

Social Construction of Vulnerability amidst Crisis Situations and Neoliberal Reforms: The Case of Smallholder Rice Farmers in Lumban, Laguna, Philippines



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ABSTRACT. This article examines how Filipino rice farmers experience vulnerability in the face of persistent and emergent crises coupled with the challenges induced by the neoliberal transformation of the country's agricultural sector. Using the case study approach, eight smallholder rice farmers from Lumban, Laguna, were purposely interviewed, and their narratives were thematically analyzed. Recurrent themes revealed that although the participants viewed risks induced by crises as "normal" aspects of rice farming systems, they primarily attributed the intensification of their vulnerability toward risks to the enduring systemic issues that have been affecting the dynamics of their rice farming operations even prior to, and during the occurrences of crisis events. Furthermore, the smallholder rice farmers were found to be resource-limited and socially disadvantaged due to long-standing concerns associated with the neoliberal policies imposed by the government. This article argues that increased public sector involvement is imperative rather than shifting support away from the farmers.

1.0. Introduction

Crisis situations present major challenges to agricultural communities, particularly rice farming, in the Philippines (Israel & Briones, 2013). Moreover, agricultural practice in the country has undergone a radical transformation since the market liberalization of the Philippine economy in the 1980s, following the intensive implementation of neoliberal restructuring in agricultural policy (Bello, 2009). In the context of the Philippines, crisis situations and the neoliberalization process are thought to not exist independently from one another but rather intersect and intertwine (Della Faille, 2015). As a result of these two mutually reinforcing forces, many agricultural workers in the Philippines, most of whom are smallholder farmers, continue to face novel situations that have given rise to issues and concerns at multiple levels.

Underscoring the intrinsic susceptibility of the country to crises is its current experience with the COVID-19 pandemic. Rigid quarantine measures imposed to curb the spread of the disease have entailed several effects on the population, including the suspension of economic activities

for non-essential sectors, prohibition of public transportation, movement restrictions, and strict physical distancing (World Bank, 2020). As if one humanitarian crisis was not enough, successive typhoons wreaked havoc while the country was still reeling from the impacts of the pandemic. The cumulative effect of these storms, coupled with the impacts of the pandemic crisis, has been tremendously destructive (Rocha et al., 2021). The devastating effects of these intertwining crises have been most felt in the sector of agriculture, which is at the forefront of responding to public health needs and ensuring food security for the nation. Rice farmers persistently face numerous risks associated with agriculture due to the unpredictable nature of the agriculture sector. Moreover, the crisis experience among rice farmers can be uneven since the sector of agriculture in the Philippines is characterized as heterogeneous, highly differentiated, and riddled with inequality (Graham et al., 2004). Thus, agricultural workers, typically smallholder rice farmers, who have less adaptive capacity to risk bear the brunt of these crises more than any other social group.

However, aside from the exposure to crises, having limited resources and differential access to social and economic services among rice farmers, primarily attributed to neoliberal

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restructuring policies, likewise positions them at a disadvantage. Essentially, neoliberal policies are enforced by the state to increase agricultural productivity and production, boost agricultural exports as a basis for national economic growth, improve farmers' incomes, and ensure food security, particularly rice self-sufficiency (Graham et al., 2004). Clapp and Moseley (2020) noted that neoliberal restructuring of agriculture is manifested in the following ways: growing dependence on food importation, increased specialization and competition for export markets, removal of state subsidies on agricultural inputs, increasing influence of agricultural trading firms, growth of contract-farming arrangements among smallholder farmers, and weakened land rights for the majority of the marginalized food producers. However, it is also credited for further exacerbating the effects of crises and reducing the capacity of individuals to cope and respond to risks. The rampant deregulation, marketization, and privatization of the economy substantially reduce the coping capacities of agricultural communities to the adverse impacts of crises (Structural Adjustment Participatory Review International Network [SAPRIN], 2004). Thus, structural barriers induced by neoliberal capitalist policies of industrialization and deregulation heighten their sensitivity to risks and weaken the ability of agricultural workers to bounce back from such events (Della Faille, 2015).

