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Placemaking Cooperation among Co-operatives: The Case of the Union of Church-Based Co-operatives in the Philippines

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Abstract

This single case study explored the experience and practice of Rochdale's 6th co-operative principle by the Union of Church-based Co-operatives in the Philippines to understand its relevance to the globalized co-operative movement. The findings suggest that the union has systematically implemented programs and services to meet its objectives to unite and strengthen the members. The study offers three policy directions and measures focused and targeted toward the issues that could have hampered a more effective performance. First, it needs to push for a broader and more diverse funding base to enhance its capacity to influence and meet its members' needs. Second, it needs to take bold steps to encourage unresponsive officers to invest their physical and mental energy at a more desirable level. Third, it needs to formulate strategies and enhanced packages to increase the quantity and quality of its membership. The study adds to the limited literature on the viability and advantage of cooperation among primary co-operatives. It concludes by suggesting some potential avenues for future research on collaboration among co-operatives.

Keywords: case study, church-based co-ops, co-operative principles, group cohesion, performance level, types of co-operatives

1.0 Introduction

The globalized co-operative movement plays a critical role in promoting equity, social justice, and inclusive economic empowerment through cooperation and democratic processes (Castillo, 2018; Defourny & Nyssens, 2013; Mendoza, 2006; Birchall, 2004). Co-operatives (co-ops) are "autonomous association(s) of persons united voluntarily to meet their members' economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise" (ICA, 1996, p. 1). Its main goal is to improve the living standards and quality of life of members (Mendoza, 2006:6). Study after study shows how co-ops have successfully created opportunities, provided economic benefits, and improved their members' quality of life (Habito, 2018; Manto-Beltran, 2017; Yap, Lim, & Devlin, 2015; Quilloy, 2012; Valle & Rosales, 2013). The enabling environment (such as providing capital and technical assistance to small enterprises) that the co-ops create enables them to pursue safe, profitable, dignified livelihoods, thereby contributing to poverty reduction, especially in rural and agricultural communities. For example, Quilloy (2015) showed how a micro co-op of small cacao farmers in Davao City, Philippines has effectively empowered its members through democratic control and social equity, and building their identity as a partner in agricultural development.

Despite their well-documented individual achievements in the Philippines (Castillo & Castillo, 2017; Yap, Lim & Devlin, 2015; Quilloy, 2015; Ladisla, 2015; Villalba et al., 2009), quite a few primary types of co-ops would join forces to form and work together as a secondary co-operative, a category of co-operative the members of which are the primary co-ops. The ICA (1996) maintained that the union of co-operatives provides its members with the opportunity to experience and practice Rochdale's 6th co-operative principle, the cooperation among co-ops. They can do this at two levels. First, at the level of values, the synergy created by the 6th co-operative principle can enable the primary co-ops to serve their members more effectively as well as contribute to the strengthening of the spirit of solidarity (ICA, 1996). Second, at the level of business practices, Johnston Birchall (2004), an author best known for his significant research on the seven co-operative principles, urged small community-based co-ops to join forces to survive increasing competition, particularly among consumer co-ops. He argued that the need for cooperation among primary co-ops has become acute in a globalized economy (Birchall, 2005). For example, within Australia, Oczkowski, Krivokapic-Skoko, & Plummer (2013) noted

that cooperation among co-ops is given little emphasis due to the lack of critical mass to produce expected results. Moreover, Novkovic (2007) pointed out that the extent and impact of the connections between co-operatives seemed unclear and may need further investigation.

