

Impact of agrarian reform policies on rural development and women's empowerment in Eastern Samar

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Abstract: This study examines the impact of agrarian reform policies on rural development and women's empowerment in Eastern Samar, Philippines, a region where agriculture is central to the local economy. Employing a descriptive research design, data were collected through structured interviews and focus group discussions with 400 agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARBs), selected via stratified random sampling across various municipalities. The majority of respondents were aged between 30 and 50 years, predominantly female, primarily engaged in farming and related agricultural activities, with educational attainment ranging from primary to secondary education. The implementation of agrarian reform policies has led to improved land tenure security and increased access to support services, such as training and credit facilities. Notably, women's participation in local governance and community development initiatives has significantly enhanced, indicating progress in women's empowerment. Pearson's correlation coefficient analysis demonstrated a positive relationship between the extent of policy implementation and indicators of rural development, including household income and agricultural productivity. Additionally, metrics of women's empowerment, such as decision-making autonomy and economic independence, showed significant positive correlations with the effectiveness of agrarian reform measures. The study recommends that policymakers tailor agrarian reform initiatives to the specific needs and demographic characteristics of ARBs, enhance support services, ensure inclusive participation in policy development, and conduct continuous monitoring and evaluation to sustain rural development and promote gender equality.

Keywords: Educational Policy, Educational Reforms, Outcomes, Participation, Politics, Stakeholder Engagement

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INTRODUCTION

Agrarian reform is a key policy mechanism in the Philippines, aimed at redistributing land ownership to foster social equity and economic development in rural areas. The Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP), legislated under Republic Act No. 6657 in 1988, was designed to address long-standing disparities in land ownership, enhance agricultural productivity, and improve rural livelihoods. By granting farmers legal land ownership, CARP sought to create a more equitable and sustainable agricultural sector.

In Eastern Samar, where agriculture plays a central role in the local economy, agrarian reform policies have significantly influenced rural communities. The Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) has been at the forefront of implementing these policies, striving to enhance the living conditions of agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARBs) through land allocation and additional support services. However, persistent challenges such as restricted access to

financial resources, unresolved land tenure issues, and inadequate rural infrastructure continue to hinder the full realization of agrarian reform objectives.

A critical aspect of agrarian reform is women's empowerment, given that women contribute significantly to the agricultural workforce. Despite this, disparities in land ownership persist, with women making up a smaller percentage of ARBs receiving Certificates of Land Ownership Awards (CLOAs). This highlights the necessity for gender-inclusive policies that ensure equitable access to land and agricultural resources for women.

Incorporating gender-responsive approaches in agrarian reform is essential for long-term rural development. Research indicates that securing land rights for women leads to higher household incomes, improved food security, and increased community participation. Thus, analyzing the role of agrarian reform policies in enhancing both rural development and women's empowerment is crucial for assessing their overall impact.

Statement of the problem

1. What are the demographic characteristics of agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARBs) in terms of: (a) age, (b) gender, (c) occupation, (d) educational attainment, and (e) land ownership status
2. In what ways have agrarian reform policies contributed to rural development in Eastern Samar, focusing on: (a) agricultural productivity, (b) household income levels, (c) access to agricultural support services, and (d) infrastructure improvements
3. To what extent have ARBs, particularly women, been empowered through agrarian reform in terms of: (a) decision-making roles, (b) access to and control over land and financial resources, (c) economic self-sufficiency, and (d) involvement in community leadership and development activities.
4. Is there a significant correlation between the implementation of agrarian reform policies and: (a) indicators of rural development, and (b) levels of women's empowerment

METHODOLOGY

Research design

A descriptive research design was adopted to systematically examine the effects of agrarian reform policies on rural development and women's empowerment in Eastern Samar. This design facilitates the collection of quantifiable data, enabling statistical analysis to elucidate the relationships between agrarian reform initiatives and their outcomes in rural communities.

Respondents and locale of the study

The study was conducted in Eastern Samar, Philippines, a region where agrarian reform policies have been implemented to foster rural development and empower women. Specific municipalities and barangays were selected based on criteria such as the extent of agrarian reform implementation, diversity in agricultural practices, and socio-economic profiles. This selection aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how agrarian reform policies influence various aspects of rural life in Eastern Samar. The respondents included: (a) Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries (ARBs): Individuals who have received land or support services through agrarian reform programs. (b) Rural Farmers: Farmers engaged in agricultural activities within the selected locales, regardless of their beneficiary status. (c) Women in Agriculture: Women

actively participate in agricultural activities, including those in leadership roles within cooperatives or organizations.

