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Empowering entrepreneurs: Assessing the impact and challenges of the Church Community Market of Sto. Niño Parish as a basis for establishing a community cooperative

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Abstract

This study employs a descriptive quantitative research design to assess the impact and challenges faced by the Church Community Market of Sto. Niño Parish in Cabanatuan City, aiming to identify the skills, knowledge, and support systems necessary for empowering entrepreneurs and fostering sustainable business growth. The research involved 30 respondents representing diverse community segments, including household heads, housewives, senior citizens, and out-of-school youth, to capture a comprehensive understanding of the market's entrepreneurial landscape. Data collection included a bilingual survey questionnaire with both checklist and Likert-scale questions, complemented by focus group discussions (FGDs) for deeper qualitative insights. Findings indicate that the Church Community Market has a positive impact on local economic development, providing entrepreneurs with a platform to showcase products, build businesses, and enhance income-generating opportunities. Training programs offered by the College of Management and Business Technology have empowered participants with essential skills in product development, marketing, and financial management, translating these into tangible business success. The market has become a symbol of community resilience, promoting self-reliance and collaboration. However, challenges such as financial sustainability, competition from larger retail stores, and supply chain management persist. The study suggests that establishing a cooperative could address these challenges by providing better access to financial resources, facilitating shared training, and enabling collective negotiations for improved supplier deals. Recommendations emphasize exploring cooperative models, diversifying product offerings, and strengthening community networks to ensure the market's long-term economic stability and empower local entrepreneurs.

Keywords: Church Community Market; Cooperative Models; Economic Development; Entrepreneurial Landscape; Financial Sustainability

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship serves as a vital driver of economic growth, innovation, and social development, playing a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of communities and nations worldwide (1). In the Philippines, entrepreneurship is increasingly recognized as a potent force for inclusive and sustainable development, with policymakers, academics, and practitioners alike championing its role in fostering job creation, poverty reduction, and wealth generation (2). Against this backdrop, the Church Community Market of Sto. Niño Parish in Cabanatuan City presents a unique opportunity to explore how entrepreneurial ecosystems can be empowered and sustained through cooperative development.

Cabanatuan City, situated in the heart of the province of Nueva Ecija, stands as one of the Philippines' bustling urban centers, characterized by a rich interplay of tradition and modernity. Within this vibrant urban setting, the Church

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Community Market of Sto. Niño Parish emerges as a focal point for local entrepreneurs, providing a venue for diverse economic activities that reflect the ingenuity and resilience of the community. However, despite its economic potential, the market faces persistent challenges that hinder the full realization of its entrepreneurial capacity. Limited access to finance, inadequate business support services, and gaps in entrepreneurial skills and knowledge remain significant barriers for many entrepreneurs operating within the community (3).

In response to these challenges, there is growing recognition of the importance of establishing a cooperative as a strategic mechanism for addressing the needs of the Church Community Market. Cooperatives play a pivotal role in fostering community development by pooling resources, promoting inclusivity, and empowering individuals to achieve shared economic goals (4). Unlike traditional business models, cooperatives are built on principles of collective ownership and democratic governance, ensuring that profits and decision-making power are equitably distributed among members (5). This unique structure allows cooperatives to address the specific needs of their communities, whether through improved access to financial services, enhanced market opportunities, or capacity-building programs (6). By fostering collaboration, cooperatives can amplify the collective bargaining power of their members, enabling them to negotiate better terms, access critical resources, and mitigate risks that would otherwise hinder individual entrepreneurs (7). These benefits contribute to a more resilient local economy, where community members can thrive collectively while reducing inequalities.

In addition to economic empowerment, cooperatives foster a sense of social cohesion and mutual support within communities (8). They provide a platform for individuals to work together toward common objectives, promoting solidarity and trust among members. This collaborative approach not only strengthens the social fabric of a community but also facilitates the exchange of knowledge, skills, and resources, which are essential for sustainable development. Furthermore, cooperatives often align their activities with broader community needs, such as environmental stewardship, education, and health initiatives, ensuring that their impact extends beyond economic growth. By embedding principles of equity, sustainability, and shared accountability, cooperatives serve as powerful catalysts for holistic community development, driving progress that benefits both current and future generations (9).

