

## A Path Out of Poverty- Developing Rural and Women Entrepreneurship

The United Nations Industrial Development Organization formed the Rural and Women Entrepreneurship Program that aimed to reduce poverty levels through their support of the rural people and the women who strived for entrepreneurial initiatives. According to surveys, 75% of the poor live in rural areas and 60% of the world's poor are women. In conjunction to the Millennium Development Goals, and to reduce poverty levels, the RWE has created various approaches to reach their objective of encouraging gender equality to reduce problems such as poverty, hunger, and disease through methods that advocates sustainability. There are a variety of complex reasons that formed to create this situation. First being that the various resources and policies focuses primarily on urban development, which poorly affects the surrounding rural areas. These rural areas cannot sustain itself, therefore income is sought after in urban cities, which does not have the economic capabilities to fulfill their needs. The relocation to the urban cities has also created havoc in the familial infrastructure as the women and children are left behind. These families achieve their total income through a combination of both agriculture and commerce. A large majority of women are involved in subsistence agriculture and have various roles in their respective cultures. These "roles" hinder the women to play a more active role in the development of various enterprises within their communities, therefore the goal of the RWE is to create programs that is easily convertible to their existing community in order to create a more sustainable living economic situation and empowers the women to become strong decision makers within their community.

The RWE is utilizing the "bottom-up growth strategy" which focuses on changing and diversifying small-scale businesses to growth-oriented enterprises which allows its participants to partake in its mainstream economy. It quotes, "The strategy is not a welfare program, but a necessary condition for attaining sustainable economic growth by unleashing under-utilized productivity potentials." In order for the entrepreneurs to flourish, they have implemented various methods and tools that strengthen the public administration, enhance the development of human resource departments, and advocate policies that will assist in the advancement of rural women entrepreneurs. Depending on the specific needs of the rural location, the RWE provides various solutions to promote the business needs by considering its unique culture and also taking into consideration the status of their existing infrastructure. The articles goes on to present case studies of the implemented methodologies and tools by the RWE in various developing countries across South America, South East Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa to show the specific conditions in each location.

In terms of applying these studies directly into the project that our class is tackling, we can begin by really observing and considering what the current economical status is for the rural women in Guatemala. In reading the case study for Central America, the article explains that there was a "pressing" need to expand their market and cultivate their business in a more competitive environment. The researchers also noticed a trend of experience in the agro-food business, and they strived to tap into that arena of expertise by really developing their commercial attitudes and their entrepreneurial thinking. With various training sessions and

installing tools and methods to expand their business, the results were outstanding, with several groups of women setting up production facilities and their own micro-enterprise. I think the development of this product could go in conjunction with the already implemented NWE project, creating various product techniques to make the process of obtaining and packaging their goods more accessible and intelligent, but also creating new products that make their sustainable farming more prolific in terms of quantity, but also to ease the quality of their work habits. By really viewing and observing the way in which they manage their small business, we can really tap into the needs of the women. The process of having an agricultural business is a lengthy one, which involves a combination of planting, sowing, collecting, slicing, packaging, etc. Other processes also involve the construction of green houses, the improvement of food science and soil science, and also the implementation of their irrigation system. With even the minor changes in the product development of one essential agricultural technique/product, there could be a huge surge of improvements in crop quality and yield that can drastically progress the lives of these rural women. Ultimately, if expanding the NWE project were a realistic endeavor along with our goal to develop products, it would be a duo combination of entrepreneurial training, and also technical skill developments with the proper training of agro-tools in order for the women to better enhance their business. These newly developed products could be purchased after their first “go” subsequent to their entrepreneurial training by the NWE. Ultimately, it is not only the product that we should consider, but also its sustainable afterlife. I would also consider various non-agro-business methods of entrepreneurship that is showcased in other case studies such as the ones presented in the Pacific island countries which focuses on traditional crafts.

As I read through the articles, and the various case studies presented by the NWE, I feel presented with the overwhelming importance of cultural nuances and idiosyncrasies that is duly noted through the research by their organization. There are many logical and scientific solutions and multiple explanations that may initially present themselves as the primary key to solving the complex situation for the rural women in their respective countries, however, without acknowledging the small details and without scrutinizing the thinking frame of the individuals whose histories and past are complex, the sustainability of the solution could be in question. As a designer, I feel strongly about really observing what feels completely uncorrelated to the actual “product” at hand. The case studies really reinforced the fact that we must really observe the lifestyle and the history of the way the women live their lives in order to successfully implement various methodologies within a stem of very complex and sensitive situations. I also felt very strongly about NWE’s goals on not only rural development but also their concern with gender equality and the empowerment of these women. These issues meld together hand in hand as rural developments can only be successful with the compliance of women who believe this is possible.

With the article focusing on entrepreneurial training methods for the selective group of women who had experience in the agro-business, I wanted to do a little research in micro financing which was specifically geared towards women. FINCA, for example is a program with goals that were similar to the NWE. They provide financial services to the poor as a working capital for their business through donations, and also help install a village-banking group that serves as an economic democracy where loans are accessible. They present the information that services create

improvement in nutrition, health, and also various home improvements which raises the woman's self esteem which further increases her status in the community as a whole. They also provide various groups, depending on their situation, entrepreneurial training and various bookkeeping methods to sustain the village banking group but also to enhance their own financial endeavors. They are also strategizing in terms of the millennium development goals that strive to aggressively reduce extreme poverty.