

CASE STUDY

*Reinforcing the role of youth in Responsible
Agricultural Investment amidst COVID-19
pandemic:*

The Case of Young Farmers of the Golden Parauma Agriculture Cooperative (GPAC)



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CONTEXT

After the onslaught of Typhoon Reming in the Philippines in 2006, a social organization named Parauma Agri-Development Connection (PADC) was born out of the spirit of bayanihan, when local communities worked together to rebuild the typhoon-devastated houses. PADC was founded by Antonio D. Santos, who was then one of the leaders of PAKISAMA, and led by Jeffrey Oriquino. Registered in 2020 through the Department of Labor and Development (DOLE), it pursues social, economic, and political balance in the community while advocating rural development, youth and women empowerment, and organic agriculture. In 2014, PADC was recognized as a Regional Achiever Awardee by the Department of Agriculture (DA) RFU-V.

During that time of reconstructing houses, Santos was able to impart his knowledge on sustainable agriculture, specifically the Integrated and Diversified Organic Farming System (IDOFs), to the members of PADC. PADC then was what is now known as GPAC.

Following the approval of its management, the PADC was registered as a cooperative and named Golden Parauma Producers Cooperative (GPPC) by the Cooperative Development Authority (CDA). Bayanihan remains the heart of the cooperative, but it has shifted towards a commitment to volunteering and working together to establish farms.

However, GPPC experienced significant setbacks, such as a change in perspectives, weak governance, and gradual loss of funds.

Hence, in February 2021, GPPC was changed to GPAC



GEOGRAPHICAL COVERAGE

The **Golden Parauma Agriculture Cooperative (GPAC)** is based in Pamplona, Camarines Sur, Philippines.



STAKEHOLDERS

The initiative has been conducted by the Golden Parauma Agriculture Cooperative (GPAC), together with its stakeholders, including its youth and non-youth members, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), Department of Science and Technology (DOST), Philippine Shell Foundation, Central Bicol State University of Agriculture (CBSUA), and Pambansang Kilusan ng mga Samahan ng mga Magsasaka (PAKISAMA).

as a way for the cooperative to also encompass the complete value chain of agriculture from production, processing, and marketing and involve the youth in this through volunteering and capacity-building.

Youth involvement in the cooperative has become instrumental in helping GPAC bounce back from the challenges of the initial cooperative.

This paved the way for the cooperative to conduct capacity-building activities to advocate organic farming continuously and combat the aging population of Filipino farmers today by empowering youth to venture into agriculture.



TARGET BENEFICIARIES

GPAC is composed of Filipino youth and women farmer members, particularly mothers of the youth members (as they market the cooperative's food products).

For its farmer youth beneficiaries, the age ranges from 20 to 33 years old, and their activities involve:

1. Immersion programs on organic agriculture production.
2. Food processing.
3. Training on good governance and financial management; and
4. Agri-extension service

Presently, GPAC consists of 114 members, with 48 female and 66 male members and 23 regular youth members involved in the daily operations of the cooperative. In addition to this, 30 of their members have also passed the National Certification of Organic Agriculture Program (OAP).



OBJECTIVE

GPAC seeks to alleviate poverty amongst its members through agricultural development, environmental sustainability, and cooperative engagement. As it advocates organic agriculture and empowerment of youth and women, it also envisions Filipino farmers and entrepreneurs who are happy (*masaya*), healthy (*malusog*), abundant (*masagana*), peaceful (*mapayapa*), and empowered (*ma-empower*) while patronizing their cooperative. To attain these missions and vision, it spearheads capacity-building activities and partnerships to equip its members to practice organic agriculture, food processing, cooperative governance, and entrepreneurship, as well as financial management, to earn income.

Through this initiative, the cooperative could bounce back from its setbacks, and the youth has earned income. Not only are GPAC's youth members equipped with proper training and compensation, but they are also being empowered to lead and pursue careers in agriculture.



PROCESS / METHODOLOGY

An immersion program on organic agriculture, spearheaded by DA, was initially introduced to the students and received mentorship from the founding chairperson, Randy Rabina. During this immersion program, the founding chairperson introduced and trained the students on organic farming practices.

After the immersion program, some applied for GPAC membership and continuously ventured into agriculture. Upon joining GPAC, they were introduced to various training and workshops on food processing and agri-extension services, which DTI then provided.



Leadership roles in the cooperative were also opened to them as they were being trained for governance. Moreover, income-generating opportunities and financial management were imparted to them to capacitate them with entrepreneurial skills.



RESULTS / PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Through this initiative, the youth are equipped with skills in organic agriculture and its value chain process. The program also empowers them to generate extra income for their studies and family's needs, serve leadership roles in the cooperative, and build self-confidence as leaders and advocates of the Philippine agricultural sector.

In 2020, the cooperative received a P500,000 reward from the Department of Agriculture – Agribusiness and Marketing Assistance Division (DA-AMAD).

In 2021, 30 members passed the Organic Agriculture Program (OAP) certification. Five senior members became NC II holders (organics agricultural production certification).

Currently, the youth members who work full-time or part-time in the cooperative's business enterprise earn a salary ranging from PHP 2,500 to PHP 6,400 per month, with one year as the longest employment duration.



IMPACT

In 2020, GPAC launched the Community Food Center (CFC) in collaboration with PAKISAMA. This initiative seeks to:

1. To ensure a market for rice and other crops as well as processed food products of the cooperative members produce in the community;
2. To encourage more women in the community to engage in food production and processing to supply to the Food Center;
3. To provide employment opportunities and additional income to capable people, particularly young farmers in the community; and
4. To guarantee affordable and nutritious food is always available in the community.

