Rural community enterprises in Thailand: a case study of participation

Worasit Wongadisai* and
Sumalee Chanchalor

Division of Learning Innovation and Technology,
Faculty of Industrial Education and Technology,
King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi,
126 Pracha-Uthit Road, Bang Mod,
Thung Khru, Bangkok 10140, Thailand
Email: worasit.wongadisai@mail.kmutt.ac.th
Email: isumalor@kmutt.ac.th
*Corresponding author

Elizabeth Murphy

Faculty of Education,
Memorial University of Newfoundland,
St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada
Email: emurphy@mun.ca

Abstract: Community enterprises (CE) are a tool to support sustainable community development. They rely on community members' participation using a bottom-up, polycentric approach to management. However, they typically operate in rural areas where the required knowledge, management and marketing skills are often lacking. This study investigated members' participation in CEs and the failures and successes they encountered in participation in organisational, production, marketing and financial management. Data collection involved structured interviews with 400 participants in 200 CEs in north-eastern Thailand. The researchers also conducted focus groups with a successful CE (n = 5) and an unsuccessful CE (n = 7). Results revealed that participation was lowest for organisational, marketing and financial management. Lower levels of participation were associated with lack of time and lack of skill/education. Implications point to the value of outsourcing marketing and financial management for CEs in rural areas.

Keywords: community enterprises; participation; management; Thailand; social enterprise; sustainable development; finance; production; organisation; marketing; entrepreneurship.

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Biographical notes: Worasit Wongadisai is a PhD candidate in the Learning Innovation and Technology Program in the Faculty of Industrial Education and Technology, King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi, Bangkok, Thailand. He earned his Masters of Business Administration and Bachelor's degree in Industrial Engineering at Khon Kaen University, Thailand. Currently, he is a Lecturer in the Department of Business Management, Faculty of Liberal Arts and Management Science, Kasetsart University, Chalermphrakiat Sakonnakhon province campus.

Sumalee Chanchalor earned her BEd in English from Srinakharinwirot University, Bangsaen campus, MEd in Educational Measurement and Evaluation from Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand and PhD in Curriculum Research and Development from Srinakharinwirot University, Bangkok, Thailand. She is an Associate Professor in the Division of Learning Innovation and Technology, Faculty of Industrial Education and Technology, King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi, Bangkok, Thailand. Her research interests are in learning and learning innovation.

Elizabeth Murphy is a retired Professor from the Faculty of Education, Memorial University of Newfoundland where she was the 2007–2008 winner of the President's Award for Outstanding Research. She completed her PhD at Université Laval, Québec, Canada.

1 Introduction

Community enterprises (CE) represent a "significant grass-roots initiative" and economic development tool that rural communities can rely on in order to combat poverty [Teerakul et al., (2012), pp.6–7] and gain sustainable economic benefits (Peredo and Chrisman, 2006). As Peredo and Chrisman (2006) explained, in developing countries, CEs may emerge in response to economic, political, environmental or social problems or threats and represent a sustainable alternative to community sponsorship by external development agencies. There is an increasing trend of governments to rely on CEs for "social, economic, and environmental regeneration" in the context of austerity measures and program cuts [Van Meerkerk et al., (2018), p.651]. CEs may also emerge as a result of perceived threats to the sustainability of a community's life "as a mechanism to boost the sustainability and health of the community through economic means" [Peredo and Chrisman, (2006), p.28]. In addition to fostering economic growth, rural CEs can promote equity and sustainable natural resource management (Donovan et al., 2008). For more on CEs, and their role in sustainability and community development, see Fischer (2019).

A CE (sometimes referred to as community-based enterprises) can be defined as commercial ventures that supply markets with natural products to benefit a community (Odero, 2004) or as a "community acting corporately as both entrepreneur and enterprise in pursuit of the common good" [Peredo and Chrisman, (2006), p.4]. They are enterprises with a social base that "lies in a community – understood most commonly as a community of place" [Somerville and McElwee, (2011), p.327]. CEs are different from cooperatives in that the shared interest is not merely in the enterprising activity but also in the community itself (Peredo and Chrisman, 2006). Some authors (e.g., Berkes and Davidson-Hunt, 2010) use the term CE and social enterprise interchangeably. Marohabutr

(2016) argued that CEs are a type of social enterprise that has as a priority social and community benefits and financial sustainability rather than maximisation of profit. Likewise, Somerville and McElwee (2011) describe CEs as a form of social enterprise which creates value that goes beyond monetary terms and that has social in addition to economic aims. Others describe CEs as a subset of social enterprises (e.g., Spear et al., 2009). Whereas there already exists a body of literature on social enterprises, there is a limited amount on CEs (Montgomery et al., 2012).

