

Governmentality in the Context of a Japanese-funded Farm-to-Market Road (FMR) in Agdangan, Quezon Province, Philippines

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Abstract

Recent studies have focused on the role of Official Development Assistance (ODA) in financing infrastructural projects and rural development programmes. This study contributes to this literature by demonstrating how Japanese and Filipino aid authorities facilitate a Japanese-ODA-funded Farm-to-Market Road (FMR) subproject as a solution aiming to achieve overall poverty reduction and rural economic growth in the Philippines. Drawing on Foucault's governmentality, the paper analyses processes and interactions within the management stages of the FMR subproject. It examines the impact of the completed FMR among agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARBs). It argues that while the FMR fostered mutual understanding and beneficial relationships among aid authorities, more significant advantages were accrued by the non-poor sector. Consequently, ARBs clamour for further support to maximize FMR benefits.

Keywords: Philippines, Japan, governmentality, agrarian reform beneficiaries, farm-to-market road.

Introduction

Within the scope of contemporary infrastructure projects, farm-to-market road (FMR hereinafter) initiatives are a common infrastructure development priority. The official goal of FMR projects is to provide access for agricultural producers, especially the market entry of smallholders, while simultaneously easing the flow of goods and services to formerly isolated rural regions. FMR proponents argue that it increases market opportunities for rural producers who can take advantage of improved connectivity to avail themselves of new markets in urban centres. Current FMR debates reflect older assertions that promoting infrastructure development, such as road building as part of rural development objectives, can improve the productivity, employment, and income of the target populations (Koch & Movenzadeh, 1979). Accordingly, FMR investments facilitate rural growth and poverty reduction initiatives by linking communities and agricultural fields to the central transport system and markets (Lokesha & Mahesha, 2016; Llanto, 2011). In particular, high-quality road improvements at the local level are suggested to be more favourable for poverty reduction planning than investments in the national road network alone (Llanto, 2011).

However, not all analysts favour the benefits of these projects. Several studies raise concerns about how infrastructure projects in general – and FMR in particular – are prone to elite capture and provide insufficient benefits to improve income and productivity among marginal groups. For example, Jacoby's (1998) research in Nepal indicated that, although FMR-type projects could confer benefits on poor households, they were ultimately inadequate to drastically reduce income inequality as its benefits accrued more to the wealthy landowners. Moreover, Lyngby (2008) stipulated that FMR promotes material inequality through landowners and political elites benefitting from the right-of-way (ROW hereinafter) compensation payments and suffering the risk of elite capture over the project development process. Furthermore, Dasgupta and Beard (2007) expressed that FMR presents unequal benefits due to elite capture in community-level planning and governance. Lastly, Lucas (2016) presented a power elite capture scenario in Sumatra, Indonesia, wherein official development assistance (ODA hereinafter) benefits were rechannelled

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to village elites while demanding kickbacks and illegal payments in a development project.

This study intends to contribute to these debates through an in-depth case study of an ODA-funded FMR project in Agdangan, Quezon, Philippines. Drawing upon a range of qualitative methods and a close analysis of project planning documentation and community-based observations, the paper demonstrates how various aid authorities and other stakeholders interacted during the management stages of the FMR subproject. The paper sheds light on the uneven impacts of the completed FMR among agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARBs hereinafter). Using governmentality analysis, the paper argues that the FMR fostered mutual understanding and beneficial relationships among aid authorities, and advantages were accrued by the non-poor sector, while ARBs were left to clamour for further support to maximize FMR benefits. The paper contributes to the growing literature on the interactions and processes in FMR subproject management and the impacts of a completed FMR on the poor sector.

Japanese and Filipino aid authorities

The economic stability of the Philippines is essential for Japan's freedom of navigation and geostrategic goals (Trinidad, 2007). For instance, Japan's proactive lending activities in the Philippines intend to bring development, infrastructural projects, and foreign capital to create local employment. As a result, it provided the Philippines with \$9.9 billion between 1960 and 2019, higher by 39 per cent compared to the United States during the same period (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2019). In this study, the Japanese foreign aid authorities are represented by bureaucrats from Japan International Cooperation Agency Officials (JICA), and the Japanese private sector is represented by project consultants. Their ODA Portfolio to the Philippines provided substantial agriculture and rural development projects, particularly through agricultural reform activities for ARBs. Trinidad (2007) shared that the proactive participation of Japanese representatives in the ODA-funded FMR project reflected their economic and business interests.

On the other hand, Filipino aid authorities in this study consist of bureaucrats and national politicians from cabinet-level inter-agency coordination committees called the National Economic and Development Authority-Investment Coordination Committee (NEDA-ICC) and the project advocate, the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR). In addition, they also used contacts with local politicians who have the 'power of the purse' on the project site. Together, they exhibited a neoliberal ideology seeking to facilitate development through infrastructure and value-adding production interventions (Ryser et al., 2018).

