

Human-Centric Extension and Women's Participation: A Longitudinal Study on Community Empowerment and Social Impact

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Abstract. The success of any project relies on rigorous monitoring, evaluation, and timely assessment aligned with established goals. To this end, a team of researchers and extensionists assessed an extension project implemented by the State University's research and extension unit in 2014. The study aimed to evaluate its impact on the social fabric of its beneficiaries, involving twenty-nine participants. A mixed-methods approach was employed, utilizing questionnaires, focus group discussions, SWOT analysis, and key informant interviews. Findings from the SWOT analysis aligned with regular monitoring and evaluation reports, offering critical lessons. However, only a minority of association members actively contributed, while others displayed indifference and engaged in gossip, which caused internal conflicts. Despite these challenges, beneficiaries expressed satisfaction with the program's outputs, including skills training, health education, computer literacy, advocacy programs, and livelihood initiatives. Both economic and social impacts were rated as satisfactory, demonstrating the project's contribution to improving their social well-being. At its very least, the study highlights the need for renewed strategies to foster active participation and resolve conflicts within associations. Sustaining the project's positive outcomes requires renewing the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) before its expiration, ensuring continued support for the beneficiaries, and addressing the challenges identified.

Keywords: Lessons learned; Mixed methods; Philippines; Community empowerment; Project assessment.

1.0 Introduction

The process of assessing an extension project's impact is rarely linear; instead, it is a multifaceted and iterative endeavor (Milat et al., 2015; Tallapaka, 2023). In alignment with this view, Bohol Island State University (BISU) launched an extension program in 2014 aimed at community development, knowledge transfer, and capacity building. Over eight years, the initiative evolved to meet the needs of its target beneficiaries while navigating both challenges and achievements. This study aims to examine the project's long-term social impact, providing insights that not only inform future extension programming at BISU but also contribute to the broader discourse on sustainable development and effective community engagement. The assessment was conducted in January 2023.

Anchored in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), this study aligns with several key global

priorities. Notably, it contributes to SDG 1 (No Poverty) by enhancing livelihood opportunities and economic resilience; SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) by supporting food security through skills development; SDG 4 (Quality Education) via knowledge and capacity-building initiatives; SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) through the promotion of entrepreneurship and sustainable income generation; and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) by fostering inclusive and participatory community development. Additionally, the project reflects the essence of SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) by strengthening local governance, empowerment, and social cohesion.

To frame this inquiry, the study is anchored in multiple theoretical foundations. First, it adopts Weiss's (1995) Theory of Change, which maps the logical flow from inputs and activities to long-term outcomes. This helps clarify how BISU's project components were intended to produce lasting community impacts (Vogel, 2022). Second, it draws from Empowerment Theory (Zimmerman, 2000), which explains how individuals and groups gain agency and control over their circumstances—a relevant framework given the project's focus on capacity-building and self-reliance (Christens & Lin, 2021).

Furthermore, the motivation to evaluate the project stemmed from an external accreditation recommendation, prompting a rigorous review of the initiative's outcomes against its original objectives. This assessment, however, transcends compliance. It attempts to generate transferable knowledge that can inform similar programs across higher education institutions in the Philippines and beyond. While prior research has largely emphasized the planning and early implementation of extension projects (Birrell & Ould, 2010; Gadlage & Manos, 2020; Frazer, 2021; Smith et al., 2008), there remains a notable gap in long-term impact analyses—a gap this study aims to address.

In the Philippine context, community extension is mandated by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), under policies such as the National Service Training Program (RA 9163) and CHED Memorandum Order No. 52, s. 2016. These guidelines urge higher education institutions to deliver evidence-based programs addressing socio-economic and environmental challenges (Llenares & Deocarlis, 2018). To understand a project's outcomes holistically, demographic profiling of beneficiaries is critical (Larese-Casanova, 2017). Consistent with past studies (Codamon-Dugyon, 2016; Ammakis, 2013; Nimer & Pacoy, 2020), this research affirms that meaningful engagement and cooperation among stakeholders significantly shape project success. To frame this inquiry, the study adopts Weiss's (1995) Theory of Change, tracing the pathway from inputs to sustained outcomes and societal impact.

