

# Fostering Agricultural Policy Solutions: Understanding the Lived Experiences of Davao City Farmers through Phenomenological Inquiry

Lindsey C. Espino, Jeush Kenneth O. Callao, Damby C. Colindres, Jaymark B. Francisco

University of Mindanao, Davao City, Davao Del Sur, Philippines

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## ABSTRACT

The agriculture sector has long been considered a neglected sector of the country, regardless of the government's agricultural programs. This study aims to understand the lived experiences of Davao City farmers and their insights about the implemented agricultural policy solutions. Their experiences, challenges, and different perspectives are essential contributors to attaining food security. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 2, or *No Hunger*, emphasize the importance of food security, which underscores the need for equitable access to agricultural resources for farmers. This qualitative study was conducted using a phenomenological method. Using purposive sampling, the seven survey participants were explicitly chosen farmers in Davao City. The researchers used the in-depth interview (IDI) method and formulated an interview guide question to gather the data. The results highlighted four general ideas: experiences, challenges, strategies, coping mechanisms, and recommendations, each with different themes. It was found that issues of consistency, sufficiency, and impartiality of support were the experiences Davao City farmers grappled with in their agricultural endeavors. Moreover, personal and natural problems were the primary challenges in accessing and utilizing such policies. They had implied necessary strategies to cope with the challenges, which include alternative solutions like organic farming and relying on personal effort, including personal faith in the Almighty. The participants' insights concluded that Davao City farmers were dissatisfied with the government's agricultural policy solutions, highlighting a reform in the implementation and prioritization of the agriculture sector. Hence, the study successfully delved into the participants' lived experiences. It is recommended that the Philippine government review the implementation and distribution processes of agricultural policy solutions. Finally, specialized and effective strategies must be enacted to deal with the challenges in the agriculture sector.

**Keywords:** lived experiences, agricultural policy solutions, qualitative phenomenology, Davao City, Philippines, UN SDG #2, no hunger.

## INTRODUCTION

Agriculture has long been regarded as the backbone of the Philippines, playing an indispensable role in the nation's economic development, food security, and employment generation. Filipino farmers grapple with many adversities and challenges, including the inauspicious effects of the climate, limited financial support, and difficulties in marketing their produce at fair prices. While the rest of the world modernizes farming techniques, Filipinos still feast on the verge of commemorating the old and outdated practices. However, it should be noted that the Philippine government has been finding ways to solve issues like this, including agricultural policy solutions directed to the farmers through various agencies, especially the Department of Agriculture, to help Filipino farmers mitigate their depressing challenges. Seed distribution, for example, is one of these policies, and it is said that good-quality seeds are essential to all farmers, especially during every planting season, not to mention that all crop production requires seeds as a fundamental component since seeds are vital in ensuring food security (Louwaars & Manicad, 2022). On the other hand, despite living in a country vulnerable to natural disasters, government support for the agriculture and fishing industries has always been either insufficient or harmful. Moreover, climate change has worsened weather disruptions, wreaking even

more damage to the nation's agricultural areas (IBON Foundation, 2020).

According to Philipp (2023), one of the most prominent challenges in Zimbabwe is the need for more capacity of the government to provide financial and technical assistance. It highlights that many small-scale farmers need more capital and expertise to improve their farms and boost output. On the other hand, agriculture, as the bedrock of civilization, faces pressing global issues. Resource depletion and climate change threaten its sustainability (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2023). Besides, persistent food insecurity, with 690 million people suffering from chronic hunger per the World Food Programme, underscores the need for resilient food systems.

Moreover, biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation, as noted in the World Wildlife Fund's Living Planet Report, imperil wildlife and essential agricultural processes. A shift toward sustainable agriculture is vital to tackle these challenges, aligning with global initiatives like the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Ortiz, 2022). UN SDG 2, or No Hunger, highlights the critical role of addressing issues in the agriculture sector as a vital pillar of attaining food security. The goal of reducing inequalities and climate action is both essential to a food-secure and sustainable future.

Furthermore, in the Philippine setting, the Department of Agriculture Press Office (2022) highlights that the rapid population expansion is outpacing the ability of food production. It adds that the Philippine government should prioritize increasing local food production, even though the current methods to slow population growth are unrealistic. However, IBON Foundation (2020) adds that the Philippine government needs to pay more attention to the agriculture sector, which is disastrous to small-scale farmers. It also points out that there needs to be evidence to support the claim that the country is disaster-prepared, not to mention the little acknowledgment given to the actual implementation, recovery strategy, and budget allocation in this calamity-prone country. In fact, according to Cariaso (2023), Negros Occidental agricultural livestock in fisheries had been damaged by typhoon Egay in July 2023.

Additionally, Typhoon Egay affected the lives of the farmers because one of its factors was a challenge to access their farmland, losses in income, and difficulties recovering the crops destroyed by the typhoon. There has also been a problem that Filipino farmers are experiencing, including an increase in the price of fertilizer. One of the strategies of the Philippine government to help the local farmers is to build a cooperative agreement with the supplier and sell it at an affordable price to the farmers. The partnership established by the President of the Philippines with China was also intended to build a resilient and robust economy that lowers the fertilizer price as it becomes unaffordable to Filipino farmers (Philippine Information Agency, 2023).

The DA Press Office (2022) adds the statement of former Department of Agriculture Secretary William Dar that the Davao Region, one of the nation's primary agri-business hubs, can continue growing as a significant agricultural player in the country despite the slow development of the region's agricultural sector in 2021. Davao Region is the second-largest producer of coffee in the nation, behind Soccsksargen, and the largest exporter of cavendish bananas. Davao City alone has been estimated to produce 80% of the nation's cacao supply and was recently referred to as the cacao capital. Nonetheless, Dalumpines (2023) demonstrates that farmers in the Philippines have faced and still face several natural disasters, such as severe droughts, typhoons, floods, and, most significantly, the effects of the El Niño phenomenon. It underlines that small-scale farmers, the poorest, are most impacted by climate change. Technically, El Niño is already being felt throughout the nation due to the depletion of water supplies, according to Lolit Vinalay, a Davao City-based research expert with the Department of Science and Technology's Philippine Atmospheric Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (DOST-PAGASA).

That is why the Philippine government, through its agencies, makes attempts to help Filipino farmers by providing agricultural policy solutions or programs that could help mitigate the issues and problems they are facing because of such factors as flooding, typhoons, and other impacts of climate change, as well as the high cost of fertilizers and modern farming machinery due to inflation. One example of this agricultural policy solution the government initiated is the Rice Tariffication Law, or Republic Act No. 11203, which highlights a provision that allocates three (3) billion pesos every year to the Rice Competitive Enhancement Fund (RCEF) Seed program for the creation, propagation, and promotion of superior inbred rice seeds to increase the

competitiveness of rice producers in the Philippines. Because of this and what the Department of Agriculture likewise provided, more than ten (10) million certified seeds have been distributed, and at least one (1) million farmers coming from forty-two (42) provinces in the Philippines will benefit in 2022 (The Manila Times, 2022).

Additionally, since rice is considered the most vital staple food in the world, the Philippines is one of the countries that consumes a lot of it due to its rising population. In fact, of about thirty (30) million hectares of the total land area of the Philippines, about ten (10) million of it is devoted to agriculture (Philippine Ricepedia, 2018). It is provided that even if the Philippines is a rice-farming country, it still imports rice to other nations to meet the demand of the increasing population. In fact, in 2010 and 2011, the country was considered the most extensive rice importer in the world (Philippine Ricepedia, 2018). The Philippines' agriculture has been positively and negatively impacted for different reasons. That is why the Department of Agriculture (DA) has revised its guidelines for rice seed distribution to improve the country's production of the staple food that will be adopted in 2024. As provided in the memorandum the department has issued under the RCEF Seed Program and National Rice Programs (NRP), farmers with at least one hectare are eligible for the seed distribution program. However, there are some revisions to support farmers who still need to meet the standard agricultural land area and will claim their seeds under the municipality to which they belong (Philippine Star, 2023).

