

# Empowering Communities: The Socio-Economic Contributions of Moncast as a Catalyst for Local Development

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## ABSTRACT

This study examined the socio-economic contributions of the Monkayo College of Arts, Sciences, and Technology (MonCAST) to its local community. As a public higher education institution recognized by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), MonCAST plays an important role in improving access to education, enhancing employment readiness, and supporting local development. Using a qualitative-descriptive research design, data were collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with various stakeholders, including students, alumni, parents, local business owners, and government and cooperative representatives. Findings revealed that MonCAST significantly contributes to three key areas: educational access and upliftment, employment and workforce readiness, and livelihood and economic empowerment. The institution provides scholarships, flexible learning, and skills training, helping learners overcome financial barriers and become job-ready. Community members also described strong engagement through outreach programs, livelihood support, and partnerships that improve family participation and economic conditions. The study further identified contextual factors that affect the success of MonCAST's programs, such as strong partnerships, economic challenges, accessibility issues, and the need for continuous mentoring and follow-up. These findings align with the Triple Helix Model of Innovation, which highlights the collaboration between academe, government, and industry in advancing community development. The study concludes that MonCAST serves as a catalyst for local growth and transformation. Recommendations include expanding access to programs, improving outreach in remote areas, and strengthening stakeholder engagement to sustain long-term benefits.

**Keywords:** MonCAST, community development, higher education, livelihood, employment readiness

## RATIONALE

Higher education institutions (HEIs) play a significant role in the socio-economic development of communities by fostering human capital, creating employment opportunities, and promoting technological advancements (World Bank, 2020; UNESCO, 2021). Colleges and universities are not only centers of learning but also engines of regional growth as they contribute to innovation, entrepreneurship, and improved social well-being (Marginson, 2018). Local colleges, in particular, hold a unique position in addressing community-specific educational and socio-economic needs, often serving as catalysts for sustainable development in rural and underserved areas (Altbach et al., 2019).

As a government-recognized higher education institution through CHED Commission en banc Resolution No. 166-2016, Monkayo College of Arts, Sciences, and Technology (MonCAST) has played a pivotal role in the socio-economic development of Monkayo and neighboring municipalities. With its 3,264 graduates since 2013, 85% employment rate among alumni, and over 5,400 currently enrolled students, MonCAST contributes to the regional workforce's skill development and employment readiness (MonCAST Institutional Report, 2023). Studies have shown that increased access to higher education correlates with higher employment rates and improved living standards in rural areas (Gulbrandsen & Thune, 2022; Pascua & Navarez, 2018).

The college's involvement in community extension projects also underscores its social responsibility. Through 18 adopted community extension programs and 101 partnerships with industry and academic stakeholders, MonCAST actively addresses local socio-economic challenges by providing training and technical assistance (MonCAST Institutional Report, 2023). HEIs that integrate community engagement into their mission are known to foster social capital, enhance civic engagement, and drive grassroots development (Benneworth & Jongbloed, 2010; Taylor & Machado, 2021). These activities strengthen the institution's role as a transformative agent in society.

Furthermore, MonCAST's research outputs, including 254 published research papers in local, national and international journals, contribute to knowledge production and innovation. According to Schomburg and Teichler (2019), HEIs that emphasize research and development are better positioned to address societal challenges and drive economic growth. MonCAST's research initiatives align with global trends that emphasize evidence-based solutions to community-specific problems, which in turn contribute to policy-making and sustainable local development (Gines, 2014; Gulbrandsen & Thune, 2022).

Despite these achievements, the full socio-economic impact of MonCAST as a local college remains underexplored. Understanding the institution's contribution to community development requires a comprehensive assessment of its role in education, employment generation, and community engagement (Benneworth & Jongbloed, 2010; Marginson, 2018). This study aims to fill that gap by evaluating MonCAST's socio-economic impact on the Monkayo community and identifying strategies for further enhancing its contributions. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for policymakers, stakeholders, and educational leaders in maximizing the transformative role of local colleges in society.

## Purpose of the Study

This research sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the key socio-economic contributions of MonCAST that characterize its role as a catalyst for local development in the community?
2. How do community members and stakeholders describe their experiences and interactions with MonCAST's initiatives for socio-economic development?
3. What contextual factors influence the effectiveness of MonCAST's programs in empowering communities and supporting local development?

