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“The role of dialogue and networking:
From a transitional to an industrialized country”

Planting Seeds of Dialogue and Networking by a City University with and on behalf of “Excluded” Rural Women

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Abstract

Mass poverty excludes citizens from full participation in the economy and politics. In developing countries, a university with human and technical resources could plant seeds of dialogue and networking with and on behalf of the “excluded”.

The poor in the Philippines are in the rural areas (BALICASAN in Doronila 2000), where two-thirds live and thirty-three families dominate (cf. MCBETH 1989). Among the poor, women are worse off because of physical, economic, and cultural obstacles. They select seeds, market fish catch, or harvest, yet account only for twenty-six per cent of agricultural workers (NSO 2000). The study is premised on:

- “No society can surely be flourishing and happy, of which the far greater part . . . are poor and miserable” (ADAM SMITH, WN in Rotschild 1995:3).
- Helping is an act of restoration (GRONNEMEYER in Sachs, 1992). Direct productive assistance to poor women yield significant gains (MCKEE, 1989).
- Dialogue and networking within “vernacular universes” (cf. RAHNEMA in Sachs 1992) and across income strata are imperative in unequal societies.

A university could initiate dialogue and networking:

- publication of “best practices” — a community-based NGO cum cooperative could extend access to affordable credit among market women
- action-research among fishing village women — listening by an interdisciplinary team leads to leadership and livelihood skills training
- encounter-dialogue between economics students and “rurban” women where in-depth interview series lead to work histories of “excluded” women

The modes synthesize my research experience in the university. Data gathering was based on a social science that not only describes but changes:

- primary, through questionnaires or participant observation and secondary, through municipality archives
- qualitative, through focus group discussions and quantitative, statistics from government

As the Philippines becomes more market-friendly, a university could help lessen exclusion by setting a path of compassion among:

- NGO leaders and members towards market women enduring exorbitant interest rates
- fishing village women producing basic goods for their needy neighbors and growing in social power to serve through a lobby for a water system
- university students, who after seeing poverty, will choose more socially responsible careers / volunteer service

Keywords: Community-based NGO, exclusion, fishing village women, market-friendly, women's issues