

The Impact of AUP-CES Livelihood Initiatives, Leadership and Management in Buklod Bahayan

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the multifaceted impacts of community cooperatives on their members through qualitative data analysis, revealing significant economic, social, and organizational benefits. Economically, cooperatives offer an alternative income source through dividends from investments, loan opportunities based on membership and loyalty, and purchase discounts. Socially, members experience a strong sense of camaraderie, unity, and mutual support, fostering confidence and security during crises. Organizationally, cooperative members gain valuable skills and knowledge, particularly in accounting, leadership, and management, largely attributed to educational initiatives by the AUP-CES. These initiatives have empowered members to form and sustain resilient cooperatives, highlighting the critical role of structured training and organizational support in cooperative success. The findings underscore the holistic benefits of community cooperatives, emphasizing their potential as a model for sustainable community development.

Keywords: Community Extension Services, Community Cooperatives, Leadership, Management

INTRODUCTION

Community cooperatives play a vital role in fostering economic empowerment, social cohesion, and sustainable development within local communities. Stakeholders' initiatives play a crucial role in the realization of this direction. Misra and Patel (2018) emphasize the importance of stakeholder initiatives in promoting sustainable livelihoods through capacity-building programs. Their research demonstrates how stakeholder involvement enhances program relevance, sustainability, and impact by aligning interventions with local needs and priorities. This collaborative approach ensures community ownership and the long-term success of livelihood initiatives.

However, the success and longevity of these cooperatives hinge significantly on effective leadership and management practices. Leadership and management training offer valuable opportunities to enhance the capabilities of cooperative leaders and members, thereby influencing the sustainability and impact of community cooperatives.

In recent years, there has been increasing recognition of the importance of leadership and management training in fostering the growth and resilience of community-based organizations, including cooperatives. These seminars equip participants with essential skills

and knowledge in strategic planning, financial management, governance, conflict resolution, and stakeholder engagement.

Despite the growing interest in leadership and management seminars, there remains a need to further explore their specific impact on the sustainability of community cooperatives. Understanding how these seminars contribute to enhancing cooperative performance, promoting innovation, and ensuring long-term viability is crucial for informing policy interventions and capacity-building initiatives aimed at strengthening the cooperative sector.

This study seeks to build upon existing research by investigating the impact of leadership and management seminars on the sustainability of community cooperatives in diverse contexts. By assessing the outcomes and effectiveness of these seminars in real-world cooperative settings, the research aims to generate actionable insights and best practices that can inform decision-makers, practitioners, and stakeholders involved in cooperative development and support initiatives.

The findings from this study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on cooperative leadership and management, providing practical recommendations for enhancing the capacity and resilience of community cooperatives through targeted leadership and management interventions.

Background of the Project

Nearly half of Tartaria's residents reside in Buklod Bahayan Subdivision, which serves as the area's primary commerce hub, making it an ideal location for livelihood initiatives. During a Forum Approach Participatory Needs Assessment of Buklod Bahayan Homeowners Association Inc. (BBHAI) board members and some community representatives facilitated by the Adventist University of the Philippines Community Extension Services (AUP-CES), the pressing need for additional income among unemployed family members was identified as one of the top concerns. Subsequently, a proposal for a livelihood project leading to cooperative development was conceived, formulated, and presented by the CES Director to the AUP Academic Council, which approved the project in early 2012.

The project aimed to create economic opportunities for unemployed community members and had specific goals: to reduce daily expenses for basic commodities, offer alternative income sources, and establish a sustainable income-generating project. The project unfolded in four phases: Skills Training, Production and Marketing, Leadership and Management Training, and Cooperative Development. Following months of mandatory orientations and training sessions with the Cooperative Development Authority (CDA), the group received certification and was officially recognized as the "Buklod Producers Cooperative."

Although the project faced setbacks and eventually ceased operations, some members remained optimistic and sought alternative income opportunities with support from AUP-CES. Drawing on their training experiences and lessons learned, they regrouped and initiated the "Bigasan Project," welcoming new members into their cooperative venture. Over the next decade, this initiative evolved and thrived, eventually becoming the "Paluwagan Family Cooperative."

The purpose of the study is to evaluate the impact of AUP-CES livelihood initiative, leadership, and management on the sustainability of community cooperatives at Buklod Bahayan Subdivision, Tartaria, Silang, Cavite.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Poverty/Low Income in the Philippines

Poverty remains a persistent challenge in the Philippines, affecting a significant portion of the population and hindering sustainable development efforts. Reyes and Tabuga (2018) delve into the multifaceted causes, constraints, and potential opportunities surrounding poverty within the country.

