

GROUP FARMING EXPERIENCES IN WESTERN LEYTE, PHILIPPINES

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ABSTRACT

This study presented the experiences of five selected farmer organizations from Western Leyte and the impact of these organizations on the farming practices and economic life of the members. The 88 respondents who constitute 50% of the members from each organization were selected randomly. Most of the members (72%) joined the farmer organizations because government extension workers recruited them. The rest joined either voluntarily or were influenced by friends. The farmers have generally favorable opinions about their organizations. Sixty-three percent believed that their membership in their organizations enabled them to increase their farm production. Many claimed that they could now easily avail technical assistance and credit. Majority (77%) of the respondents believed that their organizations had strengthened inter-agency cooperation. Many had adopted improved farming practices. The majority felt that their membership in the organization had promoted their stature in the community.

INTRODUCTION

As part of the concerted effort to accelerate the development of rural communities, the Philippine government has launched several innovative rural development projects. The organization of farmers has been implemented nationwide. As a result, farmers' organizations have

proliferated all over the country. Do farmers' organizations serve as effective instruments for Philippine rural development? The answer to this question may help government planners identify the need for a better design relative to the implementation of other farmer organizations.

This study presents the status of the different farmer groups, the

impact of these organizations on farm practices, and the economic life of the members.

METHODS

The 88 farmers covered in this study were chosen randomly. They represent 50% of the total members of the Palanas Barangay Irrigator's Group, Mabagon Samahang Nayon, Tabunok Compact Farm Association, Agbanga Farmers' Association, and the Baybay Social Laboratory Seed Growers' Association.

Secondary data were gathered from documents while primary data were obtained through an interview schedule.

SITUATION ANALYSIS

Existing Situation in the Area. — The effectiveness of a strategy for development depends upon the conditions prevailing in the area. Following this line, the situations in the different areas under study were determined. In Western Leyte, the climate has no pronounced dry or wet season. Rainfall is evenly distributed throughout the year. Regions with this climate are affected by the northeast monsoon and cyclonic storms.

The barangays under study are accessible by feeder roads from the national highway that connects Baybay and Ormoc.

Tricycles ply these roads daily transporting the rural people to and from the town. Aside from mechanized forms of transportation, people use carabaos (water buffalos) and carabao-drawn carts to haul products and other commodities from the village to the town.

Palanas and Agbanga are traversed by the national highway. This makes them readily accessible to vehicles that regularly ply the Ormoc-Baybay and Baybay-Maasin Routes.

All the villages studied are near the town proper which are usually the marketing centers. The average distance from the town is three kilometers. Usually, middlemen go to the barangay to buy their products; thus, farmers seldom have to transport their rice to the market.

The Philippine National Bank branch at Ormoc City, is the source of credit for farmers in Palanas. They also avail themselves of credit extended by the Agricultural Credit Administration. In Baybay, the seed growers have the Rural Bank of Baybay as source of credit. The Tabunok Compact Farmers get loss assistance from the Agricultural Credit Administration. The Philippine National Bank branch in Maasin, about 25 km away, serves the Agbanga farmers since the town of Matalom does not have a rural bank.

The Concept of Farmer Organizations

Samahang Nayon. A *Samahang Nayon* is defined as a corporate body composed of small farmers residing in and/or farming within the geographical limits of a *barangay* (A *barangay* is the smallest political unit in the Philippines) for the purpose of improving the quality of life in the *barangay* (PD 175, 1973). The *Samahang Nayon* also helps the *barangay* people to increase their income and reduce production costs. Through the *Samahang Nayon*, a new outlook in life is developed. Eventually, the *Samahang Nayon* will pave the way for an individual farmer to own the land he tills. Above all, the association fosters the development of self-reliant *barangay* residents who are made aware of their responsibilities as members of a larger society.

The Irrigators' Group. The farmers who are the direct consumers of irrigation face several production problems. Only when they are organized can water be utilized economically. The organization of farmers into an irrigators' group results in the consolidation of irrigation end-users. Water management is the main responsibility of the group. The irrigators' group seeks to unite the farmers' activities, interests, talents, responsibilities,

and resources in maximizing irrigation efficiency to increase cropping intensity, land productivity, and, ultimately, the income of the farmers.

Once the farmers are organized, it is easier to effect equal distribution of irrigation water, cooperation among the members and better coordination with the irrigation personnel.