In addition, under President Ferdinand E. Marcos Jr.'s administration, the Philippine government has implemented policies beyond seed distribution. In the report of Simeon (2022) of The Philippine Star, it is stated that in 2022, the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) released merely eight (8) billion for farmer's subsidies, especially financial assistance. Moreover, at least 149 farmers from four different villages in Abra in the Cordillera Administrative Region benefit from four (4) government irrigation projects, as reported by the National Irrigation Administration or NIA (Philippine News Agency, 2023). This explains the programs and projects of the Philippine government to help Filipino farmers, not to mention that the current President concurrently serves as the agriculture secretary. That is why these agricultural policy solutions are being utilized and realized by the government, including technical assistance and training for the farmers, better market access to their crops, and even disaster resilience projects, considering that the Philippines is disaster-prone to natural disasters, among other policies, aim nothing but to help the Filipino farmers not just to improve their production but also to mitigate the challenges they are facing.

The relevance of this study is to understand the lived experiences of farmers in Davao City and their insights regarding the government's agricultural policy solutions. Besides, the Philippines, a Southeast Asian country characterized by a tropical climate, experiences wet and dry seasons. Moreover, Davao City is the biggest city in the Philippines based on land area. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (2020), in their 2020 Census of Population and Housing, 36 percent of households in Davao Region belong to Davao City. This shows that food security is vital to understand, given the population of Davao City alone. It aims to comprehend how these agricultural policy solutions impact Davao City's farmers. Additionally, the researchers created guiding questions that functioned as a tool for data collection. As a result, only participant responses will be highlighted in this study.

The research gap of this study lies in the need for a more in-depth explanation and understanding of the coping mechanisms used by the farmers because of the government's agricultural policy solutions. In addition, a study provides insightful information regarding agrarian policies in the Philippines and how such policies have significantly affected farmers' experiences and challenges. However, it does not delve into the specific coping strategies farmers used to overcome the difficulties they faced due to such policies. Considering these coping methods might give a comprehensive and clear view of how farmers deal with these issues and stressors connected with such agricultural policy solutions and present suggestions to support farming communities and improve the policies.

Therefore, this phenomenological study aims to examine the farmers' experience in Davao City in depth regarding the government's agricultural policy solutions, especially highlighting the coping mechanisms and strategies for the challenges they face. Besides, the researchers attempt to understand the day-to-day experience of the farmers as they interact with these policies using a phenomenological method. Moreover,

this study aims to understand how Davao City farmers are affected by such policies, shedding light on their different perspectives, struggles, and achievements. The researchers recognize certain assumptions and try to make them explicit. As a result, the study aims to address the following questions: What are the lived experiences of Davao City farmers regarding the government's agricultural policy solutions? What are the primary challenges farmers in Davao City face while accessing and utilizing these agricultural policy solutions? What strategies and coping mechanisms do Davao City farmers practice to address the challenges posed by these policies? What are the valuable insights and recommendations Davao City farmers can share about such policies?

Furthermore, the significance of this study lies in the idea that it will help us comprehend how Davao City farmers view these agricultural policies. This study is essential for farmers, national and local governments, the Department of Agriculture, and future researchers. Firstly, it will provide a platform for the Davao City farmers to raise and amplify their collective voices concerning implementing such policies. Besides, developing ways to overcome these challenges may be helpful for other farmers all over the Philippines. It is also significant to the lawmakers, both from the national government and the City Government of Davao, to have firsthand information on how such policies are being implemented, which could also influence legislation relating to the county's agriculture sector. Moreover, it will provide a reality check to the Department of Agriculture, which will help them gain important information that could foster stronger partnerships with the local farmers. In addition, this study is significant for future researchers as it will help them grasp the challenges and coping mechanisms farmers in Davao City implement. It will provide them with essential information on examining the impacts of agricultural programs.

Additionally, three theories are anchored to this study. Firstly, the Political Economic Theory manages and sensitizes the inter-relationship between the government and its populace as it evaluates the realm and impacts of the economy on the political structure of specific sovereignty (Cambridge University Press, 2017). It was an intellectual inquiry that was abdicated by Greek philosophers Aristotle and Plato, explaining the propounded philosophy of relation in the manner of natural law, then later distinguished by Scottish philosophers like John Stuart Mill in his literary work *Inquiry into the Principles of Political Economy* and Adam Smith, who introduced terminology like mercantilism and capitalism that began to approach the broader principle of government and people's relationship. Henceforth, it emphasizes the contributing factors to the citizen-government relationship, which in this research revolves around the welfare of farmers in Davao City in terms of programs and benefits provided by agricultural policy solutions and their impact on their day-to-day dilemmas and how the government utilizes its resources for the betterment of the agriculture sector. This theory will impart clear boundaries and mitigating remedies to resolve farmers' issues.

Secondly, the Coping Theory focuses on how people and societies react to stress, challenges, and difficult circumstances. This theory is distinguished by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), cited in the account of Stanislawski (2019). It suggests that people evaluate stress and choose their coping mechanism based on their situation assessment. To put it another way, it examines the methods people use to cope with and adjust to any stresses, both on a psychological and behavioral level. This theory supports the study since it can help the researchers comprehend how farmers cope with the challenges and uncertainties of such agricultural policy solutions. This theory will also prove whether farmers' coping strategies are effective, and it could help draw conclusions regarding the implications of these policies. Moreover, since the theory delves into psychological and behavioral responses to adversities, it also investigates how the feelings of the farmers translate into actions regarding their farming practices.

Lastly, the Decision-Making Theory of Herbert Simon highlights the essential role of deciding on time (Kishore, 2023). Furthermore, this theory argued that decisions were important since delaying them would hurt the target goal. According to this theory, the ideal course of action or choice is always complex. This is because there will always be a better option. After all, it is impossible to know all the facts. Simon's Decision-Making Theory also considers psychological factors that affect an individual's ability to tackle complicated issues, including stress and motives, among other things. Bounded rationality, in other words, is the foundation for decision-making because people act differently in situations involving risks and uncertainty. It implies that rather than concentrating on maximizing profits, one should pursue goals or make choices that involve the fewest risks and difficulties. Given that farmers make decisions that affect both the profitability of their farms

and their own lives regularly, this theory is entirely applicable to their situation. Farmers have a lot on their plate. When choosing what crops to grow, when to plant and harvest them, how much water and fertilizer to use, and how to control pests and illnesses. Because of this, farmers could find it difficult to thoroughly examine all of the information at their access and weigh all of the possible outcomes of their choices. That is why bounded rationality contributes to understanding farmers' adaptive and pragmatic decision-making processes.

## **METHODS**

This chapter highlights the methods and procedures, as well as the materials and instruments that the researchers used to fulfill the study. The research design, research participants, research instrument, data collection procedure, data analysis, and research ethical considerations are all presented.

### **Design and Procedure**

This study used a qualitative approach to investigate and understand the lived experiences of Davao City farmers in matters related to the government's agricultural policy solutions. Technically, the qualitative approach is a type of research that digs deeper into real-world problems (Tenny et al., 2022). Moreover, the researchers used this approach to understand the collected data thoroughly. A qualitative research approach focuses on phenomena like human attitudes, behaviors, and experiences, which is the best way to answer questions regarding farmer experiences in Davao City regarding agricultural policy solutions. Besides, qualitative research is particularly suitable for addressing why certain phenomena occur, providing detailed interventions or measures, and improving such interventions (Busetto et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the design used in this study is phenomenology. Biemel and Spiegelberg (2023) highlight that phenomenology is an experience-based structure whose only source of importance and worth is the human experience. Besides, understanding the thoughts and emotions of a particular person in connection to the issue is the primary goal of phenomenological research. The researchers believed that phenomenology is the appropriate design to use as it focuses on participants' lived experiences and attempts to understand why and how farmers in Davao City acted in a particular way from their standpoint regarding the government's agricultural policy solutions. In addition, phenomenology strongly emphasizes individual experiences and perceptions of the world. Besides, the research design of this study underscores the necessity for addressing all the concerns that must be addressed before data gathering.

