ASEAN/USDA Entrepreneurship Development

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Abstract

Entrepreneurship in agriculture is needed in Southeast Asia as well as the United States as these countries deal with urbanization and globalization. This case study is about a proposal development process that used collaborative techniques. It culminated in a proposal for an international entrepreneurship training program for Asian countries and the U.S. The participants in this proposal development process were representatives of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), USDA-Foreign Agricultural Service, USDA-Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service, and the land grant universities.

The participants used a set of “project development principles” to encourage collaboration among equals. They visited young entrepreneurs and extension agents at sites all over Malaysia. Then they constructed a proposed project to respond to the needs they had observed. A “logic model” was used to promote clarity. Consensus decision-making was used and project design components were reviewed by department heads of the Malaysian Ministry of Agriculture and by officials of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The participants proposed a five-year program of multi-national entrepreneurship training, local followup, and internships with support by electronic communications, leadership training, and organizational development. The proposal is ready for funding. Once funded, it will provide opportunities for land grant universities to participate and receive part of the funding.
Introduction

During the last decade, Association of Southeast Asian Nations* (ASEAN) member countries have experienced the migration of rural youth and young farmers to the urban areas seeking employment opportunities and better living conditions. Young farmers have failed to see profitable opportunities in the agricultural sector. They also have lacked management and technical skills to develop successful commercial farming activities (Paik, 2001).

The globalization of agriculture has left both U.S. and ASEAN farmers with new challenges. To operate effectively in the complicated international marketplace, today’s young farmers need new knowledge, skills and abilities to help them become successful (Holt, 2001). They also need support organizations to provide technical, social, emotional, and perhaps economic support so that young farmers do not feel so isolated. Finally, they need leadership training to maintain the support organizations and provide a voice for their needs to governmental agencies and non-governmental groups.

In order to address these needs, the ASEAN Working Group on Agricultural Training and Extension (AWGATE–comprised of officials from Departments of Agriculture of member nations) suggested an “agricultural apprenticeship program” in cooperation with USDA. This priority was identified as one of the top three priorities of AWGATE which wanted to send young farmers to the United States to live and work with farmers as apprentices for a year in order to learn how they are able to meet needs similar to those identified above.

Purpose of the Paper

The purpose of this case study is to describe how an assessment team made up of representatives of AWGATE, USDA and the land grant universities used collaborative needs assessment and program planning techniques to turn the “apprenticeship program” concept into a proposal for entrepreneurship development that involves not only young farmers in the ten ASEAN member countries but also young agriculturists and extension educators in the U.S. as well. Specific objectives of the case study are to 1) describe the needs assessment process, 2) describe project development principles to insure a true partnership among the three groups involved, and 3) describe key design components for the program.

Methods and Data Sources

The methods used in this case study included literature review, observation and interviews of entrepreneurs, collaborative needs assessment and collaborative program planning. Data sources included a wide range of books, monographs, and articles, including unpublished reports from diverse sources, as well as web pages on the internet. These data sources deal with models of successful educational programs in school-based agricultural education, nonformal education, extension education, adult education, youth development organizations, community development and rural development in diverse societies around the world over the past 100 years. Much of this literature review had been done by the university representative on the team. The AWGATE representative was employed by the Malaysian Ministry of Agriculture. He provided agricultural statistics and information on national goals for the agricultural sectors of ASEAN nations. The USDA representatives were both former Peace Corps volunteers in Southeast Asia and all four of the representatives had extensive experience in international development programs.
Results

AWGATE communicated its priority for a young farmer apprenticeship program to the Foreign Agriculture Service (FAS) of USDA. FAS involved the International Programs Office of CSREES (Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service) in USDA, and together they identified an international program director from a land grant university college of agriculture. Three individuals, representing FAS, CSREES and land grant universities, toured agricultural entrepreneur sites in Southeast Asia with a member of AWGATE, and interviewed young farmers, entrepreneurs and extension educators. “Rapid rural appraisal” (Beebe, 1985) was used as a needs assessment technique to organize data gained through these visits and to coordinate it with an extensive literature review.

Entrepreneurs visited included a citrus farmer in Sarawak province, small land holders in Sabah who sold fruit and handicrafts at a village market, a young farmer who sold duck eggs and made furniture to supplement his income, a five-member snack food cooperative using palm flour, a palm seedling grower, a family operation which made potato chips as well as chips from other root crops, a small dairy farmer, a large poultry operation which exported to Singapore, vegetable farmers in a government land distribution project, aquaculturalists, and floriculturalists. While traveling to these sites, the representatives related each to the proposed apprenticeship program. They agreed that leaving their farms and families for a year-long apprenticeship in the U.S. could be very disruptive to the potential trainees. Visits with extension agents and the staff of an extension training site provided more insight into the apprenticeship proposal.

