



Social Entrepreneurship among University Students: The Grey Oyster Mushroom Project for Happiness

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ABSTRACT

The Grey Oyster Mushroom Project for Happiness (GOM) was initiated at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) with the aims of creating social entrepreneurs among students as well as alleviating poverty and social problems through social entrepreneurship project. The project has chosen the disabled from Community-Based Rehabilitation in Segamat, Johor as the beneficiaries after performing a social and economic needs analysis. As the beneficiaries are suffering from social stigma and unable to be financially independent, GOM Project has given a light of hope for them and able to increase their social and economic livelihood. GOM Project was able to create a sustainable and profitable oyster mushroom business for the beneficiaries, directly impacted 30 disabled persons and 14 students as well as indirectly impacted thousands of people. It was able to fulfill three of Sustainable Development Goals

introduced by the United Nations, namely decent work and economic growth, good health and wellbeing as well as reduced inequalities.

Key Words: Social entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship, students.

1. INTRODUCTION

Glancing through, one may see that the world is progressing towards modernization with substantial infrastructures and communities who are educated and well-off. However, looking closely, one will realize that while a certain quarters of the world are wealthy, there are some plagued by poverty and other social issues. Poverty and inequality still persist in this modern world (Rahim et al, 2014; Mohtar and Rahim, 2014). Realizing this issue, UiTM has been very active towards promoting social entrepreneurship programs and initiatives among its students and staff (Rahim & Chik, 2014). Picking up on the support, UiTM students in Johor has initiated a social entrepreneurship project called The Grey Oyster Mushroom Project for Happiness (GOM) to help the community in need. Thus, this paper aims to report on the implementation and impact of the project, with the objective of contributing to practical and literature aspects. The remainder of the research paper will progress as follows. The second section will focus on the literature review of the social entrepreneurship. The third section discusses on the project and the last section will conclude the study.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Social Entrepreneurship

Though the concept of social entrepreneurship has always been there and is very much sought after in the practical world, it is still considered as a very young area and very much the opposite of the well accepted and matured entrepreneurship field (Mohtar and Rahim, 2014).

William Drayton, was the person who firstly introduced the term social entrepreneurship (Barendsen and Gardner, 2004). In 1980, Drayton founded a global organization called Ashoka which identifies and invests on foremost social entrepreneurs with system changing solutions for the world's most urgent social problems (Gandy, 2012). During that period, the social sector begins to discover that entrepreneurship and the entrepreneurial concepts could be applied in that field as well.

Social entrepreneurship's main objective is to achieve a progressive social transformation. (Hartigan, 2006). Drayton (2002) defined social entrepreneurship as the act of deliberate and intentional inclusion of entrepreneurial strategies and theories in the quest of social change.

Social entrepreneurs have the exceptional abilities of identifying complex social problems and working through it in an innovative way that raises public awareness of the problem through their vision and activities. They seek new opportunities and produce positive effect by using leadership and management methods (Dees, 2009). The social entrepreneurs work towards getting profit while producing change by providing community value (Dees, 1998), towards building a sustainable community (Johnson, 2000).

They believe that by interdependence and inclusiveness of the community (Henton et al., 1997), changes could be made so that the world could move forward (Henton et al., 1997) They link sectors, stakeholders and diverse community networks (Henton et al., 1997) by creating a solid, resilient and productive relationship between the private, public and civil sectors (Henton et al, 1997). The networking relationship between communities is being used to get even bigger community relationship by creating bridges in order to pool resources (Henton et al, 1997; Dees, 1998).

Social entrepreneurs are problem solvers with innovative solutions for unresolved community needs (Dees 1998) by marshalling and using scarce resources in inventive ways (Dees, 1998; Henton et al., 1997). They are considered as leaders in transforming the community and the world (Henton et al., 1997). They empower the others by expressing their passion in order to create a better world and creating positive changes. They are networkers and motivators, conveners and teachers, drivers and integrators, agitators and mentors (Henton et al., 1997). It was also suggested that there is a pressing need to create huge numbers of social entrepreneurs in the market (Yunus, 2008).

3. SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROJECT: THE GREY OYSTER MUSHROOM PROJECT FOR HAPPINESS

3.1. Preliminary Study

The beneficiaries for the Oyster Mushroom Project are the disabled from Pemulihan Dalam Komuniti (PDK) or Community-Based Rehabilitation, a centre in Segamat that was established by The Department of Social Welfare in assisting the disabled that are often neglected. Realizing the disabled persons are facing problems, an analysis of needs in terms of social and economic has been carried out and GOM Project is deemed pivotal to addressing the social issue within PDK Segamat which primarily is underpinned by two key aspects; (i) the demographics of the beneficiaries, and (ii) the beneficiaries' scarce knowledge and lack of exposure on agro-technology.

Firstly, the demographics of the beneficiaries suggest the low income of the disabled persons in PDK Segamat. The main reason underlying the financial constraint of these beneficiaries is attributed to the skewed job opportunities available in their local community; a

major criterion being one's physical capabilities thus their incapacitation has constrained them from satisfying the required standards, at the very onset. Inevitably, they experience emotional struggle from dealing with the perception of their (physiological) maladjustment from the society. Therefore, all of these have essentially pushed forward the GOM Project as its implementation promises a favourable economic prospectus. Besides, it conforms to the rationale of setting up a PDK which aims to provide equal chances to its beneficiaries i.e. a rehabilitation centre.

Secondly, the beneficiaries' scarce knowledge and lack of exposure on agro-technology have called forth the GOM Project. With regards to their decision to growing the plant in PDK Segamat, the idea was originally proposed by one of the disabled persons who attended an independent one-off course in which had resulted in the project to be carried out at the car park in the PDK itself. To no surprise, it was short-lived. The project struggled to yield the targeted income due to several factors, one of the most critical was identified to be its poor management – limited resources and inappropriate nursery.

As a result, these had eventually caused the setbacks to outweigh its anticipated benefits. Little did they know that the process of growing Oyster Mushroom requires the understanding of correct techniques, the establishment of a nursery to suit its fungi nature, and the administration of resources with proper instrumentation. This initiative has come to their aid as the beneficiaries are able to grow and consume their own home-grown Oyster Mushroom, plus simultaneously promoting the sense of ownership and self-empowerment. In light of gauging the impact of this social entrepreneurial action introduced in PDK Segamat, it is fundamental to highlight the autonomy of beneficiaries i.e. the disabled wherein their sustainability is henceforth assured, in the meantime, enabling them to gain personal income through the initiative.

3.2. Scope and Scalability

The scope of GOM project which is chiefly aimed to improve the standard of living of the society at large is realised through the inclusive participation. At the community level, this is crucial since a community-based rehabilitation programme (PDK), as the name suggests, requires diversity in which its strength lays in the various levels of creativity i.e. a blend of disabled and non-disabled beneficiaries alongside the new planting technique. Their aspirations and needs are fulfilled following the adaptability of the oyster mushrooms project to be the entrepreneurial action which matches the beneficiaries' resources, abilities, and local setting.

Based on the short-term and long-term benefits from growing the oyster mushrooms, this project is believed to be scalable following the early stage of selecting the oyster mushroom itself. The small capital needed to initiate the project, in addition to the nature of this plant which grows at a speedy rate of three days, easy to be taken care of, and requires no fertilisers,

have led to oyster mushrooms to be planted in the PDK for its immediate outcome. Moreover, the marketability of the oyster mushrooms has reported to be in high demand, which is currently selling at the price of MYR 12 to MYR 15 per kilogram. These have enabled this project to be sustainable. Such fruitful outcomes have secured prolonged funding from the Khind Starfish Foundation, grant acquisition from the Department of Social Welfare, the parliamentary contribution, and knowledge transfer from Farmers' Organization Authority (Peladang). On a side note, the current PDK is assigned to model another five rehabilitation centres in the Segamat district itself, as more sheds are scheduled to be established in the near future. The beneficiaries' income has become more promising, due to the upscale of harvest thus allowing them to create their own brand as they are now the prominent suppliers.