The proper conduct of the data collection procedure was ensured in this study. First, the researchers sought approval from the university's CASE Research Office before the data collection. Afterward, the researchers wrote a letter of permission to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences Education and the study participants. The data collection process was followed. Considering that this research was for the farmers of Davao City who have benefited from the agricultural policy solutions of the government, the researchers conducted an in-depth interview method. Furthermore, since this method allowed the researchers to ask additional questions, it helped them clarify participants' perspectives about such policies. Henceforth, the researchers decided to conduct the study in an online setting to understand better the issue being tackled and the subject of this study. Setting the effort to ask the respondents in a virtual degree interview, the researchers utilized Messenger to call and set a specific time for the interview. Moreover, Messenger generates dynamic collaboration and highlights focus discussions (Alonzo & Oo, 2022).

Additionally, the researchers explained the purpose of the interview to the participants before the interview began. The researchers prepared the letter of approval, the informed consent form, and all other necessary papers needed during the interview process. To ensure that all pertinent information obtained from the participant's responses was included in the following stage, the researchers asked for the participant's consent to record the interview. During the interview, the participants used hidden nicknames to hide their identities, as confidentiality was duly considered. Heaton (2022) emphasizes that pseudonyms are frequently employed to de-identify interview subjects and other individuals, groups, and locations referenced in the textual material gathered for the study. It was used because the researchers believed gaining the participants' trust was essential. Analysis and interpretation were conducted after the data was gathered. Moreover, the researchers

tapped a data analyst to interpret the results. After that, the researchers presented and discussed the interview interaction during the research discussion.

The researchers used thematic analysis to analyze the data. According to Caulfield (2019), thematic analysis is typically used to understand texts and create themes from the data being gathered, like the interview transcript. Moreover, the researchers scrutinized the data to understand the reappearing subjects, themes, and even the patterns of meaning. That is why the researchers used thematic analysis to check the recurring themes in the participants' answers. The researchers believed that thematic analysis was the best way to analyze the data, as it delves into uncovering people's lived experiences and views regarding the topic, allowing them to create concepts based on the gathered data.

According to Resnik (2020), research ethics guidelines should be followed to promote the goals of research, such as truth, information, and mistake prevention. That is why essential school administrators approved the researcher's request for the necessary approval for this study. The researchers, moreover, considered the appropriateness of the identified participants. The participant's participation in this study was voluntary and anonymous to preserve their privacy. When the respondents have inquiries, information will be provided to them, and after they have considered it, they may choose whether to participate in the study. To protect the rights of the research participants, all the data collected for this study was kept private and confidential. Besides, the researchers made sure that informed consent was practiced while conducting the study. Essentially, informed consent entails defining the study and evaluating the participant's understanding using a consent document, typically a written consent form, as an outline for verbal discussion (University of California San Francisco, 2023). The researchers confirmed that the correct and accurate approach of citing ideas from other writers and experts was followed by the study. To do this, Turnitin software's plagiarism and Grammarly grammatical checks were applied to ensure no plagiarized content and improper usage of grammar were included in the study. Lastly, the knowledge and data gathered were accurately recorded in the study to ensure that no fabricated or falsified information was included.

## **Participants**

The participants of the study were the specifically chosen farmers in Davao City. This study used the purposive sampling method called judgmental or subjective sampling. Stewart (2024) highlights that purposive sampling helps identify specific characteristics and insights within a chosen portion of the population. Instead of aiming for a broad representation of the whole population, Purposive sampling is ultimately a deliberate decision made by researchers to choose individuals who can offer the most valuable data. This strategy is essential when a researcher wants to investigate themes, patterns, or occurrences in a population subset, which calls for in-depth knowledge and subtle understanding. That is why the researchers selected the participants from the population based on their judgment, as the study is concerned primarily with examining the lived experiences of a few chosen farmers in Davao City. In addition, the data was collected from seven (7) participants. Besides, to find the participants, the researchers subjectively chose one barangay in Calinan, Davao City. The decision was made after the researchers identified that the barangay where the study was conducted resided mainly with farmers. The researchers selected participants from this barangay who benefited from the government's agricultural policy solutions until seven participants were selected. Moreover, participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and participants could withdraw from the study at any time.

## **Materials and Instrument**

The researchers used an online platform recording device, the in-depth interview (IDI) method, and formulated an interview guide question to gather the data. According to Bhat (2023), an in-depth interview, or IDI, is a qualitative data collection method with an open-ended question that generates the collection of the perceptions and experiences of the participants. Moreover, given the status quo, seven (7) farmer respondents will grapple with, share, and comprehend their experiences with the manner of agricultural conformity and programs conducted by the government regarding agricultural policy solutions. This would guide the respondents in answering the questions given to them, and it would be their discretion to answer and rationalize the question being asked. Moreover, the researchers ensured that the school's research experts checked the interview guide questions to verify their relevance and accuracy.

Furthermore, since this kind of interview offers the option to formulate additional questions, the researchers cultivated and utilized the privileges given to them to ask open-ended questions that broadened and deepened the researcher's understanding of the issue and could help the data evaluation. Using this approach, the researchers created a space in which respondents would be liberated into being expressive on things and issues they feel strongly about. As a result, the researchers were able to gain an accurate understanding of these insights and experiences, which are relevant to this study. Moreover, the interview guide questionnaire was reviewed and checked to assess and ascertain the validity of the interview guide questions. This structured interview guide questionnaire involved similar pre-written questions that were asked to every participant to make the comparison of the data gathered easier and ensured consistency (IndianScribes, 2023).

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section highlights the presentation of the results and the discussion. The data results were collected in one of the barangays of Davao City. A one-on-one, in-depth online interview was conducted with specifically chosen farmers who have benefited from any of the government's agricultural policies. Moreover, about four interview questions, the seven study participants willingly responded and shared their knowledge about their experiences, challenges, and even the coping mechanisms they implemented.

The researchers replaced the participants' names with pseudonyms to protect their identities. Heaton (2022) adds that a pseudonym is a false name that differs from the participant's actual name in qualitative research, and participants may either be assigned a pseudonym or asked to choose their own. In this study, however, the participants had the right to choose pseudonyms.

### Profile of the Participants

Participant 1, or "Edith," has been a farmer since she was young. She learned to farm coconut and cacao from her parents and was a beneficiary of fertilizer from the government.

Participant 2 preferred to be called "Neneth," a farmer for about 30 years already who has benefited from the government's agricultural policy, particularly salt for coconut.

Participant 3, or "Iska," has been farming since 1974, when she mastered banana, coconut, and cacao farming. She received free seeds from the Department of Agriculture (DA).

Participant 4, or "Sol," has been a corn farmer for almost 30 years and has received free seedlings and fertilizer from the government.

Participant 5, also known as "Opong," is a seasoned farmer with 50 years of experience farming durian, coconut, cacao, and coffee beans.

Participant 6 is "Dodong"; he was 18 years old when he started farming.

Participant 7, also known as "RJ," was exposed to farming when he was 18 years old and is an expert at farming fruits.

The in-depth online interview was conducted in one of the barangays in Davao City with the approval and help of the barangay officials to identify the participants. The interview started by introducing the researchers and explaining their study and its purpose. The researchers then asked each participant to introduce themselves, which included providing their desired pseudonyms. Moreover, the researchers assured that all participants had benefited from any of the government's agricultural policies. All participants were seasoned farmers with outstanding farming experience; four were females, and three were males. It should also be noted that the purpose of IDI, highlighting the idea of informed consent and the rights of the participants to which they were entitled, was discussed. While conversing with them, the researchers observed the readiness of the participants to respond to the questions.

