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SmartLessons

real experiences, real development

Time Banking™ Is More Than Money for Women in Senegal

Time Banking™ has been used in the United States since the 1980s to leverage social assistance funding. Time Banking™ engages a community in creating its own reform and progress by establishing a system of exchanging time and skills among community members. Time is exchanged on the basis of Time Credits, a currency of exchange that measures each person's time contribution, rewards it, and thus encourages further contributions of time. The result is that skills and assets within the community are tapped, and economic activity is increased. There are numerous applications of this flexible tool—this alternative currency. It is being applied in the UK, Japan, and other parts of the world. This SmartLesson looks at the application of Time Banking in a developing country, Senegal, and suggests its potential to leverage development assistance funds through incorporation into program design.

Background

A Vocational Training Center is established in an impoverished town in Senegal in 1995

When Pape Samb started Groupe de Réflexion et d'Action pour le Développement du Sénégal (GRADES), he was trying to help his mother and the other women in the village find more economic freedom and more time for themselves. GRADES was established to provide skills training and basic education to enable undereducated women and girls to become economically self-sufficient and contribute to stronger communities.

GRADES started as one training center in 1995 in Kaolack, a conservative, impoverished town. There was little access to formal education, 60 percent unemployment, and few, if any, job prospects for residents. GRADES was created to provide training and educational activities that improved skills and created employment opportunities. The hope was it would also serve to unite communities and empower women and girls. Classes past and present include knitting, sewing and tailoring, embroidery, tie-dyeing, computer literacy, business skills, transformation of local

products, health, nutrition, and French and Wolof literacy. There is also a center that provides day-care services as well as preschool education that includes French- and Arabic-language instruction.

When GRADES started in 1995, approximately 55 women took the training courses, and about 50 children attended the pre-school/day-care center. Women's household duties and conservative attitudes in the community — particularly among their husbands and the religious leader — conspired to curtail participation, thus diminishing the impact of the center. The numbers did not expand substantially until 2005.

Since Time Banking™ was introduced in 2005, GRADES has grown immensely both in size and scope. As of 2009–2010, nearly 50,000 individuals have completed nutrition, health, and HIV/AIDS awareness training; almost 500 students have completed the day-care program and received a foundation in numeracy, French, and Arabic. The literacy program has graduated 900 students, while nearly 52,000 individuals have received business skills and

product development training. For 1,250 graduates of the three-year course in tailoring, the average increase in monthly income has been from \$20 per month to \$100–\$200 per month. Some 500 jobs have been created. GRADES has impacted the incomes of the participants and the community at large. The fact that traditional beliefs that have restricted women are being transformed is undeniable.

Time Banking™ and its alternative currency are introduced in 2004-2005

In 2004, Pape came to the United States and learned about Time Banking. Time Banking™ is a system whereby a community (members of the Time Bank) creates a currency of Time Credits in order to exchange services among themselves. One Hour = One Time Credit. The concept is as deceptively simple as it is powerful.

To start a Time Bank, each member of the community identifies needs that he or she can address. The community translates the service performed by the individual into Time Credits. For example, women may provide babysitting services or hair braiding, or work in the day care center. Each hour of service earns the woman Time Credits. Service to the community also earns Time Credits. For example, if a woman creates a literacy club for young girls in the community, the woman will receive one Time Credit for each hour that she spends with it. Time Credits can be exchanged for services for the woman or her family, or for extra hours in the computer-training center or sewing center, or other GRADES resources.

As an alternative currency, Time Banking functions differently than money. Time Credits put women's work on a par with men's work, when exchanged in the Time Bank, hour for hour. Time Credits are not fungible, like cash. They can be spent only within the community, and only for services. They are less susceptible to "waste" within the family, and are less susceptible to "corruption" on a broader community scale. Women often expressed a preference for earning Time Credits versus cash. Cash potentially led to family fights over control of the money. Time Credits ensured that the value of what women had earned with their labor would come back to the family.

When Pape brought Time Banking to the center, the GRADES group became a community of Time Bank members that both ran and participated in classes at the training center. The women exchanged services to help each other free up time to attend classes. Women also earned Time Credits by helping to operate the center — by teaching classes, working in the day care, and so forth. Time Credits became the only currency of exchange among members of GRADES.

Once Time Banking was introduced, GRADES began to grow. The latent assets, skills, time, and talents of community members in Kaolack were activated, and they were used to support and even enhance the services provided by GRADES. The costs of operation were reduced and services were expanded. Enrollment increased significantly. Students outside of the Time Bank paid fees to attend classes, thus significantly increasing GRADES' revenue, which

helped to pay the operating costs that required cash. Time Banking has allowed GRADES to become sustainable on an ongoing basis. GRADES has grown to 13 campuses, and Time Banking is an important feature in the economic viability of each of the centers.



Men at GRADES

Lessons Learned

1) Expect resistance, and find practical ways of gaining acceptance within a conservative community; inclusion is key.

GRADES faced two major obstacles within Kaolack's conservative community: the men and the religious leader of the community. The men objected to the women's absence, since they were accustomed to having them in the home to attend to them. The religious leader was accustomed to community members paying tribute to him through labor at his farm. However, once Time Banking was introduced, the women preferred to spend their free time on activities that earned Time Credits, thus accruing benefits and services for their own families.

Winning over the men/husbands

In order to earn their support and trust, the men were included in the planning and incorporation of the Time Bank into GRADES and into the community. They were offered the opportunity to earn Time Credits themselves, if they objected to the women leaving the house to earn them. The men tended to stay with their cash-generating activities but were nevertheless a part of the system. They experienced firsthand the benefits of access to the day-care center: it educated their children and freed up men's and women's time to pursue economic activity. As the Time Bank was developed and began operating, the men began to see the benefits. Services were available to the family. After completing training, the women were able to add to family income. By being involved in the planning process and seeing the benefits over time, the men grew to accept GRADES and the Time Bank.

