

PILOT PROGRAM OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL ENTREPRENEUR EXPERIENCE

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On the 25th of August, 2006, we said our official goodbyes to the 14 international students who joined the Entrepreneurs School of Asia for the pilot program of the Social Entrepreneur Experience (SEE). To say that this group was truly a “United Nations” would not be an understatement given that the group consisted of people from 9 nations. Fortunately, unlike many countries today, conflict and the blurring of territories was not a problem as peace seemed to reign in “Big Bobby’s House.”

The SEE program is ESA’s important response to the growing problem of poverty here in the Philippines — a problem which cannot be hidden nor disguised. It is the shame of any country that has people living below the poverty line and in unsafe psychological, emotional, environmental, political and spiritual situations. The Third World, let it be known, also exists in the UK and many other “promoted” First-World countries, so it is *our* problem and it is here in the Philippines that International Students come to learn (and put into practice) that business is a tool for development and a model that is

transferable to every corner of what is known as the Global Village.

Come and SEE, taste and SEE — this is exactly what our international and ESA students did. From the moment the international trainees arrived, they were exposed to many “extremes”: extreme heat, extreme rain, extreme traffic, extreme pollution, extreme love and friendship, extreme acceptance and an extreme experience of richness and poverty.

The eight weeks of the SEE Program were broken into many experiences but specifically 4 modules:

Home Stay provided the International trainees with an experience of what it is to be part of a Filipino family as well as experiencing first hand what the life of a micro-entrepreneur really is. This contextualized their whole SEE Program

Class/lectures provided each one with the tools and insights on how to share their knowledge with the micro-entrepreneurs. As well as

discuss what the implications are on society if we all become agents of change!

Environmental Exposure, although cancelled due to the typhoon, aimed to expose all students to the environmental impacts of over consumerism.

Microentrepreneur Visits consisted of the sharing of skills and tools with the micro-entrepreneur.

Each one of these modules was designed specifically to provide the students with the understanding and tools to enable and empower the micro-entrepreneur. To pass on this knowledge was not always easy—some trainees/students were faced with reluctant recipients, others with frustration and challenge as facts were not always honestly given. However, the biggest lesson for each one of us today is that we need to be sensitive to what people want. We may be right in thinking that microentrepreneurs want to be shown how they can make big profits, yet the frustration for us is that maybe they do not want to be like Richard Branston — they want to just make enough to live. Or they may want to just make enough so they don’t have to pay taxes? The point is, success is measured differently by each one and we need to know what this means for each person.

ESA has found a niche in the market, a niche that is an opportunity for us to become agents of change. ESA aims to promote business as a tool for development, and to make a difference here in the Philippines.