

Farmers and people's organizations: Insights from Panaon Island, Southern Leyte

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International Journal of Science and Research Archive, 2025, 15(02), 226-234

Publication history: Received on 21 March 2025; revised on 03 May 2025; accepted on 05 May 2025

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/ijrsra.2025.15.2.1276>

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the attitudes and perceptions of farmers on their membership in people's organizations (PO) in selected barangays on Panaon Island, Southern Leyte. A total of 80 farmers from barangays of Lilo-an and San Francisco were randomly recruited to participate. A self-developed survey questionnaire was used to collect data. Since agricultural production has not yet been fully developed in these barangays, farmers were encouraged to join other POs because the aim of POs is to stimulate agricultural productivity through enhanced income generation, access to resources and emerging technologies, and to strengthen their economic situation. The overall mean score of 4.22 was very positive in terms of farmers' perception of POs. Farmers are definitely hopeful in the fact that POs are good organizations since they offer access to resources, training and empowerment, as well as a voice to the community. Additionally, no significant relationship was found with the farmers' demographic characteristics, such as age, sex, civil status, education, income, farm size and years of farming experience.

Keywords: Farmers; People's Organization; Insights; Panaon Island

1. Introduction

People's Organizations (POs) are important in the promotion and advancement of the welfare and empowerment of sectors in Great Rural Areas, specifically farmers. These local bodies from the grassroots level are often the lifelines to accessing agriculture support services, establishment of capacity, credit and market linkages. In the Philippines, POs have assumed a pivotal role in the development programs of both government and non-government institutions; such institutional setups are primarily engaged in agrarian reform, rural livelihood and community participation activities. (Aguilar, 2013; Department of Agrarian Reform [DAR], 2020).

Farmers in particular, being one of the most vulnerable sectors economically, continuously experience such issues as poor access to capital, lack of proper farming technologies, and volatile market prices (Balisacan & Hill, 2003). However, with PO membership, farmers may access technical training, agricultural inputs, and increased bargaining power, leading to improved farm productivity and better socio-economic conditions (Quizon et al., 2014; Catacutan et al., 2015). While such benefits may be possible, not all farmers join POs, and membership and satisfaction rates are quite heterogeneous. Studies have found that perceptions of effectiveness, leadership transparency, and perceived personal benefit are some of the determinants of farmers' decisions to engage or disengage with these sorts of organizations (Guanzon & Celestino, 2020; Mangahas et al., 2019). It is imperative that these perceptions are understood for an objective assessment of the real impact from POs and what potential improvements could be made for their better contribution to rural development.

However, farmers' organizations, such as cooperatives, associations, self-help groups, producer organizations, farmer-based organizations, farmer groups, and collective actions, are playing an increasingly significant role in supporting the

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sustainable development of the agricultural sector as well as improving the living standards of rural households. These organizations allow smallholders and resource-poor agricultural producers to work together, thus granting several benefits to rural farming households. A growing number of studies have estimated the effects of farmers' organizations, highlighting how these organizations play multiple roles in supporting sustainable development. It is found that membership in different types of farmers' organizations helps to increase farm productivity and food security, strengthen member farmers' bargaining power, improve farm management skills, raise household welfare and livelihoods, enhance product quality and value chain integration, boost rural income growth, as well as reduce poverty and cropland abandonment (Ma et.al 2023).

Among others, People's Organizations (POs) have also long been recognized as essential tools to strengthen grassroots participation, particularly in the fields of agricultural and rural development. At least locally, the strength of local organizations is one of the key determinants of the success or failure of community level programs (Uphoff, 1993). POs play a critical role in the implementation of agrarian reform and rural livelihood programs in the Philippines; they frequently act as intermediaries between the government and the rural poor (Brillantes & Tiu, 2012). According to the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR, 2020), the POs empower farmers by acting as a channel for farm inputs, credit, infrastructure, and training. Through collective bargaining, these organizations help farmers negotiate better prices in the market and implement community-driven development projects. Certainly, empirical studies demonstrated PO membership often results in concrete socio-economic benefits. Catacutan et al. In the Philippines, participation in farmer-led organizations has improved access to knowledge, capital, and agricultural technologies (2015).