Guided by a mixed-methods approach, this study analyzed the lived experiences of project beneficiaries, particularly members of the BSVAWA organization, who were involved in livelihood training, values enhancement, and capability-building activities. The underlying hypothesis is that when empowered with skills, technology, and support, participants achieve improved socio-economic well-being, deeper community ties, and enhanced human security. In doing so, this study contributes empirical evidence to an underdeveloped area of literature—long-term social impact evaluation of community extension programs. This study aimed to evaluate the long-term impact of the extension project implemented by BISU Clarin Campus on its primary beneficiaries—the Bonbon Small Vendors and Workers Association (BSVAWA)—eight years after the project's initiation. The research focused on assessing how the intervention influenced the participants' quality of life and sustainability.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study adopted a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, combining both quantitative and qualitative data to evaluate the long-term impact of an extension project. Quantitative data were gathered using structured questionnaires, while qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with selected project beneficiaries. Recognizing that impact assessment does not rely on a single methodological approach (Abbadia, 2023; Bhandari, 2022; Campbell et al., 2020), the researchers employed a mixed-methods design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. This triangulated approach aimed to generate a comprehensive understanding of the project's long-term outcomes. Participants were given ample time to respond honestly and were assured of the study's purpose. Informed consent was obtained following a thorough explanation of the research objectives. All responses were encoded,

tabulated, analyzed, and interpreted accordingly.

2.2 Research Locale

The study was conducted in Barangay Bonbon, Clarin, Bohol, approximately three kilometers from the project proponent's home institution. This location served as the extension site for the ILP.

2.3 Research Participants

The assessment involved 29 active project beneficiaries out of the original 58 members. The remaining participants were unavailable due to other important commitments, particularly those involving their children's schooling.

2.4 Research Instrument

The researchers utilized an adapted instrument developed by Nimer and Pacoy (2020), which was designed to assess the impact of community extension programs through a human security lens. The tool had previously undergone content validation as cited by its original authors and was deemed appropriate for this context.

2.5 Data Gathering Procedure

Data collection involved administering personalized questionnaires, facilitating focus group discussions, and employing SWOT analysis for cross-validation. The assessment captured pre- and post-project implementation data. Quantitative data were analyzed using standard statistical techniques, including descriptive statistics and inferential analysis, while qualitative data were thematically organized to enrich the findings.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

In adherence to ethical research standards, informed consent was obtained from all participants. Authorization from barangay officials was also secured before data collection. Anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained, and all data were used exclusively for assessment and academic purposes.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Profile of the Beneficiaries

This section presents the assessment findings addressing the study's objectives. The data were presented in tabular formats, analyzed, interpreted, and discussed. Findings are supported by the literature reviewed and cited.