This study seeks to assess the impact, challenges, and needs of the Church Community Market of Sto. Niño Parish in Cabanatuan City as a basis for establishing a cooperative. By undertaking a comprehensive analysis of the market's entrepreneurial landscape, the research aims to identify specific barriers and opportunities that shape the experiences of local entrepreneurs. The findings will inform the design and implementation of targeted interventions to empower the entrepreneurial community, fostering economic resilience and inclusivity within the parish.

Entrepreneurship education and training are critical components of this empowerment process. By equipping individuals with the requisite skills, knowledge, and mindset to navigate the complexities of business ownership and management, these programs serve as catalysts for both individual and community-level transformation (10). However, the effective delivery and uptake of such programs depend on a nuanced understanding of the local context, including the specific aspirations, challenges, and support mechanisms relevant to the Church Community Market (11).

Through rigorous empirical inquiry and interdisciplinary analysis, this research aims to contribute to the broader discourse on entrepreneurship development in the Philippines. By integrating insights from the literature on cooperatives, entrepreneurship education, and community-based economic development (12), it seeks to generate actionable recommendations for fostering a vibrant and inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem within the Church Community Market of Sto. Niño Parish. Ultimately, the study aspires to empower local entrepreneurs, strengthen community networks, and catalyze sustainable economic growth within Cabanatuan City.

2. Material and methods

2.1. Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive quantitative research design to assess the impact and challenges faced by the Church Community Market of Sto. Niño Parish in Cabanatuan City. The research aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the specific skills, knowledge areas, and support mechanisms required to enhance entrepreneurial success among community members involved in the Church Community Market. The study focuses on 30 respondents from the Sto. Niño Parish Community, selected to represent a diverse range of individuals engaged in the market's economic activities.

2.2. Respondents

The respondents for this study comprise a diverse group representing different segments of the community, including household heads, housewives, senior citizens, and out-of-school youth. By incorporating individuals from varied demographic backgrounds, the research aims to capture a holistic understanding of the impact, challenges, and training needs prevalent within the entrepreneurial ecosystem of the Church Community Market. This diverse representation ensures that the findings reflect the multifaceted nature of the community's entrepreneurial landscape (13).

2.3. Survey Questionnaire

The survey questionnaire utilized in this study is designed to gather both quantitative and qualitative data regarding the challenges and needs of entrepreneurs in the Church Community Market. To ensure accessibility and inclusivity, the questionnaire is available in both English and Filipino translations. It comprises checklist-style questions to answer the research objectives.

2.4. Focus Group Discussion

In addition to the survey questionnaire, focus group discussions (FGDs) are conducted to gain deeper insights into the challenges, opportunities, and specific needs of entrepreneurs within the Church Community Market. These discussions provide qualitative data that complement the survey findings, offering a richer understanding of the market's entrepreneurial landscape. The FGDs also explore participants' perspectives on the establishment of a cooperative, identifying potential benefits and barriers to its success.

2.5. Research Procedure

The study employs a purposive sampling technique to select 30 respondents from the Sto. Niño Parish Community, ensuring representation from key demographic groups involved in the Church Community Market. Data collection is conducted by trained researchers who administer a bilingual survey questionnaire either in person or online, depending on logistical considerations and respondent preferences. Focus group discussions (FGDs) are also held in small, structured groups to encourage open and detailed dialogue. Quantitative data from the survey are analyzed using descriptive statistical methods to identify the impact and challenges of the community market as well as the need for establishing a community cooperative, while qualitative data from the FGDs are thematically analyzed to provide deeper insights and contextualize the findings. The results are synthesized into a comprehensive report that outlines the respondents' profiles, identifies key challenges and specific entrepreneurial needs, and evaluates the feasibility and potential impact of establishing a cooperative. Based on the findings, targeted recommendations for interventions are provided to support the community's entrepreneurial growth and sustainability.

3. Results and discussion

The Church Community Market of Sto. Niño Parish in Cabanatuan City, widely recognized as the "Sunday Market," serves as a vibrant hub for local entrepreneurs to showcase and sell their products. This initiative reflects a collaborative effort to uplift the community by providing a platform for economic activity and enterprise development. A significant contributor to the market's current success has been the training programs conducted by the College of Management and Business Technology. These programs have empowered participants with essential skills in product development, marketing, and financial management, enabling them to create and sustain viable business ventures.