ARBs for rural development

ARBs are poor and landless farmers to whom the Philippine government has granted lands. Therefore, they are vulnerable to economic and social shocks, extracting a meagre income. Despite the institutionalization of the Agrarian Reform Community (ARC) development strategy in 1993, a baseline study prepared by the University of the Philippines Los Baños in 1997 showed that most ARBs live in poverty and suffer from underproductivity, while 70% live below the poverty line (Sethboonsarg, 2008). Moreover, the National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC) recognized that ARBs still have the second-highest poverty incidence (46.6%) as of 2006. Therefore, based on these statistics, the effectiveness of FMRs becomes questionable.

In the case of Agdangan, Quezon, Philippines, ARBs remain in poverty despite the FMR subproject completed in 2014. Some of them were living below the reported Annual Family Income in the Philippines (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2019a). For instance, some ARBs have a meagre yearly average income of USD 420 based on a rapid survey among 60 ARBs on the project site on 23–29 August 2021, as calculated using the Annual Philippine Peso Per US Dollar Rate End-of-Period 1US Dollar- 48.036 PhP.¹ Their profits depend on traders who give lowball offers and control product

1 Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas as of 2020.

prices, denoting their dependence on market channels (Go, 2021). Consequently, they struggle to meet the maintenance and input expenses of their farms.

Main approaches

The study analysed the interactions and processes in and between aid authorities during the management stages of the FMR subproject. It also examined how the completed FMR affected ARBs.

Using discourse analysis, the researcher focused the interactions and processes in and between aid authorities during the management stages of the FMR subproject. First, the author looked at government reports including Philippine development plans and evaluation reports. These represent some of the tools the authorities used to inculcate discourse in public (Wolff, 2020). Second, online questionnaires and online semi-structured interviews with key experts and primary actors were used to identify interactions between the authorities in the management stages of the FMR subproject, to understand the complexity, issues, and challenges of the relations and supplement the documentary analysis. Third, focus group discussions (FGDs) were also used to identify how the completed FMR affected the ARBs.

The research design of the study adhered to the qualitative case study approach. It adopted two criteria in the selection of participants: 1) those who took part in the Agrarian Reform Infrastructure Support Program (ARISP) III approval and the management stages of its FMR subproject, and 2) those who influenced the process, such as the Japanese and Filipino aid authorities. The data collection ran from November 2020 to December 2021. Research participants were selected based on their expertise, qualifications, background, involvement, and availability. The researcher facilitated online questionnaires and conducted online interviews among fourteen current and former representatives of Filipino aid authorities who took part in the project and their four Japanese counterparts as supplementary participants. Moreover, two face-to-face FGDs were conducted in Agdangan, Quezon, among sixteen ARBs to identify the FMR's impact on them. On the other hand, two FGDs were conducted among eight landowners and eight traders to recognize the difference in the access to capital among those in the project sites. Overall, there are 29 males and 14 females as seen in the demographic profile in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic profile of current and former aid authorities who took part in ARISP and its FMR subproject in Agdangan, Quezon, Philippines

Nationality	Role	Gender	Age	Participants' Code
Japanese	Japan International Cooperation Agency (Only questionnaire administered)			
Japanese	Head Consultant (from the Private Japanese Consultancy Firm affiliated in ARISP I-III)	Male	80	JCM80
Japanese	Consultant (from the Private Japanese Consultancy Firm affiliated in ARISP I-III)	Male	70	JCM75
Japanese	Consultant (from the Private Japanese Consultancy Firm affiliated in ARISP I-III)	Male	72	JCM72
Japanese	Consultant (from the Private Japanese Consultancy Firm affiliated in ARISP I-III)	Male	72	JCM72a
Canadian	Academe (Informant)	Male	Na	CAMNa
Filipino	Department of Agrarian Reform (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	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

Table 2: Demographic profile of FMR subproject beneficiaries during FGD

Village	Role	Gender	Age	Participants' Code
1	Landowner-Subcontractor	Male	57	LM57
2	Landowner-Trader	Female	50	LF50
1	Landowner	Male	40	LM40
2	Landowner	Male	45	LM45
1	Landowner	Male	47	LM47
2	Landowner	Female	48	LF48
1	Trader	Female	50	TF50
2	Trader	Female	59	TF59
1	Trader	Male	75	TM75
2	Trader	Male	71	TM71
1	Trader	Male	54	TM54
2	Landowner-Trader	Male	55	LM55
1	Trader	Male	70	TM70
2	Trader	Male	65	TM65
1	Landowner-Trade	Female	56	LF56
2	Trader	Male	60	TM60
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

This study focused on villages (1) and (2) within the municipality that directly benefitted from the FMR. Although the original project documents stated that the FMR would benefit five villages, three (3) villages did not directly benefit. For instance, one village was far from the FMR while a river creek separated the other two (2) villages.

Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality refers to the conduct of conduct (Burchell et al., 1991). It describes the way governments and other actors use knowledge and discourses to create policies that control and produce subjectivities in which the subjects themselves are indeed willing to be governed (Bevir, 2010). It describes what governors think about governing (Dean, 2010) and suggests an intimate and iterative relationship between a governing body and those being governed as shaped by technologies of enforcement concerning objects of shared interest. This study uses the concept of governmentality in analysing the interactions and processes of Japanese and Filipino aid authorities in the ODA-funded FMR subproject as an object of shared interest. It demonstrates tools that iteratively shape the subjects' willingness to be governed within their shared interests. The governmentality approach would help facilitate the impact of the FMR discourse among ARBs by explaining how they were affected by a completed FMR.