According to empirical study, farmers' associations in cooperatives, for example, increase retail prices, productivity, and the adoption of new technologies (Grashuis & Su, 2019). The terms "associativity" and "cooperativism" are commonly used interchangeably in this context. Nevertheless, rather than being mutually exclusive, the two words are complementary. According to Rodriguez and Ramirez (2016), associativity is a collaborative work process that, guided by shared ideals and beliefs, aims to achieve shared goals in terms of organizational, commercial, and/or productive elements. According to Rodriguez-Miranda et al. (2021), a cooperative is a self-help organization that is autonomous and independent, has an open and voluntary association, democratic governance by its members, and an equitable capital contribution.

The literature now in publication claims that horizontal integration in agricultural chains—achieved through cooperatives or other associations—improves farmers' access to technology, financial services, and market information, which in turn boosts farmers' profits (Andrei et al., 2019). Due to their attitudes and beliefs, which are frequently connected to their actual circumstances and features, such as farm size and market insertion, farmers' involvement in and dedication to associations is limited (Grashuis & Su, 2019).

Nonetheless, that is not the complete picture, and not all experiences are created equal. According to Guanzon and Celestino (2020), some organizations are discouraged from enhancing participation due to weak leadership, internal conflicts, or lack of accountability. Women and marginalized groups face limited representation and strategic decision-making power in POs (Mangahas et al., 2019). Second, farmers' perceptions should be explored and understood by PO to strengthen engagement of PO. According to a study by Llanto (2007), trusted leadership, perceived benefits, and participation in decision-making are some of the factors that can make farmers more likely to join some form of organization. Alongside economic considerations, social aspects like prior experiences with collaborative work, cultural influences, and peer pressure, also affect farmers' choices to join organizations, as noted in some studies from Southeast Asia (Pretty, 2003; Krishna, 2002).

In some rural communities in Southern Leyte and on Panaon Island agriculture has been a key economic activity. Many development projects in this region have been initiated, often through coordinated POs between local government and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). This low level of engagement in the work being done, along with poor perceptions about their organization's impact in the lives of farmers, can be seen in later field reports (Provincial Agriculture Office, Southern Leyte, 2022). A lack of contextual empirical research on this topic therefore calls for a closer bottom-up knowledge of how POs are viewed and experienced at a micro level.

The study is aimed at gaining more awareness and information on the opinions and knowledge of the farmers on Panaon Island, Southern Leyte, regarding whether or not they are involved in implementing PEOs and to arrive at an evidence-based recommendation to strengthen POs in supporting inclusive and sustainable agricultural development in the region through their motivations, experiences, and perceptions regarding the positive and negative effects of POs.

1.1. Objectives of the study

- To explore the role and impact of farmers and people's organizations in socio-economic development in Panaon Island, Southern Leyte. Specifically, it aimed to:
- Identify the existing farmers and people's organizations operating in Panaon Island.
- Gather local insights and perceptions on the effectiveness and sustainability of people's organizations.
- Determine the significant relationship between respondents' profile and perception on people's organization membership.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

The main material used in this study was the primary data obtained from farmers in Panaon Island by survey who were selected through a random sampling method from among the 100 farmers who were members in people's organization. The sample volume was determined using the sample size and a tolerable sampling error table with a 95% confidence level and 5% error margin. The sample size was 80 but 85 questionnaires were used in the analysis to be on the safe side.

In order to investigate and examine farmers' opinions and experiences regarding their involvement in People's Organizations (POs) on Panaon Island, Southern Leyte, this study used a descriptive survey research design. The design is suitable for using questionnaires to collect information on the attitudes, opinions, and conditions that are prevalent in a population (Creswell, 2014).

2.2. Research Locale and Respondents

The study was carried out in barangays of Candayuman in Lilo-an and Malico in San Francisco, Southern Leyte on Panaon Island, which is made up of the Southern Leyte, Philippines, municipalities of Liloan, San Francisco. The majority of the island's inhabitants make their living primarily from farming and fishing, as the island is primarily an agricultural area. The respondents of the study were the farmer members of people's organization in the said barangays. However, slovin's formula was used to determine the appropriate sample size with a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error.

