

From Start-up to Sustainability: Building Resilient Micro-enterprises Through Business Development Services

Mary Ann S. Concepcion ¹, Ahmed J. Ladjahon ², Alfonso Ramil S. Bolante ³, Rociel E. Dinglasan ⁴, Theresa C. Antonio ⁵, Mohshin Habib ⁶, Christine Jubb ⁷

¹ Social Responsibility and Performance Department, ASA Philippines Foundation, Philippines.

² Finance, ASA Philippines Foundation, Philippines.

³ Office of the President, ASA Philippines Foundation, Philippines.

⁴ Medical Team, ASA Philippines Foundation, Philippines.

⁵ MIS Department, ASA Philippines Foundation, Philippines.

⁶ Laurentian University, Canada and Policy and ASA Philippines Foundation, Philippines.

⁷ Swinburne University of Technology, Australia

¹ Corresponding author: maryann.concepcion@asaphil.org

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Abstract: In the last three decades, microfinance has gained considerable attention for its ability to address poverty, women empowerment and broader socio-economic development. However, several studies suggest that credit alone is not adequate in supporting the growth of micro and medium enterprises owned by microfinance clients. Consequently, a large number of MFIs have introduced Business Development Services (BDS) to enhance clients' financial literacy and business management skills and promote the sustainability and growth of their businesses. This paper examines the impact of BDS on the socio-economic status of clients of ASA Philippines Foundation (ASA), a non-profit microfinance institution (MFI) with 1,694 branches and 2,185,548 borrowers in the Philippines, and on the sustainability and growth of clients' businesses, including the impact of changes in the level of skills development among clients. Data were gathered using structured interviews of 307 BDS recipient clients where questions related to before and after receiving BDS and 375 non-BDS participants. Results showed that BDS clients and their businesses fared better than non-BDS clients, particularly in terms of growth in savings, sales, income, and sustainability, demonstrating the merit of using BDS to reach out to new non-BDS clients. The findings suggest that ASA should increase its BDS expenditure to improve the financial performance of clients' businesses. The BDS interventions were well-received by clients and this study indicates that BDS can help ASA and other MFIs attain their vision of poverty alleviation.

Keywords: Business Development Services, Microfinance Institutions, MSME, Training

Introduction

Microfinance has gained popularity over the years, especially in developing countries. The target market is low-income families and households without formal banking access. Microfinance institutions (MFIs) extend financial services, including micro-savings, microinsurance and microcredit to low-income families and primarily women in developing countries. Ideally, MFI clients should have a small business or be starting a business venture to generate income and make small repayments on their loans. Female clients, however, often face numerous constraints for they have less access to credit and other productive resources compared to men. Hence, MFI provision of Business Development Services (BDS) is an intervention ideally suited for entrepreneurial women that will help grow their business (Esim, 2001). BDS comprises a wide range of practical services that business owners can apply to help in running and growing their businesses, reducing poverty. (Goldmark 1997; Tanburn 2000, McVay 1996). Yirga (2018) described BDS as a comprehensive range of non-monetary services aimed to assist micro and small businesses to overcome challenges, increase their profitability, and create jobs by improving their performance.

As one of the leading microfinance institutions in the Philippines, ASA Philippines Foundation has carved a niche in the industry by continually helping its clients with easy yet low-cost financial access via business loans. It

services only female clients. With a goal of contributing to lifting women entrepreneurs out of poverty, several BDS deliveries and practices can be traced back to when ASA started its financial services and embedded them in its loan program in 2004. The ASA BDS program was cemented when the Foundation established its Social Responsibility and Performance Department (SRPD) to handle business interventions for its clients. In practice, clients undergo an orientation before they receive their loans and are asked to save a portion from their business income as part of the BDS training program. While being taught to use these savings solely for their business needs, this source of funds will eventually give them the future financial freedom they need. This study examines the success of ASA BDS measured by improvement in clients' business performance and clients' attitude towards repayment and default compared to a control group.

In assessing the impact of ASA BDS on clients, this research has the following objectives: 1) assess the relationship between entrepreneurial clients having undergone BDS and their average business income, and 2) compare the growth of clients' businesses in terms of profitability, savings accumulation, expansion, workers employed, and the extent of decision-making over their businesses with these same factors for businesses of clients receiving no BDS.

Review Of Related Literature

Business Development Services (BDS) Defined

BDS are defined as an array of non-financial services critical for small and medium entities (SMEs) and their ability to compete, survive, and grow in their respective industries (SEED, 2001). They are a service considered crucial for micro and small to medium entities' (MSME) development and success (Goyal, Sergi, & Esposito, 2018). According to Suzuki & Igei (2019), BDS represents assistance in the form of management training, financial, vocational skills, human resource development, marketing, information provision, accounting, legal services and technical support. This training goes hand-in-hand with financial assistance and has been found in many studies to be crucial for MSMEs' development and success (Goyal, Sergi, & Esposito, 2018).

Microfinance Institutions and Business Development Services

There is a great deal of evidence that microfinance can improve the lives of many small and medium scale entrepreneurs and that this performance can be increased by linking loan provision with BDS. Sievers and Vanderberg (2007) argue that one way to strengthen businesses is to give access to vital enterprise support services. These can be categorized as (1) financial services or "business loans", and (2) BDS, a broad range of non-financial services. The latter consists of a wide variety of non-financial services that increase competitiveness through improved productivity, product development, enhanced service provision, and/or improved access to markets.

GTZProMis (2010) reveals that the entire island of Sri Lanka is serviced by government-owned MFIs, cooperative banks/societies, non-bank financial institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and bank MFIs. In addition to microcredit, these MFIs provide their clients with services like counseling, business training, vocational training, savings, and insurance. Given the significance of microfinance in reducing poverty through livelihood development (NEDA, 2013; GTZProMis, 2010; Tilakaratne et al., 2009), the Sri Lankan government actively promotes it in the country. Under the umbrella of BDS, a large number of MFIs in Sri Lanka offer business training to their clients.

In the Philippines, MFIs recognize the value and impact of BDS as an addition to their financial services. The common BDS offerings for MFI clients are courses in livelihood, business organizing, marketing and others. Some MFI's focus through BDS is on values formation, such as credit responsibilities (Rodríguez, 2010).

Types of Business Development Services

Different researchers offer different classifications of BDS. These classifications are either grouped according to client types, program approaches, or based on the needs of the business. Although they are classified in multiple ways, the ultimate goal lies with one thing, supporting business growth.

One classification of BDS is by the Small Enterprise Education and Promotion Network (SEEP), which recognizes seven categories of BDS in its SEEP Guide to Business Development Services. These include alternative finance methods, market access, infrastructure, policy and advocacy, input supply, training and technical assistance, and technology and product development. Table 1 shows BDS categories based on the services offered to meet the different needs of entrepreneurs. For example, market access is offered to clients with a relatively stable business that has needs related to market linkages, marketing options such as trade fairs, and product exhibitions. Included here is

market research, packaging, and advertising. For businesses that are involved in logistics, manning agencies and start-up offices, infrastructure and policy advocacy are needed.

Table 1 Examples of BDS based on Business Needs

Category	Examples of services
Market Access:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Marketing business ● Market linkages ● Trade fairs and product exhibitions ● Development of samples for buyers ● Market information ● Subcontracting and outsourcing ● Marketing trips and meetings ● Market research ● Marketspace development ● Showrooms ● Packaging ● Advertising
Infrastructure:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Storage and warehousing ● Transport and delivery ● Business incubators ● Telecommunications ● Courier ● Money transfer ● Information through print, radio, TV ● Internet access ● Computer services ● Secretarial services
Policy/ Advocacy:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Training in policy advocacy ● Analysis and communication of policy constraints and opportunities ● Direct advocacy on behalf of SEs ● Sponsorship of conferences ● Policy studies
Input Supply:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Linking SEs to input suppliers ● Improving suppliers' capacity to provide regular supply of quality inputs ● Facilitating the establishment of bulk buying groups ● Information on input supply sources
Training and Technical Assistance:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mentoring ● Feasibility studies and business plans ● Exchange visits and business tours ● Franchising ● Management training ● Technical training ● Counseling/advisory services ● Legal services ● Financial and taxation advice ● Accountancy and bookkeeping

Category	Examples of services
Technology and Product Development:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Technology transfer / commercialization ● Linking SEs and technology suppliers ● Facilitating technology procurement ● Quality assurance programs ● Equipment leasing and rental ● Design services
Alternative Financing Mechanism:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Factoring companies that provide working capital for confirmed orders ● Equity financing ● Facilitating supplier credit

Source: ILO 2003, p.3

MFIs are recognized as providing channels for extending BDS, particularly for non-financial aspects since their main service already covers financial access but different types of clients require different types of development services. This is evident in the study conducted by The Development Policy Review Network (DPRN), as shown in their Final Narrative Report (2011), which provides a classification of BDS based on client types. As shown in Table 2 below, they divided them into three categories, each with their own importance for a particular sort of organization (DPRN 2011).