Compact Farm Association. Basically, the "compact farm" concept is a production-oriented economic unit as expounded by Ines (1976).

Farmers' Association. The purpose of this organization is to enable the members to solve their social and economic problems collectively and thereby improve their living conditions.

This association is composed of farmers with small farms. When problems of individual farmers are common to all, these problems are grouped. The government's services directed at assisting these small farmers can thus be expedited. This will eventually enable the small farmers to acquire cheaper production inputs and avail themselves of the external economics of large-scale marketing and distributive organizations based in the urban centers (Dalisay, 1977).

Seed Growers' Association. The Seed Growers' Association is an

elite group of farmers who join efforts to produce quality and high-yielding varieties of seeds to be dispersed to their neighboring farmers who seldom have a chance to avail themselves of seeds of high-yielding varieties.

As a whole, therefore, the formation of the above-mentioned *barangay* associations as part of the strategy in helping rural people assures the *barangay* residents of an enduring indigenous structure which would serve as a ready channel of information and technical assistance to improve the economic life of the people and would form a link with other service agencies (Cajigal, 1975).

It will be noted from the foregoing statements that the different groupings of farmers have more or less similar objectives — that of organizing farmers into groups for the purpose of improving the quality of life in the rural area by consolidating resources so that they can produce more and also avail themselves of needed services.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of Respondents — Most of the respondents were males (85%) and were married (91%) with an average of five children. Majority are middle-aged with the average age being 43 years. The respondents had an average schooling of five years.

Generally, the respondents are small farmers with 60% cultivating less than one hectare. They reside in the villages where they farm. The respondents have an average of 25 years farming experience. Their farms are predominantly planted to rice. Most of them (94%) do not possess occupational skills other than farming.

Reasons for Affiliating — Since these five organizations were initiated by government agencies, it is not surprising that most members (72%) had joined the organizations because they had been recruited by government extension workers. A few joined voluntarily or were influenced by friends.

Although the members had been convinced by government extension workers to join the organization, they gave reason for affiliating. The foremost reason was to avail themselves of services exclusively extended to members. They also wanted to learn new farming techniques which would increase their production. Also, they expected that joining the organization would help them meet their needs. The majority of the *Samahang Nayon* members joined in the hope of acquiring land.

Five members of the Mabagon *Samahang Nayon* revealed that they had been forced to join the organization. Since the farm lands of these five members benefit from the irrigation service maintained by the

organization, they were compelled to join so they could continually use the association's irrigation facilities.

MEMBERS' APPRAISAL OF FARMER ORGANIZATIONS

Below are the respondents' responses to 13 items presented to them for their appraisal:

Members' Trust — The respondents unanimously agreed that the members trusted the farmer organizations where they belong and the field staff who worked with them.

Comprehension of the Organization's Rationale, Characteristics, Functions and Objectives — When asked if the respondents understood the objectives and programmes of their organizations, more than 70% agreed.

Approach to Implementing Policies and Solutions — Seventy-six percent of the respondents favored the mechanics of implementing the policies and solutions to problems encountered in the operation of the organizations. Ninety percent of the respondents revealed having brought up their problems during meetings and that these were discussed.

Members' Awareness of Obligations and Participation — Sixty-eight percent of the respondents disclosed that the members are fully aware of

their obligations to the organizations. However, their degree of participation in the different activities differ. The study shows that members of Agbanga Farmer's Association and Baybay Social Laboratory Seed Grower's Association participate actively, while members of the Mabagon *Samahang Nayon* do not.

Autonomy in Program Implementation — Seventy-seven percent of the respondents agreed that the members of farmer organizations are given free hand in implementing the programs of their organizations. However, some 18% of the respondents who are members of the Mabagon *Samahang Nayon* felt that there is no autonomy in the implementation of their programs.

As to attendance in meetings, more than half (56%) of the respondents felt that the staff pressures members to attend meetings. It should be noted that the constitutions and by-laws of these organizations require them to attend meetings. Perhaps, the respondents had interpreted the reminders of the staff for them to attend meetings as pressuring them to attend meetings.

Responsibility of Members — According to 44% of the respondents, membership in the organization carried with it too many responsibilities which take up much of their time that could otherwise be

spent on their farms. This is especially true of new farmer groups such as those studied here.

Performance of Officers — Ninety-five percent of the respondents rated their officers as having performed well, except for the Maba-gon Samahang Nayon where 11% rated their officers poorly.

