

โครงการจากไร้สู่ตลาด (FMR) ใน อดตงาน เคอซอน โครงการพัฒนาสองหน้า

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บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษาชิ้นนี้ชี้ถึงส่วนราชการด้านการพัฒนาจากรัฐบาลญี่ปุ่นและฟิลิปปินส์ ให้ความช่วยเหลือโครงการจากโครงสร้างพื้นฐานจากไร้สู่ตลาดที่ได้รับทุนจากความช่วยเหลือเพื่อการพัฒนาอย่างเป็นทางการ (ODA) ได้อย่างไร ซึ่งโครงการนี้เกิดขึ้นเพื่อลดความยากจน ปฏิรูประบบเกษตรกรรม และเพื่อบรรลุเป้าหมายการพัฒนา

การศึกษานี้ศึกษาแรงกระตุ้น บทบาทความสัมพันธ์ และกระบวนการตลอดจน การบริหารโครงการ และการศึกษานี้ยังวิเคราะห์ว่าโครงการจากไร้สู่ตลาดนี้แก้ไขปัญหาให้ผู้ที่ได้รับผลกระทบจากการปฏิรูปเกษตรกรรมได้อย่างไร จากกรอบแนวคิดเกี่ยวกับ ‘ความปรารถนาที่จะพัฒนา’ โดย ทาเนีย มูเรย์ ลี การวิเคราะห์การวางตำแหน่งแห่ง หนของโครงการ ตลอดจนกระบวนการจัดการในกรอบแนวคิดการปกครองชีวญาณ โดยเสรีนิยมใหม่ (Neoliberal Governmentality) เพื่อเปิดเผยมุมมองในประเด็นที่ โครงการได้ทำไม่สำเร็จ โครงการจากไร้สู่ตลาดไม่สามารถทำให้ชีวิตผู้คนได้รับผลประโยชน์ ในภาพรวมให้ดีขึ้นได้ การศึกษานี้ใช้ข้อมูลจากหน่วยงานภาครัฐฯ แบบสอบถามจาก ออนไลน์ การสัมภาษณ์แบบกึ่งโครงสร้าง และสัมภาษณ์แบบกลุ่ม เพื่อหาแรงกระตุ้นวาท กรรม กระบวนการความคิด และเทคนิคของหน่วยงานภาครัฐทั้งญี่ปุ่นและฟิลิปปินส์ การศึกษา นี้สรุปได้ว่า โครงการนี้มีลักษณะแบบตีสองหน้า กล่าวคือในระดับต้น โครงการกระตุ้นให้ เกิดการเจริญเติบโตทางเศรษฐกิจ ความเข้าใจร่วมกัน และการเอื้อเฟื้อซึ่งกันและกัน แต่เมื่อ วิเคราะห์เชิงลึกแล้วพบว่า การทำงานเชิงตลาดทำให้ผู้เล่นที่ไม่ใช่กลุ่มคนจนเข้ามาแสวงหา ผลประโยชน์อย่างไม่เหมาะสมได้

คำสำคัญ: ฟิลิปปินส์ การปกครองชีวญาณโดยเสรีนิยมใหม่ ความช่วยเหลือเพื่อการพัฒนา อย่างเป็นทางการโดยรัฐบาลญี่ปุ่น โครงการจากไร้สู่ตลาด หน่วยงานความช่วยเหลือญี่ปุ่น หน่วยงานความช่วยเหลือฟิลิปปินส์

Farm-to-Market Road (FMR) in Agdangan, Quezon: A Janus-faced Development Program?

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Abstract

This study demonstrates how Japanese and Filipino aid authorities facilitate a Japan Official Development Assistance (ODA)-funded Farm-to-Market Road (FMR) subproject as a solution aiming to achieve the Philippines' overall poverty reduction, agrarian reform, and social development goals. Specifically, it examines their general motives, roles, interactions, and procedures during the project management process. It also analyzes how the FMR solves agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARBs) issues and challenges. Drawing on Tania Murray Li's "The Will to Improve" framework, the study analyzes how positioning the FMR project management process within the logic of neoliberal governmentality uncovers an exciting perspective on the claim that it failed. The FMR fails when ARBs do not improve their overall wellbeing from this perspective. It utilizes study instruments such as government sources, online questionnaires, semi-structured interview questions, and focus group discussions (FGDs) to determine Japanese and Filipino aid authorities' motives, discourses, rationalities, and techniques. It shows how the FMR is Janus-faced, which is usually defined as sharply contrasting policy aspects and deliberate deceptiveness. On the surface, FMR promotes economic growth, mutual understanding, and reciprocity. However, a critical perspective reveals that its permeation of market logic allowed the non-poor sector to access disproportionate benefits.

Keywords: Philippines, Neoliberal Governmentality, Japan Official Development Assistance, Farm-to-Market Road, Japanese Aid Authorities, Filipino Aid Authorities

Introduction

The farm-to-market road (FMR) is an infrastructure development priority as it gives access to markets for agriculture and smallholders, strengthening the exchange of goods and services. However, the Agdangan Quezon Philippine case failed to help agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARBs) overcome their poverty status. As a result, most ARBs in Agdangan Quezon Province suffer bankruptcy with a meager yearly income of USD 420, struggling to meet their farms' maintenance and input expenses.

ARBs in Agdangan Quezon shared that the Japan-funded FMR is necessary but insufficient to increase income and improve productivity. They shared that it did not directly affect their farm productivity but shifted their income sources to non-farm ones. As the FMR aimed to help them alleviate poverty, the current situation showed that its outcome did not meet its original objectives during the last (7) seven years after its construction. It failed to help them substantially improve their income and productivity. Hence, its inability to help them improve their productivity and income denotes its failure.

Some studies have demonstrated how FMR fails to achieve its intended outcome to improve users' income and productivity. In his study in Nepal, Hanan Jacoby (1998) recommends that although FMR could benefit poor households, it is inadequate to drastically reduce their income inequality as its benefits accrue more to wealthy landowners. Kongen Lyngby (2008) examines that limited evidence supports that FMR impacts agricultural extension services and output. He stipulates that FMR promotes material inequality, with landowners and political elites benefitting from the right-of-way (ROW) compensation payments and suffering the risk of elite capture over the project development process. Aniruddha Dasgupta and Victoria Beard (2009) convey that FMR presents unequal benefits due to elite capture in community-level planning and governance. Lastly, Anton Lucas (2016) shows a power elite capture situation in Sumatra wherein official development assistance (ODA) was rechanneled benefits to village elites, claiming kickbacks and illegal payments exist in a development project. Previous scholars



have discussed how FMR fails to increase income and productivity among poor beneficiaries. However, despite the results, Japanese and Filipino aid authorities constantly include their FMR initiatives to pursue market-oriented agricultural development and a private investment-conducive environment. This study addresses the current research gaps. Generally, it shows how aid authorities' interactions, rationalities, ideologies, and techniques and current economic structure failed poor farmers to take advantage of the FMR opportunities

First, the study uses community-level observations, documents, and FMR experts' narratives to demonstrate how FMR created beneficial relationships among aid authorities and non-poor (i.e., landowners and investors). Second, it contributes a detailed neoliberal governmentality analysis of a Japan-funded FMR during the project management process.