Contemporary sociological analysis of crisis and risks generally views many crisis phenomena (e.g., natural and man-made disasters) as socially constructed and produced (Tierney, 2019). Essentially, social constructionism argues that individuals know and understand the world through concepts they create and produce. This approach posits that if not all, of what individuals

take for reality has been historically produced in complex social interactions (Sun & Faas, 2018). Studies likewise suggest that the public nowadays tends to view crisis situations and their adverse ramifications as the result of structural and institutional failures rather than attributing the emergence of these phenomena to inevitable accidents, divine forces, or natural extremes (Tierney, 2019). The social constructivist approach clarifies crisis phenomena because it underscores how the structures of society, including the economic and political arrangements, contribute to increasing societies' vulnerability to crises and risks (Wisner et al., 2004).

With these in mind, this article sought to understand the underlying reasons behind the predicaments faced by smallholder Filipino rice farmers. The central objective of this study is to explore the social construction of vulnerability among smallholder rice farmers in the country faced with numerous risks and uncertainties. To be more focused, these specific research questions were asked: To what extent have rice farmers been affected by current crises, specifically the pandemic and typhoons? and how have existing neoliberal responses shaped the present crisis experience among smallholder rice farmers?

2.0. Methodology

This case study was conducted in Concepcion, one of the sixteen *barangays* comprising the municipality of Lumban, Laguna. The *barangay* possesses certain geographical and socio-economic characteristics that make it a suitable research area. Firstly, despite being predominantly rural, where rice is the primary agricultural crop, it is also situated in a rapidly industrializing province. As a result, features of urbanization (i.e., commercialization and



Figure 1. Location map of Lumban, Laguna

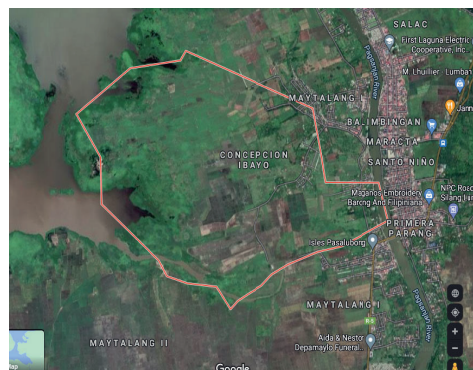


Figure 2. Research study area (Google, 2022)

population growth) seem to spill over in the area. Secondly, the topographical location of the *barangay* plays a crucial role in the prevalence of natural crises, particularly typhoons. The farmlands in Concepcion are adjacent to the Pagsanjan-Lumban River, which originates from the Sierra Madre Mountains and drains to the Laguna de Bay, making the rice fields that dotted the area significantly prone to typhoon-related disasters such as flooding and crop damage. Lastly, no established irrigation canals feed water to the rice fields. Almost all the rice farmers in Concepcion utilize well water to irrigate their crops since rain-fed irrigation is not sustainable due to erratic weather patterns. However, groundwater extraction necessitates using shallow tube wells or water pumps that are diesel-powered. This poses a major financial burden on the farmers since diesel fuel is expensive, prompting them to spend huge amounts to irrigate their lands, especially during the dry season.

The participants were purposely selected based on the following considerations: (a) they must be smallholder rice farmers, and (b) they must be rice farming lessees. Firstly, the size of the landholding was considered in this study. Studies have shown that smallholder farmers, compared to capital-intensive landowners, are more vulnerable to the adverse ramifications of natural disasters and the neoliberal restructuring in agriculture (Lasco et al., 2011; Huddell, 2010). Secondly, the nature of agricultural land occupancy is also considered. Due to the failure to attain a genuine land reform, most cultivated lands in the Philippines remain in the control of large corporations and the landed elite (Elvinia, 2011; Portera & Hila, 2020). Leasehold rice farmers are found to be highly at risk and vulnerable to financial and economic shocks due to the increasing rental rates coupled with the increasing costs of agricultural production and low-income generation (Wright & Labiste, 2018). The president of the farmers' association served as the key informant and acted as an intermediary between the researcher and the participants. In total, eight smallholder farmers from *Barangay* Concepcion, whose ages range from 35 to 78 years old and who have farming experience of between 13 to 40 years, participated in the study.

