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Assessing the Role of Agricultural Cooperatives in Facilitating Market Access to Farmers and Fisherfolk in Region Iv-A: Towards Program Development

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Abstract — This study explores the role of agricultural cooperatives in facilitating market access for their members within the CALABARZON region, the 7Ps marketing mix—Product, Price, Place, Promotion, People, Process, and Physical Evidence—as an analytical lens. Through surveys and focus group discussions with CDA representatives, it evaluates the extent of cooperative support, explores differences across cooperative types and provinces, and identifies key challenges impacting agricultural marketing.

Findings indicate uniform assistance across cooperative types, but provincial disparities point to the need for benchmarking best practices. Key challenges include infrastructure gaps, logistical bottlenecks, and limited capacity-building. SWOT and PESTLE analyses reveal both internal and external factors shaping cooperative operations.

To address these challenges, the study proposes a Cooperative Market Access Enhancement Program (CMAEP) under CDA's enterprise development efforts. This framework emphasizes: Development of marketing structures; Capacity building; Logistics and infrastructure upgrades; Strengthening of market linkages, and Product certification and monitoring systems.

The study calls for multi-stakeholder collaboration—involving CDA, DA, DTI, DILG, LGUs (through CDOs), SAOs, RCOs, financial institutions, and the academe—to expand market access, improve facilities, and enhance financial and technical support. Technology adoption, climate-smart strategies, timely market intelligence, and targeted training are also prioritized to support resilient and inclusive cooperative enterprise growth.

Keywords* — *Agricultural Cooperatives, Market Access, 7Ps Marketing Mix, CALABARZON, Capacity Building, Sustainable Development

I. Introduction

The Philippines remains an agricultural economy, with agriculture accounting for 24.8% of total employment in 2020, employing over 9.75 million people (PSA, 2021). Transforming this sector into a dynamic, high-growth engine is essential for accelerating recovery, reducing poverty, and fostering inclusive growth (World Bank, 2021). While production is vital, effective marketing is equally critical for economic development. The government has introduced key policies such as the Magna Carta for Small Farmers (RA 7607), AFMA, and the Sagip Saka Law (RA 11321). Programs like F2C2 and F2-MarA, along with initiatives like KADIWA and regional trade fairs

(DA-AO No. 20, 2020), aim to bridge market access gaps. Yet, infrastructure deficits and capacity-building limitations remain persistent barriers.

Cooperatives play a central role in enabling farmers and fisherfolk to access markets and improve livelihoods. The PACE framework, launched by CDA in 2024 as directed by President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., introduced a whole-of-nation approach to agricultural development. Complemented by the Agricultural Cooperative Enterprise Services (ACEDS) under the DA, the program seeks to boost cooperative capabilities and ensure food security (DA Press Office, 2024). A subsequent directive in August 2024 further intensified inter-agency collaboration among CDA, DILG, and DA, addressing CDA's developmental limitations.

However, literature points to persistent inefficiencies in the agricultural marketing system, especially for smallholders. Despite their importance (Elder & Samriento, 2024; Cuevas & Mina, 2024), cooperatives face fragmentation, weak policy support, and a high dependence on intermediaries—constraining income potential (Milagrosa, 2017; Arshad, 2020). Additional barriers include poor logistics, limited agro-processing, and inadequate access to market information (Cruz, 2019; Villanueva, 2021).

Challenges internal to cooperatives also exist, such as market inflexibility, reinvestment disputes, and operational inefficiencies (Qorri & Felföldi, 2024), reducing their competitiveness against private firms. Weak monitoring and limited training further hamper effectiveness (Santos, 2020). To address these issues, scholars recommend Mendoza (2018) suggested institutionalizing a nationwide marketing framework, while The Manila Times (2022) emphasized strengthening management and technical capacity. Next are through improving product-specific marketing efficiency (Sumalde & Quilloy, 2015) and enabling policy support to expand market power and socio-economic contributions (ADB, 2018; FAO-UN, 2001). Recent insights by Förster (2024) and Reyes (2024) emphasize enhancing cooperative efficiency through the 7Ps marketing mix, which includes elements like physical facilities, trust, and customer satisfaction—further validating the framework used in this study.

Ultimately, this research explores cooperative marketing efficiency through the lens of the 7Ps, offering evidence-based insights to refine cooperative strategies, address grassroots challenges, and support sustainable, inclusive agricultural development.

II. Methodology

Methods of Research

This study employs a descriptive mixed-method approach, combining quantitative survey-based statistical analysis and qualitative narrative analysis to examine agricultural cooperatives in CALABARZON. It systematically describes cooperative characteristics, including type, province, and extent of marketing support, while exploring variance in assistance levels using the 7Ps of marketing—Product, Price, Place, Promotion, People, Process, and Physical Evidence. Quantitative analysis identified patterns and statistical significance, while qualitative methods provide deeper contextual insights into cooperative operations. This comprehensive methodology ensures valid and reliable findings that highlight factors influencing cooperatives' marketing effectiveness and their role in improving market access for smallholder farmers (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Helio, n.d.; Sen, 2023).