In Thailand, where this study was conducted, CEs operate according to a formal organisation with an administrative head, committees, rules, regulations and, rights [Teerakul et al., (2012), p.9]. They were formally established by government's Community Enterprise Promotion Act in 2005. They may concentrate on sale of goods such as herbal products or on services such as hospitality. CEs serve a geographical community or a community of interest and constitute a long-term commitment to create jobs or provide a service for members of the community [Suindramedhi, (2016), p.34].

CEs are characterised by mutual dependence, symbiotic relationships, mutual goals, and social networks (Ratten and Welpe, 2011). Members typically manage and administer production and marketing activities, related to, for example, food or handicrafts (Teerakul et al., 2012). The bottom-up, polycentric approach to management and administration offers opportunities for full community participation. The participation of members is important in order to create a sense of ownership and make the CE stronger (Sakolnakorn, 2013). As Ratten and Welpe (2011) argued, although CEs are founded on tenets of equality and active member participation, in some cases, "only a portion of the community participates" (p. 284). In fact, CEs may be challenged by the need for community participation. This is because CEs typically operate in rural areas where the required education level, knowledge, abilities, and management and marketing skills are often lacking (see Sakolnakorn and Naipinit, 2013; Somswasdi et al., 2015; Naipinit et al., 2016). As a result, the sustainability of the CEs themselves may be threatened by lack of participation (Boyce, 2002).

1.1 Purpose

CEs are an important tool for rural development and sustainability. However, their effectiveness may be undermined by a lack of participation. Although research literature exists on social enterprises, there is a paucity of such research on CEs. The review of the literature conducted for this study did not uncover any studies dedicated to participation in CEs. It is with this gap in mind in the literature that this study was conducted. This paper presents a case study of participation in CEs in north-eastern Thailand. The purpose was to identify how community members participated in the CEs and the failures and successes they encountered in participation in organisational, production, marketing and financial management.

2 Background: CEs in Thailand

This study was conducted in north-eastern Thailand, in an area known as *Isan*. This region covers approximately 168,846 square kilometres and 20 provinces. The average salary in this area is approximately one tenth of what is earned nationwide (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2017) with annual salaries of

40,000 to 50,000 baht (1200 – 1500 US). Approximately 44% of the population consists of farmers of rubber, cassava, or sugarcane (Sorat, 2016).

Figure 1 The study area in north-eastern Thailand (Isan region) (see online version for colours)

In Thailand, CEs result from a government policy promoting people's participation in communal cooperation (Sakolnakorn, 2013). As of 2017, there were 11,897 CEs in Thailand of which 5,192 were located in north-eastern Thailand (Community Enterprise Promotion Division, 2017a). Evaluations of the effectiveness of CEs in this region revealed that only 25% were at the 'good' level whereas other regions in the country averaged 33–39% (Community Enterprise Promotion Division, 2017b).

The CEs investigated in this study each operated with a chairperson responsible for the overall organisation. The chairperson is selected by the members. Directly under and reporting to the chairperson are the managers for each of the following: finance/accounting, production and marketing. Managers are also selected by the members. Each CE operates with a secretary selected by the chairperson. All participants work voluntarily. Some CEs also work closely with consultants from local governments or universities and are offered training from the Department of Agricultural Extension at the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives of Thailand.

CEs typically hold meetings with the chairperson and managers once per month except if there is a special problem. Twice per year, a meeting is held with all members. It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide detailed descriptions on the origins and

organisation of CEs in Thailand. For more background on these aspects, see Naipinit et al. (2016). Figure 2 provides examples of the facilities of some of the CEs included in this study. Figure 3 shows a sample of products produced by one CE in the study.

Figure 2 Examples of CE facilities and workspaces (see online version for colours)

Figure 3 Examples of CE products (see online version for colours)

3 Theoretical framework: participation

CEs can be characterised and distinguished by the fact that they involve grassroots' community participation dependent on the community's collective skills and resources (Peredo and Chrisman, 2006). CEs have as an explicit function to facilitate economic

participation for individuals and for the community as a whole (Barraket and Archer, 2010). However, the benefits to such participation are not merely economic. In a study of social inclusion in social enterprises in Australia, Barraket (2007) found that individuals gained expanded social relationships and self-esteem. Participation, as social capital, is actually critical for the CE and affects governance and management such that a lack thereof can threaten the CE's sustainability (Peredo and Chrisman, 2006). Social capital represents "the fabric of socialrelations … mobilized to facilitate action" [Adler and Kwon, (2002), p.17] or in Putnam's (1995) classic terms, the "features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (p.67). Social capital in the case of CEs can also be conceptualised in Campbell and Sacchetti's (2014) terms of a human capacity for collaboration for mutually beneficial outcomes.