Table 2 CLASSIFICATION OF BDS BASED ON CLIENT TYPES	
Client development services	Raising awareness among clients of their basic business or personal (financial) situations. Generally aimed at preventing harmful situations (e.g., over-indebtedness) . Clients are in survival mode and generally not willing to pay for these services (e.g., financial literacy).
Entrepreneurship development	Helping individuals start their own business and raising awareness of entrepreneurship as a career choice, plus basic business skills training. Clients are aspiring to set up a business and seek awareness raising services as a positive choice, not so much out of necessity (e.g., vocational training, business creation programmes).
Business development services	Supporting existing small businesses to improve their operations, with services ranging from business advice to technical skills training and linking entrepreneurs to markets.

Source: DPRN 2011

Those clients with “on-off” operations and new to business have challenges in keeping up with capitalization requirements and need to undergo client development services. Entrepreneurial development is recommended for clients with or without existing businesses who are willing to learn more about skills and capabilities for additional business ventures. These involve BDS training and technical advice to improve operations.

On the other hand, Rodriguez (2010) divided BDS types based on what is called “program approaches”. This means that BDS providers or the institutions that extend such services have to identify their target beneficiaries based on major program influence, as shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3 BDS TYPES BASED ON PROGRAM APPROACHES	
Sub-sector Led	BDS programs choose sub-sectors that have the potential to develop the MSE significantly or to create a considerable amount of employment.
Demand Led	Demand for specific services determined BDS programs.
Target Population Led	Focused on specific target populations.
Services Led	Based on the replication of services that have previously been successfully offered by the organization.
Supplier Led	The direct providers that determine what BDS programs to implement.
Broad (Wide-ranging) Economic Development	Driven by cross-sector situations.

SOURCE: Rodriguez, Basilio M. (2010)

According to Sospeter and Nchimbi (2018), the sorts of services provided by an effective BDS system are decided by the needs expressed by the businesses. The following traits for market delivery and development should be taken into consideration to produce a demand-driven market approach:

- a. *Focus on the market* - rather than concentrating on what they believe they can deliver, they should concentrate on market needs. For instance, in order to provide services that address difficulties unique to women-owned small businesses, those services must fully cater for the clients’ needs when it comes to the type of service provided, its quality, its ability to be paid for, and its method of delivery.
- b. *BDS suppliers* should treat their consumers like customers rather than desperate persons with no other options.

Training and Its Importance

One of the notable practices employed by organizations like MFIs is to provide training either to staff or clients. Training is seen as an effective type of development tool to promote business growth of the client, while it also has an impact on the microfinance industry itself.

Since the goal of business training is to enhance the performance of MFIs and owner-managers, MFIs should take a variety of factors into consideration when establishing business training programs (Abeysekera, R., 2020). MFIs should offer demand-driven training programs to their clients, according to studies (Shaw, 2004).

Training impacts clients’ business outcomes, resulting in improved conditions which can be reflected in, for instance, better loan repayments, higher client satisfaction and ultimately client retention. When a client undergoes training, they also gather valuable business skills and information pertaining to things like record keeping, sales and income, especially during bad sales months, handling inventory and market expansion. Although training provides a good starting point for BDS implementation, it is uncertain as to how extensive the reach of training needs to be to affect the business positively. Several additional types of BDS are a must for a more holistic approach with regard to MFI BDS implementation due to the evolving needs of customers and market development (Karlan, Valdivia 2011).

In 2011, Karlan and Valdivia conducted a randomized control experiment (RCT) to assess the effectiveness of integrating entrepreneurship education into the regular group banking sessions of FINCA’s microfinance program in Peru. Results showed that training improved business practices and increased revenues and profits. Clients reported using many of the skills they learned in the program, including market analysis, separating business and household funds, reinvesting profits, and maintaining records. The training also led to better repayment rates and greater client retention for FINCA, probably as a result of higher client satisfaction.(Ham, Callie; Sievers and Merten 2015).

Clients who used BDS had better company outcomes, made larger loan applications, and made more money from their companies (Halder 2003) compared to those who did not. They were happier, made more money, and created more jobs. The company gained from improved client relationships and employee happiness (De Wildt 2004).

A similar study was carried out on ADEMCOL (2001), a Colombian microfinance provider that added business training to weekly meetings with clients. Unfortunately, the results of the study are inconclusive due to other factors affecting delinquency and dropout rates. However, after training was introduced, staff reported higher client satisfaction and lower rates of delinquency.

In Uganda, in the study 'The Wheels of Trade: Developing Markets for Business Services' published in 2000 by IT Publications, a trainer who runs a training business after being accepted into an ILO Training of Trainers (ToT) programme claims that the poorest consumers are frequently the most ready to pay since they have been barred from donor-funded training programs, which frequently demand some level of education.

In Kenya, Action For Enterprise (AFE) did a joint sub-sector study and BDS market evaluation for Small Enterprises producing vegetables on behalf of USAID/Kenya. Crop husbandry training and extension services were chosen as the priority, with recommended interventions. These are assisting exporters in improving subcontractor training and developing an inventory of crop husbandry training courses. The study aided in the formulation of a substantial USAID/Kenya initiative known as the "Kenya Business Development Services Program".

FINCA-Peru, a small, nonprofit, financially sustainable microfinance institution that has been operating in Peru since 1993 seeks to empower women and improve the socioeconomic conditions of the underprivileged. FINCA anticipates that its clients, who are mostly low-income women without collateral, will enhance their earned income. This is done by giving them operating money to boost inventory and invest in their enterprises and teaches its consumers how to save money by requiring matching weekly or monthly savings deposits. The business training intervention has two objectives, to enhance institutional results for the microfinance organization as well as business outcomes and overall wellbeing for clients.

Presented below is a sample module used in Lima, Peru, which may apply to other MFIs when providing training. The module is divided into two, focusing on different kinds of training to be undertaken by the participants, and has a minimum of eight topics or sessions that may extend up to a maximum of fifteen.

EXHIBIT A1. BUSINESS TRAINING SESSIONS PRESENTED IN LIMA

Module 1: Training For Success		Module 2: The Business and the Family: Costs and Finances	
Session	Title	Session	Title
1	Training for Success	1	The Business and the Family
2	What Is a Business?	2	Income, Costs, and Profits
3	How does a Business Work?	3	My Costs of Production and Operating Resources
4	The Market	4	How Do I Calculate the Cost of Production of My Product?
5	Who Are My Customers?	5	Prices and Price Equilibrium
6	Who Are My Competitors?	6	How to Make a Good Price Decision
7	Review Session 1	7	The Registers and Controls in My Business
8	Business Game: Module 1	8	The Growth of My Business
9	My Business's Position in the Market	9	Will I Be Able to Pay My Loan?
10	Product and Price Commercial Strategy	10	Taxes
11	Marketplace and Promotion Commercial Strategy		
12	My Commercial Plan		
13	Review session 2		
14	Business Game: Module2		
15	Business Game: Module3		

Source: Karlan and Valdivia (2010), p 257

Impact and Influence of Business Development Services

This section reviews various studies conducted on the impact and influence of BDS. These studies are presented to show the importance of BDS and its effects, especially on small entrepreneurs' business as well as on the BDS providers.

Profitability and loan repayments improved, and the number of customers increased, according to an ILO study (2021) of business development training's impact. Due to the BDS offered, MFIs performed well in terms of lower cost per borrower, staff productivity ratios, and administrative and salary expense ratios (Dunford 2001). Additionally, according to McKernan (2002) and Copestake et al. (2001), clients' revenues increased dramatically due to the training they received. MFIs increased the bottom line, improving clients' business performance (Henry 2006).

Kirui (2016) claimed that credit intervention and training were found to have a favorable effect on female-owned companies' performance. Training from the organization led to significantly improved budgeting and bookkeeping but improving the frequency of training and credit more than twice would be better.

Abbar ul Haq et al. (2021) claim that beneficiaries' participation in community development initiatives and skill training made them aware of the value of socioeconomic empowerment. They were conscious of their potential and realized that working together could improve their living level.