Population, Sample Size, and Sampling Technique

This research utilized simple random sampling to select respondents for the survey, with agricultural cooperatives chosen through a draw lots technique based on the 2023 CDA Region IV-A statistics. Quantitative data collection involved 396 respondents—exceeding the computed 387 based on Slovin's formula with a 5% margin of error—comprising legal-age members engaged in marketing activities. Meanwhile, the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) involved CDA key officials involved in policy formulation and enhancement, providing qualitative insights.

Description of Research Participants/Respondents

The study engaged eight FGD participants from CDA engaged in the policy-making of the Authority. Survey respondents were randomly selected members of agricultural cooperatives in CALABARZON, primarily farmers, fisherfolk, and business owners utilizing cooperative marketing services. Survey respondents were members of agricultural cooperatives engaged in marketing, including farmers, fisherfolk, and small business owners, predominantly female and aged 60 or above. Their cooperative membership spanned from under 5 years to over 30, indicating a dynamic cross-section. Data collection was coordinated with field Cooperative Development Specialists during assemblies and training events. Confidentiality was strictly maintained.

Research Instrument and Data Gathering Procedures

To address the research objectives, the study employed four complementary data collection methods: *(1) Documentary Review*. Existing literature informed the development of research instruments, from which the research instruments were meticulously developed and aligned with the research objectives; *(2) Survey*. A structured questionnaire gathered demographic data, marketing assistance levels, and challenges. Validity was established through expert review and pre-testing with 36 participants; *(3) Focus Group Discussion*. Conducted with CDA officials to explore institutional perspectives; *(4) SWOT and PESTLE Analyses.* Applied to interpret findings and assess internal and external factors influencing cooperative strategies.

Data Analysis

Statistical tools and analytical frameworks were applied to evaluate the extent of marketing support provided by agricultural cooperatives and the challenges faced, namely: *(1) Descriptive statistics.* Frequencies, means, and grand means described participant responses; *(2) Inferential* *statistics.* One-way ANOVA tested differences in perceived assistance by cooperative type and location. Reliability of survey items was verified using Cronbach's alpha via Jamovi software; *(3) Thematic Analysis.* Open-ended FGD data were coded into themes based on patterns and relevance, and *(4) SWOT and PESTLE Analyses.* Strategic frameworks were applied to examine internal strengths/weaknesses and external factors (political, economic, social, technological, legal, environmental) influencing cooperative marketing strategies in CALABARZON.

III. Results and Discussion

1. Organizational Profile of the Respondents' Cooperatives

Type of Cooperative

As shown in Table 1.1, agriculture cooperatives dominate the cooperative landscape in CALABARZON, with over 300 cooperatives compared to smaller proportions in other sectors such as fishing, aquaculture, dairy, and agrarian reform (CDA Statistics, 2023). This distribution reflects the prominence of agriculture-focused cooperatives in the Philippines, while sectors like aquaculture and fishing remain underrepresented due to limited investment and interest (Lu, 2023).

Table 1.1

Type of Cooperative of the Respondents' Cooperatives

Type of Cooperative (Sub Cluster)	Frequency	Percent
Agriculture	342	86.35%
Aquaculture	4	1.01%
Farming	20	5.05%
Fishing	2	0.51%
Dairy	10	2.53%
Agrarian Reform	18	4.55%
Total	396	100%

Province of Cooperatives

On the frequency of respondents where their respective cooperatives are located, Table 1.2 presents that Quezon province accounts for the majority of respondents, with 268 individuals representing 67.68% of the total, primarily due to the survey coinciding with cooperative training sessions held there. This scheduling ensured minimal disruption to respondents' farm and business activities, significantly influencing the distribution of survey participants.

Table 1.2

Province of the Cooperatives of Respondents

Province of Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Cavite	24	6.06%
Laguna	32	8.08%
Batangas	41	10.35%
Rizal	31	7.83%
Quezon	268	67.68%
Total	396	100

2. Extent of Assistance of selected agricultural cooperatives to its members in terms of the 7Ps of marketing along with the respondents' Type of Cooperative

This study closely examined how the agricultural cooperatives facilitate market access for their members as shown in Table 3. The 7Ps of marketing strategies are seen to have an effect to a great extent on the marketing side of operation (Reyes, 2024). It should be noted that one of the significant advantages of farmer cooperatives is improved market access (Sustainable Agriculture Network, 2024).