At present, the Sunday Market offers a variety of products that highlight the creativity and resourcefulness of its members. Among the popular items are dishwashing soaps and a range of food products, which have become staples for both the local community and visitors. These products exemplify how targeted training can translate into tangible outputs, fostering entrepreneurial confidence and economic participation. Beyond generating income, the Sunday Market serves as a testament to the community's commitment to self-reliance and mutual support.

By bridging training with real-world applications, the Sunday Market not only supports individual entrepreneurs but also strengthens the parish's broader vision of creating a cohesive, economically resilient community. This dynamic environment continues to evolve, presenting opportunities for further development, such as expanding product lines, integrating cooperative models, and enhancing market accessibility for both buyers and sellers.

3.1. Impact of the Church Community Market

Table 1 Impact of the Church Community Market of Sto. Niño Parish in terms of economic development

Indicators	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
The community store contributes to local job creation.	3.25	Strongly agree
The store supports local suppliers and businesses.	3.25	Strongly agree
Revenue from the store helps fund local community projects.	3.17	Agree
The store stimulates local economic activity.	3.17	Agree
The store helps stabilize the local economy.	3.08	Agree
The store provides economic opportunities for local entrepreneurs.	3.17	Agree
The store's success encourages other community-based businesses.	3.17	Agree
Grand Mean	3.18	Agree

The results in Table 1 demonstrate that the Church Community Market of Sto. Niño Parish has a significant impact on local economic development, with respondents strongly agreeing that it contributes to job creation and supports local suppliers and businesses. The mean score for these indicators was 3.25, reflecting a positive response from the community. The experiences shared by respondents highlight that the market has created job opportunities, directly through vendor positions and indirectly through related services, thus boosting local income levels and reducing unemployment. This support for local suppliers fosters a stronger network of business relationships and helps keep money circulating within the community.

Respondents also agreed that the revenue generated by the market helps fund local community projects, with a mean score of 3.17. The respondents shared experiences that showed how funds from the market contribute to community development initiatives such as public events and local improvement projects. This revenue not only supports the physical growth of the parish but also strengthens social bonds, as it enables the execution of programs that benefit everyone. Such financial contributions underscore the market's role as a catalyst for community betterment.

The data revealed that the market stimulates local economic activity, with a mean score of 3.17. Respondents recounted seeing increased business for neighboring establishments, which highlights the market's role in generating foot traffic and boosting economic interactions within the parish. The market's success encourages a vibrant economic environment where residents and visitors alike support various local businesses, creating a positive ripple effect throughout the community. This dynamic showcases the market's potential to play a pivotal role in sustainable local economic growth.

While the mean score for the stabilization of the local economy was slightly lower at 3.08, respondents still agreed that the market contributes to economic stability. Respondents shared that the market provides consistent income opportunities, which helps soften the blow of economic downturns. However, they also noted that the market's potential to stabilize the economy could be maximized with additional support or strategic adjustments. Despite these challenges, the market still contributes to long-term economic resilience.

Overall, the grand mean of 3.18 indicates an overall agreement that the Church Community Market has a positive impact on economic development. The experiences of the respondents lend depth to the findings, showing that the market plays a vital role in job creation, business growth, and community support. While there are opportunities for improvement, such as more robust infrastructure or expanded vendor support, the market serves as a strong foundation for further growth. Leveraging these insights can guide future initiatives, including the development of cooperative models that empower local entrepreneurs and amplify economic benefits (14).

Table 2 Impact of the Church Community Market of Sto. Niño Parish in terms of social development

Indicators	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
The community store promotes social cohesion within the parish.	3.17	Agree
The store offers a space for community interaction and engagement.	3.08	Agree
The store supports community events and activities.	3.17	Agree
The store provides a platform for local artists and artisans.	2.92	Agree
The store helps foster a sense of community pride.	3.17	Agree
The store engages volunteers and parish members in its operations.	3.08	Agree
The store contributes to improving the quality of life for parish residents.	3.17	Agree
Grand Mean	3.11	Agree

Table 2 illustrates that the Church Community Market of Sto. Niño Parish has a positive influence on social development within the community. The results, with a grand mean of 3.11, indicate that respondents agree on the market's role in fostering social cohesion, facilitating community interactions, and enhancing overall quality of life. The data is supported by the respondents' experiences and provides insights into how the market acts as a hub for social connection and cultural expression.