ADEMCOL (2001) concludes that BDS encourages business growth for MFIs by improving client satisfaction. MFIs noted an improvement in loan repayments, client growth, dropout rates and financial sustainability. On the issue of sustainability, BDS also impacted clients in terms of value chains and market development. Clients who participated in BDS sustained their income, made larger profits, employed more staff and provided support to the local market than clients who did not participate, despite fees charged for the services by some MFIs (Rodriguez 2010).

BDS has a notable impact on small to medium enterprises (SMEs). This is noted in the study by Yirga (2018), which concluded that BDS improved working procedures, the ability to accumulate personal capital through government loans, saving time and energy, encouraging a suitable workplace, expansion of the enterprise, a better accounting system, profitability, and better management of the enterprise.

MFIs can attain financial stability by increasing repayments, customer loyalty, and client engagement by offering BDS. Due to their improved ability to manage their credit and enterprises, clients promptly repay loans. Furthermore, BDS boosts customer satisfaction, which motivates clients to keep doing business with MFIs. BDS provided can also tempt new clients to join MFIs (Sievers and Vandenberg, 2007; De Wildt, 2004; ADEMCOL, 2001).

Bejene's (2018) study demonstrates that BDS influenced changes in MSMEs' performance. The benefits of these changes include improved labor practices, the ability to save time and effort, a waste-free environment, a clean workplace, business growth, an improved accounting system, profitability, and better management of the company. Additionally, as a result of enhanced financial records, there was a decrease in time and resource wastage and more compliant income tax payments.

A study in Yemen, published in 2014 by the Canadian Center of Science and Education showed the effectiveness of the Islamic microfinance system's BDS in satisfying SMEs' consumers, and how this relationship is contingent on business growth opportunities. The results revealed a direct effect of BDS on SME owners' fulfilment as well as the moderating function of business growth on the relationship.

Anderson (2000) in a study of 'The Hidden MSE Service Sector Research into Commercial BDS Provision to Micro and Small Enterprises in VietNam and Thailand', states that BDS is essential to micro-entrepreneurs. BDS is delivered to them in four ways, fee for service, commission basis, through business relationships, and through the business environment.

According to the International Finance Corporation (2006), BDS when used correctly, are critical factors that help entrepreneurs operate their firms successfully. BDS facilitates financing and acts as an alternative guarantee where a tangible guarantee could make it difficult to meet the necessary security standards. The major goal of BDS services is to enable skill transfer and offer business advice.

In 2001, Southeast Europe Enterprise Development (SEED) commissioned a study on the improvement of growth and development of small and medium enterprises in Bosnia and Herzegovina. A sample of 130 companies was assessed on awareness of BDS specific services, including whether they have ever used, purchased or have they used these services more than once. A high level of repeat use of these services means satisfaction by these companies with the benefits they received from the said services, which in turn leads to business growth.

In recent years, a study published by Mwaniki, Z., Ngugi, Patrick, and Nyang'au, S. (2022), showed a significant positive relationship between BDS and growth of small and medium enterprises in Kenya. Growth of small and medium enterprises in Kenya of up to 23 percent is attributable to BDS according to this study. Manufacturing

SMEs are assisted in supply of inputs, negotiation with suppliers, as well as in collaborative facilitation or joint procurement. Other factors considered include market access, infrastructure, and technical assistance.

Several studies from different countries back up the importance of BDS in the microfinance environment, especially in providing satisfaction among clients. The Table 4 presents the authors, the methods used, the focus of the study, and key findings describing the impact of help that BDS provides in different aspects directly affecting business growth.

Table 4 Summary of the Literature on BDS

Author	Method	Focus	Key Findings
ADEMCOL (2001)	Case study (Columbian MFI ADEMCOL)	To evaluate the success of BDS (e.g., training) provided by ADEMCOL	MFI experienced better loan repayments, client satisfaction, increase in the client base, decrease in the client dropout rate, and increase in financial sustainability
ILO (2002)	Case study Zimbabwe	Impact of training on MFIs	MFI profitability and loan repayments improved. Client base grew
Dunford (2001)	Case study Zimbabwe	Impact of BDS on MFI performance	MFIs did well in terms of better administrative expense and salary expense ratios, cost per borrower and staff productivity ratios due to the BDS provided
Copstake et al. (2001)	Case study Zambia	Impact of microcredit and training on the performance of clients	Clients' profits increased due to training received
Nisttahusz et al. (2002)	Case study Bolivia	Impact of BDS on loan repayment and clients.	Clients who received BDS showed better business results and applied for larger loans. There was no relationship between BDS and loan repayment
McKernan (2002)	Case study in Bangladesh	To measure the impact of credit and non-credit programmes on clients	Clients' profits improved significantly due to the BDS programmes
Halder (2003)	Case study based on the MFI BRAC in Bangladesh	To measure the skills development training impact on participants and the cost-effectiveness of BDS	Clients who received training from BRAC earned more from their business ventures than those who did not
De Wildt (2004)	The case study method was used to study the case of Financiera Solución (FS) in Peru	To identify the cost and benefits of linkage (credit and BDS) to microenterprise clients and FS	Clients who received training were more satisfied, earned more, and generated more employment than those who did not. FS benefited in terms of having better client relationships and employee satisfaction.

<p>Karlan and Valdivia (2006)</p>	<p>Quantitative case study of a Peruvian village banking program (by using treatment and control group) clients</p>	<p>Training led to improved business knowledge, practices and revenue in the treatment group, whereas the control group remained as they were before.</p>	<p>The MFI benefited in terms of higher loan repayments and better client retention due to the training given to clients</p>
<p>Henry (2006)</p>	<p>Case studies in Canada and Columbia: two MFI programs</p>	<p>To examine the performance of two MFI programs. The Canadian MFI used an external BDS provider, whereas the Columbian MFI used its own BDS program</p>	<p>MFIs improved the bottom line and clients improved their business performance thanks to BDS</p>

Source: Abeyssekera 2015 p46-48.

Service Delivery of Business Development Services in Other Countries

Different countries have different approaches in providing BDS. These approaches depend on the specific needs a certain business has, and on the country’s acceptable practices as well. The different service deliveries in several countries are detailed in this section.

Inefficiency and environmental contamination were identified as the main issues in analysis of the US-based NGO Enterprise Works Worldwide (EWW) "El Salvador Coffee Project" (ILO 2003). The study found that processing coffee before sale would increase the profitability of small-scale coffee farmers. With the aid of the analysis, EWW developed a program to assist small-scale coffee growers who supported various BDS in resolving the issues. Following that, the program assisted in tying together cooperatives so that smaller cooperatives lacking processing capabilities could utilize those held by larger cooperatives. Due to the connectivity, the cooperatives could work together on financing, processing, and marketing coffee, which increased productivity. The group helped the cooperatives access improved technology and teach and support their members in cost-effective, ecologically friendly production methods. Thus, environmental contamination decreased while small-scale coffee producers saw an increase in revenues.

Yirga (2018) conducted a study on a range of BDS offered in Ethiopia. BDS were available in a variety of forms for SMEs, including management training and technical assistance, market connectivity services, availability of raw materials, technology and design and development, data and consulting services, infrastructures and workplace design, finance services, and business plan creation (Yirga 2018). The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) created an MSME development strategy after realizing the importance of these businesses and their ability to help the nation combat unemployment and achieve equitable economic growth (Ministry of Trade and Industry 1997).

Based on a 2013 study by Gani et al., the Participatory Market Chain Approach (PMCA) was used in Indonesia between March 2008 and June 2009, particularly in West Java, where Indonesia produces the most potatoes in Southeast Asia. Limited business acumen and inefficient farmer groups were found to be the main obstacles to connecting small farmers with dynamic markets by PMCA practitioners working in the Andes, Uganda, and Indonesia. This prompted the project team for Indonesia to pool and mix components of the Farmer Field School (FFS) and the PMCA in a Farmer Business School (FBS) approach. Reviewing the outcomes from the PMCA's experiences in Indonesia in 2011 reveals that a number of the small farmers and processors who took part in the West Java exercise had started selling new products or marketing their already-existing products in novel manner.

Sarvodaya Economic Enterprise Development Services (Gte) Ltd, or SEEDS, is an NGO in Sri Lanka that focuses on the expansion and financial viability of small enterprises. Action research is created for Enterprise Development Services (EDS) to construct "BDS Marketing Centers" to facilitate connections between SEs and private sector BDS suppliers. A more demand-driven and cost-effective model where services are delivered for a fee, frequently in groups and in conjunction with other providers to minimize costs, has replaced the program's earlier model of direct, individual, free services. Only 25 percent of SEEDS' funding were to come from donors by 2005, according to their business strategy, down from 83 to 53 percent in 2001 (ILO 2003).