In the Philippines, there are only 59 (0.3%) operating union-secondary co-ops out of 18,065 reporting co-ops by type based on the latest report of the Cooperative Development Authority of the Philippines (CDA), the government agency in charge of the registration and regulation of co-operatives (CDA, 2018). This data reflects the need for union-secondary co-ops to demonstrate its viability and advantage as a type of business cooperation and to convince primary co-ops that they will be better off if they join it (Birchall, 2005). In an attempt to address its hidden relevance to the global co-operative movement, this study explored the experience and practice of Rochdale's 6th co-operative principle by the Union of Church-based Co-operatives (UCC, henceforth the union) in the Philippines as an illustrative case. Specifically, it presents and analyzes its members' perspectives on how it had performed and the issues that emerged from its performance. The potential practical benefits of this study to secondary co-ops include benchmarking against best-practices and other secondary co-ops. Their officers and general membership may also benefit by understanding the opportunities and challenges they face in practicing cooperation among themselves (Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, as cited in Baskarada, 2014, p. 6).

2.0 Method

This paper adopted a single and exploratory case study to describe and understand the relevance of secondary co-ops to the global co-operative movement. It is also an intrinsic case study because it aims at acquiring a rich understanding of its performance as a tool for evaluation and organizational learning (Baskarada, 2014). It used mixed-methods to gather data and information done in two phases. Phase 1 used a quantitative method to address research questions on the union's group cohesion and strength. Phase 2 adopted a qualitative approach to describe its experience and practice of cooperation. Finally, it integrated the quantitative and qualitative data to determine if they converged on a single interpretation of the case under study (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2010).

2.1 Participants

For Phase 1, the participants consisted of 33 out of the 35 primary co-operative members of the union. The members were selected and invited as respondents to the online survey based on an inclusion criterion set for the study (at least two years of membership and in good standing when the study was conducted). Out of the 33 invited, only 14 members responded despite repeated follow-ups. Thus, the online survey only achieved a 42.4% response rate for the following reasons: that it was self-administered, that the target respondents (mostly composed of the elderly) lack the essential skill to use the internet and the lack of interest in the topic. Ten of the respondents were female, and four were male, reflecting the predominance of female co-op members in the co-operative movement. In terms of role, five were managers of their primary co-ops; two were chairpersons of the BODs, two vice-chairpersons, and two members of the BODs, two members of the permanent committees, and one officer-in-charge. The age range was 35-70 years, with a median age of 55 years. The time since their primary co-ops joined the union ranged from two to ten years.

For Phase 2, the participants consisted of twelve current and former officers of its BODs and two coordinators of the committees as key informants for the focus group discussions (FGDs). The researcher selected them because they had direct involvement in the union affairs during their at least two-year term as members of the BODs. They had also served as the official representatives of their primary co-ops to the union during its annual general assembly. The majority of the key informants were female (11), and only three were male. In terms of role, eight were chairpersons of their primary co-ops' BODs, and six were managers. The age range was 45-70 years, with a median age of 60 years. The time since they were elected to the BODs ranged from two to six years.

2.2 Procedure

For Phase 1, the researchers conducted the online survey from October 10 to November 25 of 2018. The questionnaires were sent to each sample co-op, with a request that it be completed and then returned by a given date. It was done online due to the following reasons: it was relatively inexpensive; it allowed the researchers

to have access to samples that were hard to reach in person; and it permitted them to take sufficient time to give thoughtful answers to the questionnaires (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2010). On the other hand, the four FGDs were held during the BODs four monthly board meetings from December 2018 to March of 2019 in their head office. The BODs holds at least ten regular meetings a year. They were conducted around the study's theme, such as, "Why did you join this union?"; "How effective is it in providing your needs as members?"; and "Can you tell me what cooperation in this union like?" The FGD facilitator used an interview protocol drafted based on its two goals to unite and strengthen members. The facilitator made sure that they were flexible enough to refocus the questions or prompt more information if something interesting or novel emerges (Baskarada: 2014). Each FGD lasted between 40 and 60 minutes. They were recorded, transcribed, and coded for interpretative and integrative analyses. The study also conducted documentary reviews of available newsletters, brochures, souvenir programs, audiovisuals, and audited financial records published by the union spanning five fiscal years (2013-2018) as secondary sources of data and information. The study used this period to provide a comprehensive picture of the union's documentation and reporting for five fiscal years.