The focus of the study is a 5-kilometre FMR subproject with a 35-metre bridge in Agdangan, Quezon. It was completed in 2014 and is situated in a 5th class municipality in Quezon province, southeast of Manila, Philippines. It is a Japanese-funded subproject under the 25-year-old Agrarian Reform Infrastructure Support Program (ARISP) III. It presents typical technology that the government adopts to achieve rural economic growth and poverty reduction. However, it did not alleviate ARBs in poverty, since the poverty index remains double-digit, despite the FMR investment (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2019b).²

The first part pertains to the interactions and processes of aid authorities in the management stages of the FMR subproject. It shows the FMR as interactions and processes with multiple centres, as both Japanese and Filipino aid authorities had significant control of the social power during the management processes of the subproject. It presents the relations and pathways of the aid authorities while employing the rhetoric of economic linkages, productivity, and income to achieve a poverty reduction and rural economic growth agenda. The second part presents the FMR's current situation and how the project beneficiaries use it in their livelihood activities. It demonstrates that the FMR led to greater value chain incomes among non-poor sectors, such as landowner-subcontractor and traders. Finally, the third part relates to the critical insights that are crucial in discerning how the FMR impacts the overall productivity and income of ARBs. It illustrates that the FMR instigated and managed by the aid authorities was ineffective to a large extent, as the authorities failed to acknowledge the socio-political issues that resulted in unequal benefits between the poor and non-poor sectors.

The management stages of the FMR subproject

FMR Initiation: Aid authorities facilitated harmonious interactions and collaborative approaches

The Japanese consultancy firm, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), and the Filipino bureaucrats from the DAR and the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) had harmonious interactions and synergistic approaches from the facilitation of the ARISP project charter to its approval stage. More specifically, DAR was the project advocate, while the Japanese consultant served as a technical adviser in preparing documentary requirements for the NEDA-Board and JICA project approval process. On the other hand, Japanese consultancy firms lent their agricultural development expertise in collaboration with the Philippine government and sought approval from JICA and NEDA.³ This scenario is consistent with Arnold's (1985) study that consultants usually act as technical assistance personnel in ODA projects worldwide, and they influence ODA projects through research and consultancy in the recipient countries. For instance, JCM80, the Japanese head consultant, shared his experience in pioneering the creation of the ARISP project charter:

In 1994, I had a chance to discuss the new project supporting the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program [CARP] with DAR Secretary Ernest D. Garilao. He introduced Mr. Jose Mari B. Ponce [who was] the Director of DAR Project Development Management Staff. (JCM80)

Then DAR Secretary Garilao, who created the ARC strategy, received the Japanese consultant's offer to pursue a poverty reduction and rural economic growth agenda by intensifying DAR's necessary support services towards ARBs. His main thrust was distributing agricultural lands while allotting a minimal budget for support services. In addition, due to his inclination in favour of FMR subprojects, his office accepted the Japanese consultant's offer to create a project charter for extension services. PPF78, a former DAR employee who directly reported to the secretary and was active in the ARISP implementation, shared that the Japanese consultant's proposal was an offshoot of DAR's resource mobilization activities in the 1990s, with Japan as the biggest donor, to wit:

² Philippine Statistics Authority defined 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 neighbouring provinces.

³ Based on the collective narratives shared by the research participants interviewed from November 2020 to December 2021.

DAR decided to access the ODA due to budget constraints. We were delighted because his offer showed that we could benefit from funding commitment for the entire project duration. It was a product of our hard work in convincing the donors! It was mutualism; we gave them projects while giving us the funds to fulfil our mandate. (FPF78)

Due to aligned interests, the DAR secretary allowed the Japanese consultant to work on the project details. As a result, both sides were in a flexible working arrangement. They developed a close professional relationship while working during the JICA and NEDA project appraisal process. For instance, JCM72, a Japanese consultant, conveyed his experience when he and other Japanese consultants, such as JCM72a, JCM80, and JCM75, arranged their pet project with DAR:

Together with Mr. Ponce and his staff, we prepared a Project Proposal for ARISP-I in 1994. I fully assisted in the actual implementation of ARISP-I through technical support during the project appraisal by JICA. Finally, ARISP-I was approved for implementation by JICA and NEDA. (JCM72)

Moreover, JCM80, as he was familiar with Philippine agriculture projects, mentioned that he also helped in the ARISP III document preparation ‘the Project Proposal for ARISP II & III were prepared during the implementation of ARISP I & II, respectively, by the DAR ARISP Project Management Office (PMO) with technical assistance from the Consultant.’