The results were gathered through in-depth interviews and field observation. The interview guide contains questions that explore the smallholder rice farmers' experiences of various agricultural risks brought by crisis situations, specifically the pandemic and typhoons, as well as questions about the implications of

neoliberal policies and how these reforms affected their adaptive capacities. The recorded interviews were examined using the data analysis procedure proposed by Lichtman (2013), which includes creating and revisiting initial codes; developing and modifying the list of central ideas; moving from codes to themes/concepts; theory generation. After extracting the core concept/category, a theoretical model was generated. Meanwhile, to establish the credibility of the research findings, prolonged engagement (through field visits) and triangulation (by means of presenting the emergent themes to the key informant and subsequently relayed to the other rice farmer participants to accommodate further comments and suggestions) were employed. As a supplement to the interviews, the key informant accompanied the researcher to the rice fields in the *barangay* for field observation which, at that time, were mostly submerged in floodwaters after the devastation of Typhoon Ulysses. The visit to the rice field areas was important to the study because it helped the researcher understand the farmers' behaviors, needs, and social relations in their environment. Through the field visits, the researcher was able to capture interesting insights, including the lack of appropriate agricultural infrastructure in the area, the extent of the typhoon damage, other non-farm and off-farm activities of the rice farmers, and their general day-to-day way of life, that transcend the verbal interpretations of the participants of their situations. Likewise, a thick description was done to ensure the transferability of the findings and an audit trail to maintain dependability and confirmability. Lastly, the researcher exercised reflexivity by being aware of his preconceived notions and biases, remained objective during the interviews, and did not influence participants' reactions to the questions asked.

For ethical considerations, informed consent was given and discussed with the participants prior to the personal interviews. The form included the objectives of the study and the expected extent of participation of the rice farmers. The researcher also assured confidentiality among the participants; pseudonyms were used to maintain their anonymity. Aside from securing informed consent, the researcher likewise observed sensitivity in asking the interview questions. There was an acknowledgment that the participants had the right to terminate their participation should any part of the interview make them feel uncomfortable. Furthermore, minimum health and safety protocols, such as wearing face masks and face shields and

maintaining physical distancing, were strictly followed throughout the interviews.

3.0. Results

The themes that emerged from the narratives of the smallholder rice farmers include the following: Rice farmers' experiences related to the pandemic, Experience of typhoons as a great threat; Normalization of crisis situations; and Neoliberalism and the social construction of rice farmers' vulnerability.

Rice farmers' experiences related to the pandemic

Despite the quarantine restrictions imposed by the local government during the height of the strict lockdown in the province, the physical mobility of the farmers within their community was generally unaffected. As one of the participants mentioned:

"We're not significantly affected. We're not prohibited when we have to buy something [related to farming]. The impacts were not as substantial as those who are working in offices" (Participant 2, personal interview, November 27, 2020).

This is because rice farmers are considered "essential workers" by the local government and are allowed to freely conduct and continue with their work. This is in accordance with the resolution released by the Inter-Agency Taskforce for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF) declaring that industries and workers involved in agriculture are allowed to operate and work for the duration of the community quarantine (IATF, 2021). Moreover, even during the strict lockdown, the *barangay* chairman permitted traders and buyers to access their community as long as they could present quarantine or travel passes. Since rice traders could visit their area without rigid restrictions, the supply chain of agricultural produce was not entirely disrupted. Although rice farming activities in the area -from pre-harvest to post-harvest- were largely uninterrupted, the rice farmers were still required to comply with the necessary health protocols (such as the observance of physical distancing and wearing of face masks) as well as the use of travel passes especially when purchasing agricultural inputs outside of the *barangay*.

Despite the absence of mobility barriers to agricultural operations, the rice farmers still noted

certain challenges, albeit to a lesser extent. The farmers mentioned that they had encountered difficulties in the access of farm equipment that came from distant municipalities. One of the participants shared his experience on this:

"The effect [of the pandemic] on us would be when our rented harvester from another town was put on hold and was not allowed to be transported. Thus, we had to wait for it to come. There were some [equipment] that arrived, especially from towns that were not placed in a lockdown" (Participant 7, personal interview, November 27, 2020).

This poses a challenge to rice farmers because most rely only on rented farm machinery for agricultural operations. Although farm equipment (e.g., harvester and hand tractor) provided by the municipal government are present and accessible in their community, the participants claimed that these are not enough, especially when farmers are working simultaneously, prompting them to still rent from neighboring municipalities.