The highest mean score of 3.17 was recorded for indicators such as promoting social cohesion, supporting community events, fostering a sense of community pride, and improving the quality of life for parish residents. Respondents shared personal stories about how the market has brought people together, creating an environment where residents can interact, share experiences, and collaborate on community projects. The market's ability to support events and activities that engage people further strengthens social bonds and makes the parish a more inclusive and vibrant place.

The store's role in offering a space for interaction and engagement received a mean score of 3.08, demonstrating agreement among respondents. This finding suggests that the market provides a setting where people can come together for casual gatherings, discussions, and social events. Many respondents pointed out that the space has become a place for local groups to meet, enhancing the sense of belonging among parish members. Such spaces promote a strong community spirit that extends beyond the market's economic functions.

The indicator related to providing a platform for local artists and artisans scored slightly lower at 2.92, though respondents still agreed on its importance. Experiences shared by respondents emphasized that the market has offered a venue for local talent to showcase their crafts and performances, which has contributed to cultural enrichment and recognition of local talent. While this area showed slightly less impact compared to others, it highlights an opportunity for the market to further promote arts and culture through expanded events or dedicated spaces.

The market's involvement in engaging volunteers and parish members in its operations received a mean of 3.08, indicating agreement. Respondents mentioned that many parishioners participate as volunteers, supporting various activities and initiatives tied to the market. This engagement not only assists in the market's smooth operation but also fosters a greater sense of community ownership and shared responsibility (15). The market's impact on social development, reinforced by the involvement of the community, demonstrates its importance as a catalyst for both economic and social growth, creating a more cohesive and prouder parish.

3.2. Challenges faced by Church Community Market of Sto. Niño Parish in terms of social development

Table 3 highlights the challenges the Church Community Market of Sto. Niño Parish faces in terms of financial sustainability and access to funding. With a grand mean score of 2.87, respondents agree that financial issues are a significant concern for the market. While there is some agreement that certain aspects of the market's financial management are effective, overall, the data points to areas that need attention to strengthen its financial stability.

The indicator with the highest mean score was "The store has effective financial management practices in place," at 3.00. Respondents agreed that the market has some solid financial management systems. However, the scores for other indicators suggest that despite these practices, there are still challenges that impact the market's long-term financial health. This could imply that while financial management is functional, it may not be sufficient to address more substantial funding or growth needs.

Table 3 Challenges faced by Church Community Market of Sto. Niño Parish in terms of financial sustainability and access to funding

Indicators	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
The store has adequate financial resources to sustain its operations.	3.08	Agree
Securing funding for the store's expansion is challenging.	2.75	Agree
The store has access to financial support from local organizations.	2.58	Agree
Managing the store's finances is a significant challenge.	2.83	Agree
The store faces difficulties in obtaining loans or grants.	2.92	Agree
The store's revenue is sufficient to cover operational costs.	2.92	Agree
The store has effective financial management practices in place.	3.00	Agree
Grand Mean	2.87	Agree

The data showed that "Securing funding for the store's expansion is challenging" and "The store faces difficulties in obtaining loans or grants" received mean scores of 2.75 and 2.92, respectively. Respondents expressed agreement that these challenges are significant barriers to the market's growth. This suggests that while there is a demand for expansion and improvement, external financial support is limited, making it difficult to invest in scaling operations or enhancing market facilities. The difficulty in accessing loans and grants further emphasizes the need for strategies that can improve financial backing from both public and private sectors.

The mean scores for "The store has access to financial support from local organizations" (2.58) and "Managing the store's finances is a significant challenge" (2.83) indicate that while some respondents recognize limited access to external financial support, managing finances continues to be a hurdle. This suggests that even when the market is able to secure funding, it may not be sufficient or consistently available. Respondents' experiences reveal that there are likely gaps in building strong partnerships with local organizations or leveraging available financial resources effectively.

Lastly, "The store's revenue is sufficient to cover operational costs" (2.92) had a lower mean, showing that while revenue might be enough to cover basic expenses, it may not be enough for expansion or unexpected costs. The market's financial sustainability is thus under pressure (16). Addressing these challenges would involve seeking more robust funding sources, partnerships with local organizations, and strategic improvements in financial practices. Enhancing these aspects can help ensure that the market remains sustainable and can continue to support the community effectively.