## Lived Experiences of Davao City Farmers regarding the Agricultural Policy Solutions of the Government

The researchers organized the themes according to Davao City farmers' lived experiences about the government's agricultural policy solutions. These experiences centered on three (3) primary themes: Insufficiency of support, Inconsistency of support, and Impartiality of support.

*Insufficiency of support.* Based on the gathered data, participants were initially asked about their experiences as beneficiaries of the government's agricultural policy solutions. Some participants recounted their experiences regarding the government's insufficient support for their agricultural endeavors. Participant 1, or "Edith," recalled her experience and shared her thoughts.

*"Ang akong nasinatian no kanang dili man jud focus nagahatag og assistance or hinabang ang government sa mag-uuma diri sa Dabaw oy. Kung naa man perte ra jud gagmaya unya may nalang kung muagi pa ang tag 3 or 4 years before pa dugay kaayo. What is, makaluluoy ang mag-uuman diris Dabaw oy kung muhatag man gamay ra pud."* (What I have experienced is that the government doesn't really focus on giving assistance or help to its farmers here in Davao. If there's any help it would probably be around 4 to 5 years and it's too long. This is pitiful for the farmers because if they give it is too little). – Participant 1

The study participants highlighted their dissatisfaction with the need for more focus on assisting with the part of the government, particularly assistance for their agricultural endeavors. They perceived the limited and delayed agricultural policy solutions as insufficient to meet their agricultural needs. This statement of "Edith" is supported by Participant 7 or his given name, "RJ."

*"Pasabot nako ba nga naa juy kulang usahay pud ba ang atoang government murag parehas anang bahin sa abuno, kung i-maintain nila murag ana ba."* (What I mean is that I understand that sometimes there is a lack of support from the government, just like with fertilizer. If they can just maintain it, it will be helpful). – Participant 7

The government's agricultural policy solutions sometimes feel lacking, specifically in the management of fertilizers for farmers. Almasen (2022) highlights the statement of Director Wilfredo Roldan of the Department of Agriculture—Fertilizer and Pesticide Authority (DA-FPA) that fertilizer is significant for attaining food security as it helps grow healthy crops and improves the soil, allowing crops to absorb the necessary nutrients and transfer them to consumers, which include people. Fertilizer is essential as it helps farmers grow healthy crops. However, as farmers in Davao City experienced, the support given to them is not enough, and the maintenance of support is lacking at the same time. Moreover, there is no denying that all Filipino farmers must get aid from the government, but this support must be done comprehensively and promptly (Manila Bulletin, 2023). Therefore, the Philippine government must liberalize and streamline the agricultural policy solutions they implement, which are by the political-economic theory that highlights how the government utilizes its resources, not to mention that Davao City farmers feel that the support they receive is insufficient to meet their agricultural needs.

While most participants strongly argued about their dissatisfaction, Participant 2 and Participant 4 believed that the support they received was sufficient and satisfactory.

*"Aw nakuntento raman pud ko ato kay mao raman pud to akong na kuan pud, nakatabang man sad to sa among panginabuhi."* (Well, I was satisfied with it somehow because it helped us and our livelihood). – Participant 2

*"Okay raman siya, kay makalibre sab mi sa mga seedlings ug sa abuno."* (It is good because we get to have seedlings and fertilizer for free). – Participant 4

*Inconsistency of support.* Most participants also stated that the support they received from the government needed to be more consistent. The interviewed participants highlighted instances where they benefited from any of the government's agricultural policy solutions and instances where they felt neglected in terms of



support. Since governmental agricultural programs were essential to the lives of the participants, considering that it was their way and means of living, it was discovered that most participants were dissatisfied with the implementation of such programs. It was exemplified in the sharing of Participant 3 and Participant 1.

*"Dili man gud magpareha, dong, usahay naay madawat usahay wala, unya dili lang sad kay kami, daghan man gud mi, dili pud maato sa gobyerno og suroy-suroy ba."* (It is not the same, sometimes we receive something and there are times that we do not, and it is not just me, there's plenty of us that the government will not be able to cover). – Participant 3

*"Dako gud unta kayo to ug tabang kung naa lang pirme kay ngano, nindot kayo ang result sa bunga sa tanom labi na ang lubi kay taba kaayo sya, unya muani jud sya insakto nga produksyon dili gyud ingon nga kuan, taba ba, бага kaayo ang unod sa lubi."* (It would definitely be a big help if it were always available. You know why? The coconut fruit is so healthy. It also earns a good production, certainly not a deficit; the fruit itself is so thick). – Participant 1

Participant 1 also complained about the lengthy waiting periods for such support to be provided. Given her ownership of a significant portion of agricultural land, she voiced that the support would be beneficial.

*"Kuntinto unta, kung dili gud intawon pila ka years, pila na ka years ang niagi wala na pud, another batch dapat unta bisan nalang every 5 years or 4 years baron, inani nga pila na ka years ang niagi."* (I would be satisfied if it would not take years; many years have passed, and there is nothing. For another batch, it would be better to have at least 4 or 5 years, unlike this, where so many years have already passed). – Participant 1

Considering that the Philippines is considered an agricultural country with its vast corn fields and vegetable gardens, it is questionable that the Philippine government could not provide consistency with its agricultural programs. Given that farming is considered one of the most neglected sectors in the country, as highlighted in the report of the Inquirer (2023), it is imperative that even small agricultural support is consistently provided. Interviewees felt that it would greatly help them if agricultural policy solutions were always available and provided. Moreover, the inconsistency of agricultural support affected participants' perceptions of their contentment. Participant 6, or "Dodong," argued that the irregular agricultural support led to his dissatisfaction.

*"Unta ug mag permanente, ug nag permanente, kontento kaayo. Kay karon, kami namay namalit, dili naman pautang."* (Only if it was permanent would I be satisfied. Because today we are the ones buying everything, there are no longer loans from the government). – Participant 6

According to the National Farmers Union (2022), small-scale farmers and farmworkers have fallen between the disparities and problems in the current agricultural support systems. Research in Africa states that policy inconsistencies affected or slowed farmers' production. It is provided that farmers are consequently required to obtain what they need, even in the face of government initiatives offering free resources like seeds and fertilizer (Banda, 2021). This implies that beyond the agricultural policy solutions, the government has implemented, the inconsistency of support being given to them, which takes even years, is problematic, as Davao City farmers felt unsatisfied. After all, this theme correlates with the political-economic theory, as the participants' positions made it clear that timely and consistent agricultural programs are what Davao City farmers need, not to mention the dilemmas of the inconsistencies within the scope of agricultural production, which have a detrimental impact on food sustainability. The interconnectedness between the power dynamics of agricultural policies and resource allocation should be considered the primary contributor to the inconsistency of support.

*Impartiality of support.* Equality without bias is essential in any democratic country like the Philippines, where the essence of representing and providing for anyone, regardless of everything, must be upheld and respected. Moreover, it must be implied that considering the status quo of the agriculture sector, the need to support every farmer is essential to achieving food security. Karn Manhas, the founder, and CEO of Terramera, an agricultural company, provides that it is critical to provide impartial support to farmers due to the more frequent calamities they face, including extreme weather events, typhoons, and inflation, among others (Manhas, 2023). Based on the participants' responses, it was discovered that Davao City farmers get

agricultural policy solutions from different government agricultural agencies. Two participants shared where they got the agricultural policy of the government.

*"Sa kuan na siya sa, diha bitaw sa kuan sa PCA, unya miyembro man mi ana mao tung gi distributan mig asin."* (It was from the PCA, which we were members of. That is why they distribute the salt to us). – Participant 6

*"Siyempre sa amoang, ang amoang Department of Agriculture, atoang City Agri naga connect man pud na sa barangay."* (Of course, they are from the Department of Agriculture and our city agriculture, and they are connected to the barangay). – Participant 7

Being a member of a local agricultural organization like the Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA) or having access to updates from the local government unit is essential for the farmers to benefit from the policies. Unfortunately, some participants felt that the impartiality of the agricultural policy solutions implemented by the government was problematic, only choosing or favoring some people or groups and neglecting others. According to Participant 6, support is only limited by the government's choice of who and where to give such assistance.