Subsequent discussions at the Ministry of Agriculture in Kuala Lampur outlined the essential elements and weaknesses of the apprenticeship proposal. The outline of a modified proposal, emphasizing entrepreneurship and multi-national exchange for shorter periods of time, began to emerge. These discussions included collaborative techniques to insure that no point of view dominated the proposed project design. These techniques included the use of a logic model to clarify activities and avoid different interpretations of subjective information, consensus decision making, review and evaluation of ideas by department heads of the Malaysia Ministry of Agriculture, use of “project development principles” (below), and use of a “partnership exploration” (Etling, 2002) instrument being developed by the U.S. land grant university representative.

The five-year, multi-national entrepreneurship development program which emerged, consists of a ten-day international workshop held annually in Southeast Asia (trainers and participants come from the ASEAN countries and participating U.S. universities and states), followed by the implementation of local entrepreneurship enterprises and training for additional participants. To support the local activities, agricultural organizations will be developed at the local and national levels. Entrepreneurs will be linked by international exchanges, internships and by internet communications. The following sections of results in this paper describe the new project proposal.

Project goal: To develop the entrepreneurship skills of young ASEAN and U.S. agriculturists in order to enhance their ability to compete in the global economy and to contribute to the economic and agricultural development of their communities and countries.

Project objectives:
1. To develop the entrepreneurial knowledge, skills, abilities, and aspirations of young ASEAN and U.S. agriculturists and extension educators;
2. To increase the income of young agriculturists through enhanced entrepreneurship practices;
3. To develop and strengthen the leadership skills of young agriculturists;
4. To develop or strengthen organizations to support young agriculturists at the local, national, and international levels;
5. To train extension educators in effective methods of educating young entrepreneurs; and to strengthen the support network of extension educators dealing with young agriculturists and entrepreneurship programs.

Project development principles (table 1) were used to insure equality in decision making among the partners. The eleven principles emphasize philosophical, ethical and procedural guidelines focusing on mutual responsibility, innovation, synergy, balance and excellence.

Table 1. Project Development Principles

- Partners in this program will all be treated as equals in terms of planning and decision making.
- We will emphasize integrity; our ethical principles will include universal values embraced by all major religions and humanistic philosophies (fairness, caring, trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, moderation and cooperation).
- We will not try to be all things to all people everywhere all the time; we will set topical and geographical priorities for the program.
- We will emphasize teamwork for bottom-up programming.
- We will not accept grants and funds that do not fit our program priorities and partners needs.
- We will emphasize flexibility and creativity over the way it has always been done, innovation over duplication.
- We will seek new methodologies for program planning, implementation and evaluation, rather than relying on worn-out methods that are no longer consistent with our values and ethical principles.
- We will question everything as we develop programs, and encourage our stakeholders to question everything we do.
- We will look for opportunities for synergy as we make program and administrative choices.
- We will strive for balance among stakeholders, balance of benefits among partners, and a balanced approach to program planning that avoids procrastination and panic.
- In all of our efforts we will be guided by excellence and quality will be valued over convenience and speed, opportunism will be qualified by excellence.

Project design components, in addition to the project goal and training objectives, included 1) a logic model (figure 1) which describes program stages, implementation at the different levels (local, state, national and international) and impacts on the entrepreneur participants and on agriculture in ASEAN countries and the U.S., 2) an implementation time line, 3) an evaluation strategy, 4) provisions for sustainability after year five, and 5) a budget.

Logic model A logic model is a diagram of causes and effects which helps to clarify a complex or controversial program model. A clear, accurate logic model helps to insure that all individuals have the same understanding of the project.
**Figure 1. Program Logic Model**

*Project timeline:* The following project timeline describes how the activities in the logic model are to be implemented over a five year period.