A. Japanese and Filipino Aid Authorities

Japan's proactive lending activities in the Philippines intend to bring development, infrastructural projects, and foreign capital and create local employment. As a result, it provided the Philippines with \$39.4 billion between 1960 and 2018 (Trinidad,2001). The Japanese foreign aid authorities comprised bureaucrats from Japan and International Cooperation Agency Officials (JICA), project consultants from the Japanese private sector representatives, and national politicians who allocated and approved Japan's overall ODA budget. They provide a substantial amount to Philippine agriculture and rural development. They also invested in infrastructures stimulating economic activity and trans-border transport imperative to economic development. They acted as good neighbors and essential participants in Philippine ARBs' agricultural reform activities. Philippine ODA Portfolio Review assessments showed that they supported the Philippine government's agricultural interventions and funded various agrarian reform programs, such as the farmers' distribution and irrigation management system modernization for agricultural productivity.

C. Hypothesis

The FMR presented itself as a form of aid authorities' power to facilitate change among project beneficiaries by redistributing its benefits through market participation. For instance, all landowners, landowner-traders, and landowner-subcontractor may improve their income and economic status at the expense of ARBs by leveraging their asset holdings and power relations to maximize the FMR opportunities. On the other hand, ARBs and other small farmers may fail to increase their income and improve productivity due to the unequal market mechanisms that expose them to oppression, dispossession, and deprivation. For instance, the non-poor sector, such as the traders and subcontractors, may display opportunistic behavior.

The FMR's failure to deliver its objectives, address the real problems, and pay attention to the current scenario may speak of a preset and implicit agenda aligned with the primary goal of market expansion—which conflicts or even skews with the needs of ARBs. However, the predominant structural problems (i.e., unbalanced social structure and unequal concentration of asset holdings and land distribution) were unsolved and had an immense bearing on defining how impacts occur in the ARC.

D. Project Site

The Silangan Maligaya Dayap FMR was built last 2013 under the ARISP III. It is a 5.1-kilometer FMR with a 6.4-kilometer bridge subproject in the Sildakin Arc, Agdangan, Quezon, funded by the Japan Bank for International Cooperation, a subset of JICA. It is part of Japan's comprehensive assistance in contributing to the Philippines' poverty reduction programs by improving ARBs' livelihood and income living in ARCs. Its main objective is to increase ARBs' income by enhancing their productivity and connecting the community to new markets and other development opportunities surrounding the area. In addition, it intended to reduce the travel time and the transportation costs of agriculture products within the locality to improve ARBs' productivity and income, resulting in ARBs' improved productivity, hence increased income.

The chosen project site is in Agdangan Municipality, a 5th-class municipality in Quezon province, southeast of Metro Manila, Philippines. It was chosen because of its ARBs' poverty incidence despite the efficient implementation of land reform measures, with land transfer at 98.71 percent while agricultural leasehold scope at 100 percent. As of 2015, the municipality's population is 12,851, of which most are into prime agricultural activities, such as coconut farming and fishing. Thus, apart from a sufficient timeframe for impacts to manifest, the FMR also presents a standard technology that the government adopts to achieve rural economic growth and poverty reduction agenda. However, it did not alleviate ARBs in poverty, with their double-digit poverty index, despite significant investments due to unaddressed socio-political challenges that hamper their income and productivity.¹

This study focuses on the FMR context of Japanese ODA projects in the Philippines. It uses the FMR project for two reasons. First, it represents a typical Japan ODA project as it belongs to the economic infrastructure sector classification of the third tranche of a 25-year-old Japan ODA-funded ARISP. The ARISP has been one of the Philippine government's interventions and the first Japan ODA loan assistance to poverty reduction and rural development. Second, it also denotes a typical Japanese infrastructure project used by the Philippine authorities to pursue economic development. However, issues and challenges regarding inequality still linger as benefits accrue mainly to the non-poor sector (e.g., landowners, landowner-subcontractors, and traders). Hence, it is high time to scrutinize the process and identify who reaps the short- to long-term benefits.

The units of analysis are the participants' narratives, interactions and project documents. It analyzes the interplay of practices and interactions from project rationalization to implementation and assesses the impact of

¹ Philippine Statistics Authority defines poverty index pertains to the part of families/ individuals with per capita income/expenditure lower than the per capita poverty threshold. As of 2015, its poverty index of 15.2, higher than some of its neighboring provinces.

those developmental governmentalities on the beneficiaries. Moreover, the researcher used narratives to examine how relationships among different institutions and populations have evolved and affected the FMR.

Research Method:

A. Study Instruments

The researcher used combined study instruments such as government sources, online questionnaires, semi-structured interview questions, and focus group discussions (FGDs) to determine Japanese and Filipino aid authorities' motives, discourses, rationalities, and techniques. First, government reports such as Philippine national and local development plans, evaluation reports, Japan ODA Charter and Country Assistance Policy, and other pertinent documents were used to know their ideologies, rationalities, and techniques. The reports show how aid authorities' thinking process reflects and uncovers their rationalities and ideologies. They also analyze quotations from official reports and interpretations of practical texts to study the Philippines-Japan ODA relations. Second, the online questionnaires and online semi-structured interviews with key experts and primary actors were used to know their motives, roles, perceptions, and knowledge in the authorities' interaction in the FMR subproject and to understand the complexity, issues, and challenges of the relation and supplement the documentary analysis. Third, the researcher also used FGDs with various project beneficiaries, especially ARBs, to know their standpoints on the FMR implementation processes and FMR impact on their living conditions and livelihood activities.

B. Study Participants

This study adopted two criteria in selecting target participants. The first criteria are those who took part in the Agrarian Reform Infrastructure Support Program (ARISP) III approval and the Agdangan Quezon's FMR subproject development processes, meetings, and consultations at national and local levels. Second, those who influenced the process, such as the Japanese and Filipino aid authorities. The data collection ran from November 2020 to December 2021,

where participants were selected using purposive sampling methods based on their expertise, qualifications, background, involvement, and availability. The researcher facilitated online questionnaires and interviews among fourteen Filipino aid authority representatives and their four Japanese counterparts who participated in the FMR project management process. Moreover, four face-to-face FGDs were conducted in Agdangan, Quezon, among sixteen ARBs to identify the FMR's impact on them, and two FGDs were done among eight landowners, landowner-subcontractors, and landowner-traders. Eight ordinary citizens (non-farmers) to recognize the difference in access to capital among those in the project sites. Below are the participants' profiles.



Table 1

Participants' Demographic Profile

Nationality	Role	Gender	Age	Participants' Code
Japanese	Japan International Cooperation Agency (Only questionnaire administered)			
Japanese	Head Consultant (from the Private Japanese Consultancy Firm affiliated with ARISP I-III)	Male	80	JCM80
Japanese	Consultant (from the Private Japanese Consultancy Firm affiliated with ARISP I-III)	Male	70	JCM75
Japanese	Consultant (from the Private Japanese Consultancy Firm affiliated with ARISP I-III)	Male	72	JCM72
Japanese	Consultant (from the Private Japanese Consultancy Firm affiliated with ARISP I-III)	Male	72	JCM72a
Filipino	DAR (Administered Questionnaire and Conducted Follow-up online interview)			
Filipino	Former Local Politician	Female	60	FFLPF60
Filipino	Private Sector (Former Bureaucracy)	Female	78	FPF78
Filipino	Private Sector (Former Bureaucracy)	Female	66	FPF66
Filipino	Bureaucracy	Male	55	FBM55
Filipino	Bureaucracy	Female	56	FBF56
Filipino	Private Sector (Former Bureaucracy)	Male	59	FPM59
Filipino	Former Local Politician	Male	65	FFLPM65
Filipino	Private Sector (Former Bureaucracy)	Male	55	FPM55
Filipino	Private Sector (Former Bureaucracy)	Female	71	FPF71
Filipino	Private Sector (Former Bureaucracy)	Female	70	FPF70
Filipino	Private Sector (Former Bureaucracy)	Female	60	FPF60
Filipino	Former Local Politician	Male	64	FFLPM64
Filipino	Private Sector (Former Bureaucracy)	Male	52	FPM52
Filipino	Private Sector (Former Bureaucracy)	Female	61	FPF61
Filipino	Former Local Politician	Male	60	FFLPM60
Canadian	Academe (Informant)	Male	Na	CAMNa
Filipino	Academe (Informant)	Male	64	FAM64
Filipino	Consultant	Male	60	FCM60
Filipino	Contractor(Former Representative of Contractor 1)	Male	66	Fcon1M66