*"Wala naka-uyon, wala nay suporta, naay ayuda, bugas, unsa pay ubang ayuda sa gobyerno, pero pilion ra pud, usahay kami wala."* (I really did not like it. There is no longer support; there is this rice and any other program of the government, but they only choose where to give it; sometimes we do not get anything). – Participant 6

Furthermore, some participants thought they were unlucky not to be chosen to receive support. The sharing continued with one of the participants emphasizing the problematic system of distributing agricultural aid, especially for new and young members of the farmers' organization.

*"Naay distribution sa abuno para daw to sa kuan, mga asin man to mga prutas unya dili man pud tanan mag-uuma mura raman tung mga member nga mga nagdugay na pero ang bagohan wala pa kadawat."* (There was a fertilizer distribution for the crops; it was salt and fruits, and it is not for all the farmers; just a few who have been members for a while and some who were new did not yet receive anything). - Participant 1

The responses from the interviewees regarding the implementation of agricultural policy solutions are a testament to both successful bureaucracy in distribution and its failure to achieve impartiality. Despite Davao City LGU's performance in fostering an inclusive government for farmers, primarily through their respective organizations, the fact that exclusivity, the idea that only members of the organization can benefit, and its implications on agricultural distribution remain a hindrance to achieving a policy solution that is free from any structural inequalities and systematic biases.

### **Primary Challenges the farmers in Davao City face while accessing and utilizing Agricultural Policy Solutions**

The primary challenges Davao City farmers faced often stemmed from their lived experiences receiving and using agricultural benefits from the government. These challenges encompassed four main themes. The themes include the Releasing Mechanisms and Guidelines Challenge, Unprecedented Natural Challenges, External Support Challenges, and Internal Self-Support Challenges.

*Releasing Mechanisms and Guidelines Challenge.* One of the significant challenges Davao City farmers faced in their lived experiences regarding the government's agricultural policy solutions was the complexity of the release mechanisms and guidelines. They felt the policies needed more inclusive due to intricate requirements and complicated implementation for receiving agricultural programs. One of the participants confirmed this by saying the process was challenging and sometimes unresponsive.

*"Dapat unta kung naay assistance, syempre assistance dili na gud unta pud lisod-lisuron ang mga planters kung dili i-ano na sa area, designated nila kung asa og kinsa ilang tagaan, dili kay kami pa ang mag problema, dili namo makuha kung dili kami ang mag-amot sa amoang panginahanglanun."* (It should have

been if there was assistance; of course, since it is assistance, it should not be difficult for the planters but instead provide it in the area. They should have designated it to where and to whom they would give it, not that we will be carrying the problem. We won't be able to get it if we do not fund our needs). – Participant 1

Davao City farmers need to grasp the complexity of mechanisms and guidelines to benefit from the policies. They felt that the release of implementation in accessing agricultural policy solutions made it difficult for farmers to manage these complicated procedures, which at the same time complicated their ability to benefit from government subsidies properly. This was supported by Participant 5, or by his preferred name, "Opong," when he argued about the unfair distribution of the program.

*"Dili kuan, dili patas ang ilang ginahatag sa programa nila, dili patas, dili pantay."* (No, the distribution of the program is unfair, so it is not equal). – Participant 5

Not only are the releasing mechanisms and guidelines challenging in accessing these policy solutions, but also the partiality of the said support. This highlights that the guidelines implemented have problems regarding the amount or quantity of support, leaving some farmers feeling neglected or questioning the integrity of the release implementation. According to the report in the Manila Bulletin (2023), AGRI Party-list Representative Wilbert Lee pointed out that the Philippine government offers subsidies and other forms of support to Filipino farmers where the Philippine bicameral Congress allocates enough funds for their implementation. The only problem, according to the report, is that, due to the complicated criteria, it has yet to be used. Representative Solon notes how challenging it is to get assistance due to the numerous, time-consuming qualifications.

Moreover, it highlights that policies often get redirected because the farmer's group disagrees with the officials. Considering this scenario, it must be considered that the interests and programs of the farmers should be kept separate from politics. Therefore, it should not be a burden for the farmers who need assistance from the government. That is why, in this context, the political-economic theory correlates with the theme, signifying how bureaucratic inefficiencies on the part of the agriculture authority and established biases may block the fair distribution of the programs.

On the other hand, while some participants raised their concerns, Participants 3 and 7 seemed satisfied with the releasing mechanisms and guidelines provided in the agricultural policy solutions.

*"Aw wala, kay naa mi grupo, naa mi cooperative, kung mag adto lang ka perme sa cooperative makabenepisyo ka sa ilang mga panghatag."* (Oh, nothing, because we have a cooperative; you only need to go to the cooperative every time for you to benefit from their distribution). – Participant 3

*"So far, wala man pud, ah dali raman kay ang City Agri diria man pud na assign, abtik pud kaayo siya, so pasa ra tag request, okay raman wala man siyay ingon na gi lisod lisod."* (So far, there are none. It was easy because the city agriculture assigned here was active; you had to pass the request, and you were good to go. There is nothing that I can consider a challenge). – Participant 7

*Unprecedented Natural Challenges.* The Philippines lies not only in the Pacific Ring of Fire, which is the reason for concerning earthquakes, and beside the Pacific Ocean, resulting in destructive typhoons and volcanic eruptions provided by the Statistica Research Department (2024), but also experiences tropical conditions distinct dry and wet seasons; farmers are the ones that are affected the most. Corn fields covered with floodwater or destroyed by strong winds and farm fields yielding heat because of irrigation issues are just a few of the natural challenges farmers face, not to mention pest control problems. Participant 4 and Participant 5 affirmed this view when they emphasized the natural challenges in their agricultural endeavor.

*"Kana lang siguro tig tanom na bitaw tapos naay mga insekto, failure unya usahay mabahaan."* (I think only during the planting season when there are insects, so it is really a failure, and sometimes it is affected by flooding). – Participant 4

*"Syempre kay usahay di man nato matagnaan ang panahon, mag drought, mag init init, malaya siya, unya ang insekto pud, unya ang sa cacao, mga insekto pud."* (Of course, since sometimes we cannot predict the weather,

if there is a drought, the crops will dry out and the insects will spread diseases in the cacao). – Participant 5

According to the Environmental Protection Agency (2023), natural disasters, including hurricanes, floods, fires, earthquakes, and tornadoes, threaten agricultural productivity yearly. It adds that natural disasters and catastrophes readily damage agriculture since it depends on the weather, climate, and water availability to survive. With the changing weather in the Philippines, floods and typhoons are a significant concern for the farmers, and the lengthy dry season may seriously affect crops. Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) confirms that the dry season in the country starts from December to May, while the rainy season is from June to November. The challenge lies in the issue of prolonged droughts that slow the growth of crops, which can eventually lead to crop loss. Besides, since drought can weaken plants, especially if the irrigation system is problematic, the weaker crops are more vulnerable to disease and pests. The participant responses made it clear that such natural challenges affected the success of their agricultural endeavor.

*External Support Challenges.* It is crucial to consider the dilemma stemming from outside the local government in understanding the challenges Davao City farmers face in accessing and utilizing agricultural policy solutions from the government. Moreover, external support challenges pose a concerning problem, particularly insufficient government funding for agricultural programs and limited opportunities for farmers to attain financial assistance. This was supported by Participant 7 when he pointed out that the farmers frequently lacked sufficient resources.