Occhipinti (2018) in her paper “Funding Business Development Services for Women Micro-entrepreneurs in the Philippines”, states that CARD MFI has a business development institution called the Business Development Service Foundation, Inc. (BDSFI). The Foundation provides business advisory, marketing, and product development to very low-income clients. As a facilitator, BDSFI finds and prepares commercial providers who may offer clients BDS, shifting from its previous function as a direct provider of workshops and training. Clients of CARD can obtain BDS from the textile supplier in the form of design recommendations, business introductions, and instruction in accounting, product development, and sales strategies. In this scenario, the commercial supplier is able to sell textiles to micro-entrepreneurial garment producers who are BDSFI clients, and the BDSFI clients are reinforced through the services provided by the commercial provider. By training them how to train and assist clients while engaging in business with BDSFI, the organization develops the capacity of the commercial providers who are experts in their field (Large, 2005). BDSFI uses the market facilitation model, which starts by preparing its clients for market contacts and continues to support them until they can become independent. Then BDSFI then moves on to the following company in need. This keeps clients from becoming overly reliant on BDSFI over time; BDSFI can assist a healthy mix of successful clients as well as those who actually need the aid.

In 2008, the ILO and Negros Women for Tomorrow Foundation (NWTF), a provider of microfinance and development services in the Philippines, teamed to enhance the risk management techniques employed by NWTF customers and to address the issue of client over-indebtedness. Eduarte & Castro (2011) states that NWTF introduced Start Your Business (SYB) and Grow Your Business (GYB) training modules in November 2011. A Training of Trainers for 17 NWTF loan officers was designed by a NWTF project manager, together with an in-house ILO Master Trainer. They designed a “Training of Entrepreneurs Plan”.

Although it makes it difficult to compare effectiveness with standard SYB courses, both packages were significantly condensed—GYB was taught in one day, and SYB in two—making it easier for busy loan officers to take on the additional duty. The goal of the study was to evaluate how the training affected clients' financial attitudes and behaviors, vulnerability, and entrepreneurial attitudes and skills. According to the analysis, participants were less likely to 1) borrow money to pay off another loan, 9.4% 2) anticipate repayment issues, 4.7% and 3) make a late payment, 4%. Additionally, after the training, clients were more likely to increase their asset base and increase their revenues.

Additional findings from another study (Ham, Callie; Sievers and Merten 2015) show clients were more willing to hire workers, and despite an increase in earnings, the average number of workdays reduced, suggesting higher efficiency. These outcomes demonstrate a development in consumers' managerial abilities as well as advantages for the financial institution. Clients are better able to manage their business finances and other aspects of their operations, and as a result, NWTF saw a higher repayment rate and improved client confidence.

Rodriguez (2010) states that MFIs in the Philippines offer “credit plus” services in response to increasing demand for services that complement financial products and services, particularly loans. There is a wide range of nonfinancial services being offered with all 13 MFIs in this research providing financial literacy/education and BDS to clients. Leadership and enterprise skills development training, particularly for women, are common among MFIs that still use groups and weekly or monthly meetings for transactions such as collection. A number of MFIs are also known to provide community development services, such as feeding, medical or dental missions and relief operations in the aftermath of disasters.

While there were only a few published studies on the delivery approach of BDS in the Philippines, a study “Evolving Models and Business Practices in the Design, Delivery and Monitoring of Business Development Services to Micro and Small Enterprises in the Philippines” (Rodriguez 2010) listed several organizations interviewed and they specially provided the delivery approaches they utilize. Table 5 below provides a summary of organizations interviewed. Among these are three known microfinance institutions, namely CCT, TSPI, and CARD.

Table 5. BDS in the Philippines

Organization	Type / Area of Operation	Major BDS Provided	BDS Delivery Approach
Center for Community Transformation (CCT)	Microfinance Institution / Across Philippines	Mentoring, business model / franchising, bulk supply / sourcing, training	Direct, services provided to microfinance clients
Center for Agricultural and Rural Development (CARD)	Microfinance Institution / Across Philippines	Business format, bulk supply / sourcing, training	Direct, services provided to microfinance clients, studying systemic approaches
TSPI Development Corporation	Microfinance Institution / Primarily Luzon	Training, mentoring, technical assistance, input supply, market linkages, market research, product development	Direct, services provided to microfinance clients, some facilitation, studying systemic approaches
INSOL Development Corporation	Business support services / Metro Manila, Southern Luzon	Training, business incubation, business services centers, product development, mentoring, market linkages, technology, advocacy	Direct services provided to microfinance clients of Ahon Sa Hirap, Inc. (ASHI)
Federation of Multi-Sectoral Alliance for Development - Negros (MUAD)	NGO Network / Negros Island	Training, technology transfer, marketing, product development, input supply, trade fair participation, community / cluster development	Direct, also facilitates services provided by its member NGOs and other organizations, initiating systemic approaches through PCCI
Cordillera Network of Development NGOs and POs (CORDNET)	NGO Network / Cordillera Region	Trade fair participation, product showroom, training, community / cluster development	Direct, also facilitates services provided by its member NGOs and other organizations, initiating systemic approaches through PCCI
Philippine Development Assistance Program (PDAP)	NGO / Across the Philippines	Training, technology transfer, community / cluster organization, market linkages, organization of industry associations, policy advocacy	Direct, also facilitates delivery of BDS services, initiating systemic approaches
ECHO Store	Private Social Enterprise / Across Philippines	Training, advocacy, product development, marketing	Market player (systemic)
PBSP - Business Advisory Program	Specific Program within an NGO / Across the Philippines	Advisory Services provided by volunteers	Direct services
Upland Marketing Foundation, Inc.	NGO / Across the Philippines	Product development, marketing, input supply	Market player (systemic)

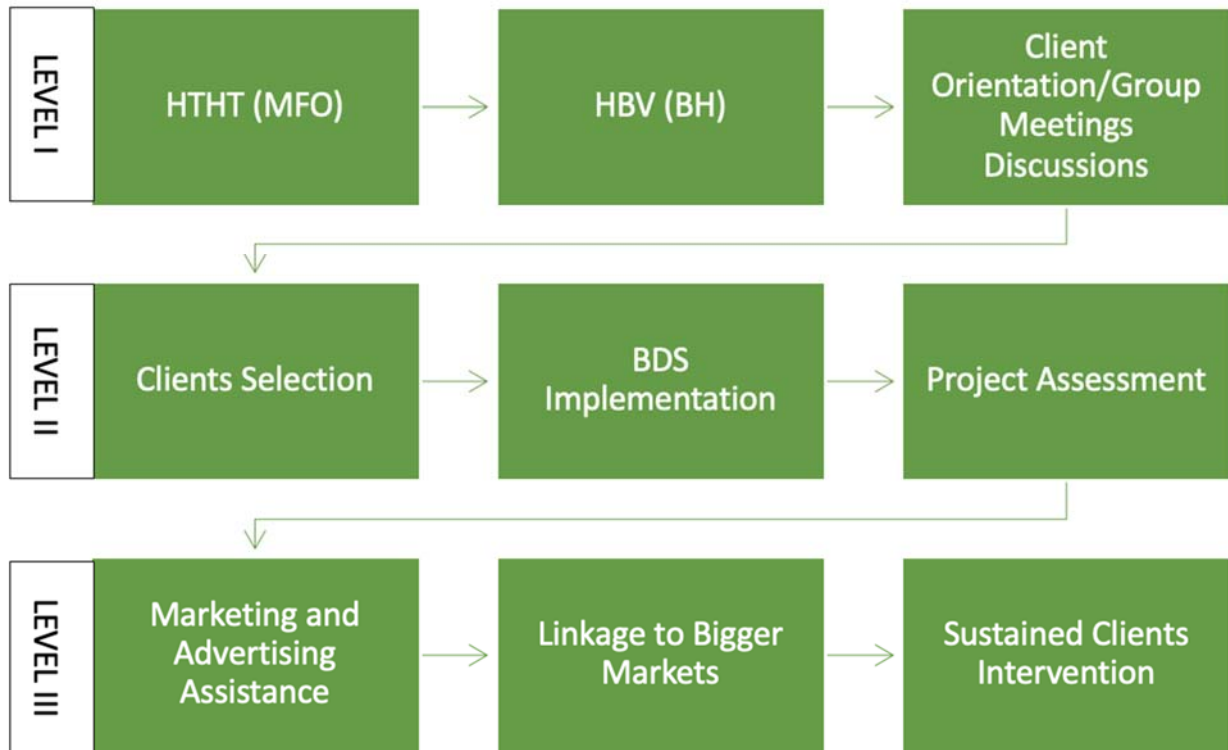
Source: Rodriguez 2010

BDS in Asa Philippines Foundation

BDS deliveries are sub-classified into levels, with a step-by-step process and evaluation until the clients’ business becomes sustainable. The BDS deliveries are 1) Financial Literacy and Credit Use (Level I), 2) Management Training and Business Planning (Level II), and 3) Marketing and Advertising Assistance (Level III). These Levels are explained next.