JICA funded ARISP in the 1990s, and it was implemented in several phases. The first phase in 1995 concentrated on irrigation projects, while the second in 1999 focused on the potable water supply. Moreover, FPF66, a former DAR employee representative, shared that they pushed for the third phase due to the lingering problem facing the Philippines of essential support services to ARBs, to wit:

We needed help because we must give support services. Japanese consultants have been supportive of Philippine development projects. Japan's 2005 Country Assistance Strategy acknowledged ARISP gains and pledged support to replicate it. ARISP III was an offshoot of the lessons learned from previous stages and added institutional development aspects. (FPF66)

JICA's official response also seconded this claim by stipulating that ‘ARISP III was conceptualized (after implementation of ARISP I and II).’ (JICA, personal communication, 17 May 2021). Moreover, its request-based loan procedure created an incentive for the Japanese consultant to pursue the project and even include him to be part of it. JCM80, in an online interview, recounted how he became officially part of ARISP at the onset:

In the Japanese yen loan project, the implementing agency (DAR) should hire a technical consulting firm to implement the project. Fortunately, my firm won the competitive bidding for selecting the consultant services firm in 1996. Therefore, since 1996, I was assigned as Team Leader of the Consultant Team for ARISP-I, -II, and -III until March 2015. (JCM80)

Consequently, the initiatives of the Japanese consultants created harmonious interactions between DAR and JICA. JCM72a shared their efforts to promote a collaborative approach as stipulated in his response, ‘we subcontracted with Filipino consultants, and we closely communicated with JICA for the successful implementation of ARISP. We were an effective bridge between DAR and JICA.’

Eventually, DAR prioritized the approval of ARISP III by including it in the Philippine Investment Plan. Driven by mutual understanding and the perceived success of ARISP I & II from 1994 to 2006, NEDA-ICC and JICA formalized the ARISP III approval process on 18 December 2007. It partially funded the FMR subproject in Agdangan, Quezon, as the Local Government Unit (LGU) funded the other half. Japanese consultants were active facilitators in the initiation stage. For example, JCM80 provided more comprehensive copies of FMR documents, such as project implementation policy manuals and ARISP III intervention details per province. It could be due to his direct participation and contribution to the development of the project implementation policy manual, as part of

his consultancy services, that he said, ‘In terms of reference (TOR) of the Consulting Services, the preparation of the project management guidelines [project implementation manual] was stipulated as consultant’s (my) task works.’

Manifesting the power and interests of the aid authorities

The initiation stage involved three major project processes: facilitation of ARISP’s project charter, project appraisal, and project approval processes, supported by Japanese consultants, DAR, JICA, and NEDA interactions. Significant issues that prevailed in this stage are as follows: First, the aid authorities used rural economic growth and poverty reduction to legitimize the FMR and gain public support and acceptance. However, these narratives are often adopted to maximize their interests. For instance, the complementarity and aligned interests of the Filipino and Japanese aid authorities made the project acceptable on both sides; DAR was mandated to create support services programmes for ARBs, while the Japanese consultant was expected to secure the projects.

Second, JICA flexed its power nominally and encouraged the Japanese private sector to pursue the ODA projects. For example, it used a request-based loan procedure to incentivize Nippon Koei representatives to plant requests in the DAR. This is consistent with Arase’s (1994) claim that the Japanese private sector and their bureaucracy worked together to ensure Japan’s overall national (business and economic) interest in ODA projects. Third, the aid authorities facilitated contingent convergence, stipulating that the recipient agrees with the donor’s preferences (Hout, 2015). For instance, a DAR representative shared that the DAR’s adherence to the project implementation policy manual was a condition for JICA’s loan agreement provisions that ensured smooth approval and implementation processes between the two institutions. Such a scenario is similar to outcomes in Dietrich and Wright’s (2015) study, wherein the recipient’s ODA delivery patterns align with the donor’s ODA policy orientation.

Fourth, the interactions and processes demonstrated how the FMR subproject attracted and co-opted itself as a source of soft power ‘by default and design.’ For instance, JCM80, with the assistance of other Japanese consultants, was part of the PMO involved in governance of the subproject. He also created the project implementation policy manual, which provided a common framework for FMR implementers, decision-makers, and beneficiaries. Hence, operational policies and guideposts prepared based on various subproject documents were influenced by Japanese development thinking. This manifests a governmentality perspective that allows governing by embodying discipline in individuals through the creation of docile agents (van Rensburg et al., 2016). During the FMR initiation stage, the interactions and processes exhibited the aid authorities’ harmonious collaborations.

FMR planning (selection and prioritization): FMR as a tool for the aid authorities in facilitating a poverty reduction and rural economic growth agenda

The study of governmentality starts with knowing what the authorities want to happen concerning problems defined and strategies and techniques (Rose, 2009). The aid authorities’ poverty reduction and rural economic growth agenda emphasized the importance of the FMR. For instance, local Agdangan politicians and the DAR saw the FMR as an intervention to pursue the municipality’s economic growth. For instance, FFLPM65, a former local politician, relayed that the FMR was aimed to enhance Agdangan’s supply chain and facilitate efficient delivery of primary agricultural output surpluses (e.g., rice and coconut products) from the farm to local and regional market sites and food processing centres:

It was helpful for the community, especially for the traders and coconut farmers. They needed the road to transport their agricultural products towards their business clients. Therefore, we (DAR and LGU) rationalized our poverty reduction and rural economic growth objectives and harmonized processes and interactions to construct the FMR. (FFLPM65)