Reyes and Tabuga (2018) identify several key causes contributing to the prevalence of poverty in the Philippines. Structural factors such as limited access to education and healthcare services disproportionately affect low-income families, perpetuating intergenerational cycles of poverty. Additionally, inadequate infrastructure and geographical disparities hinder economic opportunities, particularly in rural areas where agricultural productivity is crucial for livelihoods.

The study underscores the constraints faced by marginalized communities in escaping poverty. Limited job opportunities and underemployment exacerbate income inequality, with a significant portion of the workforce engaged in informal and vulnerable employment. Insufficient social protection programs further compound vulnerabilities, leaving many families susceptible to economic shocks and setbacks.

Despite these challenges, Reyes and Tabuga (2018) identify potential opportunities to address poverty in the Philippines. Strategic investments in education, health, and infrastructure are highlighted as essential pillars for inclusive growth and poverty reduction. Policies that promote rural development, enhance agricultural productivity, and facilitate access to credit and markets for small-scale entrepreneurs can empower communities and uplift livelihoods.

Alternative Sources of Income Including Cooperatives

In the Philippines, alternative sources of income, particularly through cooperatives, have emerged as important strategies to diversify livelihood opportunities and enhance income generation. Quizon and Ballesteros (2016) provide insights into the role of cooperatives in empowering communities and promoting sustainable income generation.

Quizon and Ballesteros (2016) highlight the significance of cooperatives as effective vehicles for income generation, particularly among marginalized sectors. Cooperatives enable members to pool resources, access markets collectively, and engage in value-added activities such as processing and marketing agricultural products. By leveraging economies of scale and enhancing bargaining power, cooperatives contribute to improving the economic well-being of their members.

The study underscores the diverse forms of cooperatives operating in the Philippines, ranging from agricultural cooperatives focused on crop production and marketing to savings and credit cooperatives providing financial services to members. These cooperatives not only generate supplementary income but also promote social inclusion, empowerment, and community development.

Quizon and Ballesteros (2016) emphasize the positive impact of cooperatives on poverty reduction and income enhancement. Through capacity-building initiatives and access to training, cooperatives equip members with essential skills in entrepreneurship, financial management, and market engagement. This enables individuals and communities to break free from the cycle of poverty and achieve sustainable livelihoods.

Relationship of Poverty and Alternative Sources of Income

Cruz and Garcia (2017) illuminate the complex interplay between poverty and alternative sources of income, shedding light on how diversifying livelihood opportunities can bolster economic empowerment and alleviate poverty in the Philippines. They emphasize the pivotal role of alternative income sources in mitigating poverty, enabling individuals and communities to build resilience against economic challenges and pursue sustainable development pathways.

The study underscores the positive impact of alternative income-generating activities on poverty reduction, highlighting the transformative effects of microenterprise development, cooperatives, skills training, and social protection programs. By providing marginalized populations with access to these opportunities, individuals can break free from poverty traps and achieve economic self-sufficiency.

Cruz and Garcia (2017) stress the importance of addressing structural barriers to income diversification, such as limited access to education, healthcare, and financial services. They advocate for strengthening social safety nets and promoting inclusive economic policies as essential strategies to foster inclusive growth and reduce poverty. Their findings underscore the need for integrated approaches that combine poverty alleviation efforts with investments in alternative income sources, empowering individuals and communities to leverage their skills and resources for inclusive development and sustainable poverty reduction.

Leadership and Management Seminars on the Resiliency of Community Cooperatives

Garcia and Reyes (2018) highlight the critical role of leadership and management training in bolstering the effectiveness and sustainability of community cooperatives. Their study emphasizes how specialized training equips leaders with essential competencies such as strategic planning, financial management, conflict resolution, and team building, which in turn leads to higher organizational efficiency, innovation, and resilience within cooperatives. Effective leadership, as underscored by Garcia and Reyes (2018), not only enhances governance structures but also promotes community empowerment and inclusive decision-making, thereby strengthening the social and economic fabric of communities.

Meanwhile, Tan and Ong (2019) delve into the transformative impact of livelihood seminars and training on the establishment and success of community cooperatives in the Philippines. They emphasize how these capacity-building initiatives nurture the skills necessary for cooperative formation, including entrepreneurship, financial management, and marketing. Tan and Ong (2019) highlight the positive correlation between participation in livelihood seminars and the creation of community cooperatives, with enhanced capacities in organizational development, governance, and market engagement contributing to the sustainability and resilience of cooperatives over time.

In conclusion, both studies advocate for continued investment in leadership, management, and livelihood development for community leaders and members involved in cooperatives. Strengthening capacity-building programs and fostering inclusive participation are recommended to empower leaders to drive positive change, foster sustainable development, and promote local economic empowerment within communities.

METHODS

The study employed a qualitative approach designed to assess the importance of initiative and the impact of leadership and management trainings and seminars on the resiliency and sustainability of community cooperatives. To evaluate this impact, researchers formulated three key questions aimed at understanding participants' perceptions of the initiative, leadership and management trainings and seminars. The study utilized Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and interviews as the primary methods to gather insights and perspectives from participants.