*"Ang atong government naa man unta siyay mga panglantaw, dili lagi ingon tanan ma accommodate. Unya kay tungod lagi pud sa kadaghan so mao raman jud na ang makita jud namo nga mga problema, kay kung si government naa siyay mahatag pero dili constant ba, mao jud na ang iyahang mga medisina, ana abuno, so then kung naa man bahin-bahinon pa jud namo, kanang naa mi, sa among farmers, naa tuy time na tig duha ka kilo ra mi, tulo, isa ka kilo ana ba. So kuan, naa may budget kung baga, pero dili lagi enough."* (Our government has plans for us, but not all farmers will be accommodated because of the huge population, and that is the only problem that we saw. Though the government does give some support, it is not constant. There is medicine and fertilizer, but if there is, we still need to divide it. There are times that we only get 2 or 3 kilograms. There is a budget, but it is not enough). – Participant 7

Without enough financial assistance and funding to implement agricultural programs, the implementation is heavily affected, devastating farmers who need agricultural support. Savoy (2022), in his commentary posted in the Center for Strategic and International Studies, explains that government funding is essential as the primary source of support for farmers. Moreover, according to the City Information Office (2020), the local government unit allocated five hundred thousand pesos to support Davao City farmers, on which they implemented the C.L.E.A.R. Program, or Confirm, Locate, Engage, Address, and Resolve, run by the City Agriculturist Office (CAO), to help farmers whose income is impacted by a decline in farmgate prices of agricultural goods like vegetables. This year, 2024, Sunstar Philippines (2024) reports that the Rice Farmers Financial Assistance (RFFA) program under Republic Act No. 11203, or the Rice Tariffication Law, of which 40,000 rice farmers in Davao Region would get five thousand pesos, is expected to receive an allocation of P213 million, according to the Department of Agriculture-Davao Region (DA-Davao).

However, reports have been made on financial support for other farmers, such as coconut, cacao, and banana. With the concerning responses from the participants, there is no denying that agricultural and budgetary support is not enough to meet the needs of the farmers, as exemplified by one participant.

*"Kung maghatag ug suporta, dapat suporta jud sa agriculture. Naay fertilizer, saamo kay lubi naa may PCA, unya minus man ang panorbe kami na lang mag palit, unya kanang kuan mga abuno sa mga prutas walay suporta sa gobyerno uy."* (If they will give support, it should be support for agriculture. We have fertilizer, and in coconut we have PCA. Since the survey is free, we only need to buy it. Then, when it comes to fertilizers for fruits, there is no support coming from the government). – Participant 6

*Internal Self-support Challenges.* With the lack of external support given to the Davao City farmers, mainly because they felt the budgetary or financial programs needed to be revised, they tend to rely on their ability to

manage their agricultural endeavors independently or within their agricultural organization. However, the participants encountered an array of challenges within their agricultural community. Access to agricultural resources and the organization's incapacity to solve problems within their scope were only some internal self-support challenges participants shared, particularly Participant 1 and Participant 5.

*"Hay super giyud, dako ko ug amount nga nahatag atong time gani nga, kay ako man gud ang kuan adto, ako ang treasurer on that time ang na elect namo nga president amo pud diri nga kapitbahay which is maapil namo tung abuno, kami ang mag-abaga sa dako kaayo nga truck. So wala may kuan, wala may lain ako ra gyud intawon adto nag-abaga sa transportation og sa food sa driver."* (Super, I gave a large sum of money during those times. I was the treasurer at that time, and our president here was my neighbor. The thing is, we could only avail ourselves of fertilizer if we carried the huge truck carrying it. Since no one dared to, I took the initiative to shoulder the payment for the truck and the food for the driver). – Participant 1

*"So syempre ah, listed kay gamay ra ang abot unya mahal ang palitonon, mahal bugas so lisod jud."* (Of course, it is very difficult since the products that were harvested are very cheap and the living commodities are costly, the rice is expensive, so it is tricky). – Participant 5

Moreover, Participant 3 continued the sharing, highlighting leadership issues in their organization that affected the support they were receiving.

*"Wala pud ko kabalo unsay tumong sa gobyerno, kay diri pud sa among grupo murag nawala sab to among chairman sa PCA."* (I don't really know the plan of the government because, in our group, our former chairman is no longer part of PCA). – Participant 3

Davao City farmers often rely on their capacity to solve agricultural issues. However, as the interviewees highlighted, limited access to resources and issues about leadership underscore a demand for more adaptable practices, specifically within their agricultural community. It highlights that more than supporting themselves independently is required because of the underlying problems that must be addressed. The availability of financial capacity in the organization, especially when facing problems with the transportation of crops and limited access to irrigation, restricts their ability to overcome such a financial burden (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2023). Also, organizational leadership must be vital, considering the critical role that farmer organizations, like cooperatives, play in sharing resources and information.

### **Strategies and Coping Mechanisms Davao City farmers practice to address their Challenges**

The agricultural community of Davao City demonstrated innovation and resilience as they faced specific challenges in their agricultural endeavors. Employing different strategies and coping mechanisms was essential to mitigating such challenges, not to mention that farmers' resilience is essential to achieving food security. The findings can be read in three (3) primary themes: Self-reliance and Diligence, Alternative Solutions and Organic Farming, and Faith in the Almighty.

*Self-reliance and Diligence.* There needs to be an insufficient supply of products from the government to make the farmers of Davao City stand independently and not depend on the benefits the government would provide. Farmers from Davao City have their way of coping with the expenses to help and provide for their families. This inquiry indicates that interviewees survived, given that insufficient support and supplies are visible in agriculture. Participant 5, or "Opong," indicated that despite the challenges, they continued to work.

*"Nagtiis, nag self-employed as, kami, ako lang naga trabaho, akong anak para ma less gasto sa laborer unya sa cacao kami pud nagabalot sa bunga kay mahal man ang medisina so kami pud ang ga harvest ug kuan ug wala na naga pa labor."* (We endured. We are self-employed; we only work by ourselves, my family, and my family, so that we will have fewer expenses for laborers. For cacao, we are also the ones that cover its bearings so that the insects will not eat the cacao shell because medicine is costly. We are also the ones who harvest the products to avoid any labor expenses). – Participant 5

Due to several challenges that the farmers of Davao City have faced, they have tried to cope with their

strategies in life. Lack of support, insufficient supplies, and occasional financial support made the participants work with themselves and supply their land with medicines and products that could help them farm. Most of the farmers build a different kind of life to support their land and their families. Participant 3, or "Iska," devised her strategies.

*"Nagbuhi-buhi ko ug baboy, unya ika-duha kaning mga saging, nagtanom bisag hawong pero makatabang pud."* (I raise pigs, and second is this banana that I've planted, even though it's not that much, but somehow it helps.) – Participant 3

The two statements concurred that there is a need to stand independently and never depend on the insufficient supplies and minimal benefits that the Department of Agriculture has provided. The interviewed participants were less reliant on the supplies and beneficiaries the government provided due to its inadequateness, and they could only support some farmers in Davao City. However, self-reliance starts with focusing on oneself; instead of leading to stability, it could lead to disruption (Campanella, 2023). That is why farmers relying too much on each other could disrupt production, as the lack of government support can affect the goods and services of the farmers in Davao City. This means that farmers tend to stand independently and depend on what they can do to help their families due to an insufficient supply of products. According to the Decision-Making Theory, humans have limitations and face many hindrances in life. This theory explains why this theme is present simply because the participants realized pragmatic and adaptive ways to cope with the challenges and not depend on government aid, not to mention the problem when it comes to the distribution timeline.

*Alternative Solutions and Organic Farming.* With the lack of supplies and support from the government, the farmers of Davao City made alternative solutions to keep their farming from deteriorating and implemented organic farming methods. Most farmers must focus their lives on farming since more is needed to cover all their expenses, especially fertilizer and seedlings. That is why, with the help of alternative options, they strive for their agricultural land and solve the primary challenges they have faced. Participant 6, who preferred to be called "Dodong," has mentioned his alternative solutions.