Second, it was intended to improve Agdangan’s farm-level productivity. An overall reduction in

transportation costs will encourage ARBs to pursue efficient crop production and diversification, generate market activity, and facilitate the commercialization of their farm products. The project charter aimed to help ARBs improve productivity and combat poverty by increasing the overall real household income by 30 per cent, from PhP 58,331 (\$ 1,214) to PhP 75,830 (\$ 1,579). FFLPF60, a former politician, shared, 'the FMR is helpful for the ARBs so they could sell to traders and get more income. It will improve their agricultural productivity, income, and quality of life.' Third, it was utilized to capacitate ARBs towards economic development by participating in the market economy, acquiring income source opportunities, and fostering economic linkages to enhance agricultural production (National Economic and Development Authority, 2004).

Eventually, DAR agreed to fund it partially. FPF61, a former DAR employee, shared that while working with local politicians, DAR also benefitted from the project as it helped to achieve its mandate of implementing support services to ARBs and harnessing their growth potentials, to wit:

We requested an ARISP funding extension to support those ARBs previously not covered by other agricultural programmes. Their significant participation in the market would lead to more opportunities, improved productivity, and higher income. Moreover, working and aligning our objectives with local politicians was required to get the ball rolling. (FPF61)

Moreover, FPF61 further shared that DAR supported the FMR because it is beneficial for all:

Domestic firms with international Japanese clients, such as JNJ Oil industries and Peter and Paul, contracted our big landowners as partner organic coconut farms (under contract-growing schemes). They get profits because it is organic! [Laughs]. As a DAR employee, I helped them because it was good for the community. More development would create jobs for the poor. So I think profit is the success indicator of the FMR!

Aside from the market-oriented reasons, the political context back then influenced the decision to construct the FMR. As the request was submitted a year before the elections, the president may have exercised beneficial relationships with the local Agdangan politicians. FFLPM64, a former politician who was active in securing funding for the FMR subproject, pointed out that they benefitted politically from the project. He also underscored that LGU's political capital made the FMR possible:

I was confident that we would secure the FMR because it was a promise by the Philippine president. Specifically, the FMR subproject was easy to lobby for since our municipality was included in her resource-based cluster areas programme. Aside from that, since most of us 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 re-election. I hate to say this, but political will and affiliation always matter if we want these infrastructures. (FFLPM64)

Moreover, FPF60, a former DAR employee, confirmed that local politicians benefitted from the FMR due to their direct business interests within the community. She also shared:

It greatly benefitted those with stable business relationships outside the community. I knew one former local politician who is into coconut oil supply connected with her prospective Japanese clients. Probably, that is out of the DAR's hands because that is an unintended benefit of the FMR. I admit that the FMR may have supported the concept of patronage politics. If the request is within our parameters, we will support and construct the infrastructure needed for agriculture. (FPF60)

Demonstrating highway politics

In this stage, interactions between DAR and local politicians supported the selection and prioritization of the FMR subproject process. Significant insights prevailed in this stage: First,

the aid authorities demonstrated an explicit inclination towards the profit, economic efficiency, productivity, and linkages discourse, manifesting their liberal governmentality. They focused on the FMR's rational and economic indicators and stipulated its significance in rural economic growth and poverty reduction. This scenario is consistent with the study by Muller et al. (2017) that exhibited liberal governmentality as a governance structure whereby the decision-making process is based on rational and economic principles.

Second, the politicians demonstrated 'highway politics' in providing the FMR. This pertains to the extent of political favouritism to exercise political control (Selod & Soumahoro, 2019). The narratives show politicians using the FMR in exercising clientelism and reciprocity to benefit themselves. A study conducted by Batalla et al. (2018) showed that this practice is rampant in road development and notes that political interference occurs in all stages. In addition, national politicians recognize local politicians' interests and the societal web played according to their own rules (Migdal, 1988), which may result in an engaging relationship between national politicians and beneficiaries (also known as voters) through local politicians who 'harvest' votes through material incentives (Thompson, 2010).

FMR execution, monitoring, and closure: the project implementation policy manual as essential in maintaining order during the management stages of the FMR subproject

The execution, monitoring, and closure stages of the FMR presented how governmentality created compartmentalized but cohesive actors with defined processes and stable interaction patterns. The project implementation policy manual functioned as the governance framework for the FMR that implemented governmentality (Müller et al., 2017). It was a requirement for JICA's loan provision that allowed the DAR, as the subproject implementer, to define the scope, cost-sharing arrangements, and structure of the project implementation schemes that fostered collaboration and cooperation. According to FPM55, a former DAR employee, 'it helped us standardise processes and minimise conflicts among local politicians. It also provided us the JICA systems that served as our 'bible' in facilitating ARISP.'

Moreover, it guided the decision-makers to work independently but collaboratively. For instance, while DAR was the FMR subproject's overall implementer, JICA reviewed and approved significant FMR decisions based on necessity and economic viability indicators. Both collaborated, approved, and classified Agdangan as high development priority using the selection criteria provided in the manual. JICA's official response states that 'the inclusion of this FMR project [in the community] means it has satisfactorily met the selection criteria established in the project implementation policy manual' (JICA, personal communication, 17 May 2021). In addition, new actors, such as Filipino private sector representatives, ensured the execution of the FMR within the project schedule. For example, two construction firms – M.G. Salazar Construction Corporation and R.A. Mendiola Construction & Developer – bagged the FMR subproject. However, FPM52, a former DPWH employee, shared that despite pending court cases, these firms were shortlisted due to alleged political affiliations, 'the contractors participated because of their political connections. As a result, they even won the bid despite pending court cases [laughs].'

The Japanese consultants and DAR representatives collaborated across the management stages of the subproject and ensured that everyone was working towards a mutual understanding of the FMR's objective. JCM80 shared that Japanese and Filipino aid authorities were working collaboratively:

We (myself and DAR) were always working on how to support the agrarian reform beneficiaries and how to improve their living standards because those were also DAR's ultimate objectives. Thus, DAR appreciated my work. Even we sometimes had heated discussions. (JCM80)

During the execution and monitoring stages of the subproject, FPF70, a former DAR representative, preferred to work with the Japanese consultant because of his keenness on the quality of the FMR while exercising harmonious and flexible relationships, to wit:

He initially suggested using Portland Concrete Cement Pavement (PCCP) instead of gravel to ensure sustainability and quality of the FMR; however, it was not approved due to the high cost. Nevertheless, to ensure FMR's alignment with the guidelines, he suggested using PCCP on steeper sloping parts and gravel in flat parts, which the DAR finally approved. I admired how he displayed his humility, flexibility, and creativity to get things done. (FPF70)

Relatedly, FPF71, a former DAR regional staff, shared that the Japanese consultant was firm on FMR technical details while flexible when dealing with political issues, to wit: 'he followed the project implementation manual and always deferred to the DAR and LGU on political issues related to the FMR construction. Moreover, he is amenable if decisions are aligned with the guidelines.' These interactions highlighted how the Japanese consultants and DAR representatives cooperated and collaborated on power resources. While the former had technical expertise, the latter had decision-making power. Their inclination to work harmoniously and collaboratively made the FMR process stable and acceptable among actors.

JICA did not have an active role and relied heavily on DAR and the Japanese consultants as a conduit of information. For example, as part of monitoring, DAR had to submit quarterly progress reports to JICA, while the Japanese consultant had meetings to report essential topics about implementing the FMR. Putting this forward, JICA's official response, 'All JICA-funded Project is based on the recipient government's official request; thus, an implementing agency of the recipient country is always at the center of project conceptualization...' (JICA, personal communication, May 17, 2021). The FMR construction started on October 13, 2013, and ended after 240 calendar days. The Filipino aid authorities led the execution of the FMR to its closing stages. However, two former local politicians within the community also dominated as they benefitted from the construction of the FMR through circumstantial coalition-building, as recounted by FPM52:

Some of the local politicians back then were keen on knowing which parts of the FMR would be concretized so they could either request the contractor's staff to concretize the FMR in front of their lot or buy those farm lots covered by the concretized FMR. So, for instance, the contractor concretized those areas not previously included in the original plan, including those in front of the local politician's 4.8 hectares of land. (FPM52)

Project beneficiaries, particularly landowners and traders in coconut-related enterprises, explored business prospects. Some had talks with prospective Japanese firms to expand their business opportunities. For instance, one of the local Filipino export businesses in Agdangan, JNJ Oil Industries, created a coconut hub facility to strengthen the coconut industry within the locality after the FMR was constructed. LM57, a landowner-subcontractor, shared, 'the FMR is beneficial because we talked with prospective Japanese business clients and secured supply contracts. Most of them were into raw coconut materials such as copra meal, refined bleached, and deodorized coconut oil.'

On the other hand, when asked how ARBs benefitted, TM60, a trader, answered, 'we bought their products. They did not need to talk to other traders. They did not need any transportation to deliver their products to outsiders. We bought their products, and they got compensation.' The FMR execution, monitoring, and closure stages demonstrated how Japanese and Filipino aid authorities worked harmoniously and collaboratively. On the other hand, some local politicians, traders, and landowners had a clear picture of the opportunities afforded by the FMR and took initial steps to take advantage of the setup.

Maintaining order and strengthening control

This stage had three major subproject processes: execution, monitoring, and closure that entailed harmonious interactions with Japanese consultants, DAR, DPWH, JICA representatives, local politicians, and Filipino construction firms to ensure smooth FMR subproject management stages. Significant insights that prevailed in this stage are as follows: First, JICA and the Japanese consultant developed a good working relationship among Filipino aid authorities. Although JICA

was passive by allowing DAR to conduct overall supervision, it controlled crucial parts such as fund disbursements. This seemingly reflexive relationship was not conducted in a spirit of non-interference. Instead, it co-opted DAR in the Japanese-created project implementation policy manual. Though JICA and the Japanese consultant did not admit it, CAMNa, an informant from the academy, confirmed that it was a usual technique for any Japanese ODA project, ‘The project implementation manual is its way of inculcating the so-called “Japanese techniques” towards the recipients. In the long-run, their system would be the most preferred...because the recipients are used to it, creating a loyal-recipient following.’

Second, the principles of neoliberal governmentality were evident in the implementation policy manual. The policy manual aimed to maintain order and strengthen the implicit control of the management stages of the FMR subproject. Among its goals was to establish congruency of values in the project to foster self-control (Franck & Jungwirth, 2003). It contained the rules of engagement that define how they should work and make decisions together and showed that the aid authorities are not directly ‘steered’ by anyone but through their ideologies (Lemke, 2001). For instance, all the operational policies, procedures, and subproject parameters were based on it, resulting in less friction, maintaining interests, and minimal contestation among decision-makers

Current situation

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 the villagers. As a result, significant business profits were generated, and market and production areas were connected. The community’s ARC Level of Development Assessment (ALDA) increased from level 1 to level 3 in 2019, denoting its growth. FBM55, a DAR representative, stipulated that ‘the FMR catalyzes development, as evidenced by the increasing number of traders penetrating the area to buy ARB produce. It provides market access, motivating them to plant more, eventually improving their production and income.’

However, some ARBs rarely participate in business engagements. Based on the findings, they usually have minimal investments, high reliance on family labor, inadequate access to information, and no direct contact with significant market players. In addition, some usually sell their produce immediately after harvest within their community at low prices. During the FGD, AM75, an ARB, shared that he has minimal business engagements with her neighbors, to wit:

We do not have a business because I do not have money. All we have is our rice and vegetable produce. Our [local] government does not offer us any support [to improve our harvest]. Only our neighbors purchase our crops because our harvest is just a few. We need to sell it before it gets spoiled. I refuse to sell it to [a trader] because he would be the only one who will profit from it. He is a scoundrel. (AM75)

On the other hand, landowners would only subcontract ARBs to ensure their quota requirement during the high-demand season. However, the ARBs will only receive their share after deductions of loans they made in the past. AF66, a subcontractee, shared her choice and experience in dealing with a subcontractor, to wit:

Given a choice, I do not like selling my coconuts to [a trader] because he will deduct the money I owe him from my earnings. He offers me little payment because he knows I am not that educated. They are the ones who profit. Also, they add huge interest to our loans. Due to the quota system, I am already in debt, but I cannot do anything because I have children [to support]. We should have our own market [communal trading post], paved roads without humps [laughs], and financing from the [local] government. Those would be reasonable provisions. I wonder when I will experience that. (AF66)

Despite its rhetoric, the aid authorities lack situational awareness to see the real plight of the ARBs. The FMR is insufficient to improve ARB income and overall productivity, as the predominant social structure and concentration of asset holdings have an immense bearing on capturing its benefits. The following section shows the impact of the FMR among ARBs vis-à-vis approved subproject indicators at the onset.

The impact of the FMR on ARBs

All ARB research participants in Agdangan, Quezon are active farmers, with two having alternative livelihoods within the community – one as a babysitter and the other as a faith healer. Their yearly per capita household income ranges from PhP 10,000 (\$208)⁴ to 80,000 (\$1,665), averaging PhP 37 555 (\$781), while their land ranges in size from 1 to 3 hectares, averaging 1.95 hectares per capita. They also shared that they consume a part of their production while the majority is sold in the market. Like landowners/traders, they all use the FMR for personal and work-related reasons.

They recognized an improvement in the average rice yield (ton/ha) by 20–30 percent due to the FMR. However, though some ARBs admitted that the FMR made them pursue cash crop cultivation to earn an average annual income of PhP 19,000 (\$395) to PhP 23,500 (\$489) per hectare, they still could not feel any increase in their income. For instance, though their production increased, the selling prices were unchanged due to lowball offers from landowners/traders and the traders citing an excess of supply; AM65 shared, ‘the traders control the prices, and we cannot do anything about it (contract price) since we have an existing contract with them’ (FGD, August 23, 2021). This scenario manifests that their income depends on the traders controlling the prices. Specifically, cash crop cultivation subjects them to commodity price fluctuations, leaving them unable to diversify to other income sources.

Moreover, farm inputs, such as fertilizers and pesticides, are expensive, ranging from PhP 12,000 (\$250) to 17,000 (\$353)/cropping, offsetting any gains. The ARBs also shared that those agricultural officers visit the municipal office and landowners, expecting information and support services to be cascaded to them. However, it barely happened. Most ARBs felt that they did not receive enough support services. 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 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. (AM70)

Therefore, though their coconuts and rice yield improved, it was not commensurate with the overall price increases in farm inputs and essential commodities (e.g., coffee, cooking oil, salt, detergents) for their daily sustenance.

Most ARB participants recognized that their net annual farm income (pesos/year/household) increased by 5 percent but this did not correspond with the increasing prices of overall production costs. Therefore, some of them cultivate short-term crops such as banana, cassava, and other root crops for subsistence. 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 meals 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. They were not able to increase their asset holdings or production assets. AM40, an ARB, mentioned that he bought a motorcycle not because his income improved but 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 must still get jobs outside the community. It did not help, but I had to deal with it. (AM40)

Hence, the FMR expanded his income source to non-farm activities but did not affect his farm productivity. On the other hand, this shows a possible long-term problem. The FMR can cause agricultural diminution and the further dependency of ARBs on the monetary system in return for short-term and higher incomes if they do not mind its source. Moreover, since they can choose the job they want to pursue, they may choose to pursue jobs in the industrial and services sector, as the agriculture sector offers comparatively little.