Experience of typhoons as a great threat

More than any other crisis, typhoons are considered the most dreaded natural crisis among the rice farmers in Concepcion. In recent years, the participants observed the occurrence of more destructive typhoons that bring massive damage to their agricultural production systems. As one farmer put it,

"The typhoons these days are getting stronger and also getting more frequent, unlike before." (Participant 8, personal interview, November 28, 2020).

The experiences of the rice farmer participants with more destructive typhoons demonstrate the glaring reality of the climate crisis in the country (Holden, 2018). Meanwhile, another participant lamented,

"It is really the typhoon calamity that affects us the most. There is not much that can be done about it once it strikes" (Participant 5, personal interview, November 28, 2020).

Furthermore, the participants asserted that their rice farming community is inherently

vulnerable to the impacts of typhoons because their planting area is low-lying and situated near Laguna Lake. Thus, the rice fields in the area are highly susceptible and prone to intense flooding, which usually takes months to subside. These conditions ultimately bring uncertainty and anxiety among the smallholder rice farmers in Concepcion.

These circumstances, in turn, affect the decision of the rice farmers whether to continue with rice planting during typhoon season or not. One of the farmers shared,

"Here during the rainy season, many farmers would rather not plant rice [to prevent losses caused by typhoons]. If you're just starting out, it's fine because you still haven't incurred that much expenses" (Participant 7, personal interview, November 27, 2020).

The participants also complained that despite the detrimental effects of the typhoon on their agricultural activities and the economic costs it entails, they rarely receive relief or assistance from the government. Thus, they feel that the state often neglects them; they even compare their situation to other sectors affected by natural disasters, such as households and industries, which they believe receive preferential treatment in times of crisis. One participant confessed his feeling of being neglected during the interview:

"We [farmers hit by calamities] did not receive aid from the government, but those people whose houses were damaged received relief assistance. We didn't get any support although our rice fields were also devastated. But we're no longer thinking about not receiving support, for as long as our houses are spared, we can manage" (Participant 1, personal interview, November 26, 2020).

Normalization of crisis situations

The rice farmers in Concepcion generally view crisis situations, especially the pandemic and typhoons, as unavoidable aspects of a farmer's way of life. As agrarian communities across the country grapple with more intense and pervasive disasters and risks, the perception of the rice farmers toward crisis situations consequently changed over time. They described crises as external forces that bring unwanted outcomes but are essentially inevitable and uncontrollable. Due to their repeated exposure and experience

of these crises, the rice farmers gradually learned to accept their situation despite the negative implications associated with these risks, such as the instability in the price of agricultural outputs resulting in income losses to farmers. This is particularly evident in the response of one of the participants:

"There is nothing you can do about it because it's a pandemic and the climate. Nobody also wants it [the typhoons] to happen" (Participant 2, personal interview, November 27, 2020).

Furthermore, participants considered farming a work that inherently involves risk-taking decisions. Hence, rice farmers believe that agriculture-related risks induced by crises must be accepted as normal and frequent life experiences. Engagement in this sector is seen as a form of gambling, a decision the farmers must consciously take despite their knowledge and awareness that it is highly uncertain and unpredictable work.

"It is also like gambling. Sometimes you lose, sometimes you win" (Participant 4, personal interview, November 27, 2020).

"It is really like gambling. If you got lucky, then okay. [Sometimes you] will suffer bad luck, just like what happened to my palay harvest last year, it was only breakeven. There could be times wherein the earnings can be good, and sometimes the opposite" (Participant 3, personal interview, November 26, 2020).

Some rice farmers also expressed that recurring experiences of crises taught them to reframe their thoughts and perceive stressful situations more optimistically. They believe that allowing themselves to be overwhelmed by negative thoughts related to matters beyond their physical capacity to change will only lead to anxiety and stress that are essentially counterproductive. One participant, for example, shared in his interview that repeated experiences of crisis in the past helped him to develop a more positive emotional response and better cognitive appraisal:

"I do not think about that anymore. I am not the only one who experiences it. It would be unfortunate if I am the only one

who got affected, right? So even if I lost a lot, I just thought that I was not alone. If you are going to dwell on it, you would really feel the full extent of the impact. I just said, just do not let me die. It is hard to scare me now. I am no longer afraid of crises" (Participant 7, personal interview, November 27, 2020).