Table 2
Extent of Assistance through the 7Ps of Marketing in terms of their cooperative type

Statements/Indicators	Agriculture			Aquaculture			Farming			Fishing			Dairy			Agrarian Reform			OVERALL		
	WM	SD	LOA	WM	SD	LOA	WM	SD	LOA	WM	SD	LOA	WM	SD	LOA	WM	SD	LOA	WM	SD	LOA
Price	3.29	0.63	E	3.07	1.01	E	3.32	0.66	E	3.33	0.58	E	3.80	0.28	HE	3.42	0.44	E	**3.37**	**0.60**	**E**
Physical Evidence	3.29	0.72	E	3.00	1.73	E	3.23	0.65	E	3.33	0.58	E	3.78	0.44	HE	3.39	0.50	E	**3.34**	**0.77**	**E**
Promotion	3.26	0.73	E	3.00	1.73	E	3.12	0.71	E	3.33	0.58	E	3.78	0.44	HE	3.47	0.51	E	**3.33**	**0.78**	**E**
Product	3.26	0.62	E	2.94	1.42	E	3.12	0.71	E	3.22	0.39	E	3.81	0.26	HE	3.43	0.42	E	**3.30**	**0.64**	**E**
People	3.28	0.64	E	2.89	1.17	E	3.15	0.78	E	3.28	0.48	E	3.72	0.30	HE	3.51	0.44	HE	**3.30**	**0.63**	**E**
Process	3.37	0.63	E	2.73	1.55	E	3.35	0.59	E	3.00	0.00	E	3.69	0.41	HE	3.66	0.43	HE	**3.30**	**0.60**	**E**
Place	3.26	0.69	E	2.83	1.48	LE	3.25	0.58	E	3.28	0.48	E	3.63	0.46	HE	3.47	0.46	E	**3.29**	**0.69**	**E**
OVERALL WEIGHTED MEAN	**3.27**	**0.68**	**E**	**3.00**	**1.56**	**E**	**3.18**	**0.62**	**E**	**3.33**	**0.58**	**E**	**3.78**	**0.34**	**HE**	**3.45**	**0.47**	**E**	**3.34**	**0.71**	**E**

Legend: 1.00–1.50 (Not extensive/NE), 1.51-2.50 (Less extensive/LE), 2.51-3.50 (Extensive/E), 3.51-4.00 (Highly extensive/HE)
WM - Weighted Mean; SD - Standard Deviation; LOA - Level of Assistance

Dairy cooperatives consistently led in respondents' assessment of the marketing assistance provided by cooperatives for their products and those of their members. It earned *Highly Extensive (HE)* ratings in all areas, particularly in **Price** at 3.80 WM, **Physical Evidence and Promotion** at 3.78 WM. This reflects a strong support system, likely driven by well-established operations and structured marketing strategies. Dairy cooperatives demonstrate highly extensive assistance in product innovation, pricing strategies, distribution channels, and promotional activities, contributing to market success and enhanced member competitiveness. This prominence is linked to intensified programs in the industry under the Department of Agriculture (DA Press Office, 2022). **Agrarian Reform Cooperatives** also performed well, with WMs close to Dairy and consistently falling within the *"Extensive (E)"* to *"Highly Extensive"* range.

In contrast, aquaculture cooperatives receive minimal support in several indicators, such as **Place (2.31 WM),** rated *"Less Extensive (LE)"*. This suggests weak distribution channels or location-based marketing support. Indicators like **People** and **Process** hover around *2.73 WM*, implying gaps in staff competence, training, and workflow effectiveness. Other types of cooperatives, while providing extensive support, show variability, with aquaculture lagging in areas like product innovation, distribution, and process optimization.

The findings underscore the value of **benchmarking** dairy cooperatives as models for best practices in marketing support and **adopting market-driven strategies** and leveraging technology can help address gaps, improve marketing practices, and ensure sustainable success for cooperatives and their members. Findings also suggest **sustaining and replicating success in People and Process**, and invest in elevating other indicators to "Highly Extensive" levels across all sectors. Results likewise calls for the **conduct of focused diagnostics** in low-performing areas with high standard deviations (e.g., Aquaculture's Physical Evidence SD = 1.73) to identify root causes and tailor support. Relatedly, finding amplify the need to **prioritize intervention in Aquaculture**, focusing on distribution strategies (Place), staff development, and promotional outreach.

Rolfe et al. (2022) emphasize that market-aligned cooperatives with a focus on strategic product development are more responsive to consumer needs and remain viable. Cooperative systems also offer an efficient alternative to fragmented producer arrangements by coordinating supply and improving operations. Likewise, Qorri and Felföldi (2024) highlight that market-oriented approaches help cooperatives navigate uncertainty and sustain growth in competitive environments. Moreover, agricultural cooperatives' role across the value chain—from production to marketing—further underscores their importance in addressing market challenges and fostering economic sustainability (Christian et al., 2024). It also suggests that future initiatives should focus on leveraging technology, refining marketing strategies, and addressing specific sectoral needs to enhance cooperative efforts, ensuring sustainable development and competitive market positioning (Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2018). Enhanced support in these areas will fortify the cooperatives' role in improving farmer capabilities and securing long-term success in the agricultural market.