## METHODOLOGY

This study is qualitative research utilizing a descriptive approach. As explained by Mertler (2014), descriptive research seeks to understand and interpret the current conditions, experiences, or perspectives of individuals within a specific context. This design is appropriate for exploring how the Monkayo College of Arts, Sciences and Technology contributes to the socio-economic development of the community, based on the views and lived experiences of those directly involved or affected.

The respondents of this study are stakeholders of the Monkayo College of Arts, Sciences, and Technology (MonCAST), specifically including students, alumni, members of the business industry, parents, and beneficiaries of the institution's community extension programs.

This study is anchored on the Triple Helix Model of Innovation by Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff (2000). This theory describes the collaborative relationship between academia (universities), industry (businesses), and government as essential for successful innovation. As a higher education institution, MONCAST plays an essential role in this framework by producing a skilled and competent workforce that contributes to local economic growth and innovation.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part presented the discussion of results and reflection of the study. The data presented in this part followed the arrangement set in the Research Questions.

Table 1. Participants of the Study

Participant's Position / Affiliation	Code
TDP Scholar	IDI 1
Working Student	IDI 2
Alumni- OFW	IDI 3
Alumni- Store Manager	IDI 4
Businessman	IDI 5
Parent- Single Mother	IDI 6
Grandfather – Guardian	IDI 7
Farmer –	IDI 8
Street Vendor	IDI 9
Student Leader	FGD 1
Alumni– DepEd Teacher	FGD 2
LGU Employee	FGD 3
Farmers Cooperative Member	FGD 5
Alumni- Employed in MAGRO	FGD 6
Cooperative Employee	FGD 7

The study involved a diverse group of participants representing various sectors of the community who are either direct beneficiaries or stakeholders of MonCAST. Individual interviews (IDIs) were conducted with scholars, working students, alumni working both locally and abroad, small business owners, parents, and informal workers such as farmers and street vendors. Focus group discussions (FGDs) included student leaders, alumni now employed in government agencies like DepEd and MAGRO, local government employees, cooperative members, and representatives from farmer organizations.

RQ 1. What are the key socio-economic contributions of MonCAST that characterize its role as a catalyst for local development in the community?

Based on the results of the interviews addressing the research question, “What are the key socio-economic contributions of MonCAST that characterize its role as a catalyst for local development in the community?”, three key themes emerged. These are: Educational Access and Upliftment, Employment and Workforce Readiness, and Livelihood and Economic Empowerment. These themes highlight the significant contributions of MonCAST to the socio-economic development of the local community by promoting educational access, enhancing workforce readiness, and empowering residents through livelihood initiatives.

**Educational Access and Upliftment.** Based on the responses of the participants, it was revealed that MonCAST significantly expands educational access and uplifts students from economically challenged backgrounds. Through scholarships, flexible learning opportunities, and community-focused programs, the institution allows learners to pursue education without being hindered by financial limitations. More than academic support, the college instills a deep sense of purpose, self-worth, and hope for a better future.

"As a TDP scholar, I was able to pursue my education without placing too much financial pressure on my parents. The assistance I received allowed me to concentrate on my studies and inspired me to aim for a future where I can uplift my family's situation. It gave me a sense of purpose and motivation to succeed." (IDI 1)

"Being a working student is challenging, but I'm thankful that my education at MonCAST allowed me to continue my studies while holding a job outside to support myself. The experience taught me to balance responsibilities and prepared me for real-world demands." (IDI 2)

"The training I received shaped me into a competent teacher and gave me the skills I needed to pass the Licensure Exam and land a job at DepEd. I've also seen how the college supports literacy programs, extending its reach beyond the school to help more people through education." (FGD 2)

"The practical skills and values I learned in MonCAST helped me find work abroad. The training equipped me with the confidence to face challenges in another country, and now I'm able to provide financial support to my family back home." (IDI 3)

The collective experiences of participants highlight MonCAST's vital role in promoting equitable education and social mobility. This is consistent with UNESCO's (2020) assertion that targeted support mechanisms such as scholarships and flexible pathways are crucial for improving access and retention among marginalized learners. Flexible education models that accommodate non-traditional students, such as working individuals, align with Schuetze and Slowey's (2012) advocacy for lifelong and inclusive learning systems. Moreover, MonCAST's contribution to local and global employability reflects the transformative power of higher education, as outlined by Marginson (2016), who emphasizes education's capacity to enable social advancement and labor market success. By strengthening skills development and community engagement, MonCAST embodies the ideals of SDG 4, which promotes inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all (United Nations, 2015).