Neoliberalism and the social construction of rice farmers' vulnerability

When asked about the greatest problem they currently face, the rice farmers mentioned neither the effects of the pandemic nor the typhoon. They were troubled about the volatility of rice prices in the market – a long-standing concern among rice farmers even before the pandemic. The rice farmers emphasized that economic problems, such as financial and market risks, were already in existence even prior to or during crisis situations. The rice farmers attributed them to the following reasons: insecurity in land tenure resulting in the dependence on contract farming, unhampered rice importation, inadequate capital, rising costs of farm inputs, and poor investment in irrigation. All these reasons are unintended outcomes of the neoliberal restructuring of the agriculture sector that favors strong private property rights, inexpensive foreign commodities, and reduced public spending to promote greater interference in the private sector.

Since the farmers do not own the land that they till, it became a common practice to engage in contractual arrangements in farming. Contract farming, or the pre-harvest agreement between farmers and buyers (IBON Foundation, 2002), is crucial to raise much-needed capital to sustain agricultural production. One of the participants described how lack of land ownership reduces farmer's capacity to face economic risks brought by crisis situations:

"Another major concern is that the land is not our own. If we own the land, we probably would not stop farming. Because we just are just renting, when the landowner sells it, we can't do anything there" (Participant 2, personal interview, November 27, 2020).

However, this scheme puts them at the mercy of palay traders or middlemen. Their engagement in contract farming also lays bare its disadvantageous implications in the dynamics of agriculture in their community. According to the farmers, these usurious intermediaries can

essentially manipulate rice prices in the market. A participant related:

"The farmer is really at a disadvantage [referring to the vale system]. The farmer is obligated to the buyer due to debt of gratitude. I used to be engaged in that system, but now I realized that it oppresses the farmer" (Participant 1, personal interview, November 26, 2020).

Furthermore, the contract-farming system exacerbates the impacts of typhoons. Based on the farmers' experience, the price of rice in the market tends to go down during the typhoon season because persistent rainfall affects the quality of the rice grains. Traders typically prefer well-dried grains, while wet ones fetch lower market prices. As a result, the rice farmers had no choice but to sell their produce at low prices. One farmer expressed his thoughts regarding the decreasing output price of rice in the market:

"You can do nothing about it. If your palay is priced, for example, thirteen pesos, when you bargain and ask for a higher rate, sometimes they [the trader] will leave you. That's all there is to it" (Participant 3, personal interview, November 26, 2020).

Meanwhile, due to the removal of state controls on agriculture-related commodities, the prices of agricultural inputs, such as seeds, fertilizers, etc., also increase drastically. The participants identified the rising costs of agricultural inputs as one of the culprits behind the difficulties many rice farmers are experiencing, especially in crisis situations.

"The increase in the price of fertilizers, seeds, etc. There have been problems before, but it is getting worse now because there was a pandemic and then the typhoon came one after another" (Participant 8, personal interview, November 28, 2020).

"That's really the main problem here, it needs to be irrigated. Crude oil is expensive, fertilizer is also expensive! The sale of our rice is cheap, but the fertilizer we use is expensive. How else will the rice farmers make money? Even before the pandemic came, farmers were already suffering" (Participant 3,

personal interview, November 26, 2020).

Furthermore, the influx of huge quantities of imported cheap rice because of extensive importation causes the farm gate price of domestic rice to plummet. Narratives of the farmers' experiences of the pandemic crisis reveal the close link between rice importation and fluctuation in rice prices. In 2019, the Philippine government passed the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL), which seeks to address food security concerns in the country by removing the quantitative restrictions on rice imports resulting in the influx of huge quantities of cheap foreign rice (Ranada, 2019). In a study conducted by Balié et al. (2021), they found that although Filipino household consumers benefited from the RTL in the form of reduced rice prices in the market, the rice farmers, particularly non-competitive rice growers, who are net sellers are negatively impacted by the said reform. The farmers confessed that the temporary suspension of rice importation by the Duterte administration during the height of the lockdown (a consequence of the strict controls implemented by neighboring rice exporting countries) had resulted in a significant increase in the farm gate price of locally produced rice. One participant admitted that the pandemic crisis, to some extent, has worked to their advantage:

"When they halted the rice importation, the market price of palay increased even if there was a pandemic. We said among ourselves, "That is all it takes to increase the price of rice! Somehow it worked in our favor because the price of palay increased" (Participant 2, personal interview, November 27, 2020).

