

SECOND ROUND OF MONITORING AND EVALUATION VISITS HELPS PAINT A CLEARER PICTURE

HP completes the second round of its ground breaking monitoring and evaluation, for Asia Pacific Micro Enterprise Development program.

Long known for its commitment to investing in the economic and social wellbeing of the communities they support, HP's Micro Enterprise Development Grants initiative works hard at assisting micro business development agencies in their important work supporting very small businesses throughout Asia Pacific.

Specifically, since its inception in 2006 HP has provided technology, cash and training to a broad cross-section of over 40 non-government and not-for-profit groups working for the development of micro businesses.

Whilst it's one thing to be a good corporate citizen, HP believes in taking its support a step further than traditionally seen in the corporate social responsibility arena, and has developed a ground breaking monitoring and evaluation program to determine how effective the program is being at supporting the local community.

Specifically, the program aims to track the economic and social impact that the program has on the trainees. It also enables HP to accurately report on the results of the program to its stakeholders, as well as ensure the program continues to meet its objectives.

Round two continues the momentum

Following its successful debut in July 2007, the second round of monitoring and evaluation visits has recently been completed, with overall positive reports about the role that the HP technology and curriculum plays in developing skills and promoting improved opportunities in each of the monitored communities.

In this second round of evaluation, site visits were conducted at nine centers around Asia Pacific, with four to centers that were part of the first site visits. This second evaluation of centers visited last year, form a vital part of establishing baseline data, specifically for pre and post training. It also provides a valuable gauge of implementation progress, training deployment and a general monitoring report on external factors influencing the program. The nine centers visited were:

1. Entrepreneurship Development Institute (India)
2. China Association for Employment Promotion (China)
3. Center for Information Systems Training (Cambodia)
4. Korea Institute of Trade Association (Korea)
5. ASEAN Foundation (Indonesia)
6. Fuping Development Institute/Yunnan Financial School (China)
7. Mission Australia (Australia)
8. Self Employed Womens Association (India)
9. Auckland Chamber of Commerce (New Zealand)

Site visits and subsequent reports were conducted by ten evaluators, all who are researchers from the Australian National University and who have been trained

specifically for the task, including Train the Trainer and a specific workshop for using the IPAQs and specially designed software, by Grabba International.

Initial observations point to promising results

Across the board, the evaluators reported on the invaluable nature of visiting the centers and experiencing the implementation first hand. Spending an extended period of time at the centers presented valuable insights into the centers and the challenges they face, particularly in light of each of their individual cultural, social and environmental factors. For example in some locations where training is conducted in India, there is limited electricity, with training subsequently affected by its availability. Not only can such valuable insights be then addressed and worked into the program, but understanding how a center deals with such hurdles can also be shared with others who face similar issues.

Individual assessments of the centers pointed to some extremely heartening results. In China for example, where, incidentally the adoption rate was the highest of all countries, the China Association for Employment Promotion reported results that included a 300 percent increase in profits for micro entrepreneurs that had completed the HP curriculum. Of the 93 people trained, 43 expanded their business as a result of training and 37 are exploring starting their own business. Within the Yingshan county, a total of 220 extra employment opportunities had been created by the training/program. Importantly, these increased local employment opportunities led to a number of families being reunited, who had been previously forced to separate, due to migrant labor.

Ultimately however, due to the enormous diversity within the recipients and the unique societal, economic and cultural issues affecting communities throughout Asia Pacific, the evaluators highlighted that further time and research will be required to identify finite trends. Some initial observations can be drawn however, for example, training smaller groups is more efficient and beneficial.

Generally speaking, the latest round of visits identified that the program is playing a role in developing skills and promoting improved opportunities for the trainees. For example, at the Self Employed Women's Association in India, of the trainees surveyed: 58 percent were accessing technology for the first time, 64 percent said that the program had improved their IT skills, 51 percent reported an improvement in business skills and 23 percent expected to gain new employment as a result of their involvement in the program. In addition, across the board the research also pointed to the program having a significant positive impact in many intangible outcomes, for example, reported increased levels of self esteem and confidence amongst the trainees, as a result of new and developed skills gained through the program.

Importantly though, the round two visits demonstrated the need for continuing and progressing these visits to ensure the social and economic impact of the program is accurately tracked. This is something that HP remains clearly focused on, as it continues with this monitoring and evaluation process, as part of its commitment to providing sustained and accountable benefits to communities around the region.