As Lines and Selart (2013) explained, in organisational research, the term 'participation' refers to attempts to involve members in decision-making and problem-solving. Lines and Selart (2013) argued that participation is typically "a byproduct of the traditional division of labor" with higher-level managers giving decision-making powers to those lower in the hierarchy (p.290). An alternative perspective on participation conceptualises it as a tool to promote collective responsibility in relation to a sustainable future (Laessoe, 2008). In this regard, participation may lead to empowerment which, in turn, may lead to sustainability (Lyons et al., 2001). The action plan for sustainable development adopted at the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992 described broad public participation in decision-making "as a fundamental prerequisite for the achievement of sustainable development" [UNSD, (1992), p.219]. Participation is integral to sustainability in relation to defining relevant interests, adjusting to change, building consensus, juxtaposing different approaches, and transforming values.

Some studies of participation in CEs have found evidence of a lack of participation by certain groups. For example, a global review of rural CEs (see Donovan et al., 2008) revealed that, in some agricultural-based enterprises, women's roles are sometimes limited to harvesting and processing as opposed to forming part of the boards of directors. Donovan et al. (2008) attributed this lack of participation to cultural as well as domestic factors that limited women's decision-making role. Participation can also be challenged by an imbalance between member participation versus managerial control or by costs related to member participation (Donovan et al., 2008). Participation may also be challenged by an inability of members to perform the functions required for the CE to function effectively. In their global review, Donovan et al. (2008) found that some rural CEs were characterised by weak financial controls and record keeping, and a lack of appropriate rules or regulations. The authors noted that "too much participation by inexperienced members" may interfere with income generation.

Participation may be enhanced through policy measures and support services. A study in Korea (see Jung, 2016) found that the more successful CEs benefitted from both rural development policies, effective partnership and leadership as well as support services. At the same time, participation may be threatened by the volunteer nature and lack of remuneration and competing personal interests. A study of CEs in Scotland (see Stewart, 1996) revealed that members were volunteer community participants who worked in the enterprise without financial remuneration, but with the requirements to attend committee meetings, participate in training and effectively manage their and the community's socio-economic needs. All of these duties had to be carried out in an economic climate

characterised by poverty, high unemployment and poor housing conditions. This voluntary type of participation combines a socially-based activity outside the labour market and represents an economic act based on exchange of time and skills to participate (Stewart, 1996). As Stewart (1996) argued, the fact that members volunteer under these circumstances makes CEs especially unique contexts for research.

4 Methods

4.1 Data collection overview

This research adopted a case study approach (see Yin, 1994) that relied on structured interviews with 400 members in 200 CEs in north-eastern Thailand. In addition, researchers conducted focus groups in one successful (n = 5) and one unsuccessful CE (n = 7). Reliance on the focus groups is in recognition of Dana and Dana's (2005) argument in favour of the need to expand the scope of methodologies used in entrepreneurship research. Their argument highlights the limitations of quantitative survey research and the concomitant need for a "deeper holistic understanding" (p.80) of entrepreneurship in its culture-specific context. Cultural specificity is highly relevant in contexts such as the one in this study. As Dana (2007) explained, given differences in culture, values, public policies and history, there may be wide differences in entrepreneurship between countries in Asia. The relevance of culture has also been affirmed by Fraune (2015) in relation to how it, as well as social and political contexts, "shape individuals' agency to participate" (p.56). Thailand is a country that has not been colonised. It has not experienced the influence of socialist/communist economic policies as have Cambodia, Vietnam or Laos. The country has, therefore, been able to evolve its own unique approaches to entrepreneurship.

4.2 Interview participants

Interview participants (N = 400) (see Table 2) were recruited from 200 CEs in north-eastern Thailand. Data from the Community Enterprise Promotion Division (2017a) indicated that there were 89,758 members in 5,192 CEs in the area studied. There are 20 provinces in Isan and these are grouped into five administrative regions by the Ministry of Interior. These regions have various numbers of CEs depending on the region size. The researchers consulted officials for the north-eastern regions of the Community Enterprise Promotion Division to obtain access and contact information for the CEs and members. The researchers selected 200 CEs to participate from each region based on sampling techniques from Krejcie and Morgan (1970) that support calculation of an estimate of an appropriate sample size to represent the characteristics of the population. Table 1 summarises the characteristics of the CEs that were involved in the study.

To recruit participants, the researchers contacted by telephone the chairperson of the CEs. The chairpersons then helped with recruitment of volunteer participants. The average age of participants was 51–60 years (37%). Forty-two percent of participants had only primary-level education. In terms of employment, agriculture occupied the highest proportion of people (70%), while 22% were traders, 6% were pensioners and 2% were civil servants. Thirty-two percent of participants had an average monthly income of 5,000 to 10,000 baht (approximately 300 US dollars). The respondents with an income of

20,000 to 25,000 baht and 25,000 baht were 7% and 6%, respectively. Table 2 summarises the demographic characteristics of the interview participants.

