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THE SURVIVAL STRATEGIES OF THRIVING MULTIPURPOSE COOPERATIVES IN DAVAO ORIENTAL: A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY

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Abstract

This qualitative multiple case study is aimed at the investigation of the survival strategies of thriving multipurpose cooperatives (MPCs) in Davao Oriental. In this study, five (5) MPCs were purposefully selected and were analyzed through in-depth interviews and thematic coding. The results of the study revealed that diversification of product/services, member participation and support, transparent and participatory leadership, effective financial management and resource allocation, and strategic partnerships and linkages were the survival strategies of the MPCs in Davao Oriental. On the other hand, how these MPCs navigate their challenges is through adapting evolving product/services, member empowerment and shared accountability, strategic leadership and governance, financial discipline, and capacity building for sustainability through externally funded programs. All of these cases had the same practices on how they managed to survive in times of difficulties, however, they differ on the how they implement these approaches. The study highlights that cooperative resilience rests on the participatory governance, financial prudence, and contextual innovation. The results of this study gives practical insights for the cooperative leaders, policymakers, and academic institutions to create a responsive program that can promote inclusive growth and rural change. The findings of the study also provide a better insight into how community-based enterprises can thrive in uncertainty and changing socio-economic condition by incorporating the cooperative values into the strategic planning and stakeholder engagement.

Keywords: Multiple case, Multipurpose cooperatives, Survival strategies, Thriving cooperatives, Sustainability challenges.

Introduction

The multipurpose cooperatives (MPCs) in Davao Oriental is considered as a catalyst for inclusive economic growth and rural development. These cooperatives however experienced problems such as financial instability, governance inefficiencies, and environmental threats. Prior studies (Birchall, 2017; Mwangi & Ouma, 2018; Briones, 2019), revealed that strategic diversification, member empowerment and adaptive management are important factors for the cooperative resilience. But there is still a gap on empirical evidence on how these thriving multipurpose cooperatives deals with their challenges and even how do they survive. This research fills this gap by exploring the survival strategies of thriving multipurpose cooperatives and understanding how these cooperative navigates their challenges aligning with resource-based view (Barney, 1991) and stakeholders theory (Freeman, 1984), which investigates internal resource-use and stakeholders involvement as strength to resilience.

This study primary aimed at giving insights into the survival strategies of five thriving multipurpose cooperatives in Davao Oriental. The results of the study would be useful to cooperative leaders, policy makers, and academe in way of replicating practices of these thriving multipurpose cooperatives.

Method and Materials

This qualitative research employs multiple case study methods in order to capture the survival strategies of thriving MPCs in Davao Oriental and to encourage the development of an interpretative understanding and perception into how cooperatives operate. By purposefully choosing five (5) MPCs in which were involved in agricultural activities in Davao Oriental, the study was able to identify different strategies on how they maintain their cooperative activities under economic, environmental, and institutional constraints. This methodological selection is consistent with Creswell (2013) who suggests that case studies can be used to particularly investigate complex social phenomena.

Further, a semi-structured interview, document analyses and thematic codes were used to facilitate triangulation of the sources and verify conclusions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). During the conduct of the study, there were five core survival strategies identified such as diversification of product/services, member participation and support, transparent and participatory leadership, effective financial management and resource allocation, and strategic partnerships and linkages. These survival strategies underpin the key features of internal resource mobilization in resource-based view (RBV) Theory (Barney, 1991), through which cooperatives utilized leadership, financial capital and organizational knowledge to sustain their competitive edge complementing with Freeman (1984) stakeholder theory.

The finding shows that case A retail services and a logistic partnership in case C emphasized income diversification as their cooperative safety net during agricultural product seasonality. Anabo (2021) states that creating value addition processes can help in reducing the market vulnerability. Further, the findings shows that all of these five cases navigate their challenges through member education and training which corroborates Santos and Reyes (2023) arguing that financial literacy and digital skills is helpful in reinforcing cooperative resilience, as well as citizen empowerment to engage both in governance and operational activities.

Additionally, case D encourages trust and participation among members through a group decision making demonstrating ethical governance and transparent leadership. Their cooperative strategy is in line with Freeman's (2023) stakeholder formulation, which states that in order to preserved cooperative legitimacy and responsiveness, a variety of stakeholders, including members of the communities and government agencies, must be involved. As validated by Lopez et al. (2022) and Briones (2019), who emphasized such ongoing issues for sustainability of cooperatives, the analysis demonstrated that such governance practices helped in managing disruptions due to climate and financial constraints.

Further, case B showcased discipline in managing their finances that helped their cooperative in dealing with limited credit availability, a problem that has been extensively discussed in Philippine cooperative literature (Abad, 2020; Llanto, 2020). What I also found is, during difficulties, these cooperatives are strategic about budgeting and internal controls in a way that keeps them liquid and has allowed many of them to make investments with other credit sources were all but shut down. This also highlights the critical role of internal financial management as a survival strategy especially in rural settings where banks may classify cooperatives among high-risk borrowers.

Strategic alliances were identified as an important external resource. Cooperatives worked with local government units (LGUs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and academic institutions to avail of training, grants and market. These collaborations have not only increased the ability of cooperatives to cooperate, but also increased the fulfillment of climate-resilient measures by implementing agroforestry and organic farming recommendations (Sinulingga et al. (2023) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (2020).

Between case comparisons showed that although all cooperatives combined similar strategies the relative weight between internal and external resources was different. Some accentuated member empowerment and internal governance (Cases B and D); others depended more on external partnerships and market integration (Cases A and C). These variations indicate that the cooperatives in Davao Oriental resource allocation strategies have cultural and contextual dimensions determined by cooperative size, location, as well as stakeholder composition.

Thus, the theoretical underpinnings and methodological soundness of my study have made it easier to understand about how thriving MPCs in Davao Oriental overcome challenges and survive uncertainties. The findings of this study reveals that cooperative resilience is intimately related to participatory governance financial management, and contextual innovation and does not just rely on external support. Cooperative leaders, legislators, and development professionals who want to expand effective strategies and promote inclusive rural development might learn valuable lessons from these findings.

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