Table 4 Challenges faced by Church Community Market of Sto. Niño Parish in terms of competition with local and larger retail stores

Indicators	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
The store faces strong competition from larger retail stores.	3.25	Strongly agree
Local competition affects the store's market share.	3.17	Agree
The store differentiates itself effectively from competitors.	3.00	Agree
Pricing strategies are challenging due to competition.	3.17	Agree
The store competes with online retailers for customers.	3.00	Agree
The store struggles to maintain customer loyalty amid competition.	3.08	Agree
The store has strategies in place to address competitive pressures.	3.17	Agree
Grand Mean	3.12	Agree

Table 4 presents an analysis of the challenges faced by the Church Community Market of Sto. Niño Parish in terms of competition with local and larger retail stores. With a grand mean score of 3.12, respondents agreed that competition is a significant concern for the market. The data indicates that while there are strategies in place to navigate competition, challenges persist, impacting the market's ability to compete effectively and maintain its share in the local economy.

The highest mean score of 3.25 was recorded for the statement, "The store faces strong competition from larger retail stores." This strongly reflects the respondents' experiences, indicating that larger retail chains pose a significant challenge due to their resources, broader product selections, and often lower pricing. This competition makes it difficult for the market to retain customers and compete on an equal footing, as larger stores have the advantage of scale and infrastructure that the Church Community Market may lack.

Indicators such as "Local competition affects the store's market share" (3.17) and "Pricing strategies are challenging due to competition" (3.17) reinforce the notion that local competitors and pricing pressures pose considerable challenges. Respondents noted that neighboring markets and retail establishments can impact the Church Community Market's customer base. The competition makes it challenging to develop pricing strategies that attract and retain customers without compromising profit margins. This creates a tough environment where maintaining competitiveness and profitability becomes an ongoing struggle.

Respondents also expressed agreement with statements like "The store competes with online retailers for customers" (mean: 3.00) and "The store struggles to maintain customer loyalty amid competition" (mean: 3.08). These scores suggest that online shopping platforms, which offer convenience and often competitive prices, pose a challenge to the market's ability to draw customers. Additionally, maintaining customer loyalty has been difficult due to the variety and ease that larger and online competitors provide. This further emphasizes the market's need for strategies that can build and sustain a loyal customer base.

Finally, the indicator "The store has strategies in place to address competitive pressures" received a mean score of 3.17, indicating that while there are efforts to deal with these challenges, they might not be sufficient or robust enough to overcome the competitive landscape fully. The respondents' feedback points to the need for enhanced marketing strategies, partnerships, or unique selling points that differentiate the market from its larger and online competitors (17). Overall, while the market is navigating these challenges with some strategies, further efforts are needed to strengthen its position in a highly competitive environment.

Table 5 Challenges faced by Church Community Market of Sto. Niño Parish in terms of supply chain and inventory management

Indicators	**Mean**	**Verbal Interpretation**
The store faces difficulties in managing inventory levels	2.42	Disagree
Supply chain disruptions impact the store's operations.	2.67	Agree
The store has effective inventory management practices.	2.75	Agree
Procuring products from suppliers is a challenge.	2.58	Agree
The store experiences frequent stock shortages or surpluses.	2.50	Agree
The store maintains good relationships with its suppliers.	3.00	Agree
Managing supply chain costs is a significant concern for the store.	2.75	Agree
Grand Mean	2.67	Agree

Table 5 outlines the challenges the Church Community Market of Sto. Niño Parish encounters related to supply chain and inventory management. With a grand mean of 2.67, respondents generally agreed that supply chain and inventory issues present significant challenges for the market, though not as severe as some other categories discussed earlier. This suggests that while there are operational hurdles, the market has some systems in place to manage these difficulties.

The lowest mean score was for the indicator "The store faces difficulties in managing inventory levels," with a mean of 2.42, indicating that respondents disagreed with the statement. This suggests that, overall, the market may have relatively effective practices for inventory management compared to other aspects of supply chain challenges. However, respondents still highlighted that other issues related to inventory management persist, which impacts the market's ability to optimize its operations.