The Japanese research participants were all males who actively participated in all ARISP and the FMR as part of the decision-making and technical team that facilitated the detailed engineering design. One of them started to work in the Philippines in 1981 as a consultant for several agricultural & irrigation development projects of the Philippines under Japan ODA (JICA technical assistant projects, Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund (OECF) yen loan projects, and others) for National Irrigation Authority (NIA), Department of Agriculture (DA), and Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH). He was the head consultant and an irrigation engineer who conceptualized and implemented the ARISP project, the FMR, and the project implementation policy manual conceptualization. He and his three Japanese colleagues worked with their Filipino counterparts to achieve the overall project objectives. They are still employed in the same Japanese consultancy firm looking for possible ODA-funded infrastructure projects. They were interviewed to know their participation in the overall FMR project management process and their collaborations among actors.

On the other hand, Filipino research participants were predominantly male and participated in ARISP III and the actual FMR implementation process. Specifically, due to a lack of project documents, the DAR bureaucrats provided online answers and granted follow-up interviews to provide in-depth responses. Former DAR bureaucrats who led the CPMO were also interviewed to share their experiences and clarify issues and interactions in facilitating the FMR project. It is worth noting that most of them have developed their expertise while working with Japanese consultants. While some became DAR Regional Directors, most became consultants of other multilateral organizations or were even hired as Japanese consultancy firm consultants in the Philippines.²

² Philippine Statistics Authority defines poverty index pertains to the part of families/ individuals with per capita income/expenditure lower than the per capita poverty threshold. As of 2015, its poverty index of 15.2, higher than some of its neighboring provinces.



Filipino consultants from the domestic consultancy firm that facilitated the ARISP III were also interviewed to know their participation and clarify issues regarding consultants' payment gap and rigid reporting system that affected their stint during the FMR management process. In addition, former and current politicians were interviewed to clarify the Local Government Unit's (LGU) participation and the benefits they incurred in the FMR. Moreover, former representatives of contractors were also interviewed to know their interactions and relationships among actors and to clarify the FMR contract's variation order.

Table 2

Project Beneficiaries' Demographic Profile

Village	Role	Gender	Age	Participants' Code
1	Landowner-Subcontractor	Male	57	LM57
2	Landowner- Trader	Female	50	LF50
1	Landowner-Trader	Male	67	LM67
2	Landowner	Male	45	LM45
1	Landowner	Male	47	LM47
2	Landowner	Female	48	LF48
1	Landowner-Trader	Male	65	LM65
2	Landowner	Female	66	LF66
1	Ordinary Citizen(non-farmer)	Female	50	OF50
2	Ordinary Citizen(non-farmer)	Female	59	OF59
1	Ordinary Citizen(non-farmer)	Male	75	OF75
2	Ordinary Citizen(non-farmer)	Male	71	OF71
1	Ordinary Citizen(non-farmer)	Male	54	OM54
2	Ordinary Citizen(non-farmer)	Male	55	OM55
1	Ordinary Citizen(non-farmer)	Female	70	OF70
2	Ordinary Citizen(non-farmer)	Female	65	OF65
1	ARB	Male	75	AM75
1	ARB	Female	66	AF66
1	ARB	Male	66	AM66
1	ARB	Male	70	AM70
2	ARB	Male	40	AM40
2	ARB	Female	80	AF80
2	ARB	Male	65	AM65
2	ARB	Male	73	AM73
1	ARB	Male	59	AM59
2	ARB	Female	61	AF61
1	ARB	Female	63	AF63,
2	ARB	Female	69	AF69

1	ARB	Female	68	AF68
2	ARB	Female	71	AF71
1	ARB	Female	72	AF72
2	ARB	Female	74	AF74

The project beneficiaries were divided into landowners, ARBs, and ordinary citizens. Half of them are female and are active farmers from the project site. They were interviewed to know their participation in the FMR management process and how they were affected by the FMR.

C. Data analysis:

Governmentality is the first level of governance (Turner, 2020). It is the overarching mechanism from which governance flows (Dean, 2010). It is also the way governors interact with those they govern (Muller, 2019).

Tania Murray Li's (2007) *The Will to Improve* framework refers to persistent determination to improve people's conditions and conducts (Kumar, 2021). Her framework is suitable for study in several ways. It helps analyze the FMR project management process and its impact on project beneficiaries by demonstrating how the FMR is entangled with formal and informal practices and knowing the difference between FMR's plan and what it has accomplished. According to Foucault, as Tania Murray Li narrated, practices are fragments of reality. They "induce a whole series of effects in the real, crystallize into institutions and act as grids for the perception and evaluation of things (Li, 2007). Lastly, it scrutinizes how FMR reduced socio-political issues in mere technical and apolitical terms and failed to consider core political-economic questions. Using Tanya Murray Li's *Will to Improve* framework in analyzing governmentality will aid authorities' decision-making approach, management style, and culture process to improve ARBs' productivity and income. Second, it details how aid authorities introduce capitalist accumulation, put ARBs in the market economy, view them as deficient, and need development to partake in the capitalist preference of competition, accumulation, and progress. Lastly, it draws attention to the FMR's peculiarities, effects, and the inevitable gap between what is desired and what is accomplished.



The framework describes Japanese and Filipino aid authorities' motives, discourses, rationalities, and techniques to facilitate the FMR subproject. It shows that FMR is insufficient to increase ARBs' income and productivity as their usufructuary rights need to be considered. It also demonstrates that non-poor access to resources and capital allows them to exploit the FMR opportunities. Therefore, it is a valuable tool to scrutinize how an FMR subproject fails ARBs from pursuing poverty reduction, agrarian reform, and social development.

D. Scope of the research

The focus of the study is the 5-kilometer with a 35-linear meter bridge FMR subproject in Agdangan, Quezon. It was completed in 2014 and situated in a 5th class municipality in Quezon province southeast of Metro Manila, Philippines. It is a Japan-funded subproject under the Agrarian Reform Infrastructure Support Program (ARISP) III intended to contribute to the Philippines' poverty reduction programs by enhancing local ARBs' productivity. Specifically, it aimed to reduce agriculture products' travel time and transportation costs to improve ARBs' productivity and income. The FMR in Agdangan, Quezon, presents how a typical FMR infrastructure failed to help ARBs overcome poverty. It also represents a typical Japan-funded project as it belongs to the economic infrastructure sector classification of the third phase of a 25-year-old Japan ODA-funded ARISP. Furthermore, the ARISP was the first demand-driven and integrated agricultural development ODA project facilitated by the Philippine government and the first Japan ODA loan assistance for poverty reduction and rural development. Lastly, it also denotes Japanese and Filipino how aid authorities pursue economic development.