2.3. Slovin's Formula

- $n = N / (1 + Ne^2)$

2.3.1. where:

- n = sample size
- N = total population (100 farmers)
- e = margin of error (commonly 0.05 or 5% for 95% confidence level)

2.3.2. Substitute the Values

- $n = 100 / 1 + 100(0.05)^2$
- $n = 100 / 1 + 100(0.0025)$
- $n = 100 / (1 + 0.25)$
- $n = 100 / 1.25$
- $n \approx 80$ Therefore **n = 80 respondents**

2.4. Data Gathering Procedure and Analysis

To identify & contact intended respondents the researcher worked with agricultural officers, leaders of POs and local government agencies. To accommodate & meet the respondents' desire for language proficiency in survey collection, surveys were handed out face-to-face with the help of qualified survey enumerators who speak the native language. The purpose and objectives of the study were explained to the respondents who were also encouraged to participate in this voluntary and confidential study. The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations) to characterize the demographic profile and perception levels. Thematic analysis was applied to identify themes and insights related to open-ended questions in the qualitative data.

3. Results and Discussion

The survey received 80 anonymous self-report surveys from the target participants, yielding a 100% response rate. The features of the study population are displayed in Table 1: the mean age of the study population is 43.93 years; 48.75% of the sample was in the age group of 41–50 years, which is the major distribution group in the <30–>50 age range. This suggests that the members of the people's organization were mostly mature. For the profile, sex distribution shows that 64 are men and 16 are women. This indicates that males are outnumbered compared to females. A large majority (92.50%) are married, 3.75% are separated, 2.50% are single, while 1.25% of the sample is widowed. This finding entails that married members in POs are more numerous compared to single, separated, and widowed members. The majority of those were high school level (87.50%); 5.0% were college level, 3.75% had no formal education, 2.50% were elementary level, and 1.25% obtained a vocational program. The findings connote that most of the PO's members were high school level, and they were literate enough to understand about membership in a farmers' organization. Among them, 55.0% were farming as the main source of income, 37.50% were in fishing, 3.75% engaged in small business, 2.50% were in labor, and 1.25% had buy and sell. Frequently, 85% of the members of POs had an estimated monthly income of below P5,000.00; 7.50% had an income between P5,001.00 and P10,000.00; 5% had an income between P10,001.00 and P15,000.00; and 2.50% had an income above P15,001.00. Among them, 88.75% had a farm size of below 3 hectares; others, 8.75%, had between 4 and 5 hectares; while 2.50% tilled land for more than 6 hectares. Some of the members in PO's 41.25% experienced in farming between 6 and 10 years; 35% between 11 and 15 years; 11.25% between 16 and 20 years; 10% more than 21 years in farming experience; and 2.50% between 1 and 5 years. Findings entail that the farmers engaged in people's organization membership for some purpose that POs would help them to improve their agricultural production and income generation and provide access to resources and technology, and also it addresses their issues in economic vulnerability.

Table 1 Respondents Profile

Profile Variables	Frequency (f) N=80	Percentage (%)
Age (years)		
Below 30	4	5.0
31- 40	27	33.75
41-50	39	48.75
51 above	10	12.50
Sex		
Male	64	80.0
Female	16	20.0
Civil Status		
Single	2	2.50
Married	74	92.50
Widowed	1	1.25
Separated	3	3.75
Educational Attainment		
No formal education	3	3.75
Elementary level	2	2.50
High school level	70	87.50
Vocational	1	1.25
College level	4	5.0
Main Source of Income		

Farming	44	55.0
Fishing	30	37.50
Small Business	3	3.75
Buy and sell	1	1.25
Labor	2	2.50
Estimated Monthly Income		
Below P5,000.00	68	85.0
P5,001.00 – P10,000.00	6	7.50
P10,001.00 – P15,000.00	4	5.0
P15,001.00 and above	2	2.50
Farm Size		
Below 3 hectares	71	88.75
4-5 hectares	7	8.75
6 hectares and above	2	2.50
Years of Farming Experience		
1-5	2	2.50
6-10	33	41.25
11-15	28	35.0
16-20	9	11.25
Above 21	8	10.0