**YEAR ONE**
- Curriculum Development Workshop
- Entrepreneurship Training Program
- Field Follow-up on Entrepreneurial Activities of Young Agriculturists
- Entrepreneurial Training Programs at the Local Level
- Development and strengthening of Young Agriculturist Support Organizations

**YEAR TWO**
- Internship (ASEAN participants to U.S.)
- Entrepreneurship Training Program
- Annual Meeting of Alumni
- Field Follow-up on Entrepreneurial Activities
- Entrepreneurial Training Programs at the Local Level
- Development and strengthening of Young Agriculturist Support Organizations

**YEAR THREE**
- Internship (U.S. participants to ASEAN)
- Entrepreneurship Training Program
- Annual Meeting of Alumni
- Field Follow-up on Entrepreneurial Activities
- Entrepreneurial Training Programs at the Local Level
- Development and strengthening of Young Agriculturist Support Organizations

YEAR FOUR
- Internship (ASEAN participants to U.S.)
- Entrepreneurship Training Program
- Annual Meeting of Alumni
- Field Follow-up on Entrepreneurial Activities
- Entrepreneurial Training Programs at the Local Level
- Development and strengthening of Young Agriculturist Support Organizations

YEAR FIVE
- Internship (U.S. participants to ASEAN)
- Entrepreneurship Training Program
- Annual Meeting of Alumni
- Field Follow-up on Entrepreneurial Activities
- Entrepreneurial Training Programs at the Local Level
- Development and strengthening of Young Agriculturist Support Organizations
- Final Workshop to evaluate project and plan for future

Evaluation: During the preliminary stages of this program baseline data will be collected to document the need for entrepreneurship training and set the stage for project planning and evaluation. Baseline data will include the following:
- number of young agriculturists in target areas,
- potential target population of young entrepreneurs,
- needed skills, knowledge, abilities and aspirations,
- mean and median incomes of the target population,
- existing support organizations for young farmers at the local, state and national levels, and
- need for leadership development training within existing young farmer organizations.

In terms of methodology, a combination of evaluation methods will be utilized in this project. These include the following:
- participant assessment of training through questionnaires,
- competency based evaluation to measure changes in knowledge; skills, and abilities,
- evaluability assessment to determine critical points in the logic model,
- participatory rural assessment to determine accomplishments and impacts at the local level,
- the USAID approach to measuring institutional capacity, and
- the USDA TOPS (Targeting Outcomes of Programs) methodology to determine specific programmatic outcomes.

Expected outcomes include:
• measurable improvement in entrepreneurial knowledge, skills, abilities and aspirations of participants including agriculturists and extension educators,
• documented changes in practices of participants that demonstrate effective entrepreneurship,
• increase in entrepreneurial activities attempted/completed,
• increase in income of participants as a result of new entrepreneurial activities,
• increase in leadership activities among participants,
• strong organizations that support young agriculturists at the local, state and national levels,
• increase in entrepreneur education at the local level, and
• satisfaction of project participants.
Sustainability will depend on assisting rural youth to develop profitable, competitive farming operations – a current priority of ASEAN. This project will increase the number of youth engaged in successful agricultural entrepreneurship activities. It will also strengthen the capacity of extension educators in participating countries to train and support future young agriculturists. In addition, extension educators will be expected to integrate their new knowledge, skills, and abilities into their ongoing educational programs.

The core training curriculum developed under this project will be available for adaptation to agriculture training institutes and universities in participating countries and beyond. Representatives from the National Agriculture Training College in Malaysia have already expressed an interest in using this skills-based curriculum.

The support organizations for young agriculturists developed under this project are expected to continue well beyond the life of the project. Association activities will be financed by modest dues, fund-raising activities, or grants from other organizations.

Conclusions

The partners concluded that the original apprenticeship program for ASEAN was not the best approach. Rather the entrepreneurship training program that resulted was preferred. The partners decided that they need to submit the new proposal to AWGATE for approval since it contains significant changes from the original proposal approved by AWGATE. The partners agreed that the finished and approved proposal should then be submitted to potential funding sources. Next, involvement of U.S. universities by application and selection is desirable. The details of the application and selection process need to be worked out.

Educational Importance

The educational model designed (figure 1) should have many elements useful in other settings. Multi-national coordination, multi-lateral funding, provisions for true partnership, and linking participants across national boundaries, are innovative yet practical elements. The results and impacts could influence development work in many settings. As soon as the proposal is approved and funded, opportunities for universities and other groups to participate in this program will be announced. Those universities and agencies that have prepared themselves conceptually, and who have positioned themselves strategically for these opportunities, will have a definite advantage. The potential impacts to U.S. universities, young entrepreneurs and extension agents in the U.S. and in Southeast Asia could be considerable.
References
Etling, A. (2002). Final report: Adapting/testing a tool for creating international higher education partnerships. Lincoln, NE: International Programs Division, IANR, University of Nebraska.