The idea of home-grown mushroom promotes the ease of access to vegetables, at a relatively low cost hence shrinks the household costs. Furthermore, oyster mushroom is a power house natural medicine which is associated to improve weight management, enhances nutrition, increases vitamin D level, and boosts the immune system. The present initiative at PDK Segamat is an example of the replicated project from the successful rehabilitation centres in Dungun and Pulau Perhentian, Terengganu. Given its potential, the current initiative has upgraded in terms of the planting technique thus stands better chances of further growth and replication.

3.3. Implementation

In the implementation of this Oyster Mushroom initiative, several collaborations have provided greater leverage and advantages. For instance, the fund from Khind Starfish Foundation has enabled the set-up of the mushroom shed and provision of split grills, two major essentials to growing the fungi. Peladang, on the other hand, has contributed to the new innovation of growing the oyster mushrooms, i.e. split grill and it has proven to significantly multiply the outcome. The use of split grill as the new planting method as compared to the medium block has shown this project to be significantly cost-efficient and able to increase the production of the oyster mushroom and double the monthly profit of the project. The use of split grill as the advanced method of growing oyster mushrooms is a new discovery in the agricultural industry, and is yet to be patented.



Figure 1: The split grill method used for GOM Project

On top of that, the students have initiated the set-up of the mushroom shed which has provided the ideal growing space of the fungi, now even at a bigger scale. Previously, the use of medium block requires gradual watering which was done manually but the instalment of the automated water sprinkler at the mushroom shed has enabled the maintenance of optimum humidity at every 3 to 4 hours interval, without any human assistance which shall deter the growth due to its highly sensitive nature to odours or bacterial contamination.



Figure 2: The mushroom shed of GOM Project

3.4. Impact

Through the GOM Project, 30 disabled persons from PDK Segamat and 14 UiTM students worked alongside with local communities and external parties. Through this initiative, the beneficiaries involved are explicitly introduced to the notion of social entrepreneurship in which it boosts their standard of living, gaining nearly RM3,000 sales in the first month and expected to increase up to RM14,900 in the coming months. Not only that, their confidence and social well-being increased tremendously as they are able to successfully maintain a sustainable profit-making business.

Apart from that, GOM Project entitled them to receive additional allowance of RM 350 for the working people with disabilities from Department of Social Welfare (JKM), exclusive of their income benefitted from growing the Oyster Mushrooms within the PDK. PDK Segamat is planning to create its own brand of oyster mushroom with proper packaging to increase marketability and sales of their oyster mushroom. Furthermore, GOM Project will be replicated to 5 other PDK due to its success.

Table 1: The impact of GOM Project

No	Impact	Description
1	People Impacted	Direct Impact: 30 disabled from PDK Segamat and 14 UiTM students Indirect Impact: Awareness created to thousands of people through social media and media coverage.
2	Economic impact	RM3,000 sales in the first month and expected to increase up to RM14,900 in the coming months
3	Social Impact	Confidence and social well-being increased tremendously as the disabled are being empowered with needed skills to successfully maintain a sustainable profit-making business.
4	Engagements	Secured prolonged funding from the Khind Starfish Foundation, grant acquisition from the Department of Social Welfare, the parliamentary contribution, and knowledge transfer from Farmers' Organization Authority (Peladang).
5	Replication	GOM Project will be replicated to 5 other PDK

4. CONCLUSION

GOM Project proved to be a successful project in which it empowered the disabled persons with entrepreneurial skills and a sustainable profit-generating business of oyster mushroom. Therefore, the disabled person's social and economic well-being were increased tremendously. While economic situation is important, however the social well-being shows the most in the faces of the beneficiaries. They are more confident, happy and full of hope in facing the future. This project directly impacted 30 disabled persons and 14 students while indirectly impacted thousands of people by creating awareness as well as collaborated with various external parties to make this project a successful one. As United Nations introduced the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) to transform our world (United Nation,2015), GOM Project was done in line with SDG and able to hit 3 of the SDG; namely decent work and economic growth, good health and wellbeing as well as reduced inequalities.

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