Research Results:

FMR Initiation Stage:

The Japanese consultancy firms are proactive in the Philippines' agriculture development. It works with various Philippine government agencies for JICA's agriculture development projects. Its consultants depend upon the ODA process and are primarily technical assistance personnel worldwide from

one assignment to another. It influenced ODA projects through research and consultancy in recipient countries. For instance, the ARISP preliminary phase showed how the Japanese private sector made it happen. A Japanese participant from the study shared his official response via an online questionnaire:

I had a chance to discuss (about) the new project for supporting the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) with the DAR Secretary (Mr.) Ernest D. Garilao. The Secretary introduced Mr. Jose Mari B. Ponce (who was) the Director of DAR Project Development Management Staff (PDMS).

He was in a flexible working arrangement with DAR representatives. He developed a close professional relationship while working on the ARISP details during the JICA and NEDA's project appraisal process. Relatedly, DAR enthusiastically supported the Japanese consultant's offer to strengthen DAR's land redistribution program. As DAR's main thrust was to distribute agricultural lands, it also recognizes the provision of necessary support services at the same pace as land redistribution. The Japanese consultant mentioned that he also helped prepare the ARISP III document. Driven by mutual understanding, NEDA-ICC and JICA facilitated the loan agreement on December 18, 2007, under the 27th Yen Loan Package, thus sustaining joint agricultural projects for the small-scale comprehensive agricultural and rural development subprojects targeting the whole country. The Japanese foreign aid authorities use ODA to secure projects for the Japanese private sector, which is structurally included in their policymaking activities, even if modalities change over time. The FMR subproject may not be possible, to begin with, without the Japanese private sector. For instance, JICA's request-based loan procedure created an incentive for the Nippon Koei to plant requests in the DAR and allowed JICA to continue a case-by-case decision-making process.

Although the Philippine ODA Act of 1996 prioritizes Filipinos over foreign suppliers in procuring services and goods. No local consultancy firm contested the Nippon Koei's involvement. Instead, Nippon Koei subcontracted Filipino firms and created connections between DAR and JICA. He also shared that the FMR aimed to help ARBs improve productivity and combat



poverty by increasing the overall real household income by 30 percent, from PhP58,331 (\$ 1,214) to PhP75,830 (\$ 1,579)³. Specifically, he provided more comprehensive copies of FMR documents than the DAR representatives.

This stage was characterized by contingent convergence. It shows a flexible structure wherein the recipient agrees with the donor's objectives and processes. For instance, DAR followed Japan's project processes entirely and adapted institutional arrangements that impacted FMR's everyday politics and implementation options. It utilized Japanese consultants' project management guidelines. It enabled FMR to align with the Japanese' flexible project cycle management system, which manifested Japanese counterparts' easy access to FMR's project implementation systems.

On the other hand, this shows how Japan could easily dictate to recipients what the project implementation system should be and create knowledge instrumental to its objectives and procedures, undermining the subproject ownership. Aside from the issue of its indirect encroachment, this observation is consistent with the claim that decision-makers set conditions to arrange things to preserve the system as people following their self-interest will do as they ought to (Scott, 1998).

The relationship formed, interactions, deep knowledge, and complete access to the ARISP processes exhibited the Japanese private sector's proactive participation in Japanese ODA. It is consistent with David Arase's (1994) claim that the Japanese private sector and its bureaucracy worked together to ensure Japan's overall national (business and economic) interest in ODA projects.

FMR Selection and Prioritization

The Filipino bureaucrats and politicians had significant interactions during this stage. For example, this stage commenced when the Agdangan local politicians expressed their desire to get an ARISP III package in 2009. They saw the FMR as a significant intervention in facilitating the

³ Converted using the Annual Philippine Peso Per US Dollar Rate End-of-Period (1 US Dollar= 48.036 PhP) as of 2020

municipality's agricultural base. First, it was meant to create economic opportunities for ARBs by enhancing Agdangan's supply chain. It could facilitate efficient delivery of primary agricultural output surpluses, such as rice, corn, coconuts, processed oil, sugar, soap, and other coconut products, from the farm to local and regional market sites and food processing centers. One of the local politicians involved in the FMR request shared via FGD:

FMR is helpful for the community, especially for the traders and coconut farmers. They need the road to transport their agricultural products, such as coconuts, rice, and corn, towards their business clients. Therefore, we did everything to get DAR's approval for this FMR.

Second, it was intended to improve Agdangan's farm-level productivity by reducing transportation costs of input and output prices and delivery time. Overall, a reduction in transportation costs will encourage ARBs to pursue efficient crop production and diversification, generate market activity, increase competition among input suppliers, and promote the commercialization of their farm products upon harvest. On the other hand, DAR agreed to fund it partially and prepared both Indicative and Sectoral Development Plans through the ARISP III Provincial Project Management Office (PPMO). One former DAR employee shared that DAR benefitted from the project as it helped to achieve its mandate of implementing support services to ARBs and harnessing their growth potential.

Aside from the market-oriented reasons, the political context back then also heavily influenced the decision about the FMR construction. To begin with, most of the local politicians who requested the subproject belonged to the prevailing political party of the president back then. As the FMR was requested a year before the elections, the president may have exercised reciprocity or clientelism to the Agdangan's local politicians. Therefore, those local politicians who requested the FMR have used that opportunity to gain disproportionate benefits to strengthen their sociopolitical capital within the community. Former politician participants shared that they benefitted politically from the project. One participant shared via FGD:



I was confident that we would secure the FMR because it was a promise by the Philippine president. Since our municipality was included in her regional agricultural development for resource-based cluster areas program, it was easy to lobby for this project. Aside from that, since most of us (local politicians in the municipality) belong to her political party, we used our political narrative that the FMR would be useful in the upcoming elections. It was true enough! The farmers were happy, and most of us won for reelection. I hate to say this, but it is always political will and affiliation that would truly matter if we wanted to get these infrastructures at the national level.

The ARISP III's DAR Steering Committee (DAR-SC) comprises representatives from DAR, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), and the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) representatives. The DAR-SC followed the project management guidelines as its governance structure, which manifested liberal governmentality. For instance, DAR is the overall implementer of the project, while FMR decisions only entail concurrence from JICA. The decision-making process was guided by the economic and administrative goals in the project management guidelines. DAR was responsible for project approvals based on the area's development plans, while JICA was responsible for reviewing and concurring FMR plans based on the necessity and viability indicators from the project management guidelines perspective. Other sub-implementing agencies, such as DPWH, reported to DAR and were responsible for implementing the subproject from the bidding process to its turnover. Accordingly, it approved and classified Agdangan as a high development priority using the selection criteria in ARISP III implementation guidelines.

The Japanese and Filipino aid authorities' interactions, roles, and procedures present their liberal ideology and market-oriented rationality in facilitating the FMR. Their "will to improve framework" aligns with the World Bank policy of rural development (1975) that stipulates that FMR is a significant component of rural development in stimulating local growth and helping integrate the rural economy into the economy. They rationalize

FMR as a viable solution in achieving the Philippine overall development goals of poverty reduction, agrarian reform, and social development.

Consequently, they perpetuated local agriculture aimed to be conducive to all market actors, such as ARBs (as a supplier) and local businesses (as consumers), making FMR an image of progress, modernity, and development (Menga, 2018). Using Mitchell Dean's (2010) work, it can be inferred that they had a neoliberal culture that led to neoliberal governmentality. Their behavioral and judgment norms were focused on preparing both local indicative and sectoral development plans to transform ARBs' situation economically. They implemented mechanisms that governmentalize power relations under their patronage while demonstrating their high-modernist views and pursuing their economic and political interests (Ferguson, 1991). Culture influenced governmentality. Weber & Hsee (2000) shared that culture influences decision-making processes via behavioral norms and choices.