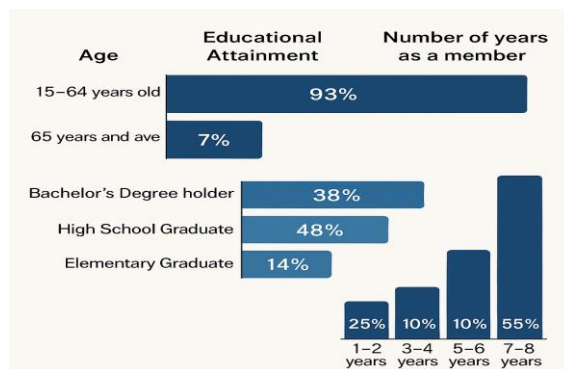


Figure 1. The Demographic Profile of Respondents

As reflected in Figure 1, results indicated that the majority of the project beneficiaries (93%) were within the 15–64 age group, categorizing them as part of the working-age population. This demographic alignment is consistent with Malahay's (2019) findings, which noted that most extension participants are middle-aged adults with a mean age of 45 years. In terms of gender, the respondents were predominantly female (97%), with only one male (3%) participant. This gender disparity may be attributed to the fact that most male community members were employed during the project, thereby limiting their participation (Llenares & Deocarís, 2018). Regarding educational attainment, nearly half (48%) of the participants were high school graduates, while others held a bachelor's degree (38%) or completed elementary education (14%). Notably, more than half (55%) of the respondents had been involved in the project for seven to eight years, indicating a high level of sustained engagement. Their long-term participation suggests valuable experiential insights into the project's

implementation and outcomes. These findings support the notion that women, particularly those in midlife, are more likely to engage in community-based extension efforts.

The comparative analysis of the project's impact before and after its implementation reveals a notable positive shift across all six thematic dimensions. Before implementation, the overall composite mean was 3.88 (SD = 0.72), interpreted as "Agree." Following implementation, this increased to 4.26 (SD = 0.56), interpreted as "Strongly Agree," indicating a general improvement in beneficiaries' perceptions of the project's effectiveness.

Specifically, the dimension of Economic Development rose from a mean of 3.28 (SD = 1.01), labeled "Somewhat Agree," to 4.10 (SD = 0.88), signifying "Agree." This suggests that the program contributed to enhanced livelihood and income-generating opportunities among the beneficiaries. Similarly, Food Security improved from a mean of 3.76 to 4.04, both within the "Agree" category, reflecting increased access to or availability of food resources

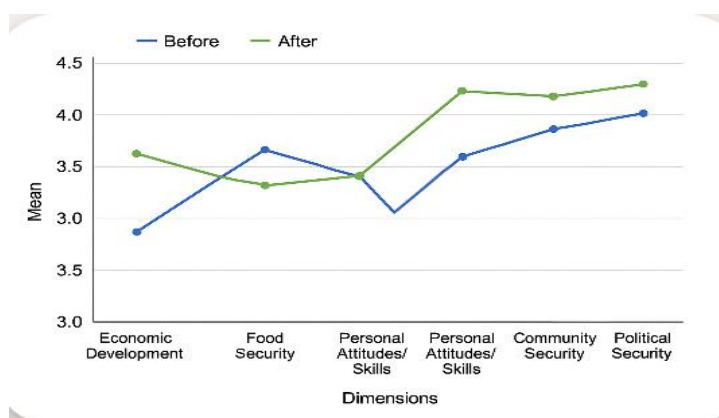


Figure 2. *The Project's Social Impact Overview*

The Personal Security dimension, which was already rated highly at baseline (M = 4.27, SD = 0.78), increased to 4.59 (SD = 0.71), both rated as "Strongly Agree," suggesting that the project significantly reinforced a sense of safety and well-being. Likewise, Personal Attitudes and Skills improved from 3.89 ("Agree") to 4.34 ("Strongly Agree"), indicating substantial growth in self-confidence, work ethic, and skill enhancement.

Community Security also shifted from "Agree" (M = 3.99, SD = 0.92) to "Strongly Agree" (M = 4.34, SD = 0.78), implying strengthened cohesion and collective resilience within the community. Lastly, Political Security showed a modest yet positive increase from 4.09 to 4.16, maintaining the "Agree" descriptor, suggesting a relatively stable perception of community members' empowerment and involvement in governance.

Overall, the findings affirm the extension project's meaningful contribution to the socio-economic, personal, and communal well-being of its beneficiaries. These improvements validate the program's long-term relevance and effectiveness and align with the research objective of assessing measurable impact over time.

Figure 3 illustrates the perceived effectiveness of various project dimensions based on respondents' evaluations, with mean scores ranging from 4.25 to 4.67 on a 5-point Likert scale. All six dimensions of the project were rated highly, indicating a generally positive perception among participants.