Source: Primary Data

3.1. Perceptions on People's Organization Membership

The results in Table 2 shows that in statement 1: "Being part of a PO has allowed me to access farm resources" (Mean = 4. 48 SD = 0. 573 Interpretation: Strongly Agree) entails that this is a very strong positive indicator. It means that the PO is effectively doing the key function of providing access to resources that other farmers might not have independently (e. g. access to inputs (seeds, fertilizer), equipment, land, credit, etc.) This point demonstrates just how much value PO membership actually brings. For statement 2: I have received training and capacity building through my PO (Mean: 4. 34 SD: 0. 4672 Interpretation: Strongly agree) this also indicates a fundamental strength of the PO and the role of training and capacity building as it contributes towards improving production practices, applying new technologies and improving overall farmers knowledge. The high mean suggests the PO is active in this area and that respondents find their own benefits from the opportunity. The low standard deviation suggests that responses are clustered so tightly that they are all closely related to "Strongly Agree". In statement 3: "PO membership has strengthened my voice in community decision-making" (Mean 4. 23%SD 0. 591 Interpretation: Strongly agree). This implies that this could be used to analyze more beyond the farming aspect i. e. whether the PO is providing the farmers with political and social empowerment as having the collective voice for themselves helps them better defend themselves in the community and make them more favourable towards policies and allocation of resources for development. In addition, statement #4: "I feel like I have support and empowerment as a farmer after I join PO" (Mean: 4. 31 SD: 0. 667 Interpretation: Strongly agree). This finding implies that the PO must give farmers a supportive environment whereby they can make decisions and improve their means of living, and that social and emotional support may be as important as material resources. Statement 5: "PO activities will meet the real needs of farmers in our area." (Mean 4. 24, SD 0. 533, Interpretation: Strongly Agree). This shows the relevance of PO's work, is that farmers feel that the activities are relevant to their actual needs, and this is key for maintaining participation and at the same time reaching practical impact. However, statement 6: " Leadership in the PO is transparent and participatory" (Mean: 4.21, SD: 0.589, Interpretation: Strong Agree). This connotes that any organization needs trust and good governance.

Table 2 Perceptions on People's Organization Membership

Statement	Weighted Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. Being part of a PO has allowed me to access farm resources.	4.48	0.573	Strongly Agree
2. I have received training and capacity building through my PO.	4.34	0.476	Strongly Agree
3. PO membership has strengthened my voice in community decision-making	4.33	0.591	Strongly Agree
4. I feel like I have support and empowerment as a farmer after I join PO.	4.31	0.667	Strongly Agree
5. PO activities will meet the real needs of farmers in our area.	4.24	0.533	Strongly Agree
6. Leadership in the PO is transparent and participatory.	4.21	0.589	Strongly Agree
7. I am happy with the services provided by PO.	3.89	0.636	Agree
8. I would recommend PO membership to other farmers.	3.93	0.689	Agree
Overall Mean	4.22	0.594	Strongly Agree

Source: Primary Data

This finding shows that farmers believe in the transparency (open and honest) and participation (involving members in decision-making) of the leadership of the PO. This creates a feeling of ownership and credibility. For statement 7: "I am happy with the services provided by PO" (Mean: 3.89, SD: 0.636, Interpretation: Agree). This finding indicates that there are some services the PO was potentially not effectively delivering or something that some members were expecting and not receiving. This justifies that research to identify more precisely the areas to address is also required. Also, statement #8: "I would recommend PO membership to other farmers" (Mean: 3.93, SD: 0.689, Interpretation: Agree). These findings suggest that farmers have some expectation of benefits from membership, but have reservations or find it lacking from the standpoint of what is attractive to them as potential members in some specific aspects. The overall mean of 4.22 entails that the survey results present an extremely positive image of the PO. Farmers mostly 'Strongly Agree' the PO is helpful, gains access to resources, training, becomes empowered and has a voice in the community. This indicates that the PO is serving its members well. The findings is similar to the study of Balisacan & Fuwa (2004) that People's Organizations often serve as a model for membership in government and NGO programs that provide credit, seeds, equipment, and farm inputs. POs contribute to better access to agricultural services in rural areas. Study of Birchall (2003) emphasized that membership in cooperative and PO can increase members' capacities in terms of both continuing education and formal training. On the other hand, findings of De Dios (2002) noted that members of POs tend to participate more actively in governance in general, and thus become politically more confident. By being a member of a PO, people of all moralities and backgrounds are encouraged to participate more actively, build networks of mutual aid, and reduce social isolation. Ostrom (1990) discussed the trust and collective effectiveness within organizations develop empowerment. When POs are headed by farmers and consider the needs of the community extensively, their programs are responsive and more effective. Likewise, Gaspar (2000) noted that local culturally-rooted organizations respond to the real needs of the local stakeholders. Alatas et al. (2012) found community perceptions of POs are influenced by their management as open and consultative. Birchall (2003) confirmed that service satisfaction is one of the key factors in membership of cooperatives and Abdullah et al., (2012) noted that satisfied members create advocates and influence members to join.