FMR Implementation Stage

The actual FMR implementation process showed how governmentality created cohesion among actors. The project management guidelines allowed all actors to work smoothly while pursuing each other's interests. For instance, along with subcontracted Filipino consultants, the Japanese undertook the design phase of the FMR's road and bridge components while DAR approved the design and implementation processes. DPWH facilitated the pre-engineering, construction, and implementation while the Local Government Unit (LGU) coordinated the planning and local consultations. These actors collaborated using the defined scope of work, cost-sharing arrangements, and implementation scheme.

Japanese consultant ensured FMR implementation process alignment with the project management guidelines. He gave his suggestions while DAR decided on the final implementation. For instance, though he wanted to provide the best materials, such as a more expensive Portland Concrete Cement Pavement (PCCP) for FMR, DAR still used gravel in most



FMR parts due to a limited budget. With the Japanese consultant having technical expertise while DAR has decision-making power, this interaction highlighted their reciprocity on power resources within formal institutions.

Moreover, he visited the project site whenever necessary. He visited the FMR twice, in October 2013 for a pre-construction meeting and in March 2015 for a site inspection. In addition, he had a formal meeting among DAR, DPWH, LGU, beneficiaries, and the contractor related to the FMR's design modifications, which entailed increased contract duration, price escalation, and back and front commitment fees for the ARISP III loan. As a result, he was immersed in FMR's construction activities and aware of what the FMR was expected to achieve. In addition, a former DAR regional staff had a chance to work with him as she cared for him during fieldwork. She shared that he was flexible and ensured that the FMR processes followed the project management guidelines.

JICA ensured a smooth FMR implementation process based on loan agreement provisions, and the project implementation guidelines monitored the FMR and facilitated the fund disbursements. However, it did not have an active role during this stage and relied heavily on DAR and Japanese consultants as the conduit of information. Though it did not visit the site during construction, its representatives were still updated due to the reporting protocols underscored in the project implementation guidelines. On the one hand, DAR had to submit the quarterly progress report to JICA while the Japanese consultant had official/unofficial meetings to report essential topics about the FMR implementation.

The bureaucracy, such as DAR and DPWH, ensured actual FMR construction. DAR led the FMR implementation and exercised overall administration, planning, control, management, and supervision to develop a harmonious relationship with other FMR actors (ARISP III Project Implementation Manual, n.d.). On the other hand, DPWH selected, worked, and supervised the contractors, assessed FMR implementation status, resolved operational issues at its level, and took actions to solve FMR implementation

problems. In addition, DAR worked with the Japanese consultant and JICA to ensure FMR alignment with the approved guidelines. DAR decentralized the FMR implementation to LGU to provide customized technical support to a specific project in a specific area using the local government code and the ARISP III project implementation guidelines. For instance, the LGU assisted in preparing the pre-engineering studies consisting of feasibility studies (F/S), detailed design (DD), and Program of Works (POW). It rarely worked with Japanese and Filipino consultants but collaborated with DAR and DPWH according to an agreed implementation scheme. A former DPWH participant shared that local politicians benefitted from the FMR construction due to their access to the planning and governance process and affiliations with his former colleagues and the contractor. It shows how local politicians demonstrate constant negotiation and circumstantial coalition-building within the FMR subproject.

Filipino private construction firms ensured FMR alignment with the approved budget contract and schedule. The two construction firms, M.G. Salazar Construction Corporation and R.A. Mendiola Construction & Developer, participated in a joint venture for the FMR construction subject to the Philippine procurement law. Due to their experiences, knowledge of local conditions, and familiarity with Filipino workers, domestic construction firms relied on technical aspects during FMR implementation. As a result, the Philippine construction firm Contractor 1, with a joint venture with Contractor 2, bagged the Agdangan FMR subproject. A DPWH representative shared that both companies were chosen because of their better Net Financial Contracting Capacity (NFCC) and Constructor's Performance Evaluation System (CPES) compared to their competitors, which were essential requirements in the Philippines procurement law (V. Saplala, personal communication, August 13, 2021). On the other hand, one former DPWH employee shared that these firms were affiliated with a local politician as they had previous engagements. However, it is worth noting that the FMR contractor still won the bidding despite pending court cases (Lalu, 2019). Despite the court cases,



the construction companies were still allowed to participate in the FMR bidding and other big-ticket infrastructure projects. It is worth noting that these FMR contractors were top DPWH contractors from July 2016-December 2017, with Contractor 1 occupying the top 120th contractor of DPWH, while Contractor 2 is in 340th place, getting 784,291,736.05 PHP (\$16.3M) and 235,478,217.39 PHP (\$4.9M) of the total value awarded DPWH contracts, respectively (PCIJ, 2017).⁴

Lastly, project beneficiaries, particularly landowners and investors in coconut-related businesses, maximize the assumed FMR opportunities by exploring economic cooperation within and outside the community. Agdangan, Quezon, is included in the Bondoc Peninsula Agrarian Reform Community (ARC) Connectivity Cluster Plan for coconut production; hence, most significant investors and landowners in the area are into coconut-related businesses and developed indirect business relations with Japanese firms. Some were already in talks with prospective Japanese firms during FMR construction to expand their business opportunities. For instance, one of Agdangan's local Filipino business exporters, JNJ Oil Industries, created a coconut hub facility to strengthen the coconut industry within the locality after FMR construction. As early as FMR construction, several investors in Agdangan recognized their Japanese clients to be a significant part of their business portfolio once FMR was operationalized. Some also shared the opportunities of doing business with the Japanese as they are keen on sharing their agricultural technology with local Filipino enterprises. They even mentioned that some Japanese businesses were eager to meet due to FMR construction.

All actors created an aligned working relationship despite the FMRs' issues regarding increased contract duration, price escalation, and back and front commitment fees for the ARISP III loan. The FMR implementation

⁴ Income calculated using the Annual Philippine Peso Per US Dollar Rate End-of-Period 1 US Dollar= 48.036 PhP) of Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas as of 2020.

demonstrated how Japanese and Filipino aid authorities worked and complemented each other. It aligns with John Jay, Alexander Hamilton, and James Madison's (2003) description of how actors play a crucial role in delivering benefits detrimental to minority groups and the poor. On the other hand, project beneficiaries, particularly investors and landowners, clearly understood the FMR opportunities and took advantage of the setup. The actors' interactions, roles, and procedures in the FMR implementation stage demonstrated liberal governmentality. Governmentality influenced the democratic culture in the decision-making process, pursuing their objectives and goals while considering the relationship with other actors, reflecting consistent and stable working relationships among various actors. The project management guidelines, characterized by rational and economic principles, become its rules of engagement that define how actors should work together and what decisions should be made. This scenario is consistent with Ralf Muller, Li Zhai, and Anyu Wang's (2017) study that exhibits liberal governmentality as a governance structure on which the decision-making process is delegated to project implementers and decisions are based on economic rationale.

This stage supports the observation that JICA and the Japanese consultant exercised the passive power stage. Though the Japanese consultant had enough basis to push to use PCCP, he chose to act nominally and let DAR decide. As a result, he had minimal interference in the FMR dynamics unless his interests were disregarded. He also developed a good working relationship and had less friction among actors. Moreover, JICA was also passive, allowing DAR to conduct overall supervision. However, it was not done in the spirit of participation. Instead, the primary purpose was to co-opt DAR in the Japanese-created project management guidelines.