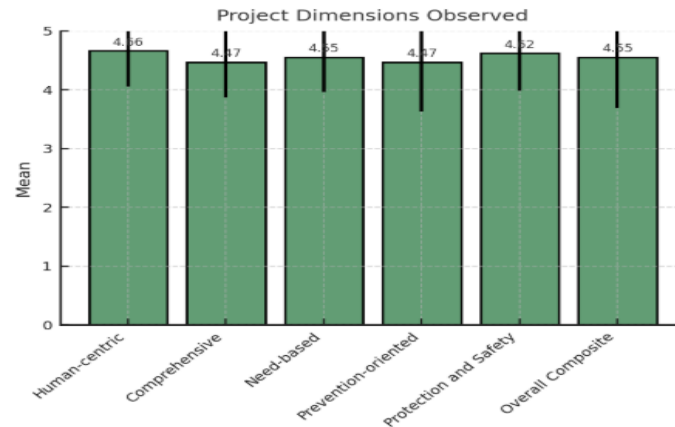


Figure 3. *The Extent of Implementation of the Project*

Among the observed dimensions, the “Human-centric” attribute received the highest mean score ($M = 4.67$), suggesting that the project was viewed as significantly responsive to the needs, values, and contexts of its primary stakeholders. This is closely followed by “Comprehensive” and “Prevention-oriented” (both $M = 4.57$), reflecting a perception that the project thoroughly addressed multiple facets of the problem and placed strong emphasis on proactive measures to avoid issues before they arise. The dimension rated lowest, albeit still favorable, was “Protection and Safety” ($M = 4.52$), which may indicate areas for improvement in ensuring participant security or physical/environmental safeguards.

The “Overall Composite” mean score of 4.55 reinforces the consistently high evaluations across all dimensions, implying that the project, in its entirety, was effectively designed and executed. The error bars indicate relatively low variability in responses, pointing to a shared consensus among the respondents.

These findings suggest that the project design aligns with best practices in community-based or stakeholder-driven initiatives, emphasizing human welfare, comprehensive planning, and preventive action. The slightly lower rating in protection and safety, while still strong, could be attributed to contextual limitations or perceived risks that were not fully addressed during implementation. This aligns with the literature on program design, which underscores the importance of integrating both proactive and reactive safety measures to enhance project sustainability and impact (Glenzer & Schroeder, 2020; Kania, Kramer, & Senge, 2018).

Thus, the results affirm that the project successfully embodied critical developmental principles, notably those that are human-centered, need-based, and strategically preventive. Further research might examine which specific practices contributed most to these positive evaluations and how areas like safety could be bolstered in future iterations.

3.2 Results of the Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

The data-gathering process concerning the respondents’ pressing issues and concerns during the assessment period was conducted scientifically through a structured Focus Group Discussion (FGD). Participants were divided into three groups. During the discussions, they were asked to identify: (1) three major problems affecting the project’s implementation, (2) feasible solutions they could offer, and (3) how the project contributed to improving their social well-being.

Across all three groups, responses to the first question were notably consistent. The most commonly cited challenges included financial constraints, poor communication and support systems, and a general lack of commitment among some members of the association. These issues were corroborated through informal interviews conducted by the project team with selected officers, members, and trusted key informants in the community. Findings from the regular quarterly monitoring and evaluation visits by the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Team confirmed that only a small number of members actively participate in association

activities. Apathy, gossip, and interpersonal conflicts were reported as contributing factors to the declining membership, from an initial 58 members to the current 39, including recent entrants.

When asked to propose actionable solutions, participants unanimously agreed on the need to strengthen cooperation and enhance commitment among both members and officers. They emphasized the importance of fostering teamwork and a shared sense of responsibility to ensure the sustainability and growth of the association. During institutional consultative forums and accreditation activities, both the current association president and the former president—who now serves as a barangay official—attested that the project significantly enhanced their social engagement and personal growth. The barangay council, likewise, expressed deep appreciation for BISU Clarin Campus, noting the valuable skills, insights, and talents imparted through the extension programs. “We are very thankful for all of these,” she remarked, echoing a sentiment she consistently shares when discussing the project’s impact.

