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Rags2Riches: Action Research Findings

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Presentation of Projects for Rags2Riches, Inc.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The poor lack access to market and income opportunities all over the world; this reality is more pronounced among women. Rags2Riches, Inc. (R2R hereafter) addresses this problem in the Philippines by creating social and economic opportunities through livelihoods for its artisan partners and their

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communities. By providing training in weaving skills and financial literacy, R2R assists each artisan, their families, and their communities. In order to measure its impact, R2R developed a social impact survey; however, it was paper-based and was not well suited to gather the social impact data that donors and investors require. R2R seeks to continue scaling its impact by partnering with more communities. To support the training of new artisans and communities, R2R has used an educational tool, however activities were not standardized into a timeline or documented in a module.

R2R requested that a team of Global Social Benefit Fellows address these needs by assessing and improving the effectiveness of its social impact survey and expanding its community expansion module into a comprehensive training plan. Critically evaluating the existing survey, we developed and piloted a revised format that would garner more appropriate data and be easier to administer. Our survey pilot data allowed us to determine the best topics to measure social impact. Upon return to campus in the fall, we converted the condensed paper-based survey into a mobile application to make survey administration and data consolidation more efficient.

In order for R2R to effectively scale, it needs a better-developed community expansion module with more livelihood teaching, skills training, and community values modules. Evaluating the existing community expansion module and observing training meetings in 6 communities, we were able to create an improved community expansion module that takes into account the learning curve of artisans as they practice weaving and business skills and to develop a more complete training plan. We improved the curriculum by writing clear learning objectives for each lesson, and by providing improved personal and business skills education throughout.

The first product is a social impact survey mobile application. It is currently accessible to R2R by Android and Apple phone users through the Magpi Mobile Data Collection application. The survey is to be administered by the Community Supervisor on the Magpi app, where data can be collected and stored directly. This data can then be uploaded onto the Magpi webpage where

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it is consolidated and accessible for download into an excel spreadsheet. Social impact data can then be interpreted and used to communicate R2R's social impact to investors, for a public webpage, and for internal use.

The second product is the improved community expansion module. This module is a 12-month training guide with a progressive evaluation form to evaluate the progress in learning of each artisan. It is to be used by the Community Supervisor in new artisan communities as a guide and timeline of monthly training activities.



Background on the Enterprise and its Research Needs

R2R pursues the mission of lifting Filipino artisans out of poverty as it provides marginalized people with market access and livelihood opportunities. R2R adopts a spirit of inclusivity and collaboration as it partners with artisans. In addition to providing livelihoods, R2R trains them in weaving, educates them in financial literacy and basic business skills, raises their awareness of health

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and education opportunities, and supports their personal and community development. After each artisan community is established and thoroughly trained, the community supervisor holds meetings once a month. These support the growth of the community and facilitate communication between the communities and the enterprise. R2R provides sustainable incomes and meets the social needs of its artisan partners.

R2R was conceived in 2007 in the community of Payatas, a disadvantaged urban area in Metro Manila and former dumpsite. Women were collecting scrap pieces of clothes, weaving this into rugs, and selling their product in the informal market. Middlemen exploited these women by intervening in their access to supply of fabric and the market, which had the effect of stealing their wages. Payatas became the first R2R artisan community, and the enterprise began its mission of providing poor Filipinos access to the market and formal economy. Over the past 7 years, R2R has refined their weaving technique, and trained over 900 artisans across Metro Manila in these skills. The enterprise has also expanded their product line beyond rugs and now makes eco-ethical fashion products, such as handbags and purses, and home accessories. By also partnering with influential designers, R2R has created products that are desirable to both fashion conscious and socially responsible consumers. As the brand continues to grow, so does the enterprise's ability to positively influence the lives of poor Filipino women.

We set out to understand and analyze the impact that R2R makes on its artisan partners as we engaged in field research and data collection. In doing so, we aimed to address the research needs of the enterprise as we improved its social impact survey, created a survey mobile application, and developed a community expansion module.

Social Impact Survey

The revised social impact survey aims to measure the quality of life of individual artisans, and to gather social impact data that can be used to show

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investors the true social impact of R2R, for public viewing on a webpage, and for internal use. Survey topics include education, income and financing, banking and loans, food security, healthcare, and household services.

Rationales of survey topics are include the following list:

- a. R2R aims to assess the impact that involvement with the enterprise can have on education. The survey records the education level of artisans and also tracks the education level of their children. This information is helpful in determining if an artisans' involvement with R2R also makes a positive impact on their children and family members. The survey measures this through tracking the age and grade level of artisans' children.
- b. R2R tracks the income and of the artisans. By tracking this, R2R can also compare artisan's income to their expenses, which allows the enterprise to measure its own relevance to its artisan communities. The survey questions ask about income earned from R2R and artisans' family member's income. It measures this in Philippine pesos per month.
- c. R2R wants to track savings and correlate this to artisans' use of the Quality of Life Program (QLP), also known as a passbook savings account. Survey questions ask what they save for and about how much they save for the specified item or items. It measures this in Philippine pesos.
- d. R2R evaluates the food security of artisans and their family members. The survey questions ask how many meals artisans and their families eat per day, what food they purchase and how much of it, and how much of their income pays for food items. This is measured by the number of meals that an artisan and their family members eat per day, and how many Philippines pesos are spent on food items per week.
- e. R2R wants to know what healthcare services artisans are active members of, and to track how often they and their family members visit the doctor. Survey questions ask about healthcare. These questions measure artisans' access to healthcare services by the number of times that they visit the doctor in a year.

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- f. R2R wants to assess artisan's quality of life through tracking their access to household utilities and infrastructure. The survey questions ask about basic utilities and infrastructure. It determines if artisans' do or do not have electricity and drinking water in their homes and what level of ownership they have of their homes. The survey measures artisans' access to household utilities and infrastructure with yes or no and multiple choice responses.

Community Expansion Module

The community expansion module provides a yearlong training plan to be used by the Community Supervisor in new artisan communities. It includes initial training instructions, business and values modules, and final evaluation forms to assess the readiness of individual artisans and the community. Requirements of a R2R artisans and weaving skills are taught during the initial training period and are built upon as training progresses. The community expansion module teaches basic business skills so that artisans understand the connection between the enterprise and their integral role as artisans. Values modules are valuable to the development of a successful artisan community, and also aim to contribute to artisans' personal growth. Each month's business and values modules are accompanied by interactive teaching activities that display the cohesiveness between the two. The community expansion module also includes a final evaluation checklist and an evaluation questionnaire. These forms can be used by R2R to determine if a group is ready to become an established artisan community.

In producing the module there was a great deal of dialogue with key stakeholders: members of artisan communities, the community supervisory, and staff of the enterprise, as the training plan was developed. Discussion with relevant parties was imperative as the community expansion module serves as

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a training tool that is learner-focused. The community expansion module will also be accessible as a resource for other enterprises that aim to replicate a similar training initiative. If used by other enterprises for future module creation, we recommend that the organization actively engage with the community it aims to serve so that it understands the needs of its audience and can adapt the module accordingly.