By launching CFC as a community-based supply and marketing hub, it aims to provide (1) income for the members of the cooperative business and (2) access to organically grown, fresh, processed, and cooked agricultural products for the community. The center, in turn, opens interconnection among partnerships, advocacy, community engagement, and learning for local development.

GPAC was also chosen by the Center of Social Action Center (COSCA) of De La Salle University (DLSU) to support its promotion as an agricultural cooperative.

Currently, it continuously partners with PSF Inc. to conduct training on organic farming. The cooperative's food products are also showcased in various Trade Fair Exhibits and marketed through projects with local institutions.



SUCCESS / FACILITATING FACTORS

Youth involvement in the initiative has provided more avenues to expand organic farming advocacy into more opportunities such as food processing and marketing, partnerships, and support from national government agencies. In addition, the youth's expertise in information technology and provision of financial benefits led to its success.

To continue the cooperative's advocacy on organic agriculture, as well as the empowerment of youth and women, more youth should be reached out to and engaged in organic agriculture (through institutional training).

Relevant training through partnerships with local institutions is also needed for continuous capacity-building and support to access necessary equipment for food processing.



CONSTRAINTS / CHALLENGES

- ◆ Setbacks, change of perspectives, weak governance, and gradual loss of funds were identified as the challenges of the initial cooperative before it became what is known now as GPAC.

Other than these, the need for more youth engagement in agriculture, specifically in attending TESDA's Organic Agriculture classes, vis-a-vis the old age of most farmers today, was also identified as a challenge by the GPAC youth leaders.

- ◆ Currently, the GPAC Youth also identified the following issues and challenges that they encounter:
 1. Internal conflict and several managerial changes
 2. Competitive salary that will encourage the youth to continue working in the cooperative
 3. Additional resources to acquire at least 0.5 hectares of land for the construction of a cooperative office, equipment shed, food processing center, natural fertilizer input production, Pinawa Rice Mill, the training center, for a mini demo farm of IDOFS
 4. Sustained market opportunities/market sustainability. All processors aim to develop their business model canvas, be certified by the FDA, ensure the best packaging and label, and have nutritional food analysis per product.

By involving the youth in GPAC, leadership roles to govern the cooperative, specifically its business enterprise, have been opened to its youth members.

Additionally, the capacity-building training – particularly on food processing – conducted for the youth and women members provided extra income while also opening marketing opportunities for the cooperative to showcase their in-house food products and generate sales for the cooperative.

Lastly, through consultations with them, additional support for needed resources and opportunities to strengthen their roles in the cooperative and continuously advocate the mission and vision of GPAC can now be raised and attended to.



TESTIMONY

✦ Testimonials from GPAC Youth

Erwin Zolas (20 years old)

“Nakatulong sa akin ang GPAC sa pamamagitan ng pagbibigay ng trabaho sa akin at nakatulong upang magkaroon ako ng pang load sa aking online class. Higit sa lahat, nakatulong ito upang mailayo ako sa mga masasamang bisyo at natuto ako sa larangan ng organikong pamamaraan ng pagsasaka.”

“GPAC helped me by giving me a job that supported me in purchasing load/internet data in my online class. Most of all, the cooperative guided me to keep me away from bad habits/vices and taught me the different methods and techniques of organic farming.”

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✦ **Sonny Brunia (21 years old)**

“Dati po sa school po, ‘di po ako nagiging pinuno po. Doon po sa Golden Parauma [Agricultural Cooperative], na-experience ko pong maging pinuno po dahil ‘yong mga kailangang gawin, nagagawa ko na...”

“Before, I was not able to become a leader in the school. In Golden Parauma [Agricultural Cooperative], I can experience becoming a leader since I get to do the things needed to do.”



GPAC youth members shared how the cooperative assisted and supported them and even changed their lives in pursuing careers related to agriculture. These youth members are also members of PAMANAKA (Pambansang Samahan ng mga Nagkakaisang Kabataang Magsasaka), the national federation of young farmers' organizations from different parts of the country. It is the official young farmer's arm of PAKISAMA, which was established and recognized in 2019.

- Adrean Perez, 20, is currently the youth president of GPAC and a first-year BS Agriculture Student. He shared that joining the cooperative changed his view on agriculture, that youth can be the face and driver of change in further attracting youth in the sector. The cooperative gave him the opportunity to attend training in organic agriculture production, food processing, and driving, which gave him extra income to support his family.
- Jan Villamin, 20, is the acting treasurer, property custodian, and sophomore Agribusiness student. He's grateful to his cooperative that gave him the opportunity to generate income while studying, boosted his self-confidence to deal with youth colleagues and senior coop officers and leaders, and enhanced his skills in organic agriculture production financial management.
- Felina Vigan, 23, serves as the board secretary and admin staff at the same time 4th year agri-business student. Apart from the monthly salary she receives, she continuously improves her skills through the training in good governance and financial management provided by GPAC.
- Kaycee Arellaga, 20, GAD focal point and first-year BS Agriculture Student. She had the opportunity to know and fully understand the basics of organic farming through the immersion program, training, and study tours organized by GPAC.
- Roen Corneras, 22, a first-year BS Agriculture Student vice president of their local youth organization in the barangay, is being trained to be a skilled agri-extension service provider or farmer technician of the cooperative. He gained three NC2 titles through the training provided by the cooperative and strengthened his call for the passage of the Magna Carta of Young Farmers.
- Shella Lyn Nolland, 33, one of the Board of Directors, and the inclusion of youth members in the cooperative structure and governance is a huge milestone for them as she was able to bring and advance the agenda of their youth members.



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