

Kasambahay (Domestic Workers) Savings Month

Kasambahay Savings Month (KSM) successfully expanded the benefits of Kasambahay Savings Project (KSP), piloted in San Juan City last year, throughout different cities in Metro Manila and to some extent, across the country. Just like KSP, the KSM workshop also educated domestic workers on the necessity and methods of financial planning. But through the media campaign, KSM was also able to reach the Filipino general public.

Information Campaign

An account opening workshop was held on September 27, 2015. During the event, domestic workers opened bank accounts and received financial training. KSM was featured on four national TV shows: (News to Go, 24 Oras, Balitanghali, Quick Response Team). One spot was an on air announcement of the September 27 account opening workshop details. The three other spots included an interview of Lindsey Lim, a KSP pilot kasambahay, and details of the September 27 workshop. The spots were played at different times of day, morning, afternoon, prime time, etc. to reach different audiences.

Despite efforts to contact radio and newspaper journalists including handing them project briefs in person, media coverage was primarily on TV and one newspaper, Business World. Although the TV spots provided national coverage and generated inquiries from Baguio city in the north of the Philippines to Iloilo, Cebu, Leyte and other provinces south of Metro Manila, most inquiries were generated from flyer distribution.

Flyers were distributed directly to 8,050 houses in Pasig, Muntinlupa and Makati cities. These houses were located in seven large housing subdivisions known to have a high concentration of domestic workers: Wack Wack, Ayala Alabang, Corinthian Gardens, Magallanes, San Lorenzo, Urdaneta and Bel-Air villages. The flyers contained a letter to homeowners (in English) explaining the project and a poster (in Tagalog) for kasambahays explaining the workshop details and requirements.

Challenges

Unfortunately, the project was not able to encourage commercial banks to create special savings products (or market existing products) to low income people. Although Philippine Veteran's Bank was initially eager to create a new product with a low minimum initial deposit, they found it difficult to get their board of directors to approve it in time for the September 27 workshop.

About 406 kasambahays called or sent SMS messages to the phone hotlines. Kasambahays were instructed to send their name and type of ID (but not the ID number) to the hotline as their way of registering for the September 27 workshop. Unfortunately, only about 17% of the registered kasambahays attended the workshop.

In June 2015, Lindsey Lim presented KSP in front of 16 commercial banks to encourage them to join Kasambahay Savings Month. Out of that event, two banks: Philippine Veteran's Bank and RCBC Savings Bank, expressed interest and later confirmed their participation in Kasambahay Savings Month. Bank of the Philippine Islands (BPI) provided the savings accounts for the pilot program

through its field sales division, but after the June presentation, BPI's consumer division did not deem this market to be a priority and declined to participate.

After delays in signing the memorandum of agreement, Philippine Veteran's Bank pulled out of the program saying they could not get board approval in time to create a new savings product for kasambahays. RCBC Savings bank could not produce cards on the spot and would require kasambahays to attend the workshop and then return to the nearest branch to pick up the cards. Given the limited number of RCBC Savings bank branches, Lindsey Lim approached BPI's field sales division again and asked if they would participate. BPI's field sales division agreed but given the internal disagreement between BPI divisions, a written memorandum of agreement was not pursued. Upon finding out the BPI would participate and knowing that BPI would be able to generate bank cards during the workshop itself, RCBC declined to participate fearing that all kasambahays would prefer to open BPI accounts instead of RCBC accounts even though the KSM-RCBC memorandum was ready to be signed.

Although it is known that kasambahays went directly to bank branches to open bank accounts as a result of the information campaign, it was not possible to track how many due to the lack of a formal agreement with BPI. Tracking which accounts were generated by KSM would have required an agreement by all BPI branches in Metro Manila to tag accounts (to put an indicator) identifying them as KSM participants.

A difficult lesson from KSM is that financial inclusion/account opening programs cannot be expanded geographically and must stay at the grassroots level. The original hypothesis of KSM was that greater impact can be generated by inviting bigger numbers of kasambahays across cities. This was found not to be the case. Even though it was the kasambahays who voluntarily registered themselves for the workshop, the attendance rate was only about 17%. This was consistent with the average rate from the pilot but the highest attendance yields from the pilot were generated when the venue was located within the housing subdivision grounds. This indicates that city-wide or region-wide financial inclusion programs for domestic workers are not feasible and programs can only be implemented at the village or community level.

Program Sustainability

KSM aimed to facilitate the replication of similar financial inclusion programs for other vulnerable groups or in other cities. Instead of an online seminar, an in-person teaching workshop was held, to circumvent internet connectivity problems in the Philippines (internet speeds are too slow to sustain web conferences). Three organizations came to observe the September 27 workshop and four more attended the October 15 teaching workshop. The three organizations that came to observe the September 27 workshop were Miriam College, a shipping company's foundation, and a children's financial literacy program. The workshop observers were given direct access to BPI staff so they can contact BPI directly if they want to set up their own workshops. Miriam College runs an adult night school which counts kasambahays among their students. The shipping company runs a livelihood program in an urban slum area and was interested in adding a bank savings program for their beneficiaries. The children's financial literacy program is based all the way in Cebu City.

The teaching workshop was an especially designed session that taught other organizations how to set up financial inclusion programs for their own beneficiaries as well as how to avoid problems encountered by KSP and KSM. Leonard Cheshire Disability Philippines Foundation, Valle Verde 6

Cortijos 5 Homeowners' Association, White Dove Community Care (for people with HIV), and Tulay sa Pag-unlad, Inc. (a microfinance institution) attend the workshop.

Among these seven organizations, Tulay sa Pag-unland or TSPI has shown the most potential and enthusiasm for replicating the program. TSPI has 19,000 microfinance members throughout the Philippines. As of today, KSM has provided TSPI the contact information of all the BPI managers we worked with and TSPI has taken the initiative to meet with the manager of one of the branches involved in the KSP pilot. TSPI hopes to pilot their own program in Quezon City before expanding to other areas. As an established microfinance organization that holds regular meetings with its members/borrowers, TSPI is able to yield higher attendance rates of about 40%.

KSM has built in several sustainability components. First and foremost, KSM found an established organization, TSPI, which may replicate the program. It also features several knowledge transfer components:

Volunteers from the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) and students from the University of the Philippine's development studies program helped run the workshop. These volunteers will carry valuable implementation knowledge into their future projects. Apart from increased public awareness through its media and flyer distribution campaigns, workshop participants can also share financial literacy lessons (word of mouth) with their friends and families. Finally, the KSM facebook page continues to get page views a month after the project ended. The facebook page explains how kasambahays, who did not attend the workshop, can apply for bank accounts directly at branches.