Indicators such as "Supply chain disruptions impact the store's operations" (mean: 2.67) and "Procuring products from suppliers is a challenge" (mean: 2.58) were identified as challenges that the market deals with. These scores indicate that while inventory management may be somewhat effective, issues such as disruptions in the supply chain and difficulties in product procurement are notable concerns. Respondents' experiences show that these disruptions can affect the market's ability to maintain a steady supply of products, impacting its operations and customer satisfaction.

The indicator "The store experiences frequent stock shortages or surpluses" had a mean score of 2.50, demonstrating that respondents agree to some extent that stock imbalances are an issue. This finding aligns with the data showing that inventory management is not perfect and may lead to shortages or overstocking, both of which can disrupt business operations and customer trust. Additionally, "Managing supply chain costs is a significant concern for the store," which scored 2.75, further emphasizes that while the market does have some effective practices, the financial aspect of managing the supply chain remains a challenge.

Interestingly, the indicator "The store maintains good relationships with its suppliers" received the highest mean score of 3.00, indicating that, despite the challenges, the market has succeeded in fostering positive relationships with its suppliers. This could be seen as a strength that helps mitigate some of the challenges associated with supply chain management. The market's ability to maintain strong supplier relationships is a crucial asset that supports its operations and helps build resilience in the face of other supply chain difficulties. Overall, while there are challenges in supply chain and inventory management, the market's strong relationships with suppliers and relatively effective inventory practices help balance these issues (18).

3.3. Perceived Importance of Establishing Cooperative

Table 6 Perceived importance of cooperative

Indicators	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Establishing a cooperative can help local entrepreneurs in the church community market thrive and grow their businesses.	3.00	Agree
A cooperative can provide church market vendors with better access to financial resources essential for expansion and sustainability.	3.33	Strongly agree
Cooperative offers opportunities for collaboration among church community members, fostering stronger partnerships and shared goals.	3.08	Agree
A cooperative can provide shared access to training and education tailored to the unique needs of the church community market.	3.18	Agree
Joining a cooperative can reduce individual operating costs for church vendors, promoting affordability and efficiency.	3.17	Agree
Cooperative can facilitate collective negotiations for church community market members to secure better deals with suppliers or service providers.	3.08	Agree
Cooperative supports the local church economy by uniting resources, ensuring stability, and empowering small-scale vendors.	3.08	Strongly agree
A cooperative can provide mentorship and guidance specifically aimed at helping small businesses in the church community market succeed.	3.00	Agree
Cooperative offers a platform for church vendors to share risks and benefits in pursuing joint business ventures.	3.25	Agree
Establishing a cooperative will strengthen the business networks within the church community, fostering unity and economic resilience.	2.92	Agree
Grand Mean	3.11	Agree

Table 6 outlines the perceived importance of establishing a cooperative for the Church Community Market of Sto. Niño Parish. With a grand mean score of 3.11, respondents generally agreed that forming a cooperative would offer substantial benefits to local entrepreneurs and contribute to the market's growth and sustainability. The data reflects strong support for the idea, highlighting that a cooperative could serve as a foundation for economic empowerment, enhanced partnerships, and shared success among church vendors.

The highest mean score of 3.33 was given to "A cooperative can provide church market vendors with better access to financial resources essential for expansion and sustainability." This shows that respondents strongly believe a cooperative could open doors for financial support, which is crucial for growth and long-term stability. Respondents emphasized that access to funding and resources could alleviate the financial challenges previously noted, enabling the market to expand its reach and invest in improvements that could benefit all members.

The indicators "Establishing a cooperative can help local entrepreneurs in the church community market thrive and grow their businesses" (mean: 3.00), "A cooperative can provide shared access to training and education tailored to the unique needs of the church community market" (mean: 3.18), and "Cooperative supports the local church economy by uniting resources, ensuring stability, and empowering small-scale vendors" (mean: 3.08) further illustrate that respondents see cooperatives as essential for empowering individual vendors and fostering skill development. These responses underline the market's need for a structured system that offers collaborative learning opportunities and strengthens its members' capabilities.