**Employment and Workforce Readiness.** Participants consistently highlighted how MonCAST prepares students for employment through skill-based training and value formation. The institution equips learners with both technical competencies and workplace discipline, producing graduates who are job-ready and globally competitive. This preparation contributes directly to the local labor market and helps reduce underemployment.

"Graduates of MonCAST that I hired in my store have proven to be dependable and capable. They bring skills and discipline that help my business run smoothly. Having well-prepared employees from local schools is a big help to small business owners like me." (IDI 5)

"The practical skills and values I learned in MonCAST helped me find work abroad. The training equipped me with the confidence to face challenges in another country, and now I'm able to provide financial support to my family back home." (IDI 3)

"The training I received shaped me into a competent teacher and gave me the skills I needed to pass the Licensure Exam and land a job at DepEd." (FGD 2)

These accounts underscore the critical role of higher education in enhancing employability through practical training and personal development. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2021), institutions that align academic offerings with labor market needs play a vital role in reducing skills mismatch and unemployment. The development of both hard and soft skills, including discipline and adaptability, increases graduates' chances of securing and maintaining employment in both local and global contexts (OECD, 2020). Moreover, training programs that lead to professional certification and licensure, as in the case

of teacher education, are strongly associated with improved job placement and career progression (World Bank, 2019). By equipping students with relevant competencies and instilling a strong work ethic, MonCAST contributes meaningfully to workforce development and the economic stability of its graduates.

***Livelihood and Economic Empowerment.*** The responses of participants reveal that MonCAST extends its impact beyond traditional education by empowering local residents through livelihood training. Programs such as cocoa processing and small business management enable individuals to increase income, improve sustainability, and gain entrepreneurial confidence.

"Before attending the cocoa-making training, we only knew how to sell raw beans. The program taught us how to process cocoa into products we can sell at a higher price, which has boosted our income. It gave us the skills to improve our livelihood and gave us hope for better opportunities." (IDI 8)

"As a street vendor, I really appreciated the Ahon-Kariton program. We were taught simple ways to manage our small business and make it more sustainable. The knowledge helped me find ways to increase my daily earnings and better support my family." (IDI 9)

"Graduates of MonCAST that I hired in my store have proven to be dependable and capable. They bring skills and discipline that help my business run smoothly." (IDI 5)

This aligns with the concept of community-based development, where education institutions play a role in economic empowerment through skills training (UNESCO, 2016). Moreover, targeted livelihood interventions have been shown to improve household income and promote inclusive growth in rural areas (ADB, 2020). MonCAST's approach exemplifies how localized, skills-focused programs can uplift individuals and stimulate grassroots development.

RQ 2. How do community members and stakeholders describe their experiences and interactions with MonCAST's initiatives for socio-economic development?

Based on the results of the interviews addressing the research question, "How do community members and stakeholders describe their experiences and interactions with MonCAST's initiatives for socio-economic development?", three key themes emerged. These are: Community and Family Engagement, Capacity Building and Practical Support, and Economic Empowerment and Job-Readiness.

***Strengthens Community and Family Engagement.*** Based on the responses of the participants, it was revealed that MonCAST fosters strong community and family engagement through its outreach programs and inclusive initiatives. The institution not only provides quality education but also extends its reach to the homes and lives of its stakeholders, creating a sense of shared ownership and partnership in local development.

"MonCAST encourages us to take part in outreach and livelihood programs. It's inspiring to witness how the school connects with different sectors and involves us in activities that help improve lives." (FGD 1)

"MonCAST gave my children the chance to have a quality education close to home. They engage families and communities through their outreach and skills development activities." (FGD 2)

"The programs of MonCAST gave my son the education and training he needed for a stable job. They also offered livelihood and character development opportunities." (IDI 6)

"MonCAST invites guardians to participate in community activities and livelihood training, making us feel part of our grandchildren's journey." (IDI 7)

This approach reflects Epstein's (2011) framework on school-family-community partnerships, which highlights the positive impact of collaborative engagement on student and community outcomes. Engaging families and local stakeholders in educational initiatives builds trust, strengthens social networks, and enhances the relevance of school programs (OECD, 2019). MonCAST's inclusive practices contribute not only to educational attainment but also to stronger, more resilient communities.