2.3 Instruments

Demographic questionnaire. It used a questionnaire to obtain a pen portrait of the participants' gender, age, number of years of membership in the union, number of years and role in the BODs, and primary co-operative affiliation.

The study used two structured instruments for the online survey. They are the Group Cohesion Test (GCT) (Forsyth, 2010) and the Performance Assessment Rating Tool [PART] (Office of Management Budget, 2008). The GCT is an attitude scale that aims to assess and understand group behavior (Cota, Evans, Dion, Kilik, & Longman, 1995). Cohesion refers to the creation and maintenance of co-operative effort toward attaining the organization's goals (Kenny, 2010). The members of a social group are cohesive when bonds unite them to one another and the whole group (Forsyth, 2014). Group cohesion has its known benefits (Forsyth, 2010; Harun & Mahmood, 2012). First, it enables the members more inclined to engage readily and to stay with the group (Forsyth, 2010). Second, it can boost performance and allow the cohesive groups to perform better than less cohesive groups (Weldon, Jehn & Pradhan, 1991)). To assess the union's perceived cohesion, the researchers asked the respondent-members to agree or disagree with statements based on the five elements of cohesion: (1) the commitment to work together as a group, (2) the attraction of the members to one another and to the group, (3) unity based on shared identity and belonging, (4) the emotional intensity of the group and individuals when in the group, and (5) structural integrity based on group norms, roles, and inter-member relations.

The study also used the PART to assess the union's performance, as seen by its members (Gilmour, 2007). The monitoring and assessment of the performance can allow the group members to determine the likelihood of goal-attainment (Weldon & Weingart, 1988). The instrument could help identify the group's strengths and weaknesses. It asked dichotomous questions in terms of the eight factors that can reflect and impact the union's overall performance. It includes the following: mission, external environment, strategic planning, internal and external communications, organizational structure, ethics and accountability, human resources management, information technology, evaluation and performance management, and financial management.

2.4 Mode of Analysis

The quantitative and qualitative data were separately treated and analyzed. Frequency and percentage counts were used to treat and analyze the quantitative data. On the other hand, the qualitative data analysis followed the steps of the scissor-and-sort technique that Stewart & Shamdasani proposed (2014). First, we read and reread the transcripts to identify those sections relevant to the research questions and purpose. Next, based on the readings, we developed a classification system for emerging themes and identified material in the transcript related to them. We used color-coded brackets to mark different themes within the text with colors. Then, after the coding process was completed, we cut the coded copy of the transcript apart and sorted so that all material relevant to a particular theme was placed together. Finally, the researchers constructed a narrative account around each theme using the various pieces of the transcribed texts as supporting materials and incorporated them within an interpretative analysis.

3.0 Results

The directors and officers assessed the union's performance in terms of its twin objectives to unite and strengthen the members. This section presents the result and findings of the survey under three headings- the union's profile, analyses of the survey results, and analyses of the outcomes from the FGDs.

3.1 Profile of the Union

The union is a secondary co-op located and operating at the National Capital Region, Philippines. Sixteen founding members established it in 2003. Through values formation and promotion of the seven co-operative principles, it envisions uniting and strengthening church-based co-ops as economic structures that can help respond to the poor's socio-economic needs. As its name suggests, membership is exclusive and open only to primary co-ops established by church-based groups or organizations. Its organizational structure consists of a seven-member Board of Directors (BODs) and eight committees on audit, mediation and conciliation, education, ethics, membership, governance, gender and development, and election.

The union has 35 active primary co-op members, as of October 2018. The area of operation of 23 is located in the National Capital Region (NCR), where the large, mostly institution-based co-ops are also based. Twelve operate in the nearby agricultural regions such as Rizal, Zambales, and Romblon. Figure 1 shows a map of the union's area of business operation and the city of operation of the majority of its primary co-op members.

Figure 1: The Research Site.



Source: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Frumencio_Co

In terms of its members’ assets, ten are classified as micro, eleven are small, eight are medium, and six are large. Table 1 shows a summary of the profile of the members of the union.