Situation in 2022

The FMR led to greater value chain incomes. Actual site-visitation showed that it created more economic activities as traders and other



businesses were more than willing to transact with these barangays due to their accessibility. Hence, significant business profits were generated. Specifically, the FMR connected the community to the nearest market and production areas. The production areas/farms were accessible to the existing and prospective markets. As a result, the community's ARC level of development assessment (ALDA) increased from level 1 to level 3 in 2019, denoting its growth. However, ARBs rarely participate in business engagements. Based on project site observation, ARBs usually have minimal investments, high reliance on family labor, inadequate access to information, lack of support services, and no direct contact with significant market players. Some ARBs usually sell their produce immediately after harvest within their neighborhood at low prices due to low quality. On the other hand, landowners would subcontract ARBs to ensure their quota requirement during the high-demand season. Hence, it shows that the FMR site benefitted a minimal number of ARBs and small landless farmers.

The FMR Impact on ARBs

This part briefly describes how FMR, as a governmental technology, impacts project beneficiaries' social and economic conditions and tangible examples of how they benefitted or even disadvantaged. Using Tania Murray Li's (2007) *The Will to Improve* framework, which is based on the Foucauldian concept of governmentality, this part details how the FMR was deployed and scrutinises its impacts through outcome indicators to grasp how power is lived, produced, and contested. It also examines the FMR's capital formation processes to produce current conditions and identify the inevitable gap between what it attempted and what it accomplished and its persistence in its shortcomings and failures.

All ARB research participants in Agdangan Quezon are active farmers. They are engaging with multiple-output markets (i.e., short-term crops and coconut markets) because of the dual role of crops for consumption and market sales. ARBs produce vegetables, corn, and coconut as sources



of income, regardless of their level of market integration. Corn is usually intercropped with coconuts and remains a staple food and a significant livestock feed. Vegetables serve as an additional source of income, while coconut is the primary source of income and the leading exporting agricultural commodity in the area. Some have alternative livelihoods as a babysitter and a faith healer. Their yearly per capita household income ranges from PhP 10,000 (\$208)⁵ to 80,000 (\$1,665), averaging PhP 37 555 (\$781), while their land sizes range from 1 to 3 hectares, averaging 1.95 hectares per capita.

All ARB participants' average yield per cropping season is insufficient to address their needs. They recognize an improvement in the average yield per cropping season (ton/ha) by 20- 30 percent. Some ARBs admitted that the FMR made them pursue cash crop cultivation to earn an average additional annual income of PhP 19,000 (\$395) to PhP 23,500 (\$489) per hectare. However, they still could not feel increased income. For instance, though their production increased, the selling prices were unchanged due to lowball offers from landowners/traders and traders citing excessive supply; AM65 shared, "the traders control prices, and we cannot do about it (contract price) since we have an existing contract with them" (FGD, August 23, 2021). Nevertheless, cash crops enabled them to survive, continue their relations, and earn money for everyday needs.

Moreover, the scenario shows that the FMR enable them to accommodate cash crops to increase income sources, a manifestation that their income depends on the traders or subcontractor controlling the prices. Specifically, cash crop cultivation subjected them to commodity price fluctuations, leaving them unable to diversify to other income sources. This observation supports Li's (2019) statement that cash crops are used to improve farmers' economic status. Like landowners, ARBs saw it as a market

⁵ Converted using the Annual Philippine Peso Per US Dollar Rate End-of-Period (1 US Dollar= 48.036 PhP) as of 2020



opportunity and adopted those cash crops simultaneously without a further push from the aid authorities. However, it subjected them to inequitable market relations and high transaction costs, leaving most of them destitute.

The ARBs have expressed various critiques of the FMR and its insufficiency in addressing their current challenges. They complain about how aid authorities failed to deliver on their promises to improve poverty status and promote economic growth within the ARC. However, they did not challenge the structure that gave aid authorities the power to intervene in their ARCs. For instance, they complain that farm inputs, such as fertilizers and pesticides, are becoming expensive due to a lack of or minimal technical assistance from the government. The costs range from PhP 12,000 (\$250) to 17,000 (\$353)/cropping, offsetting the preliminary gains of cash crop cultivation. They even shared that those agricultural extension agents visit the municipal office and landowners more frequently, expecting that information and support services to cascade to them and other small farmers within the ARC. However, the cascading of information and support services towards them barely happened. They felt that they did not receive enough support services from the government or non-government organizations due to their antagonistic stance towards a local politician. For instance, AM70, an ARB, shared that he had to access informal credit from a landowner charging exorbitant interest, to wit:

I always borrow money from a landowner-subcontractor to plant my crops. I will just pay it once I sell all my crops. The lender charges high interest, but I cannot do anything because he is the closest that can lend me that much. Unfortunately, no government programs provide credit support services. (FGD, August 25, 2021).

Thus, though their produce yield improved, it was not commensurate with the overall price increases in farm inputs and essential commodities (e.g., coffee, cooking oil and salt, detergents) for daily sustenance. In addition, AF69, an ARB, shared that DAR's provision of support services in the ARC is weak and sometimes skewed towards the relatively rich ones, to wit:

Besides FMR, we need credit facilities and accessible farm inputs. We also need cropping skills and agricultural education. DAR could visit us in the ARC so our children or we could study different seed varieties and cropping skills that we need to grow our produce. I always try to use new seed varieties, but I still need to figure out the process. I wish someone could help me with the appropriate process. I wish someone could teach us while setting up a model village to pilot-test the seed varieties. That is good! (FGD, August 26, 2021).

On the other hand, information scarcity of adaptable crop varieties is primarily due to weak extension service delivery of the government, relative to the numerous unfamiliar crop varieties released onto the market without adequate agricultural education on the types and economic benefits of improved varieties to improve their adoption decisions (Langyintuo & Setimela, 2007). Therefore, AF63, an ARB, suggested the LGU institute mechanisms that could improve the farm-related livelihood of its constituents, to wit:

The LGU focused on requesting FMR maintenance funding and should also request other resources to improve agricultural support service here in Agdangan. They should not merely follow the policies or approaches being advocated by DAR and PCA (Philippine Coconut Authority). Instead, they should create innovative programs, facilitate the creation and strengthening of ARB associations and cooperatives, and promote the development of the coconut, vegetables, and livestock industries. All these should be given along with FMR to overcome poverty. Hence, the government simultaneously provides the FMR, agricultural support services, and livelihood activities at the national and local levels. Yes, we already have a walkway, and we can walk quickly, but when it comes to farming, it does not help. Only traders benefit from it. (FGD, August 26, 2021).

ARBs expressed a deep-rooted and exemplified critique whose earlier livelihoods had been challenged by the FMR, notably those who



directly suffered from asset access asymmetry, low market information, and low extension services. They translated unmet promises into demands for accountability, as AF61, an ARB, shared:

They involved us in the commercialization process through FMR. However, they exposed us to the landowner-subcontractor and traders who are greedy for profit. The government should have supported us to compete with them initially, but they neglected us. Like they said, oh, there is an FMR; your lives will get better. But it is not the case. The road is rough and uneven [laughs]. Honestly, we just need to participate without traders to distribute our marketable surplus. During the pandemic, there were no traders. Many vegetables became rotten. We could have given these away for free. At present, we really rely on traders and landowner-subcontractor. (FGD, August 25, 2021).

The claim shows that aid authorities' FMR deficiencies are more readily identified and contested than the usual exploitation when production is arranged along capitalist lines. It also shows that ARBs made sense of their situation on their own terms without attempting to change the structure and failing to collaborate and disassemble the current relations. However, their claim is consistent with the idea that asset holdings such as social, political, financial, and human capital and farm implements are crucial for marketable surplus production and can help alleviate production and market shocks. (Jayne et al., 2010). On the other hand, it also demonstrates the FMR as a misguided and insufficient intervention due to a lack of support services. It presents aid authorities' systematic infrastructure bias toward fostering agriculture development. ARBs claim that aid authorities failed to accompany support that would maximize the FMR opportunities and address imbalances due to ARBs' lack of asset holding. They even argued that aid authorities included them in the market agenda, further exacerbating the problem that FMR tried to resolve.