***Provides Capacity Building and Practical Support.*** The participants also described MonCAST as a reliable partner in capacity building, especially in agriculture, cooperative management, and community planning. The institution delivers practical, relevant training that responds to the direct needs of its stakeholders, helping build local competence and sustainability.

"MonCAST plays a key role in agricultural development. Their trainings and seminars are practical, and they coordinate well with us to support local farmers." (FGD 6)

"Our cooperative benefited from MonCAST's seminars on managing and sustaining a cooperative. The sessions were clear, practical, and easy to apply." (FGD 5)

"We appreciated the professionalism of MonCAST in conducting the feasibility study. The team worked closely with us, listened to our needs, and delivered outputs useful for planning and decision-making." (FGD 3)

This aligns with recent evidence that community-based capacity development enhances local resilience and decision-making. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2021), targeted training interventions rooted in local priorities strengthen institutions and empower stakeholders to implement sustainable practices. Similarly, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2020) highlights that capacity-building must be participatory and adaptive to be effective in dynamic community contexts. MonCAST's model supports these principles by providing accessible, relevant, and collaborative learning opportunities for local development.

***Promotes Economic Empowerment and Job-Readiness.*** Participants acknowledged MonCAST's contribution to economic empowerment by developing graduates who are not only employable but also valuable to local businesses and cooperatives. The training and support offered by the college connect education directly to livelihood and economic improvement.

"MonCAST shaped my management skills. I value how the school produces job-ready graduates who support local businesses." (IDI 4)

"I've worked with MonCAST graduates in our cooperative, and they are well-prepared and responsible. The school's programs connect education with economic improvement." (FGD 7)

"MonCAST gave my children opportunities not just for education but also for stable employment through its programs." (FGD 2)

This reflects the World Economic Forum's (2023) assertion that job readiness is enhanced when institutions blend academic learning with practical experience and industry alignment. Furthermore, the ASEAN TVET Council (2022) emphasizes that technical and vocational education plays a central role in empowering individuals and reducing economic vulnerability, especially in rural communities.

RQ 3. What contextual factors influence the effectiveness of MonCAST's programs in empowering communities and supporting local development?

The results of the interviews addressing the research question, "What contextual factors influence the effectiveness of MonCAST's programs in empowering communities and supporting local development?", four key themes emerged. These are: Partnerships, Collaboration, and Support Systems, Economic and Social Conditions Shape Participation., Accessibility, Inclusion, and Participation, and Readiness for Change and Need for Continuous Support.

***Partnerships, Collaboration, and Support Systems.*** Based on the responses of the participants, it was revealed that the effectiveness of MonCAST's community programs is significantly influenced by its partnerships and collaborative engagements. The strong coordination with local government units (LGUs), agencies, and community stakeholders ensures sustained implementation and shared accountability. The involvement of external actors reinforces the reach and resource availability of institutional initiatives.

"One major factor I've seen is how closely MonCAST coordinates with government offices. Strong partnerships with the LGU help sustain initiatives." (IDI 1)

"Our office worked with MonCAST during a feasibility study. Early involvement of key stakeholders, joint ownership, and openness to feedback contributed to success." (FGD 3)

"The success of the seminars depends on external support from the LGU or agencies. The culture of cooperation among members strengthens results." (FGD 5)

These findings align with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP, 2021), which stresses that multi-stakeholder collaboration strengthens local development programs by promoting inclusive governance and maximizing resource mobilization. Similarly, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2020) highlights that effective school-community-government partnerships improve service delivery and program accountability. MonCAST's strategy exemplifies this synergy, positioning itself not just as an academic institution but as a catalyst for local transformation through strategic collaboration.

***Economic and Social Conditions Shape Participation.*** Participants noted that socio-economic realities directly affect the reach and effectiveness of MonCAST's programs. Financial constraints, unstable economic conditions, and competing responsibilities—especially for working students—can hinder participation and engagement in school or community-based activities.

"The financial situation of students and families affects program participation. Transportation, food, and material costs can be barriers. Scheduling can also conflict with working students' jobs." (IDI 2)

"The business climate in Monkayo influences program success. A stable local economy and active partnerships with businesses create more opportunities for graduates and livelihood programs." (IDI 4)

These findings are supported by the work of Spaul and Taylor (2019), who argue that poverty remains a critical barrier to meaningful participation in education and community development initiatives, especially in rural and under-resourced areas. Similarly, Milner and Lomotey (2021) emphasize that education programs must be responsive to structural inequalities and designed with an awareness of local economic and social dynamics. For MonCAST, addressing these contextual challenges is vital in ensuring equitable access, sustained participation, and program relevance.

