

Working towards convergence: A case study of G.O.-N.G.O. initiated organizations among upland farmers in Baybay, Leyte, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

Organizations among upland farmers in four barangays of Baybay, Leyte were analyzed using the cross-case study method to determine convergence in goal perception; knowledge, attitude and practice on environmental conservation with special reference to tree farming and information flow patterns. Members of the organizations under study were completely enumerated while non-members were randomly selected. Data gathering was conducted from May to September, 1993 employing participatory rural appraisal, participant observation techniques, semi-structured interview schedules, key informants, focus discussion, checklist and observation guide.

Data revealed that majority of both member and non-member respondents showed interest in environmental information, 81.25% and 78.63%, respectively. However, barely half (56%) of the member-respondents perceived any significance of the organizations initiated to the concept of environmental conservation. This finding indicates a convergence in terms of general interest among implementors and clientele but a deviation in goal perception. Such case implies a need for a rethink in setting expectations and intent when planning and implementing development projects or information campaigns.

On information flow, all respondents ranked barangay officials first and neighbors second as sources of information because of proximity. Also, over two-thirds (73.5%) of non-members were involved in work groups such as "Alayon", "Salibot" and "Tagbu". This points to the potential of exploring informal network links as alternative channels for orchestrating change in the barangay.

Keywords: Organizations, information flow, convergence, goal perception, communication strategy, network links

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The national concern for environmental conservation and sustainable development has spurred both government and non-government agencies to collaborate toward a common goal.

Various approaches on information diffusion have been attempted.

However, communication researches have mostly dealt with specific aspects of technology transfer and message production. There has been very little research done on analyzing

the communication activities against the backdrop of clientele organizations through which planned change is orchestrated.

Premised on the systems perspective, the standpoint of this study is that any intervention geared toward sustainable development is a communication environment where planners, change agents, communicators and target clientele are bound up with organizations and groups whose goals, communication approaches and networks must be analyzed as parts of a system working toward a common purpose.

Data gathered in this case study can provide development planners and implementors insights as to how clientele organizations and informal networks in a barangay affect environmental information flow and adoption. Also, it may serve as reference for studying parallel cases of community-based projects geared toward promoting environmental awareness and conservation.

Furthermore, this research is contributory to the pool of knowledge on the holistic analysis of patterns of convergence/divergence in terms of goals, attitude and practice among the various actors such as government and non-government agencies as well as barangay folks involved or targeted in environmental conservation programs.

Specifically, network analysis is important especially among informal organizations and groups where flow of information is not very well-defined. This is typical of community-based projects where targeting of audience-specific information and orchestrating change among non-members of initiated organizations become very difficult. Hence, this study was conducted.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study has the following objectives:

- To determine the goals, goal perception, approaches and problems among

actors in the adoption of information on environmental conservation, specifically tree farming.

- To trace and analyze the contents of communication that flow through the network links between and among the various actors.
- To derive insights from the empirical and qualitative data as basis for action planning and/or further research.

METHODOLOGY

Organizations and informal communication networks of upland farmers in four barangays in Baybay which are sites of a government/non-government collaborated social action project for environmental education and rehabilitation were analyzed using the cross-case study method.

Thirty-two upland farmers who were members of the organizations under study were completely enumerated while 120 upland farmers who were non-members of the initiated organizations were identified through stratified random sampling.

The units of analysis were the formal organizations and informal networks of upland farmers in the four sites. Convergence in goal perception, knowledge and attitude among the various actors involved in the environmental project was investigated. Likewise, content and flow of disseminated messages within the formal organizational structure were traced, analyzed and compared with the informal communication structure of the respondents.

Data gathering was conducted from May to September, 1993 using participatory rural appraisal, participant observation techniques, semi-structured interview schedules, key informants, focus discussion, checklist, observation guide and secondary data. Interview schedules were pretested.

Validity in data gathering was attained through

triangulation or cross-checking of data from various sources. Descriptive statistics were used in analysing the quantitative data. For the qualitative data, reliability was obtained through the literal/theoretical replication approach to multiple case studies. In here, each individual case study consists of the whole study in which convergent evidence is sought regarding the facts and conclusions for the case and where cross-case conclusions can be drawn.