Winning over the religious leader

The religious leader had long benefited from a system of obligations that accorded him the labor of the community. The approach to obtaining his approval was more straightforward. He was granted 100 Time Credits per month to use for help on his farm. Community members again of-

ferred services to the religious leader; they earned Time Credits for helping him. Since the religious leader was once again materially supported, he too became supportive of the program.

2) *The time-based currency empowers women; everyone benefits.*

On the most basic individual level, Time Banking allows women to help each other with the duties of women everywhere — household and child-rearing work. Women also honed their skills, both those that they were donating and also through the training they purchased with Time Credits. As they graduated from the program, they were able to contribute to GRADES by teaching — again, for Time Credits. The Senegalese government even began recruiting teachers from the GRADES program, providing some women salary-paying employment.

At the community level, Time Banking was helpful, too. Women and girls began to come together to discuss their issues. Before GRADES, they were isolated in their homes, and men exercised control over their activities. With GRADES, and the ability of the women to bring assets into the family, the women were not as restricted in their movements. They now commune and share concerns, problems, and solutions.

Before the Time Bank was established, free time or time away from cash-generating activities was spent in idle chit-chat, card games, and so on. Once an hour of free time became an opportunity to earn Time Credits, economic activity increased, and free time was more often used productively to generate services and resources for families within the community. Moreover, these economic activities that were based on time exchange enhanced community ties. Members did not have to leave the village to collect resources for their families.

As described above, GRADES has greatly expanded the earning power of many community members, and it would *not* have been able to reach as many community members without the Time Bank; thus the Time Bank has facilitated skilled economic activity by members.

3) *Time Banking is very different from barter.*

Many, upon hearing about Time Banking for the first time, comment “Oh, it’s barter.” It is worthwhile noting that Time Banking is emphatically not barter; Time Banking is fundamentally different, and truly creates an alternative currency— an alternative and flexible medium of exchange that can support an economic system— rather than a simple transaction between two entities.

Time banking differs from barter in several ways: Firstly, the *time* of each member is valued equally, regardless of market value. If barter were the basis of exchange, the market value of the goods exchanged would be part of the transaction. Instead, Time Credits consider one hour of any member’s time equivalent to one hour of any other member’s time. Thus women’s work and men’s work is on a par.



Mother and child at GRADES

Secondly, exchanges do not involve direct negotiation between provider and recipient of services. Services need not be negotiated between two particular members. The way that requests for services and offers for services are listed, one may earn Time Credits helping one member, then spend them by requesting services from another, or even from a public service provider.

Thirdly, Time Banks “pay it forward.” Unlike barter, which keeps the economic benefits between the parties to the transaction, Time Credits earned may be used to benefit the broader community; they may serve a particular social purpose (such as a reform goal), or produce a particular public good (roads, public space revamp/ clean-up/maintenance, elder care, vocational training center, etc).

4) *As an empowerment tool, Time Credits trump money.*

In Kaolack, cash was a scarce resource, as it is in many communities. Time Banking created a currency that brought resources to GRADES and was preferred by many women as payment for their services. The experience at GRADES and elsewhere highlights some of the fundamental differences between Time Banking and the broader economy that runs on money.

Money is all-purpose. It may be used for food or for gambling, for education or for drugs; in other words, it is subject to being squandered. Time Credits have a more limited purpose, and the goods for which they can be exchanged are defined by the community, the Time Bank.

Time Banking

- Values and utilizes the existing skill-set/assets within the community
- Allows beneficiaries and reformers to truly build the desired change together
- Creates access to services and skills without cash
- Allows stakeholders/community members to take ownership of initiatives that improve their lives

Moreover, money is fungible, and thus mobile, and can leave the community through corruption or simply to



Day care center children

seek interest and a better return. Time Credits are by definition locally anchored in how they are earned and how they are spent.

Furthermore, money values scarcity; the scarcer a commodity, the higher its price. Thus, everyday activities such as child rearing and other basic household economic activity, usually performed by women, are devalued. Time Credits restore value to everyday activities by placing the value on the *time spent* by the individual on the activities involved.

Time Banking creates an economic system that values assets devalued by the market/cash economy, and fills needs that the market does not. Value is accorded a woman with years of childcare experience, an elder with valuable knowledge but without a marketable degree, an extra hour at the end of a day that can't be leveraged for "employment" but can be used to provide a neighbor a service. People can earn Time Credits that can be spent on something the provider might not be able to afford with money, based on market rates. The process of earning and spending Time Credits releases social capital that the market and money have left untapped. The exchange of Time Credits perpetuates itself, and results in a multiplier effect that can be favorably compared to that of money in terms of benefits to the local economy and community.

Conclusion

There are alternatives to payment of money and calls for volunteerism to create stakeholder participation in reform. Lack of money is a constant complaint in development programming, yet practitioners acknowledge the truism that "simply throwing money at a problem does not solve it." By incorporating a Time Bank into GRADES, and into the surrounding community that supports GRADES, Pape helped to bypass the lack of cash in his impoverished community. The lesson that other development practitioners can take is that the poor have assets, as Hernando de Soto has long claimed; they simply need the mechanisms by which to use them.

Can Time Banking be used in the development-programming context to solve some of the recurring problems when undertaking community activities involving women living on the margin? The Senegal example certainly suggests that it can.



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