

A theoretical study of rural capacity building for rural cooperatives in developing countries

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Abstract

This study provides a theoretical framework model for rural cooperatives. The proposed models emphasize the rural capacity building through integration of local organizations, communities and individuals. It demonstrates that the rural capacity building in the three levels (individual, organizational and community) can help in developing rural cooperatives in developing countries.

Keywords: Rural capacity building, rural cooperatives, rural development, developing countries

Introduction

Rural cooperatives have played an important role in the development of agriculture in industrialized countries as suppliers of farming requisites, marketers of agricultural commodities, and providing services such as gain storage and transport. It appears that many of these cooperatives are adapting their operations to the rapidly changing economic environment characterized by technological change, industrialization of agriculture and growing individualism (Ortmann & King, 2007). The rural cooperatives in most developing countries are faced with constraints with regard to achieving the goal of rural sustainable development, which promotes social and economic development of local communities. In developing countries attempts to organize farmers into rural cooperatives have often failed, although rural cooperatives have the potential to supply farm inputs and market farm products that are both important for agricultural development (Hoyt, 1989). Rural cooperatives are generally considered as a tool for rural development. Due to the positive effects, many rural communities have seen cooperatives as a promising opportunity for reducing underdevelopment problems and as a means of modernizing their economic (Andriotis, 2005). In pursuing this direction, the concept of rural capacity building (RCB) has become of particular importance in identifying priorities and opportunities (Victurine, 2000). RCB in rural cooperatives can be seen as the capacity of people to participate in rural cooperatives activities (Cupples, 2005). Hence, rural development practitioners should give due regard to the concept of RCB. The question is: How can the rural community offer a viable solution for rural cooperatives development and enhance benefits for itself? The answer to this question is that RCB should be undertaken before the process of rural planning as evidenced from the earlier reports in the fields of: Health (Labonte & Laverack, 2001a; 2001b; Labonte *et al.*, 2002; Poole, 1997; Chervin *et al.*, 2005; Seremba & Moore, 2005; Raeburn *et al.*, 2006; 2007; Wickramage, 2006; George *et al.*, 2007; Maclellan-Wright *et al.*, 2007), Education (Harris, 2001; Smyth, 2009), Agriculture (Dollahite *et al.*, 2005), and Tourism (Aref, 2011). In such

a situation, RCB denotes empowering rural people to take advantage of the opportunities provided by rural cooperatives. Thus, in this way, RCB is identified as one of the ways that stimulates rural development processes and addresses rural cooperatives development issues.

Rural capacity building for rural cooperatives

For an effective rural development programs rural capacity building is necessary. RCB is a central concern of both community developers and residents (Marré & Weber, 2010). RCB helps to promote the concept of self-help and community capitals that enable the development of community-led service provision more sensitive and responsive to community needs. Capacity building has been defined in a variety of ways. However, there is little clarity about the meaning of capacity building in practice (Chakin, 2001). Much of the literature defines capacity building broadly as a measure of the ability of a community to adapt to challenges or opportunities and/or effect changes according to community goal (Clinch, 2008). Capacity building is about enabling people to develop their individual and collective potential as contributing members of society. Smith *et al.* (2001) define capacity building as a process by which community members identify community needs and strengths, and develop ways to maximize those strengths to meet the identified needs. The aim is to develop the skills and capabilities of community members so they are better able to identify, and help meet, their needs (Greg *et al.*, 2005). In some interpretations, capacity building refers to the capabilities that exist within the organizations, individuals and communities that strengthen individuals to define their values and capacities to act on these. Ferguson and Green (2000) identified several definitions for capacity building such as: improve the ability of individuals, organizations, businesses and government in their community to come together, learn, and decisions making about the community's present and future, and to work together to carry out those decisions. A comprehensive definition of capacity building is that articulated by Goodman *et al.* (1998) who write; it is a process as well as an outcome; it includes supportive organizational structures and processes; it is multi-

dimensional and ecological in operating at the individual, group, organizational, community levels, and it is context specific. Capacity building programs have been used in the developed world as well as in developing countries (Kaplan *et al.*, 2006; Rogers *et al.*, 2007; Crabbe *et al.*, 2010). While there are other studies exploring capacity building in health promotion activities and in the agriculture industry, it is worth exploring capacity building in the context of rural cooperatives. This is because capacity building can act as a force to stimulate the development of the cooperatives in Third World countries. However, there is very little literature, which discusses the practical application of approaches that have been successfully used to measure rural capacity building for rural cooperatives.