Disciplinary Measures — Majority (73%) favored the implementation of disciplinary measures to members who are unable to comply with their obligations. For uncooperative members, 44% agreed that these members should be expelled from the group.

Loan Settlement — One-half of the respondents cited loan settlement as a major problem of the organizations. In the case of the Tabunok Compact Farm Association, 92% of the members mentioned settlement of loans as a serious problem.

Pace of Implementing Activities — Almost one-half (45%) of the respondents expressed dissatisfaction over the slow pace of implementation of the programmes of their associations. Only about one-third (29%) expressed satisfaction over the pace of the implementation of their various activities.

Field-Staff Involvement — Majority of the respondents (99%) felt the need for full-time involvement of the

field staff in the implementation of their programmes.

On staff-worker relationship, 75% had good relations with the field staff while 19% did not know the staff members. The rest (6%) just heard the names of the field staff and had not had any actual contact with them.

Group Interaction — More than 75% of the respondents indicated having a favorable attitude towards the quality of group interaction among the members.

Household Participation — Although the members of farmer organizations are mostly household heads, the different activities are not only for them. Several activities of these associations require the participation of the whole family like, for instance, in farming operations. Other family members may therefore influence the decisions made by the household heads. The members were found to have favorable attitudes towards the idea of household participation.

IMPACT OF GROUP FARMING TO ITS MEMBERS

Did group farming make any impact to its members? One would anticipate that with group farming the farmers would not only be stimulated to build their villages to increase opportunities but would

also develop new aspirations, ideas, and attitudes towards farming. Among the encouraging results of group farming in the communities are as follows:

Increased Production — Sixty-three percent of the respondents believed that the farmer organizations helped them to increase food production because they could now easily avail themselves of services such as technical assistance and credit.

Increased Cooperation — Seventy-nine percent of the respondents noted increased cooperation among members of farmer organizations. This facilitates not only the prevention and control of pests and diseases in their farms but also the acquisition of production inputs such as labor, capital, and other farm technology and the marketing of their farm produce.

Moreover, majority of the members (77%) felt that their organizations have strengthened inter-agency cooperation. They felt that agencies working with them are more or less coordinated now. Among these agencies are the Ministry of Agricultural Extension, the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development, the Ministry of Social Services and Development, and the Visayas State College of Agriculture.

Adoption of Farm Practices — Another significant experience

revealed by majority of the members is that they have adopted improved farming practices. There are members, however, who claim that it is obligatory for them to adopt improved practices. This was disclosed by the members of the Agbanga Farmer's Association and the Baybay Social Laboratory Seed Grower's Association.

Promotion of Stature — Finally, 68% of the respondents felt that their membership in the organization has promoted their stature in the community. Their perception of stature promotion is expressed in increased knowledge and information, more participation in social functions like meetings, programs, meeting visitors, and being introduced to prestigious people.

The experiences felt by the members may be partly epitomized by the reaction of one of the respondents who said:

"I am learning to face people. Whenever visitors come to our *barangay*, we are always called. This gesture makes us feel important."

Filipino rural development planners, like other social scientists, hold the view that rural people can become more effective instruments of development if they are organized and mobilized. Thus, in the Philippines today, there is a strong emphasis on the formation of rural organizations especially among farmers.

Theoretically, group farming provides an efficient mechanism for pooling the resources and capabilities of farmers in order to increase production. This concept involves the difficult task of tapping the energies and interests of farmers to build up a camaraderie that will achieve a common goal.

The experience in Western Leyte shows a gap between theory and practice. While most of the members of group farming associations are aware of their duties and responsibilities, they have to translate these into concrete actions like active participation, doing personal sacrifices for the common good, and concerted group action, and as a result, significantly increasing production. This gap between idea and action bears serious implications for the implementation of strategy and thus requires in-depth analysis.

The member-farmers agree that group farming holds great promise

as an instrument of rural development. However, it should be noted that the members represent only a minority as far as the total farm population is concerned. These are usually the early adopters, the usual beneficiaries of government programs. Thus, there is a need to re-examine the recruitment procedure. For group farming to contribute significantly to the rural development efforts of the government, it should involve the great majority of the farmers including the tenants and those who resist innovations.

As practiced, group farming has a tendency to emphasize farm production. Although higher farm production is necessary for rural development, it is not enough. There is a need, therefore, to demonstrate that group farming also takes into consideration other important facets of rural development such as the equitable creation and distribution of benefits.

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