Table 1. *Profile of the Members of the Union*

Type of Members	Assets	Frequency	Percentage
Micro	3 million pesos below (\$58,000.00)	10	28.6
Small	3.1 million to 15 million (\$288,000.00)	11	31.4
Medium	15.1 million to 100 million pesos (\$1,900,000.00)	8	22.8
Large	Over 100 million pesos.	6	17.2
Total		35	100%

The data shows that micro and small co-ops had limited capital for operations, reflecting their prevalence in the co-operative Philippines’ movement (Castillo, 2018). They may also be lacking in technical and legal expertise needed to start and operate a co-operative. More interestingly, according to Castillo, there is an observed inverse relationship between the size of co-ops and asset holdings in the country. The micro co-ops, which are composed of 54%, only have 2% of the total assets, while the large co-ops are comprised of only 5% have 74% of the total assets. Thus, the vast majority of co-ops are poor but are mainly composed of people who support the economy through production—farmers, fishermen, and agrarian reform beneficiaries. Given this, Castillo posited that reversing the condition of micro and small co-ops will have an enormous effect on developing the rural and agricultural economy in particular, and the national economy, in general.

As of 2018, the union has at least three million pesos (approximately \$59,000.00) in total assets. It is a little more than its 1.5 million pesos (approximately \$28,300.00) operational and administrative expenses every year. It derives its financial resources mostly from the members’ Cooperative Education and Training Fund (CETF) (39.9%), fundraising campaigns (34.6%), and training/seminar fees (18.6%). As expected, the medium and large co-ops have contributed a significant bulk to the CETF. A documentary review and analysis of its four financial ratios (quick ratio, current ratio, total asset-turn-over ration, and debt-to-equity ratio) suggested that it has performed well overall when compared with industry benchmark (IB) (see Table 2).

The union maintains two permanent staff and, as an accredited training provider of the CDA, a pool of at least 20 expert trainers and resource persons who conduct technical capacity-building programs for members and non-members alike. The financial records show that within five years from 2013–2018, it has invested a significant part of its human and financial resources in programs targeting the overall quantity and quality of its capacity-enhancing services for all its members, with varying results:

- Promotion, publication, and information
- Advocacy and research
- Consultancy and technical assistance
- Education and training
- Mediation and conciliation of intra-coop disputes at the level of the union

Table 2. *Financial Performance of the Union Compared with IB*

Financial Ratio	Year	UCC	IB	Difference
Financial Ratio	2014	3.70	6.24	-2.54
	2015	3.49	3.99	-0.50
Quick Ratio	2016	3.62	3.72	-0.10
	2017	3.61	3.01	0.60
	2018	6.02	6.83	-0.81
Current Ratio	2014	3.70	6.35	-2.65
	2015	3.84	4.10	-0.26
	2016	3.52	3.85	-0.33
	2017	4.51	3.09	1.42
	2018	6.44	7.03	-0.59
Total Asset Turn-Over Ratio	2014	3.60	0.07	3.53
	2015	2.14	0.12	2.02
	2016	1.67	0.27	1.40
	2017	1.59	0.59	1.00
Debt to Equity Ratio	2014	0.34	0.07	0.27
	2015	0.88	0.13	0.75
	2016	0.77	0.15	0.62
	2017	0.64	0.22	0.42
Debt to Equity Ratio	2018	0.53	0.11	0.42

Summarily, the study documented an average of 26 legal, technical, and developmental training programs a year that the union had conducted between 2013 and 2018. When co-operatives can satisfy the legal and professional requirements, they will be able to enjoy specific incentives from the government, such as tax exemption (Castillo, 2014). It had served an average of 630 participants per training session that ranged from three to five hours a day. Additional programs include regular visits to at least two co-op members a month, recruiting at least three new members a year (the growth is canceled out by the number of co-operatives closing or being dissolved), and two livelihood programs. Overall, the documentary evidence suggests a pattern of strategic and regular implementation of plans and programs to meet its members' needs and interests.