The participants are the members of the community cooperatives hailed from Buklod Bahayan Subdivision, Tartaria, Silang, Cavite. The participants are selected based on their availability and willingness to participate.

In assessing the importance of initiative and impact of leadership and management seminars on community cooperative resiliency and sustainability, the researcher developed three guiding questions for cooperative members to voluntarily respond to. These questions underwent validation by three research consultants to ensure appropriateness and respectfulness. The questions were translated into Filipino. FGD and individual interviews were conducted, recorded, and transcribed. Thematic analysis was then applied to analyze the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Focus Group Discussions and individual interviews were conducted that generated the following data using the following questions:

1. How did you start as a group?
2. How did AUP Faculty help you in putting up the Paluwagan Family Cooperative?
3. In what way did the Cooperative become beneficial to you and the community?

Thematic Analysis

Theme	Responses
Economic Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “1K lang po per share namin nung una. After 1 year ay Php 3,300 na at pwede na po kami humiram ng 10K payable in a year or less depende sa kakayahang mag bayad.” – Jing Agbuyag (member) <i>“Our share was 1k at the beginning. It became Php 3,300 and so we can loan up to 10K payable in a year or less, depending on the capacity of pay.”</i> ● “Kumikita po ung pera namin dito. Ngayon po ay meron akong dibidendong Php 5,580.” (Php 3,300 share investment). – Jing Agbuyag (member) <i>“Our money is earning. Presently, I have a dividend of Php 5,580 (Php 3,300).”</i>

<p>Social Impact</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Malaking benefit po sa amin ung camaraderie.” – Restituto Rodelas (member) <i>“Our camaraderie is a big benefit to us.”</i> ● “Nakakatulong po sa iba.” - Restituto Rodelas (member) <i>“We can help others.”</i> ● “Hindi naman po sa lahat ng pagkakataon ay matutulungan tayo ng ating mga kamag-anak. Dito po sa aming Paluwagan, meron po kaming malalapitan sa panahon ng krisis.” – Jing Agbuyag (member) <i>“Our relatives cannot help us on all occasions. Here in our ‘Paluwagan’, we have something we can call on to in times of crisis.”</i> ● “Ang amin pong dibidendo ay bonus na lang. Malaki po ang tulong sa amin ng coop sa anomang oras na aming kakaylanganin. Kahit po ito ay emergency situations”. – Teresita Reyes (Officer) <i>“Our dividend is just a bonus. Our coop is a big help in any time of need. Even in emergency situations.”</i> ● “Ang lahat po ng myembro ay inaalalayan lalo na po yung mga talagang nangangailangan ng tulong. Ito po ang higit na malaki kaya po ang aming dibidendo ay bonus po sa pagkakaisa at iisang mithiin ng bawat kasapi.” – Teresita Reyes (Officer) <i>“All members are aided specially those who really need help. This is even bigger that’s why our dividend is just a bonus to the unity and common goal of every member.”</i>
<p>Organizational Impact</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Isa po ako sa tinuruan ng accounting sa AUP kasama si ate Brenda Manigbas. Mga seminars na kayo n po ang nagdadala ng libre dito sa amin para sa dagdag na mga kaalaman.” – Teresita Reyes (Officer) <i>“I’m one of those who were taught about Accounting at AUP together with Brenda Manigbas. The seminars you brought to us for free increased our knowledge.”</i> ● “Nakatulong din po ung leadership seminar na binigay nila sa amin nuon.” – Juanita San Diego (Officer) <i>“The leadership seminar they gave helps us as well”.</i> ● “Malaking tulong po ung pag organisa nila sa amin nuon. Kung hindi po sila pumunta sa amin at nag umpisa, wala po kaming ideya na bumuo ng grupo na kagaya nito.” – Juanita San Diego (Officer) <i>“The act of organizing us then was a big help. If they did not come to initiate, we do not have this idea to organize like this.”</i> ● “Marami po kaming lessons na natutunan duon sa mga experiences namin sa Kooperatiba na inumpisahan ng CES (Buklod Producers Cooperative). Kung hindi po dahil duon baka po hindi rin kami tatagal ng sampong taon na gaya nito. Malaki po ang pasasalamat namin sa AUP.” – Juanita San Diego (Officer) ● <i>“We learned many lessons from the experiences we gained from Cooperative initiated by CES (Buklod Producers Cooperative). Without it, we won’t last ten (10) years like this. We are so thankful to AUP.”</i>

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- “Nuong tumigil na po ang aming Kooperatiba, nag desisyon po kami na mag karuon ng Paluwagan. Lima lang po kami nung umpisa hanggang sa may sumali sa amin mga bagong myembro na hindi namin nakasama sa Kooperatiba. Nadagdagan kami at hanggang sa naging 20. Nag patuloy kami at dumarami hanggang ten (10) years na pala kami.” Juanita San Diego (Officer)
“When our (previous) cooperative (Buklod Producers Cooperative) stopped operating, we decided to have “Paluwagan”. We started with five (5) members then others joined us until we became twenty (20). We continued and keep adding members until we last ten (10) years now.”
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The following themes emerged from the qualitative data.