Hence, the need for the present work- RCB around rural cooperatives programs that involve organization, communities and rural people. From this perspective, RCB can be used in three major categories: community, organizational and individual levels. The depictions that follow are simple models that do not precisely represent the intricacies and complexities of reality, but serve to illustrate the relationships between components of RCB and their application in rural cooperatives development.

Individual level

The individual level referred to local people residing within the geographical location of a particular rural area (Aref, 2010). Individual capacity can develop rural cooperatives through enhancement of skills and knowledge, and sense of community.

Organizational level

This level focuses on organizational assets and resources as well as needs. In every rural community, there are different organizations with varying levels of operational management connectedness with community residences (Mora & Diaz, 2004). Community organizations can play a critical role in supporting RCB (Blackburn *et al.*, 2003). They can provide financial support, grant schemes, employ community workers, provide facilities, contract voluntary organisations to provide services and encourage community engagement through rural cooperatives development (Beazley & Smith, 2006). Hence, developing community organizations will help promote RCB for rural cooperatives development. Organizational level provides opportunities for RCB activities through leadership and external support.

Community level

The community level of RCB refers to local groups bounded geographically. The community level supported local people, groups and organizations in specific areas. It is supposed that developing community level acts as an engine for RCB towards elevating rural cooperatives through participation, community power, and community structures. Interaction between all levels of RCB can provide increased capacity for rural cooperatives development. Rural communities with high organizational

capacities are able to distribute external resources to individual community members. And communities with strong individual capacity have the ability to articulate their needs, resources, and access external resources to meet their needs (Weil & Reisch, 2004). Within local communities, there need to be networking between individual, community, and organization for RCB in rural cooperatives development.

Measuring domains of rural capacity building

One important stage in assessing RCB in rural cooperatives development is measuring domains of capacity building. Kwan *et al.* (2003) indicated that the main challenges of measuring capacity building are that there are only very general definitions and vague agreement on finding a valid and reliable measurement system. According to Smith *et al.* (2003, p. 45) "the primary purpose of measuring RCB is to provide an assessment for communities to use in reflecting progress towards their stated goals". Thus, the aim of measuring RCB is to understand how it contributes as a determinant of rural development. Hence, measuring RCB is needed for all stakeholders to learn and understand more deeply what needs to be healed, learned or developed in order to achieve rural development goals (Smith *et al.*, 2003). Bopp *et al.*, (2000), Howe and Shiell (2000) and Laverack (1999) also attempted to measure RCB by using a form of ordinal ranking. My suggestion for measurement of rural cooperatives development in Third World countries is use the eight domains namely; participation, leadership, structure, external supports, resources mobilization, skills and knowledge, sense of community and community power. Domains of RCB are understood as the qualities of a capable community (Labonte & Laverack, 2001a). Several writers have identified such domains and have attempted to classify the characteristics of RCB (Goodman *et al.*, 1998; Jackson *et al.*, 1999a, 1999b; Bopp *et al.*, 2000; Chaskin, 2001; Labonte & Laverack, 2001a, 2001b; Kwan *et al.*, 2003; Maclellan-Wright *et al.*, 2007).

Conclusion

Capacity building is an important strategy, enabling rural communities to respond in order to improve rural cooperative developments. The ability of rural community to mobilize resources from within and to negotiate resources from beyond is an important step towards developing the skills and community structures necessary for RCB. Prioritization is also essential because rural communities do not usually have the resources at their disposal to address all the domains, unless assisted by an outside agent. This theoretical study increases our understanding of successful rural development programs.

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