Another participant had this to say about the implications of the RTL:

"For me, the Rice Tariffication Law should be abolished. It's a huge burden for the farmers. The former [system] must be restored. Because it doesn't alleviate the plight of the farmers either. Farmers are only suffering even more" (Participant 6, personal interview, November 26, 2020).

These factors ultimately force many farmers into debt bondage, thus perpetuating the vicious cycle of poverty among them. The majority of

rice farmers use borrowed money as capital to finance their farming operations. Because these consecutive natural disasters destroyed the crops shortly before harvesting, many families could not complete the planting cycle and repay their debts. As one participant recounted:

"A lot of farmers are buried in debts. Some farmers do not even have rice to eat because they had to sell everything just to pay off their debts. Even if they compute their earnings, it will still not be enough. That is why other farmers stopped farming, they already succumbed to their debts" (Participant 7, personal interview, November 27, 2020).

One farmer shared that as long as there is a stable source of capital among farmers, they will be able to weather through the adverse effects of crises—the pandemic or typhoons.

"It's the capital indeed! It is really the capital that makes it difficult [for us]. The other problems, it seems, are common to a farmer. The foremost problem is the financial capital. When there is capital, [farming] life is fine. You have nothing to worry about" (Participant 5, personal interview, November 28, 2020).

4.0. Discussion

Emphasizing the perspectives and voices of the smallholder rice farmers, this study explored the uncertainties that characterize small-scale rice farming in the country as a result of the emergence of crisis situations and the changing role of the public and private sectors due to the implementation of neoliberal development policies in agriculture in the production and expansion of rice farmers' vulnerability. By and large, crisis situations, specifically the pandemic and typhoons, are seen and regarded by smallholder rice farmers as intrinsic and inevitable aspects of their agricultural life. Numerous studies stressed the embeddedness of risks caused by crisis situations in the sector of agriculture due to its inherent variability and unpredictability (Komarek et al., 2020; Aditto et al., 2012; Cervantes-Godoy et al., 2013). The participants viewed rice farming as a highly uncertain kind of work that increases their susceptibility to shocks (e.g., socio-economic and geographical characteristics of the area) which they have learned to accept as beyond their capacity to change or alter. Furthermore,

due to their recurring experience and repeated exposure to crisis events, rice farmers have learned to normalize such conditions. A previous study by Sorensen et al. (2008) likewise noted this phenomenon of “risk normalization” among farmers. They found that those with more routine risk exposures display a more optimistic outlook towards crisis conditions than those who did not.

It is worth noting, however, that the participants tend to gravitate towards their typhoon experience more than their pandemic experience when talking about their crisis experience. This tendency among the participants to relate crisis situations in the context of their typhoon experiences confirms the findings of other studies that risk perception is largely based on the subjective belief of the farmers about what risk can be considered more detrimental (Eitzinger et al., 2018). This is not to say that the pandemic outbreak has had no considerable adverse impact on rice farming communities in general. However, as far as the rice farmers in Concepcion are concerned, the impacts of the typhoon on their farming

operations are perceived to be more detrimental. Although perception in itself is not reality, for the rice farmer participants who are perceiving the phenomena, that is their reality.

In addition, the community, just like the rest of the country, is presently facing the outcomes of structural adjustment policies in the agriculture sector, specifically the prevalence of contract farming arrangements, constant increase in agricultural expenditures, the unbridled importation of cheap foreign rice, and the reduction of state support. The interlocking exposure and experience of crises and neoliberal restructuring produce various risks that rice farmers must contend with. In particular, economic problems are the greatest challenges faced by rice farmers. These economic problems constitute financial and market risks, such as the instability in agricultural input costs and output prices and the lack of sufficient capital. Further examination of the narratives of the participants suggests that these financial and economic risks cannot be explicitly assumed as mere by-products of crisis situations, but rather these