3. Extent of Assistance of selected agricultural cooperatives to its members in terms of the 7Ps of marketing along with the Province of Operations of the respondents' Cooperative

Table 3
Extent of Assistance through the 7Ps of Marketing in terms of Province

Statements/Indicators	Cavite			Laguna			Batangas			Rizal			Quezon			OVERALL		
	WM	SD	LOA	WM	SD	LOA	WM	SD	LOA	WM	SD	LOA	WM	SD	LOA	WM	SD	LOA
Promotion	3.31	0.27	E	3.17	0.79	E	3.43	0.66	E	2.91	0.61	E	3.32	0.62	E	**3.23**	**0.59**	**E**
Price	3.10	0.56	E	3.19	0.72	E	3.42	0.65	E	2.89	0.61	E	3.35	0.59	E	**3.19**	**0.63**	**E**
People	2.90	0.78	E	3.09	0.84	E	3.41	0.62	E	3.01	0.68	E	3.46	0.57	E	**3.17**	**0.70**	**E**
Process	3.08	0.70	E	3.04	0.81	E	3.37	0.68	E	2.97	0.65	E	3.37	0.61	E	**3.17**	**0.69**	**E**
Product	3.08	0.29	E	3.08	0.29	E	3.35	0.55	E	2.85	0.64	E	3.32	0.61	E	**3.14**	**0.48**	**E**
Physical Evidence	2.73	0.59	E	3.08	0.75	E	3.35	0.70	E	2.84	0.79	E	3.36	0.63	E	**3.07**	**0.69**	**E**
Place	2.78	0.99	E	3.05	0.84	E	3.30	0.65	E	2.89	0.69	E	3.34	0.63	E	**3.07**	**0.76**	**E**
OVERALL WEIGHTED MEAN	**2.92**	**0.67**	**E**	**3.07**	**0.71**	**E**	**3.36**	**0.64**	**E**	**2.91**	**0.69**	**E**	**3.37**	**0.61**	**E**	**3.12**	**0.66**	**E**

Legend: 1.00–1.50 (Not extensive/NE), 1.51-2.50 (Less extensive/LE), 2.51-3.50 (Extensive/E), 3.51-4.00 (Highly extensive/HE)
WM - Weighted Mean; SD - Standard Deviation; LOA - Level of Assistance

Batangas and Quezon consistently show the highest weighted means across all 7Ps indicators, ranging from Price (Batangas: 3.42 WM, Quezon: 3.35 WM) to Process and Product (both at or above 3.35 WM), indicating a strong and well-rounded marketing support system. These results reflect their high-level assistance in branding, operational structure, and strategic marketing. Additionally, their high weighted means and low variability underscore consistent efforts in cooperative support, suggesting effective strategies in areas like branding, distribution, and business optimization. Meanwhile, Laguna shows steady performance across indicators, with WMs mostly above 3.00. This suggests consistent but slightly less intensive assistance, possibly due to operational variability or resource distribution. Remarkably, **Rizal** has the lowest WMs in several categories, indicating areas that need immediate intervention, particularly in promotional visibility and service quality. **Cavite** also reflects weaker performance in **Place (2.78 WM)** and **Physical Evidence (2.73 WM)**, suggesting logistical constraints and limited emphasis on facility upkeep or visual branding.

Overall, all provinces fall within the *Extensive (E)* level of assistance (WM between 2.51–3.50), but none reached Highly Extensive. **Price and Promotion** receive relatively stronger support across regions, while **Place and Physical Evidence** rank lower, hinting at infrastructure and branding gaps. The standard deviation (SD) values highlight moderate variability, Rizal and Cavite show wider response dispersion, suggesting inconsistent member experiences.

Findings reveal that it is imperative to **replicate best practices** from Batangas and Quezon in lower-performing areas; **prioritize Place and Physical Evidence** with targeted investments in logistics, infrastructure, and facility maintenance, **support Rizal and Cavite** with strategic planning, training, and monitoring to enhance uniformity and member experience, and the need to **Advance from "Extensive" to "Highly Extensive"** by setting measurable benchmarks and fostering inter-provincial collaboration.

As emphasized by ICRG (2022), cooperative members see cooperatives as a model that play a critical role in fostering equitable and sustainable communities. By addressing disparities and advancing policies that promote cooperative development, the Philippines can emulate the successes seen in cooperative models globally, such as addressing market failures and promoting inclusive employment. These considerations are vital for shaping policies that support cooperative growth and agricultural development, driving inclusive socio-economic progress in the region.

Overall, while assistance across six promotional activities is extensive, Batangas and Quezon outperform, suggesting targeted improvements for other provinces to enhance cooperative promotional capabilities and collective marketing impact. As Han and Sun (2024) emphasized, cooperatives can strengthen bargaining power and improve profit distribution in agricultural supply chains.