Most ARB participants recognized a travel time reduction of 40 minutes on average. As a result, it became quicker to transact with traders and sell farm products. However, most of them recounted that the travel time reduction did not affect their overall income. They further shared that only those who owned a vehicle would feel the impact of the travel time reduction. Some ARBs continue to walk no matter how rough the surface because their profits are insufficient to pay for transport. Therefore, they have accepted that only landowners and traders could carry their products to the local market or food processing centers and benefit from the FMR.

Most ARB participants recognized that transportation costs were reduced by PhP 50 (\$1.04). However, although FMR reduced transportation costs, the farm input costs increased, offsetting their gains. For example, AF80, an ARB, shared that the trader directly gets the products from her farm, so she does not need to spend money on transportation. Despite lowball offers, she continued to sell her produce to the traders because she had an existing debt and supply agreement with him. In addition, most ARBs shared that there was no significant difference in their income before or after the FMR construction. Hence, this indiscernible difference could be attributed to the entire social structure in the area in which ARBs only own a small percentage of the land and 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 ARB participants cannot buy their own transportation. Hence only those who own transportation benefitted from the FMR. 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 people in the community to get his farm going.

Aside from the FMR, recognizing asset distribution among project beneficiaries is essential in understanding how benefits will accrue, especially for those who lack the capital to benefit from the FMR opportunities. For instance, some ARBs could not access the benefits of the FMR due to insufficient capital and other resources. Some decided to sell their land 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.⁵ While this was illegal, banks were used as accomplices to enable the ARBs to sell their lands legitimately. AM73, an ARB, shared that the FMR did not affect his overall status, to wit:

Just like other ARBs, the FMR is nothing to me. It is there, so I must live with it. It did not add any substantial profit to my farm but enabled the landowners, traders, and investors to create business profits at the expense of the ARBs. The rich got richer because of the FMR, while the poor got poorer. It should have been done along with other support services, such as credit facilities for ARBs (AM73)

The aid authorities lack situational awareness to see the real plight of the ARBs. The ARBs had a small share in the FMR benefits. For instance, they cannot maximize the FMR's market opportunities because their market participation depends on their endowment in productive

⁵ The market price was at PhP 50,000 (\$ 1,040) before the FMR while it grew to PhP 500,000 (\$10,409) after the FMR construction.

assets, which shapes their household's production, and consumption. Some also complained that they lack working capital and depend on the informal credit market despite high-interest rates. Some even shared that the cost of their informal credit is more than double compared to the formal sector (e.g., offered in rural banks). Hence, though the FMR intervention exists, the ARBs could not access the benefits despite owning a potentially valuable asset.

Conclusions

The notion of governmentality shows the FMR subproject management process as interactions and processes with multiple centers. This study demonstrated the interactions and processes between the Japanese and Filipino aid authorities while employing the rhetoric of economic linkages, productivity, and income to achieve a poverty reduction and rural economic growth agenda. On the other hand, the project implementation policy manual has been instrumental for the Japanese and Filipino aid authorities in fostering mutual understanding and beneficial relationships during the FMR subproject management stages. Specifically, the Japanese aid authorities ensured technical and financial support for the FMR subproject, while the Filipino aid authorities were accommodating enough to reflect contingent convergence on the donor's processes. In addition, local politicians were involved but more as a tool to rationalize the FMR subproject objectives than a mechanism to seek grassroots solutions and participation.

Apart from examining the interactions and processes within the FMR discourse, this study provides a rarely discussed aspect of the impact of the completed FMR on ARBs. Most ARBs accepted the FMR and tried to live peacefully with certain apprehensions. Submission is intertwined in their subjectivities: while in language, some show apathy to the FMR, and most of them demonstrate how it failed to help them, in action, they still choose to follow the conventional norms and rules of the aid authorities. In words, they easily express opposition and a lack of benefits; in action, most of them compromise. The FMR plays a role in rural development but is certainly not the magic bullet for poverty alleviation. Although it is always described positively, the story is much more complicated for ARBs. In this case, the FMR was insufficient to improve their economic status due to the community's contextual situation and inequitable concentration of assets.

The governmental intervention effects are both proximate and indirect, planned and unplanned (Li, 2007). Given the suitable complementary activities, the FMR can still broaden livelihood opportunities. The ARBs need support to use the opportunities that the FMR may bring. This may include providing additional agricultural extension services, such as credit and agricultural inputs needed to level the playing field. The long-term prospects entail re-examining the interaction and processes in the management stages of the FMR subproject to ensure that its benefits will be distributed equitably between the poor and the non-poor in communities. The accountability of the aid authorities should be encouraged, while rethinking alternatives to address the income and productivity of the ARBs (Zhai et al., 2017).

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