The indicator "Joining a cooperative can reduce individual operating costs for church vendors, promoting affordability and efficiency" received a mean of 3.17, indicating that respondents agree with the financial and operational benefits a cooperative could offer. This suggests that pooling resources and sharing services could lead to lower costs for vendors, enabling them to remain competitive despite the financial pressures highlighted in earlier tables. The ability to reduce operating expenses while maintaining service quality could significantly boost profitability for vendors (19).

Lastly, the data shows that respondents agree with the potential for a cooperative to facilitate collective negotiations (mean: 3.08) and to provide mentorship and guidance (mean: 3.00). These factors can empower the market by creating a unified front when negotiating with suppliers or seeking expert advice. The indicator "Establishing a cooperative will strengthen the business networks within the church community, fostering unity and economic resilience" had the lowest mean at 2.92 but still indicated agreement, pointing out that while there is a belief in the cooperative's potential to foster stronger networks, there may be perceived challenges or uncertainties about its implementation. Nonetheless, the overall response indicates a positive outlook on how a cooperative can play a vital role in enhancing the market's sustainability, unity, and collective progress (20).

3.4. Proposed Establishment of a Community Cooperative at Sto. Niño Parish

The establishment of a community cooperative at Sto. Niño Parish in Barangay Kapitan Pepe, Cabanatuan City, seeks to empower local entrepreneurs and foster economic resilience. This initiative aims to unify market participants under a structured cooperative framework, enabling shared access to resources, collaborative opportunities, and collective growth. By addressing challenges such as financial constraints, supply chain inefficiencies, and competition, the cooperative will serve as a platform for sustainable economic development and community empowerment.

3.5. Capacity-Building and Technical Assistance:

To ensure the cooperative's success, comprehensive capacity-building programs and technical assistance will be provided. Training sessions and workshops will equip members with the knowledge and skills required for effective management, including establishing an association, conducting pre-registration seminars, and preparing essential documents for cooperative registration. These capacity-building activities will not only streamline the registration process but also lay a strong foundation for long-term cooperative operations.

3.6. Technical Assistance in Cooperative Management

Post-registration, technical support will focus on the management and administration of the cooperative. Key activities include conducting Board of Directors (BOD) meetings, organizing General Assemblies, and ensuring proper record-keeping and bookkeeping practices. Additionally, planning workshops will help define the cooperative's goals, strategies, and growth plans. By providing these targeted interventions, the initiative aims to create a well-structured and efficiently managed cooperative that can address the needs of its members while contributing to the economic sustainability of the Sto. Niño Parish community.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the Church Community Market of Sto. Niño Parish in Cabanatuan City has emerged as a significant force for both economic and social development in the local community. The market plays an integral role in stimulating local economic activity, creating job opportunities, supporting local suppliers, and contributing to the funding of community projects. The respondents' strong agreement that the market has a positive impact on economic development underscores its importance as a sustainable income source and a platform for entrepreneurial growth. Despite challenges such as competition from larger retail stores and financial sustainability, the market has shown resilience and adaptability, providing a foundation for future growth. Introducing cooperative models could further strengthen its impact, allowing for more effective resource sharing and business expansion.

On the social development front, the Church Community Market has become a vital hub for community engagement and social cohesion. It provides a space for parish residents to interact, share experiences, and collaborate on initiatives that promote a sense of pride and belonging within the parish. The market's support for community events and volunteer efforts has significantly contributed to strengthening social bonds and creating a more inclusive and vibrant community. While there are opportunities for further enhancement, such as offering more space for local artists and expanding areas for social interaction, the market's role in fostering social development is undeniable. As both an economic and social catalyst, the Church Community Market has demonstrated the power of community-driven initiatives to bring lasting benefits to local residents.

However, the market does face several challenges that impact its ability to sustain growth and meet the demands of its community. Financial sustainability remains a significant hurdle, with difficulties in securing funding, accessing financial support, and managing revenue for long-term expansion. These challenges, combined with competition from local and larger retail stores and difficulties in supply chain and inventory management, suggest the need for strategic interventions. Strengthening financial management, improving marketing strategies, and optimizing supply chain practices are crucial to overcoming these barriers. Additionally, the establishment of a cooperative could offer significant advantages, including better access to financial resources, shared training opportunities, and enhanced collaboration among vendors. By addressing these challenges and leveraging cooperative models, the Church Community Market has the potential to continue its growth and remain a vital economic and social hub for the community.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Statement of informed consent

"Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study."

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