4. Variance between the various elements of 7Ps of Marketing and the Cooperative Type and Province

This research analyzed the variance across the 7Ps of the marketing mix, with cooperative types categorized according to their primary business lines, as per RA 11364 (Cooperative Charter of 2019) aimed to enhance cooperative growth as tools for equity, social justice, and economic development, restructuring the Cooperative Development Authority (CDA) into six clusters. One key cluster, the Agriculture Cooperatives Cluster, was further divided into six subclusters based on their business focus, forming the foundation for this study's framework.

4.1. Variance between the various elements of 7Ps of Marketing and Cooperative Type

The study tested the null hypothesis (H_0) that there is no significant difference between the type of cooperative and members' perceptions on the extent of assistance in the 7Ps of Marketing. The results, with p-values exceeding 0.05 across all elements of the 7Ps, indicate no statistically significant differences in the extent of assistance provided by different types of agricultural cooperatives, not rejecting the null hypothesis.

Results suggests that cooperatives—whether in dairy, agriculture, or aquaculture—provide comparable levels of support across all marketing mix components. While dairy cooperatives show slightly higher and more consistent assistance, the differences are not statistically significant, underscoring a shared commitment to equitable member support.

Maintaining this balanced distribution is essential, but there is room for sector-specific enhancements. For instance, aquaculture cooperatives, which tend to receive marginally lower support, could benefit from tailored programs addressing their unique needs. Policies should promote equitable resource allocation and offer capacity-building in areas like financial management, marketing, and technical training.

Table 4.1
Variance on the extent of assistance provided and the type of cooperative

7Ps of Marketing Elements	Type of Cooperative	p-value	Interpretation
PRODUCT	Agriculture Aquaculture Farming Fishermen Dairy Agrarian Reform	0.6133	Not significant
PRICE	Agriculture Aquaculture Farming Fishermen Dairy Agrarian Reform	0.2133	Not significant
PLACE	Agriculture Aquaculture Farming Fishermen Dairy Agrarian Reform	0.3371	Not significant
PROMOTION	Agriculture Aquaculture Farming Fishermen Dairy Agrarian Reform	0.1184	Not significant
PEOPLE	Agriculture Aquaculture Farming Fishermen Dairy Agrarian Reform	0.0634	Not significant
PROCESS	Agriculture Aquaculture Farming Fishermen Dairy Agrarian Reform	0.1126	Not significant
PHYSICAL EVIDENCE	Agriculture Aquaculture Farming Fishermen Dairy Agrarian Reform	0.198	Not significant

By standardizing best practices and reducing disparities, cooperatives can improve member engagement and marketing performance. This approach supports broader goals of strengthening cooperative capacity and promoting socio-economic inclusion, as emphasized by the International Cooperative Research Group (ICRG, 2022).

4.2.Variance between the various elements of 7Ps of Marketing and Province

Table 4.2
Variance between the various elements of 7Ps of Marketing and Province

7Ps of Marketing Elements	Province	p-value	Interpretation
PRODUCT	Cavite Laguna Batangas Rizal Quezon	0.00134	Significant
PRICE	Cavite Laguna Batangas Rizal Quezon	< .002	Significant
PLACE	Cavite Laguna Batangas Rizal Quezon	< .001	Significant
PROMOTION	Cavite Laguna Batangas Rizal Quezon	0.00512	Significant
PEOPLE	Cavite Laguna Batangas Rizal Quezon	< .001	Significant
PROCESS	Cavite Laguna Batangas Rizal Quezon	0.00118	Significant
PHYSICAL EVIDENCE	Cavite Laguna Batangas Rizal Quezon	< .001	Significant

The study reveals statistically significant differences ($p < 0.05$) in cooperative assistance across Region IV-A provinces, contrasting the uniform support observed among cooperative types. This indicates that cooperatives adapt strategies to suit the distinct economic, logistical, and cultural contexts of each province.

These tailored approaches are evident in adjustments to pricing, distribution, promotion, operations, and physical assets—aligning with regional purchasing power, preferences, and infrastructure. As such, cooperatives must emphasize: (1) Customization, which entails aligning strategies to local conditions; (2) Resource Allocation or targeting support where most needed; (3) Continuous Improvement, which includes regular assessments to ensure relevance, and (4) Member Engagement through using feedback to guide decisions.

Balancing regional flexibility with standardized best practices can elevate member support. The implementation of RA 11535, which institutionalizes Cooperative Development Officers (CDOs), reinforces this effort by strengthening LGU collaboration, providing technical aid, and expanding market access. By leveraging these regional nuances, cooperatives can boost their effectiveness, sustainability, and role in advancing socio-economic development across CALABARZON.

5. Issues that affect farmer-members in marketing their products

The study highlights natural disasters and climate variability as the most critical challenge (3.37 WM), significantly impacting production and product quality, consistent with global findings (FAO, 2018; FAO, 2021). Remarkably, cooperatives can play a key role in enhancing climate resilience (Candemir & Duvaleix, 2021).