Economic Impact

Community cooperatives provide an alternative source of income for all its members. Their dividends show the gain earned by their investments at the end of the year. Loan opportunities are also in place based on membership investment and loyalty credits. Members also enjoy discount incentives on their purchases to the cooperatives.

According to Birchall (2013), cooperatives play a critical role in enhancing the income levels of their members by reducing the costs of goods and services and providing better market access for their products. Furthermore, cooperatives have been instrumental in stabilizing local economies by keeping wealth within the community, which is particularly crucial in rural and underdeveloped regions (Borzaga, Depedri, & Tortia, 2011).

The financial inclusion offered by cooperatives is another significant economic impact. By providing credit and savings options to those who might otherwise be excluded from formal financial institutions, cooperatives empower their members to engage in entrepreneurial activities and improve their economic status (Birchall & Ketilson, 2009).

Social Impact

Members enjoy camaraderie and the opportunity to be of help to others. They feel and enjoy the sense of unity among fellow members. They also express confidence and security in times of crisis and emergencies. Mazzarol et al. (2014) note that cooperatives enhance social capital by building trust and cooperation among members, which can lead to increased civic participation and community development.

Cooperatives also contribute to social inclusion by providing a platform for marginalized groups, such as women and the poor, to participate in economic activities and decision-making processes (Malo & Vezina, 2004). This inclusion not only empowers these groups but also promotes gender equality and reduces social disparities (Borda-Rodriguez & Vicari, 2014).

Organizational Impact

Members of the community cooperatives learned relevant knowledge and experiences that equipped them to reorganize and run a new group that became a successful and resilient cooperative. Responses show that they appreciate their experience learning accounting at the College of Business and the community-based leadership and management trainings provided the AUP-CES. They are appreciative of AUP-CES initiatives in organizing, leading, and managing them, claiming that without the said initiative we could have the idea and courage to be a successful and resilient cooperative. According to Shaw (2006), participation in cooperative management enhances members' organizational and leadership skills, which can be applied to other areas of their lives.

The participatory nature of cooperatives also leads to more transparent and accountable management practices, as members are actively involved in decision-making processes. This transparency fosters trust within the organization and improves its overall effectiveness (Simmons & Birchall, 2008).

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATION, SUGGESTION, AND LIMITATIONS

The Community Extension Services (CES) of the Adventist University of the Philippines (AUP) conducted this impact study to examine the importance of initiative and the lasting impact of leadership and management training provided on the sustainability of community cooperatives. It also aims to determine the benefits enjoyed by its members. From the interview results, the participants stated positive findings relating to their finances, relationships, and resiliency.

The benefits enjoyed by the participants from joining the community cooperatives are categorized into the following themes: economic, social, and organizational. The economic benefits are described in terms of financial incentives received by the participants which specifically include finding alternative sources of income, loan opportunities, and enjoying discount incentives. Social benefits are described as; camaraderie, the opportunity to help others, a sense of unity and sacrifice, and a sense of security in crisis and emergencies. The participants also described their benefits as an organization which were described as the following: learning the importance of cooperation and the idea of a cooperative, gaining basic knowledge in accounting and other relevant skills to cooperative, developing skills in leadership and management, gaining relevant success and failure experience that eventually gave them to reorganized themselves to pursue their dream of a successful and sustainable cooperative. This confirms early research by Garcia and Reyes (2018) who highlighted the critical role of leadership and management training in bolstering the effectiveness and sustainability of community cooperatives.

RECOMMENDATION

- 1. Community Extension Services.** Document best practices in initiating, leading and managing community cooperatives. Benchmark from existing outstanding community-based cooperatives. Review perspectives, strategies, and approaches to find areas for improvement.
- 2. Community Cooperatives.** Formulate and institutionalize Continuous Improvement Program in their goal setting, products and services, processes, and standards. Consider the idea of CDA certification to qualify for possible external funding and financial assistance so as leverage to a higher milestone. Consider establishing a physical store for better storage of products and better marketing potential.
- 3. Further Study.** Next research goal should include the identification of some key factors that contributes to the resiliency of its members with the objective of identifying the significant qualities and lessons learned by the members that are contributing to the success, resilience, and sustainability of the community cooperatives. Investigate the specific components and approaches of the leadership and management training provided by AUP-CES that leads to resilience and sustainability.

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