*"Sa una jud programa nako sauna nag-alaga kog baboy sarili, ug hayop. Para sa mahuman ug eskwela sa mga bata, nanarbaho kog kompanya, para lang makab-ot ko ilang gikinahanglan. Kay kung dili, kay lisod ang mga bata ug dili nimo supportahan."* (Before, one of my programs was raising piglets and other animals. So that my children would finish their studies, I also worked for a company so that I could provide for them. It is very difficult if I cannot provide for or support them.) – Participant 6

Such alternative solutions impacted the participants as they lessened their agricultural burden. Some of them manage to build their businesses and raise livestock animals, such as pigs, to provide for their families. Aside from focusing on other businesses, they also have alternative solutions for fertilizers and other products in need of agriculture. Participant 7, or "RJ," explained how he utilized organic farming.

*"So far, daghan mga pamaagi, parehas anang imbis na abunuhan siya ug kuan mga commercial so nag kuan pud mig mga, kining organic ana. Ana lang, nag take initiative lang jud mi, mga organic, fertilizer."* (So far, there are many ways, just like instead of fertilizing it with commercial fertilizer, we used organic fertilizer. Instead, we have to take the initiative and use organic fertilizer.) – Participant 7

Farmers figure out other options to retain their agricultural land and help their families with the expenses, such as taking care of livestock animals and organic farming. Decision-Making Theory by Herbert Simon and the Coping Theory defined by Lazarus and Folkman were connected to the alternative solutions that the farmers undertake to cope with the struggles that they faced due to a lack of support and benefits from the government. These struggles have made the farmers decide on alternative farming options; they decided to establish other businesses to cope with the governmental support struggles. With this, it is evident that inadequate supplies and support from the Department of Agriculture made the participants strive on their own. The farmers practice alternative solutions and organic farming to support their agricultural land. Both statements admitted that raising livestock animals and formulating organic fertilizers have saved their agriculture. Besides, it should be noted that the importance of implementing an alternative approach is that it can be used to maintain and elevate productivity. Nonetheless, organic farming is known for being the best agricultural solution

(Gamage et al., 2023).

*Faith in the Almighty.* Farmers from Davao City wanted to rely on the government, but they relied on their faith in God instead because of insufficient support and a lack of products. It is relevant, not to mention that religion is part of the lives of Filipinos. As a last resort, they pray for their agricultural land to be given a healthy growth of fruits and fertile soil. Their faith keeps them from deteriorating, no matter how difficult their lives as farmers are. This foundation of faith in the Almighty is supported by Participant 2, or "Neneth," when she indicated how her faith helped her persevere.

*"Nakatabang sa sa akoo, for example, naa koy pangayuon sa Ginoo pinaagi sakong kusog, pinaagi sakong paningkamot, kana ako gyud na experience nako bisan sa kuan gud dili gud ingon nga kanang dagko kaayo mga ingon nato nga kanang maabot nato, at least nabuhi ta, gi-tabangan ta sa Ginoo. Mao ra gyud na akong kuan gyud pinaagi pud sa pagpaningkamot ug kusog."* (It helps me, for example, when I ask for something from God, and through my strength, perseverance, and hard work, regardless of how big obstacles come into your life, God helps me. That is it, I think, with strength and perseverance.) – Participant 2

Relying on their faith gives them strength to pursue their agriculture. They devised many strategies and different solutions to satisfy their agricultural needs, but praying and believing in the words of God are also essential for them. There is no denying that insufficient supplies and unequal support from the government have affected their agriculture. However, with the faith that the farmers of Davao City possess, they believe they can somehow gain and overcome everything through hope. Another participant supported this by emphasizing the relationship between persistence and strong faith.

*"Ang ako ra kay diskarte na lang gud, di ka kabalo maningkamot wala sad ka, dapat tama ang gisulti sa bibliya nga lihok tao kay tabangan ko ikaw, ug di sad ka mulihok, wala uy."* (On my end, you just need to think about strategies; if you don't work hard, then you have nothing to gain. The bible is right when it says, act, man, for I will help you, and if you do not act, you will have nothing to gain.) – Participant 6

By believing in the Almighty, the farmers from Davao City stated that it helps them cope with challenges and ignites the essence of hope in their lives. Working hard is one of their solutions, but as the participants highlighted, with the Almighty being with them, there will be guidance in their agricultural endeavors. Technically, the participants agreed that faith is necessary in their lives and would instead rely on faith to help themselves rather than expect an equal distribution of support from the government. According to Lang (2018), religion and agriculture have partnered in the past century, and religious traditions have had such a significant impact on agriculture that they have been practiced and spread worldwide. Religion, therefore, has a positive impact on the farmers since it gives them the idea that there is something or someone bigger to believe in. According to the Coping Theory, people choose a coping mechanism to help them assess the situation. In this theme, after all, faith becomes their coping mechanism; they prayed to make their plants grow healthy, and through faith, farmers could strive through the difficulties they faced.

### **Valuable Insights and Recommendations of Davao City Farmers in relation to such policies**

Considering agricultural policy solutions that the Philippine government has provided that have significantly affected their agricultural experiences, Davao City farmers shared valuable insights and recommendations that explain how such policies can better support their livelihood and confront significant challenges. Their insights concentrated on three (3) primary themes. The themes were The Need to Prioritize Farmers and the Agricultural Sector, The Demand for a Higher and More Sufficient Budget, and The Call for a More Consistent and Fair Support Mechanism.

*The Need to Prioritize Farmers and the Agricultural Sector.* The inquiry concerns the valuable perspective of the lived experiences of Davao City farmers about environmental policy solutions and the cry for the need to prioritize the sector. It is imperative to call for aid since it is the backbone of economic development, based on the conclusions drawn from the obtained and assembled data. Most recalled their beneficiary experience and sought more focused, centralized agricultural policy solutions. Participant 1 shared her thoughts and aspirations for the future of the Philippine agriculture sector.

*"Kung pwede lang sus, kung pwede lang tagaan dako nga focus ba nga matagaan ang mga farmers ug dako nga focus nga programa para gani nga muangat pud ni atong Pilipinas oy nga dili nga puro lang salita e aksyunan jud dili jud ingon na kanang unsa na oy murag naa, murag wa unsa baron oy, kung dili lagi manikay-sikay og kaulingon ang mag-uuma wala jud intawon mahimo magpabilin ra gyud sa kawad-on bal-an nimo mahal ang paliliton unya barato kaayo ang mga produkto." (Only if it is possible, only if they could put a big focus on the program for the farmers so that our Philippines will also rise. Not that they are all on words; they should act as well. Really, if farmers won't do anything for themselves, they will remain poor, knowing how expensive the expenses are, but our products are bought very cheaply.) – Participant 1*

This proves that farmers in Davao City felt unsatisfied with the agricultural policy solution of the government, specifically the office of the Department of Agriculture, and opted to speak about the unparalleled situation, seeking the need for a more distinct prioritization of the agricultural sector. This statement was supported by Participant 7, or "RJ," when he highlighted the need for the government to prioritize the sector of agriculture.

*"Kanang unta si ang government kanang tuktukan jud unta ang agriculture, labi na jud sa kining didto sa bukid na side. Naay mga ubang karon nagstop na jud sila, maong gi divert na lang jud nila ug ang mga dagkong humayan nila dati, gihimo na nilang bulakan, gi hose na ana ba, ilang maisan wala na, kay dili na nila kaya." (I hope the government focuses on agriculture, especially in rural areas. Some farmers stopped and diverted their land from a rice field into a field into a flower garden; their crop of corn was also gone because they were not able to handle it.) – Participant 7*

Both statements agreed that the agricultural assistance of the Davao City government is not enough to support themselves; they also amplified their cry to the authorities to put more effort into agriculture. Pawlak and Kolodziejczak (2020) state, "The agriculture sector has an important strategic role in increasing food availability and ensuring food security." That is why the government should put more effort into aiding the inquiry and agricultural assistance of the farmers, specifically in the under-reserved areas. Moreover, this theme correlates with the political-economic theory as it shows implications for the government-farmer relationship and the call to prioritize the country's agricultural sector. Ordoñez (2023) highlights that this crisis in agriculture is embedded in the government's oversight.