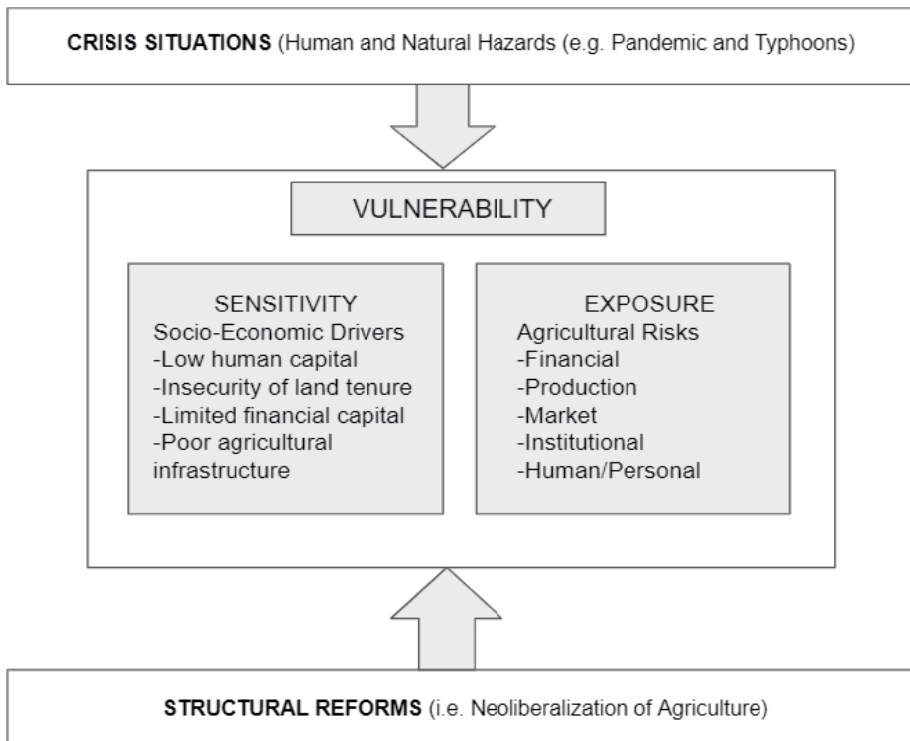


Figure 3. Conceptual model of risks and vulnerabilities of smallholder rice farmers to crises in a neoliberal agricultural setting

risks fundamentally emerged because of the existing systemic conditions in their rice farming community.

The rice farmers emphasized that these are long-standing issues that are already affecting the dynamics of agriculture in the community even prior to the outbreak of the pandemic and exacerbating the impacts of natural disasters. Thus, as underscored in this study, adopting neoliberal development policies has produced structural barriers that worsen their crisis experience, making it difficult for them to deal with and withstand the adverse effects of crisis situations. This study shows that the vulnerability of the rice farmers toward agricultural risks associated with crisis occurrences should be understood as a construct of underlying social inequalities, specifically those structural factors that increase the susceptibility of the participants to risks and weaken their ability to respond. The chronic economic and structural barriers, not just the exposure to the pandemic or the typhoons per se, make it difficult for smallholder rice farmers to adapt and be resilient.

From the themes developed in this study, a conceptual model of risks and vulnerabilities among smallholder rice farmers has emerged. This model highlights the variabilities and uncertainties that characterize small-scale agriculture due to the emergence of crises and the impacts of implementing neoliberal structural reforms.

5.0. Conclusion

The narratives of the smallholder rice farmers in Concepcion serve as a call to revisit the neoliberal development policies being implemented in the agriculture sector by the national government. The notion of resilience among smallholder Filipino rice farmers is hinged on their ability to be economically and socially equipped to face and recover from the risks induced by omnipresent crisis situations. This entails increased public sector involvement, as opposed to reducing or shifting support away from the smallholder rice farmers. Thus, reforms in the current social, economic, and political status quo of the rice farmers are necessary to empower them and reduce their vulnerabilities.

As with all research, a few limitations exist in this study. First, the utilization of the case methodology means that the findings may or may not be transferable or applicable to other rice farming communities in the Philippines. Some of the observations are unique to the local context, such as the articulation of views,

prospects, and aspirations among the rice farmers. Furthermore, since this study only centered on the experiences and narratives of the smallholder rice farmers, it may also be necessary to explore and examine the perspectives of the local government and other agencies related to the agriculture sector. This would provide a more holistic understanding of why support from the public sector was perceived by many participants as generally lacking, despite the existence of institutional programs. Acknowledging the side of the public sector and their conceptualization of crisis response will help address this gap.

6.0. Declaration of Conflicting Interest

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