SWOT Analysis Insights

Using the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) framework, the participants identified the following elements. Strengths included their talents and skills in cooking, the support of their barangay officials, the active participation of selected officers and members, and the continued technical guidance from BISU Clarin Campus as the project proponent. Weaknesses, however, included the limited number of active members, passive participation from the majority, insufficient capital for income-generating activities, and unresolved internal conflicts. The opportunities highlighted were potential support from other government agencies and stakeholders, and the practical application of the knowledge and skills acquired from the project. Threats were linked to behavioral issues such as laziness, gossiping, and low levels of commitment—all of which could hinder the association's progress.

Lessons Learned

The assessment team concluded that the association possesses considerable strengths, including legal and institutional advantages. Notably, the group is a Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE)-registered association, with Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) certification, and an officially issued Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) receipt book—credentials that legitimize and empower their operations. However, these institutional assets were not initially recognized by the members as strategic advantages. The team recommended that members be continually reminded to leverage their registered status as a platform for organizational growth and sustainability. By capitalizing on their legal standing and strengthening their internal cohesion, the association could transform existing weaknesses and threats into opportunities.

Overall, the project implementers successfully realized their objective of contributing to the beneficiaries’ improved quality of life. All participants reported that the project had a meaningful and positive impact on their lives. The association, BSVAWA, was described by its members as “a blessing,” a sentiment echoed by the Punong Barangay, who expressed continued gratitude to BISU Clarin Campus for selecting their barangay as a beneficiary of its extension programs.

4.0 Conclusion

The impact assessment revealed noteworthy outcomes, with many beneficiaries describing the extension project as a vital turning point in their lives. They acknowledged that it not only enhanced their livelihood but also instilled in them practical skills, values, and positive attitudes, clearly marking a shift in their lifestyle and outlook. These qualitative gains affirm the project’s transformative potential. However, from the perspective of the implementing institution, there remains a critical responsibility to provide ongoing technical support, mainly as the beneficiaries express a desire to acquire more advanced skills aligned with the institution’s expertise.

The SWOT analysis highlighted internal conflicts within the association, yet these are deemed solvable through strategic interventions. Strengthening our monitoring and evaluation activities is one such solution. As an academic institution, our mandate obliges us to accompany the community in its journey until it achieves sustainable independence. We thus reaffirm our commitment by renewing the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) before its expiration, ensuring continuity of support until the group can confidently sustain its operations without external guidance.

Despite these positive developments, the study is not without limitations. First, the assessment relied heavily on self-reported data, which may be subject to response biases. Second, the scope was limited to one association and did not account for comparative data from similar communities or projects. Third, the study's design was primarily qualitative and descriptive, limiting its generalizability.

These limitations offer meaningful directions for future research. Longitudinal studies tracking the beneficiaries' progress over time, comparative assessments involving other community-based initiatives, and mixed-methods approaches could yield more profound insights into the sustainability and scalability of such extension projects. Moreover, exploring gender dynamics, economic indicators, or the role of institutional culture in project success could further inform evidence-based policy and practice in community extension work.

5.0 Contribution of Authors

- 1 Main author = conceptualization of the study, editing, and revising in adherence to suggestions and comments from the panelists during paper presentations at conferences;
- 2 Co-author = searching for literature and studies, and assisted in the FGD;
- 3 Co-author = searching for theories and other references;
- 4 Co-author = assisted in the interpretation of the results; and
- 5 Co-author = responsible for statistical analyses and interpretation of results.

6.0 Funding

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7.0 Conflict of Interest

The researchers willfully declare no conflict of interest whatsoever and declare that they are not involved in this research undertaking.

8.0 Acknowledgment

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