3.2 *Quantitative Analyses*

On the union's perceived level of group cohesion. The majority of the respondents believed that the union's overall level of cohesion (90.5%) meets its need for unity or cohesion. Among the five elements of group cohesion, the commitment to work together earned the highest score (100%). The elements of social attraction (95.3%) and collective unity (90.5%) received the second and third top scores. The elements of emotional intensity (85.7%) and structural integrity (80.9%) earned the lowest scores. Table 3 summarizes the results.

Table 3. *Summary of Percentage Distribution and Response Categories of the Union Based on Elements of Group Cohesion*

Element	%	Response Categories
Task Commitment: commitment to working together as a coordinated unit.	100	Meets current needs
Social Attraction: of the members to one another and the group as a whole.	95.3	Meets current needs
Collective: unity based on shared identity and belonging.	90.5	Meets current needs
Emotional: the emotional intensity of the group and individuals when in the group.	85.7	Meets current needs
Structural integrity based on structural features: norms, roles, and inter-member relations.	80.9	Needs little effort
Average	90.5	Meets current needs

On the union's perceived performance. When it comes to the union's capacity to strengthen its members, 64.1% of the respondents believed that some effort must be exerted by the union to meet current needs. Furthermore, they thought that the union must only use little effort to meet current needs in the elements of sense of mission (82.8%), the external environment (74.3%), and strategic planning (71.4%). The rest of the elements earned scores indicating some efforts must be exerted by the union to meet current needs. Table 4 summarizes the results.

Table 4. *Summary of Percentage and Response Categories Based on the Overall Performance Measure of the Union*

Element	%	Response Categories
Mission	82.8	Needs little effort
External Environment	74.3	Needs little effort
Strategic Planning	71.4	Needs little effort
Internal and External Communications	67.1	Needs some effort
Organizational Structure	61.4	Needs some effort
Ethics and Accountability	60.1	Needs some effort
Human Resource Management	60.0	Needs some effort
Information Technology	55.7	Needs some effort
Evaluation and Performance Management	55.7	Needs some effort
Financial Management	52.9	Needs some effort
Average Rating	64.1	Needs some effort

Legend: (1) 100-85: Meets current needs; (2). 84-70: Needs little effort; (3) .69-50: Needs some effort; (4) 49-0: Needs much effort.

3.4 *Qualitative Analysis*

The researchers used several strategies to improve the rigor and trustworthiness of qualitative analyses. First, they returned to the key informants. They asked them to give feedback about the extent to which the study was able to understand and represent them in comparison with their perspectives and experience. The researchers incorporated the few changes that they suggested to the initial report of the study. Then, the researchers presented the final report to the BODs in its meeting held last December 2019. Finally, the researchers attended and presented the complete and final study to their general assembly held last January 04, 2020. These strategies suggest that one primary and two secondary themes that emerged from the qualitative data are most acceptable to all the stakeholders. This section offers a narrative of the union's practice and experience of cooperation and the three themes that emerged from the data.

Based on the observed variation of the members' experience in our study, the study generated one primary theme and two secondary themes. The primary theme is a general description representing all of the FGD participants' perspectives of the union's experience. We first present the primary theme before presenting the secondary themes of the experience. It is important to note that the themes are interrelated, not independent of each other. In our primary theme, we used "P" to denote a compound person, representing all participants' experiences and perspectives. When presenting the secondary themes, each participant is referred to by their assigned numbers: P1–P14.

The primary theme identified that the union had provided an effective support system and assistance to its small and micro co-op members. As expressed by a number of the participants,

- In our case, being a small co-operative, we join the union because we need its assistance. We had seen that our co-op became alive when it gave us help and support (P).
- The union has done great things for us. We were able to bring our primary co-op to the union, which enabled us to address our weaknesses (P).
- The union has helped us address our limitations, like the training of our leaders. If we get trainers from the outside, it will be more expensive, which a small co-op like us can hardly afford (P).
- The union has helped us a lot because every time we have a problem that we do not quite know how to answer, it will always come to our rescue. My members are not worried whenever we encounter problems because it is our support and guide (P).
- Our co-op was problematic. However, our membership in the union enabled us to complete all the training requirements and help us craft policies. Our city council gave us an award due to the assistance that the union provides (P).