Level I: Basic Financial Literacy Training/Coaching

In ASA, several BDS deliveries are employed through the implementation and supervision of the Social Responsibility and Performance Department (SRPD) and Operations department. As unique as the Foundation, the BDS program is embedded in clients' loan programs. The first level is one of the most frequently delivered BDS. Most MFIs teach their borrower clients about financial literacy and credit utilization. Many clients tend to divert their loans for other purposes, resulting in a struggle in keeping the business afloat. With fund diversion going on, clients tend to have difficulty in achieving perfect repayment. Thus, ASA implements this Level I program for all its new clients.



ASA BDS FLOW

The fundamental BDS implementation in ASA begins with financial literacy coaching provided by ASA employees, primarily the MFO (microfinance officers) and BH (branch heads). Sievers and Vandenberg,(2007) also point out basic financial literacy coaching as one of the pillars of BDS delivery in an MFI that directly affects a borrower. A client's attitude toward credit depends on her loan character. The field-based employees of ASA known as MFOs choose prospective clients while the BH verifies the viability of their businesses and eventually accepts or disapproves the loan financing. The MFO steps in during the client's loan process by holding heart-to-heart talks (HTHT), which give the clients an overview of ASA Philippines' goods and services. Basic financial literacy instruction in relation to loan repayment performance and non-diversion of loan funds training is provided by the MFO to the customer as part of HTHT. It should be noted that if HTHT is not carried out by the MFO, the loan application cannot move further. The final stage of the loan application is the house business visit (HBV), which is carried out by the BH after HTHT. HBV is required to verify the client's business, her willingness to participate in the loan program, a character check of the client, and ultimately the loan approval or denial. The loan application is approved or rejected by the BH, who has jurisdiction over it that exceeds that of the MFO.

The client goes through orientation before her financing is released after the HTHT and HBV are concluded. She must show up for the MFO's weekly group meetings for the next 23 weeks of the loan cycle after the loan has been released. BDS occurs when the MFO continuously reminds clients of the significance of loan revenues, which must be used for business capital, as well as the clients' performance of on-time and late payments. This strategy also exhibits the "unified-compulsory" approach as described by Vandenberg and Sievers (2007), which means that clients must accept the HBV and HTHT services in order to join ASA.

During the group meetings, cash-flow analysis is also covered. The client's performance is crucial for the loan to advance following the loan cycle. Additionally, it should be noted that 100 percent of ASA Philippines' clients receive basic financial literacy instruction, albeit of a rudimentary kind, during client introduction sessions held during releases and weekly group meetings. This BDS type, which is classified as financial literacy and credit utilization, is present in Sievers and Vandenberg (2007). Group sessions held during the loan cycle and payback meetings are the mode of delivery for this BDS.

According to a recent study by (Desello and Agner 2023), account ownership and availing financial services are positively and significantly impacted by financial literacy. When a client has access to this information, business operations improve. This training will assist in lowering or attenuating losses and default rates (Ussif, et.al 2020).

Level II: Specialized Trainings/Seminars (Management Training and Business Planning)

According to Olomi (2006), starting and operating a business are frequently linked to entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship training means business training, which includes learning how to launch, grow, run, and build enterprises as well as develop entrepreneurial abilities. The most crippling limitations to SMSEs' performance, include both the existing and potential business operators' limited awareness and capacity. As a result, numerous entrepreneurs merely copy what their neighbours are doing and fail to recognize the significance of their actions of creativity, excellence, reliability, and customer service. This is common in Philippines' small businesses, with copying any "booming" business and situating nearby. In the short-term, these businesses will be earning but eventually, once the "frizz" dies down, the business goes bankrupt. This issue might be addressed through training, counselling, and other support by private extension services and BDS.

During this stage, the SRPD intervenes with BDS delivery. The corporate and social responsibility (CSR) initiatives of ASA Philippines are the main emphasis of this Department. To start Level II, clients are picked by the MFO, with the BH making the ultimate recommendation. The last step commences if clients' business profile and performance are qualified. Project evaluation is carried out in the Central Office for project development and analysis after the BDS have been implemented. Clients numbering 70,017 had attended training sessions and seminars as of 2023. Even though they only make up a very small portion of ASA Philippines' 2.1 million clientele, this is an excellent place to start.

Level II can also be associated as "Unified-voluntary" as cited in Vandenberg and Sievers (2007), but differs in the financial aspect because BDS provided by ASA is free to clients in contrast to most BDS implementers worldwide. The majority of clients under Level II have undergone STAR (Sari-sari Training and Access to Resources programs with business of sari-sari stores, carinderia, bakeries, and other micro-retailing businesses). Clients in Level II often have loans from ASA Philippines of between Php50,000 to 100,000.

In order to supply non-financial company development services, ASA, in collaboration with Coca-Cola and TESDA, chooses clients who have completed technical assistance and financial literacy training programs. The following company development services were offered to chosen clients who participated in the STAR Program:

1. Safe store education
2. Building business mindset
3. Planning business
4. Managing business operations
5. Ensuring business sustainability and success
6. Basic E-commerce using social media under i-Star program
7. Networking / market access

STAR Module

This is a face-to-face training session conducted for 12 weeks, one session per week for four (4) hours. Clients with a Sari-sari store, Carinderia, bakeries and other food vending businesses are the target beneficiaries of this program. Table 6 below provides the content of this training.

Table 6 STAR Training Program Curriculum Design

STAR Modules	Module Title	Learning Outcomes	Topic
1	Practicing Gender-based Values and Entrepreneurship Skills	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Discuss the difference between sex and gender. 2. Discuss the different manifestations of gender biases concerning women entrepreneurs. 3. Identify gender-related conditions affecting health and safety issues concerning women entrepreneurs. 4. Identifying gender issues in entrepreneurship. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sex and gender • Manifestations of gender biases concerning women entrepreneurs • Gender-related conditions affecting health and safety issues concerning women entrepreneurs • Gender issues in entrepreneurship
		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Integrate gender perspectives and entrepreneurship values in their individual business goals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender perspectives and entrepreneurship values in their individual business goals
2	Planning a Business	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Describe their customers and competitors. 2. Prepare a marketing plan. 3. Develop a budget. 4. Develop a business plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding the market • Marketing my business • Budget • Developing business plan
3	Manage a Business	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Practice recording sari-sari store transactions. 2. Manage monthly income and expenses. 3. Manage credit. 4. Manage sari-sari store inventory. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeping daily records • Income and expense • Managing my credit • Managing my inventory • Practice good housekeeping and quality customer service
4	Access to Resources	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify strategies in building a business network. 2. Access to resources. 3. Define merchandising and discuss the benefits of merchandising. 4. Identify requirements for applying for a loan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building a business network • Access to resources • The essentials of merchandising • Applying for a loan

Source : Trainee's Handbook, p 4

iSTAR Module

The iSTAR Module is an online training module designed to reach more beneficiaries and at the same time cut costs on its implementation. It coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic when people were confined to their homes. Table 7 provides detail of its content.