***Accessibility, Inclusion, and Participation.*** Accessibility and inclusive participation emerged as crucial contextual factors. Respondents shared that when programs reach remote areas and involve diverse stakeholders—students, families, and barangay officials—they tend to have a greater impact. However, geographical distance and infrastructure limitations can reduce access and participation.

"Programs work best when people participate actively — students, parents, and barangay officials. Shared effort makes initiatives more meaningful." (FGD 1)

"One big factor is accessibility. If programs reach far-flung areas, more people benefit. Distance and poor roads can limit participation." (FGD 2)

These findings align with the work of Aikins and Barret (2020), who emphasize that educational and development initiatives are most effective when they are physically and socially accessible to marginalized populations. Likewise, UNESCO (2021) stresses that inclusivity in program design and delivery is critical for equitable outcomes, particularly in geographically isolated or underserved communities.

***Readiness for Change and Need for Continuous Support.*** Participants emphasized that lasting impact requires more than one-time interventions. The readiness of individuals and groups to adopt new practices, coupled with continued mentoring and follow-up, plays a critical role in program success. Resistance to change and lack of ongoing support were identified as potential barriers.

"Continuous guidance and follow-up strengthen programs. Mentoring and check-ins help people apply skills, preventing programs from becoming one-time events." (IDI 3)

"Effectiveness depends on cooperative members' readiness to adopt new practices. Some are hesitant to change, limiting the benefits." (IDI 8)

"Willingness of vendors to embrace new ideas affects success. Follow-up visits or mentoring could help vendors gain confidence and apply lessons better." (IDI 9)

This is supported by Kotter's (2021) updated change model, which highlights that long-term transformation requires ongoing reinforcement, coaching, and cultural adaptation—not just initial motivation. Additionally, Fullan and Gallagher (2020) argue that change in educational and development contexts is a process, not an event, and that continued relational support increases the likelihood of adoption and sustainability. For institutions like the Monkayo College of Arts, Sciences, and Technology (MonCAST), embedding support mechanisms beyond program completion is vital to ensure lasting impact and community ownership.

## CONCLUSION

This study highlights the important role of the Monkayo College of Arts, Sciences, and Technology (MonCAST) in helping improve the lives of people in its community. Through its programs, MonCAST makes education more accessible, prepares students for work, and supports local livelihood activities. These efforts do not only benefit individuals but also help families and small businesses grow.

MonCAST's success is strengthened by its strong partnerships with local government units, cooperatives, and other organizations. These connections help make its programs more effective and sustainable. However, some challenges remain. Factors such as poverty, distance from school, and people's willingness to accept change can affect how well the programs work. The need for continuous guidance and support after training is also important to make sure people apply what they learn.

## RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to further strengthen the impact of Monkayo College of Arts, Sciences, and Technology (MonCAST) on community development:

*Sustain and Expand Access-Oriented Programs.* MonCAST should continue offering scholarships, flexible learning options, and community outreach programs that support students from low-income backgrounds. Expanding these efforts will help more learners pursue education without financial burden.

*Strengthen Livelihood and Job-Readiness Initiatives.* The college is encouraged to enhance its technical and vocational training programs by aligning them more closely with local labor market needs. Regular consultation with businesses, cooperatives, and alumni can ensure graduates are equipped with skills relevant to employment and entrepreneurship.

*Improve Accessibility in Remote Areas.* To reach more individuals in far-flung communities, MonCAST may consider mobile training units, satellite activities, or partnerships with barangays. This can reduce participation barriers caused by distance and poor infrastructure.

*Enhance Support and Mentoring Systems.* The institution should implement regular follow-up, mentoring, and skills reinforcement activities after program completion. Continuous support will help participants apply what they have learned and increase long-term success.

*Strengthen Stakeholder Partnerships.* Ongoing collaboration with local government units (LGUs), non-government organizations (NGOs), and community leaders should be deepened to sustain programs and share responsibilities. This also ensures that initiatives remain relevant and community-driven.



*Promote Change Readiness and Community Involvement.* MonCAST may invest in awareness campaigns and orientation sessions that prepare individuals and groups for new practices and innovations. Encouraging active participation from families, barangays, and cooperatives will foster a stronger sense of ownership and engagement.

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