Two additional themes emerged from the qualitative data. The first additional theme is that the medium and large co-ops had considerable experience and expertise to support micro and small co-ops. As evidenced by the following verbalization of the participants,

- What makes us unique and serves as our selling point in recruiting new members and good in us is that our mission is to help our members (P2).
- It is a unique organization because we are here not only because of what we can get but also what we can give to the needy (P6).
- I told our BODs that we could help more; we will not be the ones to ask for help anymore. However, most of the members of the union need

much help. If we join the union, the weak will be strong; if the strong members unite, they will be stronger (P7).

The second additional theme is that the union has its share of issues that could have hampered its effective performance. As verbalized by the participants,

- Our emotional connection is not that strong, and we are concerned and focused on our primary co-ops. We pay more attention to our primary co-op than the union (P1).
- We lack support from other officers whom I rarely see attending our meetings- maybe that is one area we need to consider (P3).
- The committees are not functioning, and membership is only nominal. We have to find a way to teach them thoroughly to perform according to our by-laws (P8).
- Maybe the secretariat of the union needs additional staff. However, if it has no budget, how would it put other staff? (P9)

Summarily, and for depicting its experience and practice of cooperation, the quantitative and qualitative data helped uncover the union's accomplishments and the issues arising from its performance. The findings of the mixed-methods suggest that it has stayed on course and committed to its objectives to unite and strengthen its members.

4.0 Discussion

The present study aimed to contribute empirical evidence on how a union of church-based co-ops in the Philippines experienced and practiced Rochdales's 6th cooperative principle, the cooperation among co-ops. Specifically, it presented and analyzed its members' perspectives on how their union has performed and the issues arising from its performance. This section shows the integration of quantitative and qualitative data.

4.1 Integration of Mixed-Methods Findings

The mixed-methods' findings converged further to shed light on the viability and advantage of union-secondary co-ops in particular and the co-operative movement in general. The qualitative results suggest that the union had been relatively successful in meeting its members' needs, especially those of the micro and small co-ops. They support the two quantitative results, first, on the element of commitment to work together to achieve the shared objective and, second, on the mission element of performance measure. There are at least two factors that can explain this convergence on the case under observation: similarity breeds liking (Myers, 2003), and familiarity leads to an attraction (Reis, Maniaci, Caprariello, Eastwick, & Finkel, 2011). First, the members seemed more similar than different. They share similar needs and goals as primary co-ops. As a secondary co-op, they have shared identity and task as a church-based union of co-ops. Vidal (2001) observed that one of the advantages church- and faith-based communities bring to the table of co-operative endeavors is the widely held assumption that they can act on behalf of principles that rise above narrow self-interest. Such may be especially applicable to the medium and large members who 'volunteered' to join the union even they can very well afford not to because of who they are and what they have already achieved in terms of total assets. Vidal (2001, p. 18) characterized them as representing more than "free labor," but as good-hearted, generous, and committed people who come to their volunteer activities with energy and a positive attitude.

Second, familiarity could have also contributed to the perceived collective and adequate commitment to the task and mission of the union and the other elements of emotional intensity. Since its inception, the union has provided positive ways for members to interact, share significant events, plan collegially to address common issues and challenges and even recognize outstanding members. As Reis et al. (2011) found out, the more participants interacted, the more attracted to each other they were.

Two additional themes emerged from the qualitative data. First, medium and large co-ops had put their considerable experience and expertise to work in support of the micro and small co-operatives. Second, the union's perceived share of issues and challenges that hampered its influence suggested aspects of cooperation among co-ops that were important to them, though not as much as the primary theme.