Table 7 ASA’s iSTAR Training Program

iSTAR Modules	Title	Topic
Module 0: Safe Store Education		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Introduction to Safe Store Education ● Understanding the basic covid-19 prevention ● Improving Personal and Business Resiliency ● Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise (MSMEs) Care Guidelines ● Safe Store Education Recap
Module 1: Building Business Mindset	<p>Pagsisimula ng Negosyo Description: Building mindset and instilling values needed in business.</p> <p>Course Objectives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To have an appreciation of how businesses contribute to the society 2. To understand what is the manage personal finance 3. To guide entrepreneurs on starting up a business 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Negosyo at Lipunan ● Katangian ng Matagumpay na Negosyante ● Personal Finance: Ang Tamang Paghawak ng Pera ● Pagtatayo ng Sari Sari Store
Module 2: Planning the Business	<p>Pagpapalano ng Negosyo Description: Working on different aspects of business planning and understanding fundamental concepts</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Market: Pag-unawa ng Customer at <u>Kumpetisyon</u> ● Ang 4Ps ng Marketing

	<p>Course Objectives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To appreciate the customer profile and their demands 2. To identify different marketing strategies 3. To develop a business plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mga Gabay sa Tamang Merchandising ● Paano Gumawa ng Budget ● <u>Presyong Sapat, Ano ba Dapat?</u> ● Pagbuo ng Epektibong Business Plan
Module 3: Managing Business Operation	<p>Pagpapatakbo ng Negosyo Description: Learning the basics of day-to-day business operations</p> <p>Course Objective:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To properly manage inventory 2. To learn how to record transactions 3. To manage customer relationship through debt management and customer service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pagtatala ng Transaksyon ● Pagpapautang ● Tamang Pag-imbentaryo ● Maayos na Tindahan at Pakikitungo sa Customer
Module 4: Ensuring Business Sustainability and Success	<p>Pag-ani ng Tagumpay ng Negosyo Description: Ensuring sustainability and continued success of the business using different tools and interventions.</p> <p>Course objective</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To evaluate business performance 2. To strategize the expansion strategies (proper networking and capitalization) 3. To summarize the learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pagsusuri ng Business Performance ● Pag-abot ng Asenso ng Negosyo ● Ang Kahalagahan ng Business Network ● Loans at Microfinance Institutions ● Summary

<p>Module 5: Basic E-Commerce using social media under the <u>istar</u> program in partnership with Coca-Cola Philippines</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pagmarket ng produkto at customer care ● E-commerce at social media ● Pakikipag-transaksyon sa online
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Source: iSTAR Operational Guidelines,p 38

Level III: Marketing and Advertising Assistance/Advanced and Exploratory Projects

The enhanced and exploratory BDS in Level III can be used for clients whose firms in Level II improved. Businesses of clients in Level III have already attained a point of sustainability and require further growth to advance. In this level, clients need more capitalization, as evidenced by the fact that their loan uptakes are typically at least Php 100,000 and they have higher incomes, more employees, and other financial indicators that qualify them for Level III. ASA Philippines also connects client enterprises at this stage to larger markets via connections in manufacturing, distribution, and consumption. These clients take advantage of their relationships to increase their profit and influence through ongoing market connections made by ASA Philippines.

With its ongoing business improvements through attempts to achieve business growth, Level III contradicts the concept of significant BDS implementation globally in which BDS implementation terminates within a specific period of time due to financial limitations as suggested by Vandenberg and Sievers (2007). According to Rodriguez (2010), the majority of development oriented BDS vendors offer a variety of services rather than just one final service. Because the clients that have demonstrated the finest financial practices by continual BDS are the leading participants in this area, sustainability is crucial in this level. The typical loan amount taken on by clients during this period is between PHP 100,000 to 300,000, with multiple people employed in the business development process.

This Level is also known as network distribution to particular clients during this stage. They focused on locally produced goods made in the area. In terms of logistics, ASA helps companies with things like potential customers, transportation costs, and product distribution. For the pilot implementation of network distribution, 70 clients from Luzon have been selected from the archives of SRPD, which manages the network distribution chain. When clients can strategically position themselves for network distribution and business growth, more clients can engage in this BDS.

Development of Hypotheses

Having explained the importance of BDS, the types of BDS MFIs provide in general and the specific BDS and its three level timings that ASA implements, the Research Questions addressed by this study can be summarised as:

- 1) Does business development services have a positive impact on business improvement for ASA Philippines clients?
- 2) Is there a significant difference in the business performance of BDS and non-BDS clients?

These two Research Questions are addressed by testing two related hypotheses that reflect ASA's belief that its investment in its three level BDS program yields net positive results for the Foundation.

- H1 Business development services have a positive impact on business improvement for clients.
- H2 BDS clients in receipt of BDS experience better performance by their businesses than non-BDS clients.

Research Methodology

The Method

This research adopts a mixture of a qualitative and quantitative method. This study employed a survey, where two categories of ASA Philippines clients were compared based on monthly sales, loan size, cumulative savings, repayment, monthly profit, number of workers, down to business expansion and the gauge on decision making of the clients. The first category is a group of ASA clients who have received BDS, termed in this paper as ASA BDS clients. The second category are those who have no business intervention at all, termed as ASA non-BDS clients.

Before doing the survey, the two groups of ASA clients were randomly chosen. The consent of clients in both groups was sought, before they were surveyed separately. After the surveys, the team checked the results of both groups for any errors or inconsistencies in each answered questionnaire.

The Population

ASA is represented 100 percent by women members, whose aim is to empower and be able to create and sustain business that can help their families. Membership is open to ages 18-65 years old, of any civil status and educational background. It is common among ASA members that their business is shared with the husband, as part of a family enterprise. Husbands may have a day job and at the same time be involved in decision-making for the business.

The population for this study was the existing clients of ASA Philippines Foundation taken from five provinces, representing the three islands of the Philippines — Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. Both groups — which were classified as BDS and non-BDS — were from the same five provinces. The first group, ASA BDS clients, consists of 307 women entrepreneurs, while the second group, ASA non-BDS clients, consists of 375 women entrepreneurs.

The Validity and Reliability of the Survey Instrument

The instruments of this study were the survey questionnaires for each group. These survey questionnaires were tested both for its validity and reliability. The survey questionnaires for ASA BDS clients were 30 multiple choice questions, and 30 multiple choice questions also for ASA non-BDS clients.

The Technique of Data Collection

The technique of data collection used in this study was quantitative data (number-based). Each questionnaire was grouped based on the needed information for this study. The data collected were then classified based on each grouped questionnaire.

Analysis

The respondents were divided into two - 307 BDS and 375 non-BDS clients. All clients are women, with the majority age ranging from 41-60 years old and 79 percent are married. More than half (63%) are above high school graduates and have been residents of the area for 16 years or more.

A. Business Results

Table 8 Sales Performance

	AVERAGE SALES A MONTH				
	10,000 and below	10,001 to 20000	20,001 to 30,000	30,001 to 50,000	50,000 up
Before BDS	67%	17%	16%	0%	0%
After BDS	0%	0%	66%	23%	10%
NON BDS	66%	34%	0%	0%	0%

Table 8 reveals a significant increase in the average month sales of BDS compared to non-BDS respondents. Sales in the range of P20,001 to 30,000 increased from 16% to 66%, with 23% increase for the range P30,001 to P50,000. This may be attributed to the fact that during training, clients are taught to develop a business mindset, and plan for their business.

Yirga (2018) described BDS as aiming to assist micro and small businesses in challenging times by improving their performance. This is also supported by a similar study that as part of microfinance, with credit and BDS, businesses can hurdle obstacles through loans and BDS support to acquire necessary skills.

Table 9 TOTAL NUMBER OF WORKERS

	Before BDS	After BDS	Non-BDS
0 WORKERS	91%	85%	83%
1 to 3	8%	13%	15%
4 Up	1%	2%	2%

Table 10 NUMBER OF PAID WORKERS

	Before BDS	After BDS	Non-BDS
0	94%	90%	89%
1 to 3	5%	8%	8%
4 Up	1%	2%	3%

Table 9 shows that BDS has somewhat impacted an increase in the total number of workers, from 8% to 13% after BDS. The increase may not be so significant but with the added loan for capitalization and the boost of confidence in doing business, this has pushed them to expand. A similar result in Table 10 for the number of paid workers that are not family members is seen, from 5% to 8%. A study made by Ham, Callie; Sievers and Merten (2015) show clients were more willing to hire workers, and despite an increase in earnings, the average number of workdays reduced, suggesting higher efficiency. These outcomes demonstrate a development in consumers' managerial abilities as well as advantages for the financial institution.

Sobir, R (2020) on UNDESA on MSMEs and their Role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals claims that MSMEs create jobs and have the potential for promoting decent work and entrepreneurship. It contributes up to 45 percent of total employment in emerging market economies. In recent decades, employment generated by MSMEs has steadily increased at the global level. Across 132 countries, the number of total full-time employees in MSMEs has nearly doubled, from 79 million to 156 million. MSMEs, while having a large share of employment, may not offer decent work opportunities as per ILO standards. Nonetheless, when better supported, they have the potential to promote decent work standards and decent job opportunities.