Table 5.
Issues that affect farmer-members in marketing their products

Issues	**Weighted Mean**	**Extent of effect**
1. Natural disasters and weather patterns disrupt production schedules and affect product quality	3.37	MC
2. Insufficient transportation facilities	3.36	MC
3. Inadequate storage or lack of storage	3.35	MC
4. The lack of market linkages that connect farmers directly to consumers or value-added markets remains a challenge	3.34	MC
5. The cooperative struggles to secure financing for processing and marketing	3.33	MC
6. Poor roads and limited processing facilities affect product handling and distribution	3.33	MC
7. Members often need help to secure financing for processing, and marketing	3.32	MC
8. Market access is inadequate for efficient product distribution	3.26	MC
9. Ensuring consistent product quality and meeting certification standards can be challenging for small-scale members	3.26	MC
10. Farmers often need more bargaining power in negotiations with intermediaries and buyers	3.26	MC
11. There is a lack of timely and accurate information on market trends, prices, and demands that affect members' decision-making	3.25	MC
Grand Weighted Mean	3.31	MC

Legend: 1.00–1.50 (NC - Not a Concern), 1.51-2.50(LC- Least Concern), 2.51-3.50 (MC - Moderate Concern), 3.51-4.00 (SC - Significant Concern)

Insufficient transportation facilities (Mean = 3.36) rank second, and inadequate storage (Mean = 3.35) follows closely as third, both posing significant barriers to efficient logistics and market access (Christian et al., 2024; Ma, Rahut, & Sonobe, 2024). These infrastructure gaps delay distribution, increase costs, and limit reach to broader markets.

Market constraints, such as weak linkages (3.34) and financing difficulties (3.33), limit cooperative growth and access to value-added markets. Targeted capacity-building, particularly in quality standards and digital marketing, can enhance competitiveness (Chen & Liu, 2019). Meanwhile, product quality (Mean = 3.26) and certification issues impede entry to value-added markets (Chen & Liu, 2019), while limited market information (Mean = 3.25) restricts strategic planning (Dhillon & Moncur, 2023; Mittal & Mehar, 2016). Theodos et al. (2020) advocate for stronger policy frameworks to empower cooperatives, recommending marketing hubs, expanded training, and closer collaboration with LGUs and NGAs. Addressing these barriers can help cooperatives improve input supply, logistics, and overall efficiency, reinforcing their role in agricultural development and sustainable growth.

6. Analysis on the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) and the Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal, and Environmental (PESTLE) factors of agriculture cooperatives

This study analyzed the SWOT and PESTLE of the agricultural cooperatives in CALABARZON influencing their provision of assistance to its members, considering the 7Ps of marketing mix, derived from the findings of the survey and the FGD.

6.1.SWOT Analysis

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
• Strong agricultural focus of cooperatives • High Levels of Assistance in Certain Provinces • Consistency in Specific Cooperative Types • Active Member Involvement • Strong Leadership Development • Focus on Market Visibility	• Variability in Assistance • Challenges in Certification for Specialty Products • Inadequate Direct Sales Channels • Lower Assistance in Certain Provinces • Lack of Standardization
OPPORTUNITIES	**THREATS**
• Climate-Smart Agricultural Practices • Expanding Market Linkages • Improving Storage and Infrastructure • Leveraging Technology and Data Analytics • Enhancing Financial Access • Sharing Best Practices • Government and LGU Support • Increased Consumer Demand for Sustainability • Administration's programs to agriculture and cooperatives sector	• Climate and Natural Disasters • Inadequate Transportation Infrastructure • Post-Harvest Losses Due to Insufficient Storage • Market Access and Bargaining Power Issues • Limited Access to Financing • Inconsistent or Inaccurate Market Information • Economic Variability • Regulatory Challenges • Competition from Larger Players

Figure 1. The SWOT Analysis

The study highlights the **strengths** of cooperatives, notably their agricultural focus (86.35%) and high assistance levels in **Batangas** and **Quezon**. **Dairy cooperatives** exemplify best practices, serving as benchmarks for other types. Strong member engagement and leadership development (3.56 WM), alongside strategic use of social media and community events, enhance visibility and governance.

Key **weaknesses** include inconsistent assistance in provinces like **Laguna**, limited sectoral reach, gaps in **product certification**, and underdeveloped **direct sales channels**. **Rizal's lower assistance levels** underscore the need for targeted support. The absence of a unified framework within the **CDA** further contributes to uneven cooperative development.

Opportunities lie in adopting **climate-smart practices**, leveraging technology and analytics, strengthening infrastructure and storage, and expanding market linkages. Aligning with sustainability trends and engaging **LGUs** and national programs can provide essential support.

6.2.PESTLE ANALYSIS

The study leverages the PESTLE framework to analyze the factors influencing agricultural cooperatives' operations and market access.