These additional findings helped explain the quantitative results on the collectively perceived high level of cohesion in the union. The qualitative data suggested that the members' faith-based values had significantly improved their experience and implementation of Rochdale's 6th co-operative principle. For example, there were several times that the union chose not to increase training fees or contributions rather than to engage in more profitable activities because its belief system emphasizes the importance of concern for people and charity (Berlucci, 2004; Vidal, 2001; Birchall, 1999). However, this has resulted in limited budgets and personnel shortages, which had invariably stifled efforts to improve performance. Vidal noted that a challenge to church-based communities is to retain and draw strength from shared faith-based values. However, they must do so in a way that is consistent with practicing development as a business, that is, collecting fees consistently, preparing sound financial plans and budgets, and so forth (Vidal, 2001).

Second, the qualitative data likewise helped make sense of the collectively perceived need of the union to exert more efforts to improve its overall performance. For example, the expressed need to consider the observed lack of support from some union officers and members helped explain the quantitative result on the union's structural integrity as the perceived weakest link among the elements of group cohesion. Structural integrity is the property of an organization remaining as a single intact entity (Kenny, 2010). It also refers to how the leadership and management and delivery bodies relate and are accountable to one another (Bamber, Owens, Schonfeld, Ghate, & Fullerton, 2010). There is a clear consensus about the significant role of structural integrity in creating and maintaining group cohesion (Kenny, 2010; Mullen, & Copper, 1994; Gully, Devine, & Whitney, 1995; Evans & Dion, 1991). Although group cohesion enables group members to participate and perform better, it does not guarantee effectiveness or productivity, partly because of the group's structural integrity (Forsyth, 2014). Forsyth asserts that if group norms do not support hard work or best efforts, cohesive groups will be unproductive (Forsyth, 2014).

5.0 Lessons Learned, Limitations, and Research Directions

The study offers three policy directions and measures focused and targeted toward the issues that could have hampered a more effective performance. First, it needs to push for a broader and more diverse funding base to enhance its capacity to influence and meet its members' needs. If it does not achieve this, the union will not become very useful in assisting its most needy members. Second, it needs to take bold steps to encourage unresponsive officers and members to invest in their physical and mental energy at a more desirable level. Extra-role behavior and morale-building group communication should be an essential mediator for this lesson (Weldon, Jehn & Pradhan, 1991). Third, it needs to formulate strategies and enhanced packages to increase the quantity and quality of its membership, especially targeting the agricultural regions where a significant number of micro and small co-ops operate.

Three limitations should be considered in the appreciation of this study. The first is the high non-response rate to the online survey. Second, there is the use of perspectives rather than more concrete data to explore the experience and practice of cooperation among co-ops. Third, although recognized as a beneficial and efficient approach to analysis, the scissor-and-sort technique relied very heavily on the researcher's sole judgment. It would have been more desirable to have two or more analysts to analyze the focus group transcript independently. We addressed these limitations by conducting validation techniques and maintain the reliability and trustworthiness of the analysis. Regardless of these limitations, we believe that the study contributes to empirical support for the viability and advantage of cooperation among co-ops in several essential ways. First, it is probably one of the first to empirically explore the experience and practice of the 6th co-operative principle. The integrated findings contribute new insights into the viability and advantage of secondary co-ops, especially to the strengthening of micro and small co-ops. Second, we acknowledge the need for in-depth empirical research on the role of secondary unions when studying the co-operative movement. The study presents a picture of factors associated with successful cooperation by examining an illustrative and critical case like the case under observation. Third, the findings of the research will hopefully stimulate theoretical developments in the field. We

proposed that the identified success factors such as task commitment, structural integrity, and shared values be integrated as an extension in the co-ops' model of cooperation.

Future research can focus on developing the findings in this study and investigate if the combination of these factors can be observed in non-church-based unions' performance. Another avenue for potential future research lies in exploring the opportunities and challenges of church-based secondary co-ops in the socio-economic endeavors of organized religion. Finally, there is a need to focus on addressing the needs of micro and small co-ops and evaluating their economic and social impacts on members and their communities.

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