Table 1 Summary of the characteristics of the CE (N = 200)

Characteristics of the CEs	*N*	*%*
Type of product		
Food (e.g., rice, honey)	47	24
Beverage (e.g., fruit juice)	9	4
Textiles/clothing (e.g., woven scarves)	70	35
Decorative items (e.g., coconut bowls)	64	32
Herbal-based products (rice-milk cream)	10	5
Size of community enterprise (CMs)		
<10	25	13
11–20	85	43
21–30	53	26
31–40	18	9
> 40	19	9
Number of years in operation		
< 1	7	3
1–3	25	13
4–6	34	17
7–9	38	19
> 10	96	48

4.2.1 Female participation in the interviews

Participants were primarily female (76%). We do not have statistics on the number of females among the 89,758 members of CEs in Thailand. In general, as Teerakul et al. (2012) found, in Thailand, in community-based enterprises, "the economic activities are largely performed by women" (p.7). In addition, female representation in CEs is likely to be higher than that of males since many of the products created by the CEs, e.g., handicrafts and food products are produced by women. As noted by Teerakul et al. (2012), this production accounts for 42% of production activities in CEs. In addition, in some of the villages and regions where CEs have been established, the participating women were already organised into groups. Some of these groups include, for example, the Rural Women's Development Project L.I.F.E. Foundation (see https://www.ywamthai.org/ruralwomen).

4.3 Ethics' procedures

Ethics' procedures were consistent with those of the university in which the principal investigator (PI) was enrolled. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary, that they could withdraw at any time and that their responses would be reported in aggregated, anonymous format. They were also informed that responses would be confidential and would in no way affect their future participation in the CE.

Table 2 Demographic characteristics of interview participants (N = 400)

Item	*N*	*%*
Gender		
Male	97	24
Female	303	76
Age		
< 30	22	5
31–40	23	6
41–50	108	27
51–60	147	37
61–70	73	18
> 71	27	7
Education		
Primary	168	42
Junior high	46	11
Senior high	130	32
Vocational ed. diploma	30	8
Bachelor's degree	26	7
Occupation		
Farmer	280	70
Pensioner	25	6
Trader/business	87	22
Civil servant	8	2
Average income per month (Baht)		
< 5,000	70	18
5,001–10,000	129	32
10,001–15,000	103	26
15,001–20,000	44	11
20,001–25,000	26	6
> 25,001	28	7
Role		
Chairperson	135	34
Manager	112	28
Member	153	38

4.4 Recruitment of focus group participants

Participants (n = 12) for the focus groups were recruited by purposive sampling. The PI first consulted staff from the Community Enterprise Promotion Division which evaluates Thai CEs in relation to three categories of operational efficiency and effectiveness as follows: good; medium; needs improvement. The PI also consulted a research report by Songleknok (2015) who devised a method to categorise successful CEs using the following criteria:

1 CE registration

2 CE quality and five-star products verified by Thai Industrial Standards Institute

3 ten years in operation

4 produces own brand.

Finally, the PI consulted two agricultural promotion officers in Isan responsible for promoting and supporting CEs.

The final choice of CEs for participation in the focus groups included one successful CE with a good evaluative score and another CE with a low score needing improvement (unsuccessful CE). Next, each CE selected representatives for participation in the focus group. There were five participants for the successful CE (CES) focus group and seven for the unsuccessful CE (CEU) focus group. The difference in number of participants had to do with availability of members. Only those who provided ethics' permission to participate were included in the focus group. Each focus group had at least one CE chairperson, CE members and CE managers. The five CES participants were chosen from a total of 26 CE members. The seven CEU participants were chosen from a total of 13 CE members.

4.5 Instruments

The structured interviews consisted of 20 items with five items for each of organisational, production, marketing and financial management. Items were derived from Donkwa (2013), Vatcharajirachot (2013) and Puntadapon (2015). One example of a question and answer is as follows: How would you describe your level of participation in organisational management of the CE? Choose from one of the following: very high (5), high (4), moderate (3), low (2) or very low (1). The specific items are presented in the results' section in Tables 3–6. Cronbach's alpha for the questions was 0.903. The item-objective congruence (Rovinelli and Hambleton, 1976) was 0.76. The focus group questions focused specifically on organisational, marketing, production and financial management. Participants were asked to discuss how they participated in each of these forms of management.

4.6 Procedures

The interview was structured which meant that each participant was asked exactly the same question and could respond according to the four-point rating scale of very high to very low. Each interview lasted approximately 20 minutes. The PI met with the participants either directly in the community or in the local community office in the city. The questions were asked orally. This approach took into account the low levels of education and reading levels of some participants. For the focus group, the PI selected a time in conjunction with participants. The location for each focus group was in the community centre. Each focus group began with introductions as well as an overview of ethics. The focus group was recorded by digital recorder and with permission of participants. Codes were used to represent the surnames of participants (Krueger, 2002). The two focus groups lasted 120 minutes each.