Political Factors: Strong government backing—through RA 11535 and initiatives like ACED—positions cooperatives as key players in food security and rural development. Programs such as KADIWA and LGU partnerships enhance farmers' market access.

Economic Factors: Price volatility and funding limitations hinder cooperatives' financial stability. However, support from ACPC, ASCEND, and CFITF helps bridge gaps by funding infrastructure and capacity-building.

Social Factors: High member participation in governance fosters accountability, while public support for local cooperatives drives demand. Cross-sector partnerships with LGUs and the DA further strengthen community-based development.

Technological Factors: Advancements in logistics systems and digital tools—including real-time market data and farm mapping under ACED—boost efficiency and data-driven decision-making.

Legal: Certification and regulatory frameworks affect cooperative credibility. Strengthening policies to promote sustainability enhances market positioning (Qorri & Felföldi, 2024).

Environmental: Climate change remains a critical challenge. Adoption of sustainable farming practices improves productivity and mitigates risks, directly addressing top-rated concerns in the study.

By tackling these factors holistically, cooperatives can craft strategic, localized responses that expand market access, improve competitiveness, and empower their members sustainably.

7. Proposed Program

Based on the findings of the study, a program is proposed to enhance the role of cooperatives in facilitating market access for their members through the establishment of an enterprise development program with the suggested title: Cooperative Market Access Enhancement Program (CMAEP) may be considered with the following details:

Program Objectives: To strengthen the capacity of agricultural cooperatives in the Philippines to effectively market their products, ensure equitable resource distribution, and reduce reliance on intermediaries.

The proposed program for strengthening agricultural cooperatives consists of several interrelated components, each aimed at enhancing cooperative capacity and ensuring sustainability. **Framework development** is the first key component, led by the CDA in coordination with the DA, DILG, DTI, and the SAO-Agri Cluster, this establishes an integrated structure for cooperative program planning, monitoring, and support..

Figure 3. The Proposed Cooperative Market Access Enhancement Program (CMAEP) Framework

The second component is **capacity building**, which involves targeted training in business planning, financial literacy, enterprise growth, marketing, and logistics. The CDA, DTI, and DA will jointly deliver these programs using their specialized expertise

Third, the program includes **logistical support** to address infrastructure gaps. The DA, with support from CDA and LGUs, will facilitate the construction of strategic warehouses and provision of transport vehicles.

Another key area is **market access and connections.** Platforms will be developed to link cooperatives directly with industrial buyers and wider consumer markets. This initiative is led collaboratively by the DA, DTI, CDA, and SAO-Agri Cluster.

The fifth component, **cooperative consolidation**, seeks to encourage the formation and support of federations or cooperative consolidators to pool resources and strengthen bargaining power. Oversight will be shared by CDA, CDCs, and the SAO-Agri Cluster.

Next is the exploration for **certification and standards.** The CDA, in potential partnership with ISO, will introduce quality benchmarks and explore the creation of an independent certification body to enhance trust and product competitiveness.

Finally, a robust **monitoring and evaluation** framework will be developed to ensure continuous program improvement, driven by stakeholder feedback and evidence-based adjustments.

The expected outcomes of the program include: improved market access for cooperative members; enhanced business and marketing competencies; more efficient and equitable resource distribution; reduced dependency on intermediaries; and ultimately, increased sustainability and profitability of agricultural cooperatives.

This program positions cooperatives as key actors in rural economic transformation.

IV. Conclusion

1. **Dairy cooperatives have extensively assisted** its members across all where all other types of cooperatives can benchmark and analyze on the initiatives and strategies in all areas. There is a need to enhance of activities and interventions in facilitating market access to coop members among aquaculture cooperatives.

2. **Batangas and Quezon maintained at the high position of facilitating market access** to its members. Best practices may be identified in these provinces with the significant difference that was revealed in the hypothesis testing.

3. The study revealed **no significant relationship between cooperative type and the level of marketing assistance provided across the 7Ps of marketing**, as indicated by weak correlations and high p-values. This highlights the need for a balanced approach to address member farmers' diverse needs and tackle agricultural market challenges. A comprehensive strategy incorporating both local and global market perspectives is crucial for enhancing long-term competitiveness.

4. The study highlights **significant differences in assistance levels across provinces**, emphasizing the role of geographic factors in cooperative effectiveness as well as the significant role of LGUs in assessing and addressing the specific cooperative development needs within their respective localities. Targeted interventions, equitable resource allocation, and improved member engagement are essential to enhance market access and support, fostering the sustainable development of agricultural cooperatives.

5. Cooperative members face **critical challenges in transportation, storage, and financing**, which hinder efficient agricultural production and marketing. **Limited market linkages and financial constraints** reduce their access to profitable markets and bargaining power. **Inadequate infrastructure, absence of timely market information, and difficulties with product quality and certifications** further weaken competitiveness and complicate decision-making. Addressing these issues is vital to improving market access and operational efficiency.