Exhibit 4 Monthly Profit

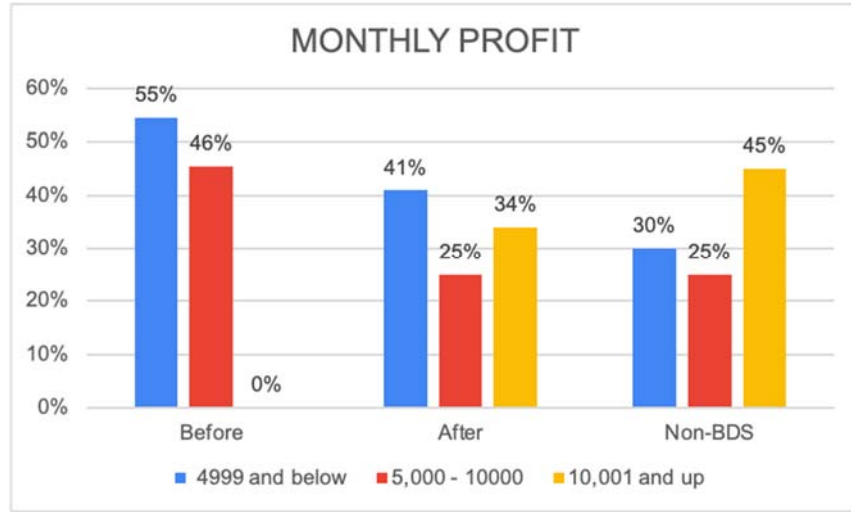


Table 11 MONTHLY PROFIT

	4,999 and below	5,000 - 10,000	10,001 and up
Before	55%	46%	0%
After	41%	25%	34%
Non-BDS	30%	25%	45%

Table 11 shows a surge of respondents with the minimum profit of P4,999 and below and this comprises the BDS participants. The motivation to offer BDS is to help clients improve their business performance, resulting in an increase in profit, from 0% to 34% for monthly profit of P10,001 and up.

Non-BDS respondents appear to have a better monthly profit compared with BDS respondents. It is inferred that better performing clients may not be interested in BDS since they feel they are earning well and BDS will only waste their time and the opportunity to earn more. According to Karlan, Valdivia (2011) one of BDS training's impacts is profitability, alongside improved loan repayment and increased number of customers. Additionally, clients' revenues increased dramatically as a result of training.

B. Business Skills and Practices

Table 12 Credit Sales

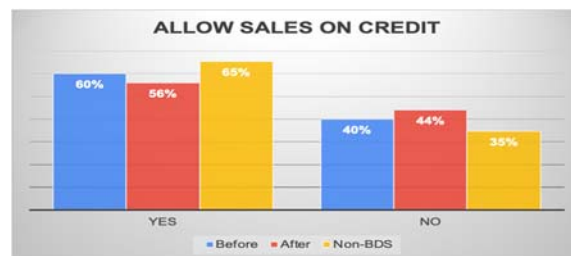
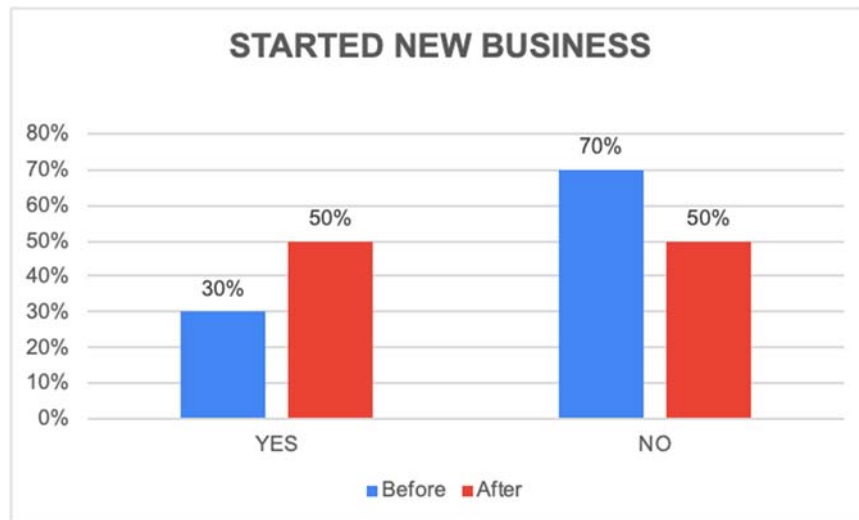


Table 12 shows that allowing sales on credit percentage decreased after BDS. For non-BDS respondents, there is a higher percentage of sales on credit, compared to BDS respondents. In non-BDS respondents, sales on credit is 65% of the total respondents. This goes to show that a lot of businesses cannot avoid resorting to credit sales to be able to survive. Many micro-retailers may not be aware of how much will be allocated for credit sales. A lot of businesses go bankrupt, if they have no proper planning and management in offering credit sales, because they do not know how to manage their operations, especially in collecting their receivables. A study published by Global Journal of Business Research (2012) states that companies with good sales levels considered that good planning and management, offering sales on credit, and other marketing strategies are the key elements to increase sales.

Similarly, a study in the Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on Sustainable Management and Innovation (ICoSMI 2020) suggests that sales made on credit to customers must be considered carefully, and with effort to regulate sales on credit, so that problems related to liquidity, including the business cash flow will not be encountered.

Typical scenario in a developing country like the Philippines, sales on credit is very common, especially for small businesses such as Sari-sari stores, food kiosks, wet markets. If these credit sales become uncontrolled, it can be dangerous to the business' health.

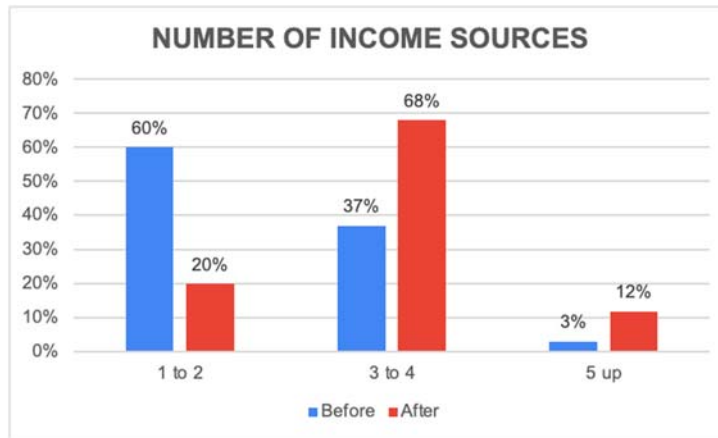
Table 13. Business Initiations



With new found motivation, Table 13 reveals an increase in the number of respondents who started their new business after BDS, from 30% to 50%. As access to larger loans is easy and improved business performance has been felt, the number of income sources, as shown in Table 14, improved from 37% to 68% for three to four sources and 3% to 12% for five income sources and up.

Table 14 NUMBER OF INCOME SOURCES

NUMBER OF INCOME SOURCES			
	1 to 2	3 to 4	5 up
Before	60%	37%	3%
After	20%	68%	12%



C. Household Outcomes

Prior to BDS intervention, the percentage result on empowerment questions is high- such as participation in making key decisions for the family and business, taking charge of household bills that are paid on time and on decisions on how much money is taken from business for other purposes. In the context of ASA, it is a usual scenario that women clients are much more involved in running both the business and their household. Most of the time, with the absence of their husbands, they are forced to act as head of the family. Thus, it is not surprising to see a survey result that is positive.

Before BDS intervention, only 57% of the respondents consciously separated their money from their husband’s or children to control expenses. The majority of ASA clients respond when asked how they manage their loans and income from the business, by saying a big portion of their income goes to household expenses, such as electricity bills, food and school fees. Often, the capital is used up. After BDS, 73% have learned to separate their money from their husbands or children to control expenses.

Based on testimonies from clients who have undergone BDS, they narrate, as shown in Table 15, that training and similar interventions had given them fresh perspectives on how women should participate actively in the family and community. They have realized that as a mother, they play an important role in their family’s economic condition.