4.7 Data analysis

For the structured interviews, analysis involved calculation with SPSS and descriptive statistics using frequency and percentage. Analysis of the focus groups involved making sense of the data in relation to participants' perspectives. First, the researchers read and re-read the data "to obtain the sense of the whole" [Bengtsson, (2016), p.11] and to remove "repetitions and oblique references to other things" [Burnard, (1994), p.112]. The researchers worked together to group similar ideas from participants' responses [Burnard, (1994), p.113] and to promote inter-rater reliability (Morse and Richards, 2002).

5 Results

Results are presented for each of organisational, production, marketing and financial management. Results of the structured interviews (N = 400) are presented quantitatively in tables for each of the four types of management. These results are presented as individual percentages with summary totals for high +very high and low+ very low. Following each table is a summary of responses to the two focus groups with the successful (n = 5) and the unsuccessful (n = 7) CEs. Members are referred to by number and whether they are in the successful, e.g., (CES1), or unsuccessful (CEU1) community enterprise.

5.1 Organisational management

In terms of overall organisational participation, only 22% to 35% of those interviewed reported high to very high participation with the lowest levels of participation in evaluating and improving performance. Table 3 shows results for overall participation. The average for the high to very high participation was 30%.

Table 3 Participation in organisational management (N = 400) (see online version for colours)

Item	*Very high*	*High*	*Moderate*	*Low*	*Very low*
	%		%	%	
Make operational plan	5	30		31	2
	35		**32**	**33**	
Select leader and team members	8	24		24	4
	32		**40**	**28**	
Set rules, regulations and practices	5	26		33	1
	31		**35**	**34**	
Allocate remittance or incentives	9	20		30	10
	29		**31**	**40**	
Evaluate and improve performance	2	20		34	12
	22		**32**	**46**	

Note: Bold values represent totals of very high + high (green) and low + very low (red).

5.1.1 CES participation in organisational management

The organisational structure of the CES (successful CE) includes the chairperson (female), the vice-chair (female) and three mangers (female) for each of finance, production and marketing, and a secretary (male). The chairperson originally did rice farming and worked as a homecare (nursing assistant) to support her family. However, the rice price was not high so she and interested local villagers sought advice from the Department of Agricultural Extension. The department recommended formation of the CE in 2009. Membership grew from an initial 11 members to a current membership of 26. Focus group participants indicated that for successful CEs' participation in organisational management, the community members need to regularly meet and brainstorm. As one member commented, "Our CE constantly has meetings and discussions to plan and distribute responsibility" (CES1). The CES also assigns clear responsibilities for each member. The members participate in setting CE regulations regarding such issues as income and profit agreements. Members openly communicate as follows: "If there is any problem or doubt, we talk and solve the problem together" (CES1).CES1 added "there were problems with accessing raw materials and inconsistent quality last time. So, we held a meeting with members and agreed that farmers who sell raw materials to us should become one of our network members".

5.1.2 CEU participation in organisational management

The organisational structure of the CEU (unsuccessful CE) includes the chairperson (male), the vice-chair (female) and three managers (female) for each of finance/accounting, production and marketing, and a secretary (female). Before forming the CE in 2009, villagers were mostly engaged in rice and peanut farming. However, the decreasing price of rice meant that their income was not sufficient to support their livelihood and poverty was widespread. Representatives from the Department of Agricultural Extension recommended establishment of a CE to support processing of local materials such as rice and peanuts into products. Initially, officials provided the organisational management and some funding. Later, members agreed that village leaders would be the management team. Department officials came to the site to train members. There were initially 30 members. Currently, there are only 13 members in the CEU. CEU members participated in the first phase of the establishment of CE under local government officials' cooperation. Subsequently, given members' limited knowledge and experience, the operation, decision-making and problem-solving activities became the responsibility of the chairperson and managers. There are few meetings with members. CEU2 explained their dependence on the chairperson as follows: "The decisions and operations depend on the chairperson. We rarely know anything and don't attend meetings. We agree to let the chairperson and the managers take care of operations".

5.2 Production management

In relation to production, participation in the high to very high levels ranged from 35 to 55%. The highest participation was in controlling the quality of products. The lowest levels of participation were in reporting and evaluating the production performance. The average for the high to very high participation was 47%.

Table 4 Participation in production management (N = 400) (see online version for colours)

Item	*Very high*	*High*	*Moderate*	*Low*	*Very low*
	%		%	%	
Control product quality	14	41		9	2
	55		**34**	**11**	
Plan and acquire raw materials	11	44		11	1
	55		**33**	**12**	
Develop and improve production	15	35		10	1
	50		**39**	**11**	
Design and develop goods or packaging	10	32		16	1
	42		**41**	**17**	
Report and evaluate performance	7	28		21	4
	35		**40**	**25**	

Note: Bold values represent totals of very high + high (green) and low + very low (red).