6. The SWOT and PESTLE analysis derived from the study offers valuable insights for stakeholders, enabling the development of targeted programs and strategies. These frameworks help agricultural cooperatives address challenges and leverage opportunities, ultimately enhancing market access and providing stronger support to their members. By aligning efforts with these analyses, cooperatives can achieve greater resilience, competitiveness, and member empowerment.

7. The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with the management of the Cooperative Development Authority (CDA) offered insights on the landscape of marketing of agricultural cooperatives in the country as well as on addressing the challenges faced by the cooperatives.

8. Through the adoption of the proposed program, cooperatives can effectively address external factors and enhance market access, supporting their members' growth and competitiveness.

V. Recommendations

1. **Diversifying cooperatives' focus** by investing in the aquaculture and fishing sectors to reduce reliance on agriculture. Tailored support should address the unique needs and challenges of each cooperative sub-cluster, with targeted interventions for efficient marketing strategies. Collaboration between CDA, ACED, AMAS, and local CDCs is critical, supported by policy enhancements following the 2024 presidential directives. National-level involvement from RCOs of the ACC and the SAO of the cluster is advised to ensure effective implementation and alignment with broader cooperative development goals.

2. **Focus on addressing regional disparities** by implementing region-specific programs tailored to local contexts and resources. **Establishing regional offices or coordinators** comprising field personnel from CDA, DA-ACED, and LGUs' CDCs is suggested to ensure localized support and monitoring. Additionally, aligning cooperative market access activities among CDA, DA, LGUs, SAO, and cooperative federations is essential to enhance efficiency and equitable access, strengthening overall cooperative development and impact.

3. Aquacultural cooperatives to **benchmark successful practices from dairy cooperatives** to enhance product development, distribution, human resources, process optimization, and physical evidence. Collaboration with academic institutions, research organizations, SAO, and cooperative federations is vital for implementing targeted support programs and training. Leveraging strategies from the dairy industry can improve aquaculture market access, supported by DTI, NGOs, and LGUs, fostering sustainable growth and competitiveness.

4. **Identify and adopt best practices from Quezon and Batangas** to improve market access in Cavite and Rizal. Collaboration among CDA, Provincial Coop Development Offices, LGUs, DTI, and DA is crucial to address areas needing improvement and provide comprehensive support across the 7Ps of marketing. Regular assessments and adaptive interventions are recommended, with proactive involvement from academic institutions, researchers, NGOs, and CDCs at all local levels to ensure consistent progress and sustainability.

5. **Develop balanced marketing strategies** that integrate local and global considerations. LGUs, cooperative federations, RCOs, and CDCs should design marketing assistance tailored to provincial needs, leveraging strengths and addressing challenges. Market research and analysis should be conducted in collaboration with academic institutions, researchers, DA, and CDA. Furthermore, CDA, DTI, DA, and CDCs must jointly provide capacity-building and training programs on marketing, quality standards, and export requirements to enhance cooperative members' competitiveness.

6. **Address key marketing challenges** by enhancing transportation and storage facilities through collaboration among DA, LGUs, and CDA. Financial inclusion should be improved by involving cooperative banks, GFIs, DTI, NGOs, and facilitated by CDA field personnel and CDOs. Developing strong market linkages among cooperatives is critical, with facilitation by DTI, CDA, SAO, RCO, and Coop Federations. Policy development should be lobbied by CDA and DA's ACED and AMAS, consulting with RCO and SAO. Timely market information provision, supported by academic institutions and DA, is essential, while leveraging DA-ACED's technology initiatives can improve decision-making and marketing strategies for cooperatives and their members.

7. The following recommendations are derived from the SWOT and PESTLE analyses: (a) **Provide certification support** for specialty products with the help of DTI and certification entities; (b) **Enhancement of the CoopBiz system of CDA** in collaboration with DA and DTI. CDA, CDCs and coop federations must drumbeat the utilization of the system; (c) The Academic Institutions, Training Providers, and CDA should **enhance the training and capacity-building** to ensure cooperatives' efficiency in facilitating market access of their members; (d) DA, CDA, SAO and other development partners should **encourage adoption of climate-smart practices** among cooperative members to attract eco-conscious customers and ensure resiliency of cooperatives and their members; (e) DTI and SAO shall be key players in **enhancing market network and linkages of cooperatives;** (f) **government (NGAs and LGUs) push for the improvement of infrastructures** that include storage facilities, transportation facilities, and leveraging technology

8. It is highly recommended that the proposed program to enhance market access of the members be considered and adopted, which may be further enhanced. This shall ensure efficient marketing strategies for agricultural cooperatives to enhance market access for members, considering external factors and supporting growth and competitiveness. CDA shall collaborate with DA, DTI, LGUs, Financial Institutions, NGOs, Academic Institutions, and Research entities.

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