All ARBs recognized that their net annual farm income (pesos/year/household) increased but did not commensurate with the increasing

prices of overall production costs. Like previous participants, most of them could not share the percentage increase explicitly. Therefore, some cultivate vegetables, corn, and short-term subsistence crops such as bananas, cassava, and other root crops for subsistence needs. AM73, an ARB, shared their need for crop and livestock-specific intervention:

New variety seeds are expensive, but it would be great if DAR could provide them. Then, once we can afford it, we will purchase it ourselves. I hope they provide us with assistance so that we can bountifully farm. They should include financial assistance so we can develop hog-raising here in ARC. We can benefit and utilize the FMR if we earn the same as the traders. The [government] should provide overall assistance, not just a rough and uneven FMR. [laugh] (FGD, August 25, 2021)

As coconut farming is not labor-intensive, others were into alternative income generation strategies outside agriculture (e.g., babysitting and faith healing services). However, they all agreed to save money by veering away from house renovation and reducing meal intakes from three to two per day. In this way, they could, at best, satisfy the basic survival needs of their family and improve their basic food security. However, they could not increase their asset holdings or production assets. AM40, an ARB, mentioned that he bought a motorcycle not because his income improved but because he needed it to pursue alternative jobs other than farming, to wit:

I am compelled to buy a motorcycle because it is the most efficient transportation for other job opportunities outside Agdangan while waiting for the harvest season. However, to be honest, farming alone will not help us buy our everyday needs. We still must get jobs outside the community. FMR did not help, but I had to deal with it. (FGD, August 23, 2021)

His claim shows that FMR expanded his income source to non-farm activities but did not affect his farm productivity. However, on the other hand, this shows a possible long-term problem since FMR can cause agricultural diminution and ARBs' further dependency on the monetary system in return for short-term and higher incomes if they do not mind its source. Moreover,



since ARBs can choose the job they want, they may pursue jobs in the industrial and services sector, as the agriculture sector offers little financial compensation compared to others.

All ARBs recognized that travel time was reduced by 40 minutes due to FMR. As a result, it became quicker for them to transact their farm products. Before, it was so burdensome for them to transport their produce because they did it through manual hauling, wherein they had to travel on foot, and the road was muddy and difficult, especially during the rainy season. It is easier for them to go from one place to another because of the FMR and motorized vehicles such as tricycles. However, most of them shared that travel time reduction did not affect their overall income. They further shared that only those who owned a vehicle would feel the impact of travel time reduction. They would continue to walk down the FMR no matter how rough the surface and their products would unlikely be sufficient to pay for transport by others in trucks. This scenario shows a symptom of ‘uneven development’ (Bebbington, 2004; Smith, 2008). For instance, only those with vehicles could get the FMR benefits. For instance, landowner-subcontractor or traders could carry their products to the local market or food processing centers and benefit from the FMR. On the other hand, ARBs have to hire transportation and shell out money for transportation costs or negotiate with traders or subcontractors who own the delivery vehicles, making them susceptible to lowballers, which is inequitable in the first place.

FMR, the aid authorities’ Will to Improve, was futile in helping ARBs obtain better prices and expand the reach for their products. Although ARBs recognized transportation cost reduction of PhP 50 (\$1), only one ARB claimed to have felt its impact, claiming that going from one place to another has become cheaper, while most of them expressed that though FMR reduced transportation costs as shared by their traders and rented horse-rider, farm input costs increased, offsetting the gains presented by the former. For example, AF80, an ARB, shared that the buyer of her products is the one who would go to her farm, so she does not need to spend on

the fare for transporting her produce. However, she revealed that the same buyer gave lowball offers. Furthermore, she shared that she still has debt and an existing supply agreement when asked why she pursued selling her products to the trader.

On the other hand, some ARBs recognized that FMR reduced transportation costs but offset the gains due to the high-interest rates from informal creditors. For example, AM59, an ARB, shared that his subcontractor gives credit and inputs provision but puts a 20 percent interest payable in a year, to wit:

My landowner-subcontractor saved on transportation costs. Since we do not have a vehicle, I did not experience that convenience. I think the trader pities us that when transportations costs are low, they give us some incentive. However, I could not accept that the interest rate for loans that informal creditors give us is pegged at 20 percent. It's really steep. It will take time to pay off (FGD, August 26, 2021).

This situation led ARBs to share unnoticeable differences in selling their products before or after the FMR construction. Hence, this indiscernible difference could be attributed to the changes in trade position and entire social structure where ARBs are often committed to selling their crops back to their debtors as part of their supply agreement. As a result, ARBs are chronically indebted to the same traders and have little to no chance to maneuver in deciding whom they sell to and at what price.

Most ARBs cannot buy their transportation. Remarkably, only those who own transportation or could buy horses and other vehicles could benefit from the FMR benefits. AM66, an ARB, emphasized that they need financial support to enhance their livelihood activities apart from FMR provision. He also mentioned that this would create multiplier effects as he could hire other poor farmworkers to get his farm going. They also mentioned that free plant seedlings would also be helpful. His father also planned to create a mini fishpond within the ARC for an additional income. In addition, some ARBs could not reap the FMR benefits due to low resources



and even sold their lots to the landowner-traders. For instance, some ARBs decided to sell their lands due to their tax deficiencies, while others sold them to other landowners for only PhP 16,000 (\$ 333) per hectare, significantly lower than the market price (i.e., the buyer paid the total land cost, real estate tax, and government fees and the PHP 16,000 pocket money for ARBs while illegally leasing the land). This scenario was illegal, but banks were used as accomplices to enable ARBs to sell their lands legitimately and are aligned with Li's (2001) observation on the existence of "capitalism from below" on which Indonesian highlanders who have switched to commercial crops have displaced subsistence production and became landless and jobless. In this study, some ARBs have been displaced over time as landowner-traders and subcontractors whose financial resources and connections enable them to take advantage of opportunities, withstand market adversities, and take over ARBs' land. However, it is worth noting that displacement has not occurred through obviously coercive means but voluntary, constant negotiation, and piecemeal. Surprisingly, no one challenged the land ownership and ARC concept; contra Polanyi (2001), ARBs did not dispute land commodification, which allowed landowners who had prospered to illegally accumulate land from those who were struggling to make ends meet. Using the concept of governmentality, FMR presents itself as a mechanism displacing ARBs from livelihoods and resources. However, the transformation, with its damaging effects on their livelihoods, is apparently because of voluntary and individual transactions.

This study provides an example of Li's (2007) claim that farmers are not necessarily interested in structural change but in conveying their right to a modest life, as seen in their relationship with the dominant group through an implied social contract that subtly mediates and articulates their needs. They seemed to want some government intervention, as long as it was benign and perceived to be beneficial. Many ARBs saw the need for an FMR to create profit and access appropriate support services from aid authorities. They were not anti-government but merely wanted to get aligned

and adequate support services and be recognized as a productive member of society. AM37, an ARB, shared that FMR did not affect his overall status, to wit:

Just like other ARBs, FMR is nothing to me. It is there, so I must live with it. It did not give substantial profit to my farm but enabled landowners, traders, and investors to create business profits at the expense of ARBs. The rich became prosperous because of the FMR, while the poor became poorer. It should have been done along with other support services, such as credit facilities for ARBs. (FGD, August 25, 2021).

