those "nonbusiness" goals.

In fact, the success of the first two years of the Village Network program has led to an innovative redesign of the core business curriculum at the University of Arkansas. The concept of the interconnectedness of disciplines means that teaching is now directed at topical areas of business rather than disciplinary silos. As the operation of business in Dangriga became integrated with the other disciplines, the university curriculum followed suit with the development of courses in human resources and in the study of markets and consumers from the perspective of each of the core business disciplines. Hands-on experience suggests that development cannot occur in the absence of a holistic effort as exemplified in the Village Network pilot in Belize.

5. Beyond the traditional classroom

One of the main educational benefits of working in a subsistence marketplace is that students learn the importance of addressing the community holistically rather than merely from a business perspective. This learning extends beyond the traditional classroom in numerous ways.

First, students come to understand the importance of developing trust with a client or partner before attempting any business. In the absence of strong regulatory or other enforcement institutions, economies depend on the development of trust as a foundation of partnerships. For example, numerous visitors arrived in Dangriga to help for a short time only to disappear, which left behind an understandable level of skepticism and hesitation. However, the initial two years of Village Network have seen the development of strong personal relationships and a sense of trust, which have grown alongside labor efforts in the community.

دریافت فوری ← متن کامل مقاله

ISIArticles
مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات