

**LEARNINGS IN MANAGING AN OUTREACH PROJECT:
THE CASE OF CPU KATIN-ARAM CENTER**

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ABSTRACT

This study described the growth and development of the Katin-aran Center and its contribution to the community and University. It used the exploratory and descriptive design. A focus group discussion with pioneers and key players validated the data. Katin-aran emerged as a response to the needs of the Social Work Department for practicum field placement. Soon it grew with established development concept, framework and effective methods in organizing communities. Because of its track record, the Center earned recognition here and abroad. It has reached its peak as separate foundation implementing multi-million empowerment projects. The impacts of its programs and services have been translated into people's community involvement. Among the administrative factors that promote and hinder the development are, as follows: institutional support provided by the University; participatory and integrated/ holistic development approach; and the charismatic qualities and management style of the pioneer director combined with highly committed staff. However, the same factors created organizational problems and issues, namely: indeterminate structure, lack of a more definite framework for strategies, learning disability, and role confusion.

INTRODUCTION

Community Outreach is one of the trilogies of functions of Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs). While education, i.e., teaching is the primary duty of colleges and universities, they have major service obligations to their communities and their country. Most often, it is the outreach endeavors of the academic institutions that have a bearing in the lives of the people in the communities, as the programs and projects directly affect their lives. The impact is more when the outreach project is properly managed.

The Michigan State University, in its *Guidebook for Planning & Evaluating Quality Outreach* (2000), has identified four dimensions in managing an outreach project. Foremost, is the *significance* of the project. Next is *context* with the following components: consistency with university/unit values and the stakeholder interests, appropriateness of expertise, the degree of collaboration, appropriateness of methodological approach, and sufficiency and creative use of resources. The third dimension is *scholarship* which refers to the resources, application, generation, and utilization of knowledge. Finally, the last dimension includes the project's *impact* on issues, institutions, and individuals. This requires rigorous, thorough, understandable, and defensible documentation and interpretation.

At Central Philippine University, it is the major goal of outreach to implement social development programs that help improve the life of our people. Among the outreach projects in the University, the Katin-aran Center stands out in terms of concrete and lasting manifestations and the impression it has created. With various programs related to Social Development, Rural Productivity, and the Community-Based Health Program, the Katin-aran Center has earned recognition and respect locally, nationally, and internationally for its flagship of quality implementation of participatory, integrated community development programs.

With such experiences, it can be assumed that the University has already established a system of outreach mechanism that can be replicated in other communities and followed by other units. The reality, however, proves otherwise. Little has been made to document and assess such fate to serve as a basis to improve the current and future endeavors. While the University has rich experiences in outreach endeavors, it still has to establish a concrete model worthy of emulation.

This makes the study more significant. It hopes to offer insights on the processes involved in administering and sustaining the outreach project. Such knowledge is expected to provide directions on how other units can further enhance their capabilities as they continue in their development endeavors. In particular, the findings of the study will help outreach units assess their management styles and other administrative aspects of work so that they can improve their structure and operations in order to become more relevant in their development endeavors.

The study was conducted to describe the administration of Katin-aran Center in coping with the demands of times and circumstances in the development work. Specifically, it aimed to:

1. Describe the factors and processes that brought about the growth and development of the Katin-aran Center and the conditions under which it was organized.
2. Evaluate the structure, function, activities of the Katin-aran Center.
3. Appraise the significant achievements or contributions of the organization to both the University and the community it serves.
4. Look into the management styles of the organization and how these affect their sustenance/survival.
5. Identify issues and problems emanating from various management styles in administration.

6. Analyze the administrative factors that promote or hinder its development.

This study covered and limited itself to the growth and development of the Katin-aran Center under the management of the University. It did not exhaustively include the period when it became a Foundation independent from the University due to limited budget and sensitivity of the problem.

METHODS

The exploratory and descriptive design was used in this study, employing the historical approach as well as the qualitative method of research. Primary data were collected through interviews with key informants using a semi-structured interview guide. Secondary data were gathered either from the retrieved records in the office or from personal file of officers made available to the researchers. Data from those sources were validated through focus group discussions wherein initial findings were presented to pioneers and key players for confirmation and additional insights.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Katin-aran Center emerged as a response to the needs of the Department of Social Work for practicum field placement. Soon it grew with established development concepts and framework and effective methods in organizing communities. It has reached its peak when it became a separate foundation implementing multi-million peso empowerment projects.

The achievements and contribution of Katin-aran to the community are highlighted by the establishment of federated people's organizations that became functional in respective

communities. The impacts of the programs and services to the personal lives of the Katin-aran members have been translated into community involvement in various forms and services. Foremost, is the development of self and service to the community. They learned to value their humanity, develop self-confidence and positive attitude in life. Becoming service oriented, they developed the courage and commitment to stand for and protect their rights, as well as the rights of others. The degree of such development was best described by the comment of one member, "Nangin tao kami" (We become human beings).

Such development has benefited the community, as well as the university. Katin-aran members became responsible, productive citizens, and effective leaders in the community. With developed skills in leadership and linkages, they served their respective communities in various ways. The initiatives and breakthroughs undertaken by the Center in communities gained recognition and awards from local to national level. These, in turn, benefited the University in its accreditation requirements, as well as in community relations.

With such experience in outreach endeavors, Katin-aran could have established a system of outreach mechanism in the whole University that can be replicated in other communities and followed by other units. Yet, the lack of documentation, assessment, and other studies has deprived the University of new opportunities for student learning and professional staff development, as well as innovations in curriculum and improvement in the institution's operations and visibility. This is where the Katin-aran Center failed based on the fundamental characteristics of the outreach project mentioned earlier. While it succeeded in the first two dimensions e.g. *significance* and *context*, the Katin-aran Center was not able to maximize the *scholarship* and *impact* of the outreach project.

Some administrative factors become responsible to promote and hinder the development. Prominently, are the

institutional support provided by the University; participatory and integrated/ holistic development approach; and the charismatic qualities and management style of the pioneer director combined with highly committed staff. However, the same factors that sustained the operation of the Katin-aran Center created some organizational problems and issues, namely: indeterminate structure, lack of a more definite framework for strategies, learning disability, and role confusion.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Through decades of experiences, the Katin-aran Center has established clear development concepts and framework. It has also formulated the step- by- step process in organizing communities which has already been tested and proven to be effective. Comparatively, the communities it has organized have been sustained even until now, many years after the Center ceased to operate. Its track record has earned recognition and respect locally, nationally, and internationally for its flagship of quality implementation of participatory, integrated community development programs.

As such, the Katin-aran Center experience is indeed worthy of emulation as a model in community outreach. Its experiences, both happy and sad, provide valuable lessons and learnings for academic institutions undertaking outreach endeavors as part of the trilogy of the higher education institutions. With it, some recommendations are in place.

Foremost, is for the University to continue the partnership and assistance to the Katin-aran communities in various forms. Among others, the University should facilitate seminars, skills training, livelihood, and entrepreneurship follow up activities; and fund assistance in the form of loans, livelihood, and technology.

It would be good if the University, through the Department of Social Work and University Outreach Center,

will continue to lend its influence in helping revive, reorganize inactive communities, as well as establish linkages, a partnership with government, local government units, and NGOs to strengthen the Katin-aran communities. But such partnership must be institutionalized so that whoever will be in the helm of leadership of both units, the working relationship will continue.

A comprehensive evaluation research by the University Research Center or Department of Social Work is highly recommended so that the rich experiences in community organization and development work of Katin-aran Center can be properly documented and transformed into reference materials that will be used in classrooms and in other academic exercises.

The Department of Social Work can consolidate communities and based on the lessons learned, integrate the outreach program with the College of Arts and Science to involve and maximize the resources of other departments and the whole University. Likewise, the Department should maximize the learning opportunities for other departments under the Arts and Sciences, in particular, and other colleges, in general. This way, the outreach endeavors will benefit both the communities and the University, as new opportunities for student learning and professional staff development, innovations in curriculum, and improvement in the institution's operations and visibility will now be enhanced.

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