5.2.1 CES participation in production management

In the CES, the chairperson schedules regular meetings to jointly plan and determine the production schedule to meet customers' desired targets. In general, there is continuous production. When a customer places an order for a product, community members come together and separate roles to make sure that work is completed on time. Members carefully record how many products are created. To ensure accuracy, this recording is completed a second time by a group leader. For production development and improvement, members consult each other and share their comments. Comments that are agreed upon are subsequently put into practice and tested. One member added, "Previously, we found that we relied on enamel bowls to clean raw materials, but the work was slow because the bowls were small. So, we decided together to use large wash basins to clean many items at one time" (CES2).

5.2.2 CEU participation in production management

In the CEU, there is no joint planning. When there is a customer order, the chairperson designates roles and responsibilities for the production. Daily productivity is recorded by the chairperson in a summary report on production participation. Member participation is not consistent or continuous because of on-demand production which means that members participate and come together only when orders are placed. If no order is placed, some members will go work in the fields as an additional source of income. "We come into production only when there are orders. We will be informed by the chairperson who assigns work to members and determines the amount of production" (CEU2). When an order is placed for products, the chairperson will assign particular tasks to particular members. CEU3 added, "I am responsible for cleaning the materials. Other members are responsible for other duties. If a member finishes the task, he or she will help the others". Regarding participation in production, CEU4 noted, "During rice

farming season, we face the problem of labour shortage for production because members have to work in the fields".

5.3 Marketing management

In terms of marketing, participation ranged from 23% to 40%. The highest level of participation was in sales and product delivery. The lowest levels of participation were in reporting and evaluating marketing performance. The average for the high to very high participation was 31%.

Table 5 Participation in marketing management (N = 400) (see online version for colours)

Item	*Very high*	*High*	*Moderate*	*Low*	*Very low*
	%		%	%	
Sales and product delivery	14	26		28	8
	40		**24**	**36**	
Market targeting	10	23		38	6
	33		**23**	**44**	
Public relations	7	25		32	10
	32		**26**	**42**	
Collect sales data	6	22		37	12
	28		**23**	**49**	
Report and evaluate marketing performance	5	18		41	13
	23		**23**	**54**	

Note: Bold values represent totals of very high + high (green) and low + very low (red).

5.3.1 CES participation in marketing management

CES5 reported that the chairperson or managers prepared the marketing information showing the details of sales and revenues. For public relations' activities to promote products, the chairperson attends various trade shows and exhibitions. If the chairperson is busy, other members attend as a representative. CES1 noted that, as chairperson, she tries to attend the trade shows. "We can show our products to potential customers". Another member added, "We can get orders from the trade show" (CES3). If there are orders, the chairperson will collect and deliver products to customers and maintain a list of sales to show to members. The chairperson and marketing manager will monitor and be responsible for sales and shipping activities. If the destination is near, the chairperson will ship goods by herself. Goods to be sent far will be done by a shipping company. The CES uses social media and the internet for advertising. This advertising includes details about the products' benefits as well as photos of certificates and awards in order to guarantee the quality of the products. "For marketing, our Facebook account was created by my granddaughter" (CES1). CES4 noted that, each year, members attend the Bangkok award ceremonies for locally-produced (OTOP-One Tambon, One Product) materials. CES members attend regular training: "The experts told us during training that good brands and packaging can increase product attractiveness. We agreed that we should hire an expert for design" (CES1).

5.3.2 CEU participation in marketing management

CEU focus group participants commented that members participate very little in marketing management because it is considered a responsibility of the chairperson. CEU2: "We don't have the knowledge to market products. The chairperson takes note of sales, finance, and details and lets members know". CEU3 confirmed this distribution of roles: "Sales and marketing are managed by the chairperson. We have no knowledge of marketing management. We only know who we sell the product to and how much the sale is". CEU4 added: "We have little participation in fairs or exhibitions and distribution of products in various festivals or events because we rarely have time to participate. Participation also requires a budget". CEU5 noted that when there is a regional tradeshow, the chairperson will sometime attend because he has a car. CEU1 explained that they do not have a Facebook page for promotion of their products. The CEU relies primarily, not on gaining new customers but, on selling products to those individuals and companies to which they have sold in the past.

5.4 Financial management

In terms of financial management, participation ranged from 14 to 26%. The highest level of participation was in funding and allocating expenses. The lowest level was in financial planning. The average for the high to very high participation was 20%.

Table 6 Participation in financial management (N = 400) (see online version for colours)

Item	*Very high*	*High*	*Moderate*	*Low*	*Very low*
	%		%	%	
Funding and expense allocation	9	17		41	16
	26		**17**	**57**	
Accounting and financial statements	9	12		31	25
	21		**23**	56	
Estimating budget	5	15		44	12
	20		**24**	**56**	
Auditing accounting and financial statements	7	11		37	19
	18		**26**	**56**	
Financial planning	5	9		42	19
	14		**25**	**61**	

Note: Bold values represent totals of very high + high (green) and low + very low (red).

5.4.1 CES participation in financial management

CES focus group participants reported that members do not participate in budget estimating but they are aware of budget items. CES2 commented that "The chairperson is the one who plans the expenses, where to buy and the amount we need. If there is not enough money, we won't buy it all at one time". Members participate in making decisions in some important cases such as investment in equipment. "Buying new machines requires a lot of money. We don't have enough money. So, we set a meeting

and agreed that I, as chairperson, would request support from government agencies" (CES1). The CEU set up a committee to take responsibility for preparing accounting and financial statements. The committee then participated in training with a government agency. The CE financial manager prepares statements to distribute to members. CES3 commented, "Data are recorded and saved in computer files and, when there is a meeting, we report the results to the members for transparency".

5.4.2 CEU participation in financial management

In the CEU, income is spent as working capital. Any remaining amounts are deposited at the bank. After deducting expenses, dividends are paid to CE members every six months. Focus group participants reported that, although the CEU established a work structure and a committee to divide financial duties, members do not always comply with the structure because they see it as the chairperson's duty. The financial manager should normally prepare statements and reports but in the CEU, the chairperson does this work. The chairperson is responsible for all aspects of financial management including budget estimation, financing, and spending, as well as preparing accounting and financial statements. CEU2 explained: "The chairperson has some knowledge and understanding of accounting. But we don't know about accounting". CEU3 added, "I am the accounting manager but I cannot do this. It's difficult to do as I lack accounting knowledge and have no time to do training with the government agency". The chairperson does manual (by hand) recording and accounting of income and expenses transactions. Participants also reported that continuous recording and accounting is not conducted. Records are not always kept of transactions.

6 Discussion

CEs are a tool to support sustainable community development in rural areas. That support, however, depends on participation from community members. Results of this study revealed overall low levels of participation in the CE. In the high to very high levels of participation, for organisational management, there was 30%, for production, 47%, marketing, 31% and for financial, 20%. Across all categories, the lowest levels of participation were in evaluation of performance for marketing, production and organisational management. The highest levels were in production management.

Overall, the lowest participation was in financial management. The manager for finances/accounting in the CEU reported lacking the skills in this area, which meant that the chairperson was responsible. Yet, as Bentz (1998) argued, financial management is critical in terms of the long-term viability of agricultural organisations. Similarly, with marketing, the CES relied on a family member (grandchild of the chairperson) to create the Facebook marketing page. In the case of the CEU, members relied on little marketing and simply aimed to sell to past customers instead of constantly trying to diversify or increase the customer base. The lack of marketing skills can make it difficult for CEs to compete with products produced in factories (Naipinit et al., 2016). Sakolnakorn and Naipinit's (2013) study with 30 CE members in Songkhla Lake basin in Thailand revealed that members lacked overall management skills as well as skills in marketing and finance/accounting.

The lack of participation in marketing and finance may be partially explained by the levels of education. As the demographic information indicated, members' levels of education were low with only 7% having completed post-secondary education and 42% having completed only primary education. Sakolnakorn (2013) and Naipinit et al. (2016) identified lack of skills in marketing, accounting and finance as problems faced by CEs. The age of members (89% >41 years of age) may have also played a role in their ability to market particularly using social media such as Facebook. In general, "younger people do not join and participate in the community enterprises" [Naipinit et al., (2016), p.354].

As noted previously in this paper, the bottom-up approach to management is compromised in part by the fact that members often lack the required knowledge and skills necessary to sustain the enterprise. Instead of wider participation by members, the evidence from the CEU suggested that they depended on the chairperson. According to Vernooy's (2005) framework for analysis of participation, the CEU would classify as contractual or consultative participation whereby most decisions are made by one stakeholder, i.e., the chairperson. In the successful CES, members participate more widely in activities including decision-making and have adopted more of a collegiate or collaborative style of participation whereby they share decision-making and try to reach consensus. Soviana's (2014) study of aspects that affect a CE's success revealed that smaller number of leaders or selected members tend to be the drivers of activity and decision making, leaving other members to pursue operational tasks. Somerville and McElwee (2011) observed regarding participation that it can be thought of in relation to a continuum of participation whereby some individuals play leadership roles and others merely a supportive role.

The CEs are supported with training by the Community Enterprise Divisions. However, participants do not always have the free time to participate as evidenced by some of the focus group comments. The issue of time or lack thereof, highlights the potential weakness in dependence on volunteers. Johnson (2010) observed regarding social enterprises that although their success is based on "the willingness of participants to cooperate and work together for mutual benefit" they face "difficulties with attracting and maintaining volunteer interest and engagement" (p.150). Likewise Fischer (2019) argued that "volunteerism is a crucial element for the existence of community enterprises" (p.i).

A further observation regarding the CEs was the role of women. As noted previously, women are well represented in CEs in Thailand and tend to be "the main economic players" in such enterprises [Teerakul et al., (2012), p.19]. Dana (2007) observed that women in Thailand have played a leadership role in entrepreneurship and family income earnings. It was beyond the scope of this study to identify the role of women in participation in CEs. Results did suggest that the CES with a female as chair was more successful in terms of participation than was the CEU with a male as chair. No generalisations can be made on the basis of these two, however, researchers interested in conducting further studies might investigate whether CEs chaired by women are more successful in promoting participation than those chaired by men.