The research design is mainly qualitative as the researcher has no control over the organization activities nor can the experiences be invented as in true experiments. Also, as in any case study, it addressed the "how" and "why" questions which are explanatory in nature. Such questions deal with operational links needing to be traced over time rather than mere frequencies or incidence.

SCOPE AND LIMITATION

The study covered four villages composed of a heterogenous population of over 300 households per barangay. This caused inapplicability of making a sampling frame for the network analysis which is ideal for total enumeration of households. Thus, contextual/thematic analysis of information that flow through the network links was done.

Due to limited time, the research focused on the ensuing events within the 5-month time frame (May-September, 1993).

Since the research questions dealt with operational links needing to be traced over time, the findings may need to be used for formative evaluation or assessment rather than for conclusions.

FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

Goal setting

In the situationer, the actors worked toward the long-term objective of environmental conservation and sustainable development. The

specific goal of was to draw away from the uplands the slash-and-burn farmers and illegal loggers by providing them alternative sources of livelihood in the lowlands with little or no land capital, and to make them natural-resource independent. This objective was coupled with environmental education and rehabilitation. To pursue such objective, intensive community organizing was done because formal organizations were seen as necessary vehicles through which the target clientele can have access to resources, information and other services.

Total enumeration of upland farmers who were members of the organizations initiated showed that majority (81%) depended on farming as main livelihood but only 40% owned land. This is closely related to their cited goal for membership which is mainly economic benefit. Their perceived reason for the organizations initiated also pointed to poverty alleviation and livelihood upliftment. Barely half (56%) of the member-respondents perceived any significance of the organizations to the concept of environmental conservation. This finding implies that divergence exists between the organizers and the clientele in terms of goal perception especially the urgency of environmental concerns.

Goal perception and expectancy/needs

Majority of both member and non-member respondents, 81.25% and 78.63%, respectively, indicated high interest and agreement toward environmental conservation. However, only half (56%) of the member-respondents perceived any significance of their livelihood projects with the goal of environmental conservation.

Relating this finding to the expectancy theories of why people join organizations, it could be deduced that the organization members may not clearly understand what to expect. Thus, there

may be a need for a rethink in concealing or revealing of intent when planning and implementing development projects or information campaigns in order to attain greater convergence between organization initiators and clientele.

Furthermore, majority of the member respondents cited economic benefit as the main reason for joining the livelihood projects. This reason emphasized task orientation associated with first level of needs which include food, clothing and shelter. Relating this finding to respondents who were non-members of the livelihood projects, 46.6% indicated that they had "no time" and were "too busy" to join the said projects. This could be referred to the needs theory of joining organizations, i.e. people in dire poverty tend to join organizations which are perceived to fulfill their first level of needs.

In this study, the said respondents perceived more concrete solution to their condition by sticking to their usual farming practices rather than trying out membership with the organizations put up. Such observation is further reinforced with the non-membership of the said respondents (83%) with any other organizations.

Information content and flow

In this study, information referred to the quantifiable data which have been processed into a form that is meaningful to the recipient and is of real or perceived value in current or prospective actions and decisions. Information, then, became a major resource in attaining success in any undertaking such as environmental conservation and rehabilitation which emphasized a massive campaign through education and information dissemination.

Contextual/thematic analysis showed that the information disseminated revolved around ecological concepts interspersed in trainings and meetings with the heterogenous audiences across the sites under study but there was no specific

communication strategy followed.

Qualitative analysis based on in-depth interviews and focus discussions revealed dichotomy in the information campaign because of an unresolved issue on land use. Such dichotomy may create problems in quantifying the specific information that flow through the formal and informal network links at various levels of communication. Also, this condition seemed to have left the project implementors with little option but to communicate with the clientele by selecting certain information according to the specific needs of isolated occasions.

While this approach calls for a receiver-orientation which manifested considerable flexibility among the implementors turned communicators, a more clear-cut information dissemination campaign and its corresponding strategies may be crucial. This is necessary to attain a better feedback/feedforward mechanism during the project implementation and to obtain a clear view of the communication processes which is a vital input in the evaluation of the extent of adoption among the target clientele. On information flow, all respondents ranked barangay officials first and neighbors second as sources of information. Also, majority (73.5%) of non-members were involved in work groups such as "Alayon", "Silabot" and "Tabu". This points to the potential of exploring informal network links as alternative channels to reach clientele who with no organizational affiliations and to orchestrate change in the barangay level.

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