Table 15 Separation of Business From Family Decision

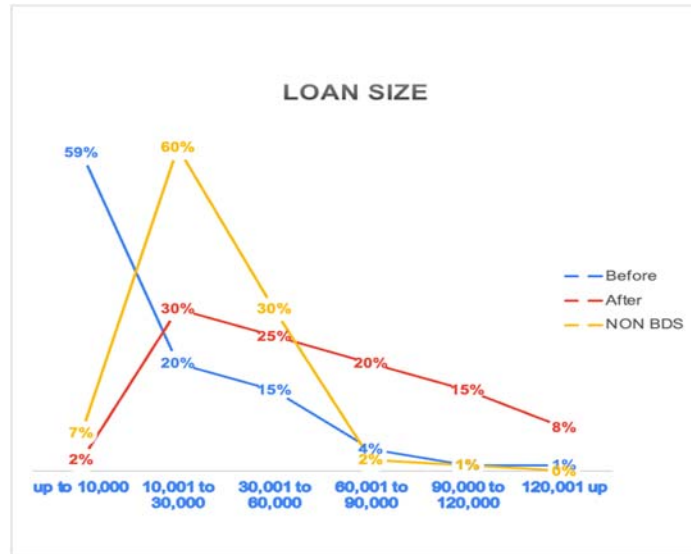
		Before	After
Do you participate in making key decision for the family and business?	Yes	85%	96%
	No	15%	4%
Are you incharge of making sure household bills are paid on time?	Yes	84%	92%
	No	16%	8%
Do you participate in deciding how much money you get from your business for other purpose?	Yes	85%	96%
	No	15%	0%
Do you separate your money from your husband/child to control expenses?	Yes	57%	73%
	No	43%	27%

D. Institutional Outcomes

The BDS intervention has resulted in an astonishing increase in loan size, as shown in Table 16. This may be attributed to the capacity of the BDS respondents to expand their business using loans. They have shown improvements in their capacity to pay and diversified products and services. This is supported by Halder (2003), who states that the clients who used BDS services had better outcomes, can have bigger loan approvals and make more money. Compared to those who did not, they are happier, made more money and eventually created more jobs and employed more people. Nisttahusz et al. (2002), who researched in Bolivia, found that BDS results in better business and clients applied for bigger loans.

Table 16 Loan Size

LOAN SIZE						
	up to 10,000	10,001 to 30,000	30,001 to 60,000	60,001 to 90,000	90,000 to 120,000	120,001 up
Before	59%	20%	15%	4%	1%	1%
After	2%	30%	25%	20%	15%	8%
NON BDS	7%	60%	30%	2%	1%	0%



There has been little effect on cumulative savings after BDS, as shown in Table 17. It can be inferred that the decrease in the savings was brought about by the usage of savings as part of capital, as the respondents had expanded their businesses.

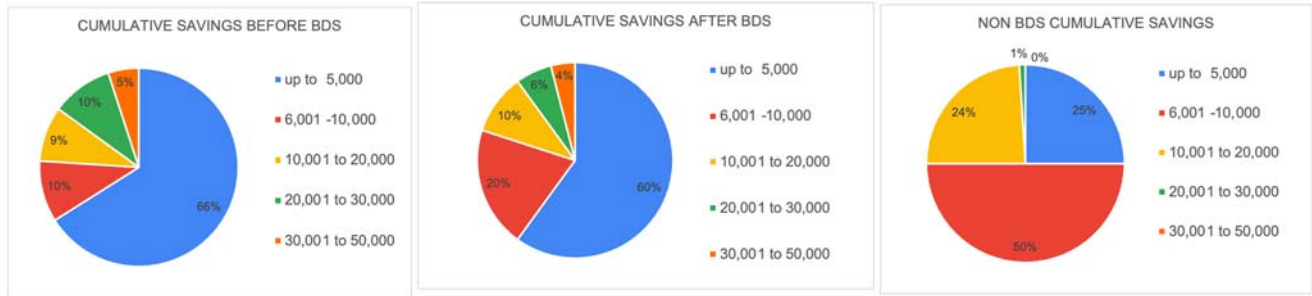


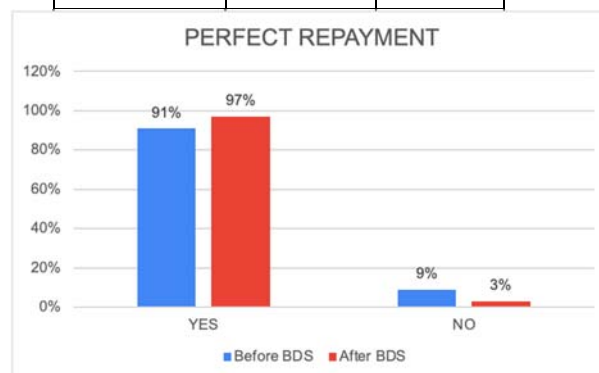
Table 17 Cumulative Savings

Cumulative savings					
	up to 5,000	6,001 to 10,000	10,001 to 20,000	20,001 to 30,000	30,001 to 50,000
Before	66%	10%	9%	10%	5%
After	60%	20%	10%	6%	4%
NON BDS	25%	50%	24%	1%	0%

In the ASA context, repayment is always nearly perfect, confirmed by the result of the survey in Table 18. There is a negligible increase in the percentage of repayment before and after BDS. Thus, BDS has little effect on loan repayment by ASA clients. But, according to an ILO study (2021), BDS impact is the improvement of profitability and loan repayments and increase in client numbers.

Table 18 REPAYMENT RATES

PERFECT REPAYMENT		
	YES	NO
Before BDS	91%	9%



The client retention percentage is higher after BDS. There are some who may leave the program, due to personal concerns but at some point, they come back. One way client retention increases is because BDP respondents have experienced an improvement in their business incomes after the intervention. With this, they have a higher repayment capability, and default is reduced. The ADEMCOL (2001) study revealed that in BDS, there is improvement in client satisfaction, client base growth, client dropout rates and loan repayments. Eventually, the company benefited from improved client relationships and employee satisfaction. (De Wildt, 2004)

Recommendation

Based on the results of the study, the group is recommending the following to the management:

Current BDS implementation must be improved in terms of its reach and depth. With the positive impact of the interventions, more clients and their families will benefit. The management must put more emphasis in the development of more types of BDS, designed according to the needs of clients and their businesses.

Additional staff must be assigned to respective areas for implementation of the programs. These staff must be trained and coached to be able to deliver quality services to the clients.

ASA's client reach is no doubt an extraordinary achievement, but keeping these clients happy and content with the current services will keep ASA one of the most successful and "top of mind" microfinance organizations in the Philippines.

ASA must continue to implement BDS free of charge. Published literature says BDS must be kept sustainable as it is, but for ASA to be true to its mission of giving the best value of money for the clients and to be a true agent of poverty alleviation, BDS must be made free to all clients who wish to join and implement the learnings in their own businesses.

The income cluster of P10,000-20,000 relates to a critical section of respondents whose income showed little improvement after the intervention. Thus, attention must be given to this cluster to re-invigorate their businesses by offering appropriate BDS coupled with right financing service. This is also a group that has just started doing business or open-and-closed businesses because they are unable to manage competition and lack business skills to continue.

The Philippines being an archipelago is in itself a challenging location to deliver uniform services across its clients. Since businesses located in far-flung areas are the most neglected, a tailored-fit program must be implemented with a full-time BDS trainer.

Documentation must be improved for clients with or without BDS. Client profiling of borrowers who experienced BDS must be done to all branches for analysis and interpretation. This will also help in forecasting the behavior of clients' businesses with respect to implementing financial and non-financial intervention in the organization.

Demand for clients' products will be critical in identifying markets. That is why constant BDS shall be implemented until such time that clients have established their own market with the improved products and services which significantly is embedded in ASA BDS Level III.

A further study is recommended to investigate why the majority of clients who have received BDS still fell in the P1,000-P10,000 income bracket.

This study recommends that the more clients get exposure to BDS, like skills training, product development and other BDS because it serves as excellent bridges to successful businesses for clients in the future. SRPD must continuously improve the BDS, and linkages to other necessary agencies must be formed to benefit the clients for a more sustainable business performance.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the data collected showed that BDS had improved the business and economic situation of respondents. However, existing BDS cannot sustain the improvements of their business due to related circumstances that hindered growth and success of the clients. BDS in ASA must be ingrained in the organization's DNA, in which every client must experience BDS during her membership in ASA. This is consistent with one of the visions of the Foundation, which is to aid the clients in poverty alleviation.

It can also be noted that in an MFI environment, BDS are as important as financial interventions, with the non-financial interventions more focused on the social equity of the clients. In the context of ASA Philippines, the

BDS showed that clients enjoyed being members of the Foundation, as portrayed in the length of membership of those clients. Furthermore, it can be determined that BDS improves the overall status of the family, which in return contributes to the overall status of the community.

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