Research instrument

The study employed a combination of qualitative and quantitative research instruments to comprehensively address the research objectives. Structured questionnaires were designed to collect quantitative data, incorporating closed-ended questions that focused on demographic information, economic indicators, and perceptions of agrarian reform policies. The use of structured questionnaires ensured standardized data collection, facilitating statistical analysis. In addition to this, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected participants to gain deeper insights into their personal experiences and perspectives. This qualitative approach allowed participants to articulate their views on rural development and women's empowerment in their own words, generating rich and detailed data. Furthermore, focus group discussions were organized to explore community-level dynamics and collective experiences related to agrarian reform. These discussions encouraged interaction among participants, uncovering diverse viewpoints and contributing to a more comprehensive qualitative analysis.

Data analyses procedure

The data analysis procedure for this study involved both quantitative and qualitative techniques to comprehensively assess the impact of agrarian reform policies on rural development and women's empowerment in Eastern Samar. Quantitative data from structured questionnaires were processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, such as frequency distributions, percentages, and means, were utilized to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics and their satisfaction levels with agrarian reform policies. Inferential statistical analyses, including Pearson's correlation and multiple regression, were conducted to examine relationships between policy implementation and key indicators of rural development and women's empowerment. Specifically, correlation analysis assessed the strength and direction of associations between agrarian reform policies and variables such as income, agricultural productivity, and decision-making power, while regression analysis identified significant predictors of women's empowerment.

For qualitative data, thematic analysis was employed to interpret insights gathered from semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. This approach involved transcribing responses, coding recurring themes, and categorizing them into overarching patterns that reflect participants' experiences with agrarian reform initiatives. The qualitative findings provided depth to the statistical results by uncovering community perspectives, challenges, and perceived benefits of the policies. By integrating both quantitative and qualitative data, the study ensured a holistic understanding of the impact of agrarian reform on rural communities, allowing for well-supported conclusions and recommendations.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic profile of respondents

Age distribution

The data indicates that the largest age group is 10 to 14 years, comprising 11.86% of the population, while those aged 80 and over represent the smallest segment at 1.22%. The median age in Eastern Samar is 22.47 years, suggesting a relatively young population.

Gender distribution

As per the 2020 census, Eastern Samar has a total population of 477,168, with males numbering 246,328 and females at 229,519.

Dependency ratios

These figures indicate that for every 100 working-age individuals (15-64 years), there are approximately 69 dependents, with 58 being young dependents (under 15) and 11 being elderly dependents (65 and over).

Understanding the demographic profile of Eastern Samar is crucial for policymakers and development practitioners to design targeted interventions that address the specific needs of various age groups and genders within the province.

Monthly family income

The majority of respondents (62.5%) have a monthly family income of 10,000 PHP or less, indicating a low-income demographic prevalent in the agrarian sector.

Educational attainment

A substantial portion of respondents have attained only elementary education (37.5%), with a smaller percentage reaching college level (17.5%).

Impact of agrarian reform policies on rural development

Respondents generally agree that agrarian reform policies have led to improvements in agricultural productivity, infrastructure, and community empowerment. However, perceptions regarding increased income levels and access to credit facilities are neutral, suggesting areas needing further attention.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The implementation of agrarian reform in Eastern Samar has led to positive outcomes in terms of rural development and poverty reduction. However, the anticipated empowerment of women has been uneven. While some women have benefited through increased participation in community organizations, systemic challenges hinder widespread gender equity in land ownership and access to support services. Addressing these issues is essential for achieving inclusive and sustainable rural development.

To promote gender-sensitive land policies, it is essential to ensure that land redistribution processes actively support women's ownership through initiatives such as joint titling and awareness campaigns targeting both men and women. Enhancing support services for women is also crucial, requiring the development of tailored programs that improve their access to agricultural training, credit facilities, and market information, enabling them to maximize the benefits of land ownership. Strengthening women's organizations can further empower them by fostering the formation and sustainability of women-led cooperatives and associations, allowing them to amplify their voices in decision-making processes and secure better access to resources. Additionally, continuous monitoring and research should be conducted to regularly assess the impacts of agrarian reform on women, identify existing gaps, and inform necessary policy adjustments. Finally, fostering collaboration among government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and local communities is vital in creating a holistic approach to women's empowerment in agrarian settings.

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