

Grameen Gazette #14

Grameen Gazette, the Newsletter from **Grameen Australia** – the organisation empowering people to change their lives through the implementation of innovative Microfinance and Social Business Projects.

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We are incredibly grateful to our supporters who make a meaningful difference to the lives of our beneficiaries through volunteering their time

Volunteers Capture their Experiences

- My internship with Grameen Australia-Philippines in Manila was unlike anything I have ever experienced. I had the opportunity to work on real social enterprises, explore incredibly diverse communities as well as work alongside truly inspirational people. *Vinuri, Sydney*
- Working with Grameen in the Philippines was, to put it simply, the best month of my life. *Sarah, Australia*
- 'It was definitely an eye-opening experience. It will certainly unleash one's inner potential to be a productive member of the team. *Shiela, Manila*
- The entrepreneurs taught me that every little thing is an opportunity and if you work hard with others, then you can do truly spectacular things. *Eddy, Sydney*
- I hope many people will be aware of Grameen's mission of empowering women with less or no financial capital at all and I encourage them to volunteer in GAP. *Pricilla, Manila*
- My time at Grameen Australia Philippines was one of the most memorable of my life. The loan recipients are treated not as victims, but as business owners only in need of some seed capital and business skills to become successful. *Andrew, Sydney*

Grameen Australia provides volunteers with the opportunity to learn about the

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application of microfinance and social business firsthand. Volunteers are encouraged to become involved in all areas of our work, including traveling to our programs to meet and work with our beneficiaries.

Recently five volunteers from the University of New South Wales traveled to our Manila Social Business Hub. They were partnered with volunteers from the De La Salle University to work with the owners of some of our most entrepreneurial microbusinesses to develop business plans to grow their activities. The volunteers spent time in the field at our communities talking to our borrowers to understand their situation and worked closely with our team and their local volunteer partners to determine the most effective growth strategies. At the end of their one-month trip, the volunteers produced thoughtful and achievable business plans.



The plans developed by the volunteers will be integral to the expansion of these businesses, thereby fundamentally changing the lives not only of the business owners but also of additional community members who will have the opportunity of employment.

For the volunteers, the experience was life changing as they were able to truly grasp the impact of the Grameen social business model first-hand and play a significant part in the application of the model for genuine and sustainable social and economic change.

Inspiring Quotes from our recent Volunteers

Sarah, Sydney

Working with Grameen in the Philippines (GAP) was, to put it simply, the best month of my life. Grameen taught me how business can be used to alleviate poverty and empower people. Grameen let me take a hands-on role in this empowerment, working closely with the incredible GAP team and with locals determined to create a better life for their families. I learnt more in one month with GAP than in an entire year at university and it was incredibly satisfying to be able to leave behind some work that wasn't going to be graded and discarded but genuinely used.

I also met some pretty amazing people along the way and am certain we will remain life-long friends. The GAP team and the local volunteers were so caring, fun and hardworking and I know I have a huge Grameen family waiting in the Philippines when I return!

Andrew, Sydney

My time at Grameen Australia Philippines was one of the most memorable times of my life.



Andrew learning a borrowers artisan trade

What does Grameen mean to me? As a volunteer, I got to see firsthand the incredible effort that the Grameen team makes to improve the living conditions of several communities in Manila. Unlike many aid programs that work simply by handouts, Grameen relies on the entrepreneurship and efforts of the loan

recipients themselves to generate their own wealth. It is therefore empowering to the individual.

The loan recipients are treated not as victims, but as business owners only in need of some seed capital and business skills to become successful, and thereby bring success to those around them. It was so inspiring to see how hard many of the community leaders worked and to see the dedication of the women in Grameen's programs.

What was my experience as a Grameen Volunteer? We were inspired to try to make a difference, and educated in how we could make that happen. The work was very challenging, but very rewarding. I learnt so much in such a short space of time. I believe we produced something of real value for Grameen.

Most of all, I will treasure the friendships I made with the Filipino volunteers, my fellow Australian volunteers, and all of the wonderful staff at Grameen Australia Philippines.