Moreover, it also aligns with the concept of everyday resistance (Scott, 1990). On the outside, most ARBs seemed to accept FMR and tried to live peacefully but with certain apprehensions that the non-poor sector would generally maximize FMR benefits. However, such appearances are slightly contrary to what they feel. For instance, the results of observations and FGDs show that ARBs' submissions are intertwined in their subjectivities: while in language, some show outrage and apathy to the FMR, and most of them demonstrate its insufficiency to help them, in action, they still choose to use it and follow aid authorities' conventional norms and rules and continue their market participation. During FGDs, they easily express FMR's deficiency and disbenefits while displaying compromise, talking to local aid authorities and participating in market opportunities. Unlike other resistance, theirs is typically hidden, occurs in unconventional places and ways, and is not politically articulated, ingenious, and disguised in nature. They tried to fight back using the so-called "weapons of the weak." However, it did not displace the structural foundation of these inequitable scenarios.

Aid authorities' Will to Improve FMR failed to achieve its primary objective of helping ARBs overcome their poverty status. For instance, it failed to help ARBs and other small farmers within the project site increase their income and improve productivity due to the unequal distributive consequences of market-led growth. Its failure to deliver its objectives, address the real problems, and pay attention to the current scenario may speak of a preset and implicit agenda aligned with the primary goal of market



expansion—which conflicts or even skews with the needs of the intended beneficiaries. The predominant structural problems (i.e., unbalanced social structure and unequal concentration of asset holdings and land distribution) were unsolved and had an immense bearing on defining how impacts occur in the ARC.

Nevertheless, recognizing how assets are distributed is essential in understanding how benefits accrue and planning mitigation and complementary measures to enable those lacking assets to benefit from any planned investment. For instance, the non-poor sector’s inclination to productivity, efficiency, and optimal FMR objectives could exacerbate their capture due to their vast array of available resources. Simultaneously, some ARBs lack the resources and capacity to supply big companies, rely on the former, and enter unjust contractual arrangements.

Most ARBs supply produce at a lower market price. Specifically, they continue to offer lower prices per kilo than the prevailing market rate due to landowner-traders’ assertiveness in getting discounted prices for bulk orders. Comparatively, market-led growth’s transaction costs (e.g., monthly land amortization, farm operation costs, and family’s daily sustenance) hampered them in maximizing the FMR while helping the non-poor sector pursue their business interests. On the other hand, while the aid authorities provide ARBs’ de jure political power, the current institutional framework provides the non-poor sector’s de facto sociopolitical power to exercise their opportunistic behavior.

This study shows scenarios of critiques of “technology” generated by those who directly experience the FMR effects in the name of their wellbeing. For instance, it shows wherein ARBs questioned and scrutinized aid authorities’ discourse by exploring the interplay between the latter’s practices in the FMR management process. It also demonstrates how ARBs, who have been FMR’s target, developed their critical realization of FMR’s insufficiency and analysis of their societal problems but lack the will to confront the authorities.

The FMR rendered socio-economic and political issues into technical ones and adjusted its indicators to portray beneficial results. Consequently, it facilitated social and economic relations among project beneficiaries and became a space of economic relationships through which bonds facilitate individual settlements to microcultures of values and meanings. For instance, most ARBs started to transact with the non-poor sector (e.g., landowner-subcontractor and landowner-traders) despite lacking formal agreements/contracts. However, on the other hand, FMR demonstrated capitalist expansion while its project beneficiaries experienced dispossession. Notably, it produced negative impacts among ARBs by disproportionately supporting the non-poor sector and enabling them to increase their asset holdings and improve their poverty and economic status at the expense of ARBs. Notably, it subjected the latter to the former's inequitable market mechanisms, exposing them to stories of oppression, dispossession, and deprivation. For instance, the non-poor sector, such as the traders and subcontractors, displayed opportunistic behavior, demonstrated by weighing losses, price-fixing, and using English contracts even if it is incomprehensible to other parties. This situation persists because ARBs fear that the non-poor sector would not get their products and instead deal with other flexible small farmers since it would be easy for them to do so as the ARC became accessible to traders with big pickup trucks.

Discussion and Conclusion:

This study demonstrated aid authorities' neoliberal governmentality in facilitating FMR to improve ARBs' productivity and income. First, they see problems in terms of technical and economic solutions by framing poverty as a result of low productivity due to inadequate infrastructure. They highlighted the persistent quality of development as an anti-politics machine wherein they focused on processes and calculable interventions and transformed political questions of resources into technical ones responsive to the infrastructure development intervention.

Second, they situated ARBs into the market economy and oriented them with capitalist accumulation and progress standards to improve productivity. FMR created market opportunities to address poverty through trade engagement and possible capital flows between ARBs, traders, and subcontractors within the ARC. This scenario demonstrates Li's (2007) "the Will to Improve" framework because it illustrates how aid authorities claim to know how project beneficiaries should live and decide what is best for them and what they need.

Moreover, this study revealed how aid authorities' FMR is Janus-faced. This scenario pertains to contrasting policy aspects and deliberate deceptiveness. This means that, on the surface, FMR promotes economic growth, mutual understanding, and reciprocity. However, a critical perspective reveals that its permeation of market logic allowed the non-poor sector to access disproportionate benefits.

On the surface, it promotes economic growth, mutual understanding, and reciprocity. However, a critical perspective reveals that its permeation of market logic allowed the non-poor sector to access disproportionate benefits. It failed ARBs and disregarded their socio-economic complexity. Consequently, due to their neoliberal governmentality ideology, aid authorities demonstrated their lack of situational awareness of the FMR's sociopolitical nature when they failed to determine its impact on ARBs and identify the appropriate capital needed to capture its opportunities. Therefore, although they succeeded in modifying ARBs' conduct towards market and accumulation and agricultural production activities, they still need to facilitate radical changes in property regimes and create activities to help ARBs promote their rights, get sufficient capital, and correct the skewed land distribution.

Suggestions

The government should address the barriers that hinder ARBs from improving productivity and income, accessing their agricultural programs, and finding alternatives to development discourse to address the wide variations within the agriculture sector. For instance, DAR should deal with this ambiguity in similar future programs; program goals and targeting guidelines must be clarified and communicated with project beneficiaries, especially those marginalized, so they understand their benefits and privileges. Some landowners and investors engage in unethical pricing by giving lowball offers to undercut prices, which not only cheats ARBs out of their meager cash resources but permanently damages loyalty over time.

Though allowing local politicians to interfere in the FMR provision enables DAR to identify the needs of the project beneficiaries at a relatively low cost, it also allows the FMR to suffer from elite capture, where those with social connections and resources obtain a disproportionate share of the benefits. For example, based on online interviews, though DAR explicitly targets the beneficiaries, relatively well-off individuals, such as landowners and investors with preliminary capital and resources, captured the primary FMR benefits. Moreover, some of the FMR processes allow local politicians to access benefits, consistent with the idea of elite capture in community-based programs.

Appropriate government programs and especially the proper market incentives could thus assure a sequence of improvements with poor farmers catching up. In addition, it should push for development policies with equity objectives for the lagging groups, such as ARBs. Finally, the possibilities for catching up could be realized by providing credit facilities and extension programs that cater to their needs rather than bypassing them. Rural poverty's economic and political considerations are far more complex and intertwined. What appears to be a simple "infrastructure-enhances-agricultural-productivity-and economic growth" formula must be taken with caution in viewing agrarian reform interventions as it could not be done by simply providing physical infrastructure.



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