7 Conclusions, limitations and implications

This study has made a contribution to the literature by providing insights into a unique cultural context of CEs in Thailand. More specifically, the study has identified from the

members' perspectives how and in what aspects they participate in the CE. Although participation does not guarantee success of a CE, it is a necessary precursor, not only to its success, but to its survival. Results showed that 'who' participates in the CE also influences its success. In terms of the 'who', women participated more than men and provided the leadership and decision-making. Both the latter and the former are key to the success of any enterprise. This leadership role of women makes evident the importance of the quality of participation in a CE in relation to its success. Results also revealed the lack of participation of individuals younger than 40 years of age. Yet, younger individuals (< 40) are more likely to be familiar with technology and social media than older members and represent, therefore, a resource that can contribute to the success of a CE. The reliance on the grandchild of the chair for Facebook marketing provides support for that argument. In general, Tantoh and Simatele (2018) observed that youth (along with women) can potentially serve as 'dynamic instruments in the success' of community development. The potential role of youth highlights the value of diversification of participation in terms of the success of a CE. The relationship between participation and success of a CE can, therefore, be considered in terms not only of its quantity but quality and diversity as well.

It is beyond the scope of this study to identify what constitutes a successful CE. Success might be conceptualised in terms of operational efficiency and effectiveness. It can also be conceptualised in terms of factors such as the contribution of the CE to overall community sustainability, to the education of its members, and to social and economic capacity. In relation to community-based initiatives in general, Igalla et al. (2019) argued that success cannot simply be measured with financial criteria, since it is more multidimensional with members providing "resources of time and energy that increase the capacity of initiatives to achieve the desired outcomes" (p.4). Somerville and McElwee (2011) explained that success depends on an appropriate balance and bridge between economic, social and cultural capital. In general, as Fischer (2019) argued, there is a need to understand the 'dynamics of community participation' because such participation serves as a foundation to the overall structure and its ultimate success.

7.1 Limitations

This study was limited to a focus on one country only. Results may be different from those gathered in other contexts. In relation to external validity of the results, readers should identify the relevance for their particular context. Data collection was limited to structured interviews and focus groups from only two CEs. Alternate data-collection techniques as well as broader recruitment of study participants may have yielded different results. However, as was the case in this study, approaches to data collection need to take into account the education levels of research participants. Open-ended interviews might provide opportunities for more holistic, in-depth insights as long as the researchers have the resources to provide accurate translations of the qualitative data.

7.2 Implications

In terms of promoting or enhancing participation in CEs, the first option might appear to be that of providing members with the skills and education needed, for example, in marketing and financial accounting. Ruengdet and Wongsurawat (2010) recommended "productive collaborations with local institutions including government agencies and

institutions of higher education on skills that the community enterprise members may lack" (p.394). However, this training is already provided in the CEs but, as results revealed, not all members participate because they do not have the time. An alternative approach may involve establishing networks between enterprises for exchange of knowledge (see Sakolnakorn and Naipinit, 2013).

In general, overall participation needs to be driven by motivation to participate. Successful CEs are those in which members are motivated, have a sense of belonging and group cohesion (Ruengdet and Wongsurawat, 2010). Organisational commitment can determine the willingness to participate (Lines and Selart, 2013). To promote this type of commitment and motivation, CEs can, as Zappalà and Burrell (2002) recommended regarding volunteers in community service organisations, gather motivational profiles or information when recruiting members. Offering rewards such as public recognition through, for example, community awards' ceremonies, might provide incentives for participation. Researchers interested in CEs might investigate measures that motivate participation.

Where specialised skills are needed but absent in the CE, outsourcing the required work may be a solution. In this regard, rather than government organisations providing training for CEs, as they do currently in Thailand, they might instead provide centralised marketing and financial coordinators who can perform the duties that the CEs are not able to do. CEs with the financial means might also consider outsourcing to private firms. Heeks and Arun (2010) described an approach to outsourcing of information technology (IT) services and support in India where skills were lacking within the social enterprises.

Another approach to support for CEs is suggested by the case of the successful CE in this study that relied on the skills of the chairperson's grandchild to create the Facebook page. As was previously noted, the CE membership of the 200 CEs in this study were largely confined to those over the age of 40. CEs may have difficulty recruiting members from younger age groups. However, they can potentially rely on support for marketing and even financial/accounting support from younger, more skilled and educated individuals from within the community. Participation of youth in CEs is an area that researchers might investigate in future studies. If, as results suggested, members do not have time to participate in training, could youth participation provide some of the expertise normally offered through training? Participation by youth could be supported through government-sponsored initiatives such as paid internships.

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