Wisruthiy, Sydney

The experience I had with Grameen Australia Philippines was incomparable to any other I've ever had in my life. During my short stay in Manila, I had the incredible opportunity to work alongside a dynamic team of managers, fellow volunteers and community members - all of whom provided kindness, support and knowledge to my journey. Holistically, I found my time as a volunteer to be challenging but immensely rewarding.

Though business and microfinance was neither my academic background nor my passion, immersing myself in the task and learning from practice led me to be comfortable and confident in my work. I now have an increased appreciation for business processes, as well as the Filipino culture and community. I wouldn't trade this experience for the world!

Shiella, Manila

Grameen Australia Philippines focuses on alleviating the lives of those individuals suffering from poverty through microfinance and social business. While being a volunteer in Grameen, I've learned to communicate better with people and understand problems present in the society.

It was definitely an eye-opening experience. The experience will certainly unleash one's inner potential and use that to be a productive member of the team. The experience I've acquired is certainly beneficial to my professional growth. I came to understand more about poverty and the society. An organization like Grameen will certainly help you develop your way of thinking and widen your perspective on how to solve societal problems.

Vinuri, Sydney

My internship with Grameen Australia-Philippines in Manila was unlike anything I have ever experienced. I had the opportunity to work on real social businesses, explore incredibly diverse communities as well as work alongside truly inspirational people.

The experience allowed me to see the tangible differences social business and microfinancing can have at a grassroots level.

To be able to speak to the borrowers and understand how their ventures were improving their livelihoods was one of the most rewarding aspects of the trip. The sense of community among the members and their determination to do something that had never been done was very inspirational. I felt privileged to be able to contribute in some way to their mission.



Vinuri with members of her borrower community

I also had the pleasure of being part of the Grameen team. Their hospitality and their willingness to share their culture made the whole experience unforgettable. The skills that I developed and the lifelong friendships that I made are invaluable to me.

Pricilla, Manila

It is such a whole package of unforgettable, enriching, and humbling experience working in Grameen Australia Philippines. Taken all together, the experience was above rewarding. If there is one particular element that I am very proud of in my volunteer experience, it is my exposure to poverty-stricken areas in our country because of my involvement in field visits. What is more important is that after I have identified the societal problems, what next step am I supposed to do. Years after I will question myself "What did I bring to humanity?"

I hope many people will be aware of Grameen's mission of empowering women with little or no financial capital at all and I encourage them to volunteer with GAP, as it needs willing people to extend their talent and ability so that more people can benefit from these collective actions of sharing and giving.

Eddy, Sydney

One of the big quotes that stood out to me over my Grameen experience was something both CEO Duncan Power and Country Head Cris Delgado said during our trip. They talked about our venture into Manila as not neo-imperialism, and they pointed out that "You will learn as much from these entrepreneurs as they will learn from you."

Over the course of the program I could not imagine how true this statement would become and it still resonates with me today. I was truly inspired by the entrepreneurs, and even though naturally I am not the hardest worker, the plight of people I met really pushed me to work to my limits in what was a very unusual environment for me. I learned more than I could ever have imagined in Grameen - not just as a business student, not just as a volunteer, but as a person. The entrepreneurs taught me that every little thing is an opportunity and if you work hard with others, then you can do truly spectacular things.



Handicrafts made by Eddy's community

Mitchiko, Manila

My experience with GAP was really fantastic because everything that we did was really adding up to our skill. I have also visited the other side of the coin of the Philippines that needs the help of GAP. Having the huge privilege of playing a role in helping 1,440 families in Valenzuela was amazing. I hope that the institution continues its goals and at the peak of its hay-day we can say "we were a part of that".

Wilma, Manila

The internship with Grameen becomes a lot more than a university requirement to us but also a chance to help others and be inspired with their creativity and will to move forward. The whole experience was eye opening to me to see that everybody has a battle to fight and many Filipinos are on a war against poverty. So, this inspired me to do things not only for myself but also for others, which is why I volunteered for the Organization.