3.2. Correlation between Respondents Profile and Perceptions on People's Organization Membership

The relationship between respondent profile characteristics and perceived membership to PO shows in Table 3. The findings reveal that none of the profiles variables (age, sex, civil status, education, income, farm size and years in farming experience) is significantly related to the perception of PO membership among the respondents. Obviously age of the farmers does not affect how they think PO membership is beneficial or disadvantageous, so either older farmers or younger farmers have equally positive or negative perception of PO membership. The expression gender does not influence farmers' perception of PO membership, so male and female farmers have similarly positive or negative perceptions of PO membership. Either the farmer is married or separated or widowed, does not have a significant influence on their perception of PO membership. The farmers education level does not significantly influence their perception of PO membership - farmers with higher or lower education levels have similar attitudes towards POs. The level of income of the farmers is not related to their perception of PO membership. Richer and poorer farmers have no

significant difference in their perception of POs. The size of the farm that the farmers own is not related to their perception of PO membership. Small and large-scale farmers have similar perceptions of POs. Number of years that a farmer has been farming is not related to their perception of PO membership. New and experienced farmers have similar perceptions of POs. The findings further suggest that farmers' impressions of people's organizations are not determined by demographic or socio-economic characteristics; they likely regard other factors besides the ones listed here more important in shaping their impressions.

Table 3 Correlation between Respondents Profile and Perceptions on People's Organization Membership

Respondents Profile and Perceptions	r - value	p - value	Interpretation
Age and Perception on people's organization membership	0.144	0.899	Not Significant
Sex and Perception on people's organization membership	0.199	0.961	Not Significant
Civil status and Perception on people's organization membership	0.087	0.778	Not Significant
Education and Perception on people's organization membership	0.040	0.638	Not Significant
Income and Perception on people's organization membership	0.091	0.788	Not Significant
Farm size and Perception on people's organization membership	0.136	0.886	Not Significant
Years in farming experience and Perception on people's organization membership	-0.003	0.489	Not Significant

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Source: Primary Data

4. Conclusion

PO is composed mostly of mature adults and there is a very high ratio of men to women, high ratio of married people in the population. Members tend to be very educated in common. Agriculture is most members main occupation, with a very small minority also fishing. Very large majority of members live on very low monthly income and have very small farms. Members experience ranges from relatively new farmers to people that have been farming for many years. Farmers join people's organizations with the expectation that they will be helped to improve their agricultural production and income, have access to resources and technology, and be vulnerable to their economic vulnerabilities. The findings suggest that there is a PO composed of relatively middle aged and for the most part male married individuals with a moderate level of education involved mainly in farming with low economic resources who hope to make some money through membership in the organization. It can be inferred that membership of a PO is seen in the majority to promote access to farm inputs, machinery, land and credit as well as training and capacity-building efforts that improve farming practices and knowledge. It also promotes farmers' empowerment by empowering them to become engaged in decision-making processes within the community and to have their voice heard. Farmers feel supported and empowered by being a part of POs; PO activities are seen as being relevant to the farmers' actual needs, which is key to having successful participation and impact. Farmers think the leadership in POs are transparent and participate in their programs therefore creating trust and credibility. While generally positive there are some instances where there is a problem with services being provided by the PO, this may indicate that there is room for improvement. It can be concluded that farmers feel they could promote being part of POs to other farmers, however, there is some disinterest about some aspects of the program that would be more attractive to potential members. There is wide consensus across the country that POs are very effective and that farmers fully agree that joining them offers various advantages including access to resources, training, empowerment and a stronger voice.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

Statement of informed consent

Participants of this study were informed about the purpose of the study since they served as the subject, and they voluntarily participated without hesitation. All information provided was kept confidential. Their identity will not be revealed in any part of the study or publications. Data will be used solely for academic purposes.

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