*The Demand for a Higher and More Sufficient Budget.* Agriculture plays a pivotal role in the country's overall productivity, ranging from the demand for food security to the mechanism of budget allocation. Widening the scope of these elements is necessary to provide products that not only help the nation's economic growth but also contribute to the idea of a more profound and inclusive future. As the cornerstone of progress, farmers must benefit from adequate agricultural budgetary resources. One participant expressed his desire for a bigger and larger agricultural budget.

*"I hope nga tagaan pa nilag budget gani, dako dako na budget, husahay man gud instead kana, mao lagi ingon nako na ang farmers importante kayo, so unta atuang government naman naga kuan sa budget unta tagaan pa nila ug dako na budget ang mga infrastructure, aww atuang agriculture rather, labaw na jud diri sa atuang district, diri dapit sa atua namuyo na jud sila sa pag-uma." (I hope they will provide a budget—a bigger budget. As I have said, farmers are very important, and I hope our government will provide a bigger budget for our infrastructure, I mean agriculture rather, especially in our district, because the people that lived here grew up in farming.) – Participant 7*

The farmers paved a deep imploration for a sufficient budget to generate real-time advancement and amelioration on their farm for them to produce quality-standard products considering the ever-changing landscape of time and the demand of the growing population; hence, the participants also stated the issue surrounding the limited budget allocation in far-flung areas. Participant 5 highlighted his experience with how the insufficient budget allocation resulted in inequality.

*"Wala sila ka benepisyo sa mga ah katung mga seedlings, wa sila ka kuha unya mao tuy naka ah murag nabalda pud ang uban nga mga farmers tungod ana murag dili gani pantay ang pag distribute nila." (They did not benefit, they did not receive the seedlings, resulting in the loss of the farmers, and it looked like the distribution was unfair)– Participant 5*



Budget allotment causes a massive disparity in the capability of a government agency to perform its mandate. This not only affects the system of engagement but also influences the dynamics and scope of the beneficiary. Regardless of the staggering budget range of 197.84 billion for 2024 for food and water security, according to the Department of Budget and Management (2023), farmers still have concerns about its inadequate and maldistribution process. This theme is consistent with the political-economic theory as it perpetuates the lack of government intervention that leads to the farmer's perception and experience of insufficient agricultural policy solutions, renouncing the call for an adequate monetary grant.

*The Call for a More Consistent and Fair Support Mechanism.* In the representation of the Department of Agriculture (DA), the government must procure a more conducive sagacity in administering plans and programs that would not result in bias. The principle of good governance is to adhere to the people without reservation, particularly in agricultural policy solutions towards the populace. Subsequently, these programs should be dispensed continuously. Participant 3, or by her preferred name, "Iska," expressed her hope and desire for the continuation of the existing agricultural policy solutions.

*"Manghinaut ko nga magpadayon tung paghatag sa gobyerno, abuno, mga semilya, ug pati sa amoa, ang among mga panginahanglan sa matag adlaw, mga gulay aron maka survive pud nga dili na magpalit."* (I hope that the government will continue to give us fertilizer, seeds, and our daily needs like vegetables so that we can survive without having to buy them.) – Participant 3

Fortifying the scrutiny of consistency as the beneficiary of the mentioned agricultural programs, namely seed and fertilizers, gratifies the government for the initiative and probes a constant distribution. The statement of Participant 3 was claimed by Participant 4, or "Sol," when she coined her call for additional support.

*"Ipadayon lang nila ang paghatag tapos siguro dungagan pa ang mga ubang panghatag like sa palay og sa abuno og muhatag pud unta sila og pang spray sa sagbot ug pang-insekto."* (They just have to continue their assistance and maybe add more to it, like seeds and fertilizer, as well as spray for insects and plants.) – Participant 4

Both asked for consistency of the agricultural policy solution from the government, as this persistently became a day-to-day convenience to them if the programs continued, as this maximized profitability. "Consistency assurance is more than just delivering great products; it is about cultivating relationships based on trust and satisfaction," said Samuel and Magali (2024). For farmers to deliver quality and standard products, government policy solutions in agriculture must be persistent, viewing imperative impact and declaring a robust outcome.

In an additional statement, programs like these must be executed equally, as Participant 5 elaborated further on the perception of fairness in the distribution and assessment of beneficiaries of these programs.

*"Unta pantay ang pagtagad sa mga katawhan, ang pag distribute sa mga seedlings ipantay nila, labi natong mga benepisyari sa yuta nga tagiya jud sa mga ah sa ilang mga lupa na unta matagaan kay sila pantay ang ilang, dili sila mag pili ug tao kay ang uban ah usahay kato ra mga arangan tungod kay makakaya sila mao ratong tagaan ang katong mga pobre nga walang wala usahay di sila makadawat."* (I hope that the distribution of seedlings and the attention given to the farmers will be equal and fair, especially for those farmers who have their own property. I also hope there will be a proper distribution of beneficiaries. They should not choose people who should benefit from it because they only choose people who are better off because they can provide. I hope they will also give the poor farmers their beneficiaries.) – Participant 5

Henceforth, adjuratory to the government-farmers relationship affiliated with the Political Economic Theory that the government's role is to provide legal infrastructure and food security for an economic corporation (Kazumi, 2020), seizing the full realization that agricultural policy solutions do not merit the farmer's need for quality and competent, fair service as citizens of the state and as members of the agricultural sector, as shown in the presented data, their unsatisfactory experience exemplary to policy programs of the administration. Therefore, there is no denying that ensuring a fair distribution of agricultural programs is crucial for fostering sustainable development and food security. Equitable access to resources, technology, and training empowers

farmers of all scales, promoting inclusive growth. Additionally, a balanced distribution mitigates environmental risks, promoting responsible farming practices. According to Krivonos (2022), fairness in agricultural programs is pivotal for creating resilient, diverse, and thriving agricultural landscapes, ultimately benefiting local economies and global food systems.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

### Conclusion

This phenomenological inquiry successfully understands the lived experiences of Davao City farmers regarding the government's agricultural policy solutions, including the challenges, strategies, coping mechanisms, and valuable insights they employed. Moreover, when it comes to the lived experiences of the farmers, the issue of the implementation and support given to Filipino farmers has been considered vital to understanding, considering the problems with which the agricultural sector is dealing with the status quo. For Davao City farmers, the agricultural policy solutions are insufficient as they fail to meet their agricultural needs. Essentially, the participants expressed their dissatisfaction with the agricultural policies the government is implementing, especially noting the lack of consistency and responsiveness of the government in distributing agricultural programs. The inadequate and timely assistance provided to the farmers of Davao City, particularly small-scale farmers, are the roadblocks hindering their essential role in achieving food security, not to mention the questionable partiality of the agricultural policy solutions. That is why, in the context of their lived experiences, participants emphasized the issues and concerns about the problems of insufficient, inconsistent, and impartial support they received from the government.

However, not only did their lived experiences keep them from being dissatisfied, but they also faced underlying primary issues while accessing and utilizing agricultural policy solutions. Both personal and natural challenges cause the problems. This includes the complexity of distribution, especially concerning the government's guidelines and mechanisms that restricted their access to agricultural programs due to such bureaucratic hurdles and the self-support challenges they experienced. According to Yu (2022), misguided government initiatives have harmed farmers and consumers. Moreover, there is no denying how natural challenges have impacted Davao City farmers in the areas of changing weather and pest control, not to mention their economic incapability. That is why the unprecedented natural challenges have affected Davao City farmers, especially their success in their agricultural endeavors. On the other hand, not only did such natural challenges hinder their agricultural life but also the external support challenges they faced. One of the major obstacles was insufficient governmental funding, which also posed a threat to food security. Moreover, internal self-support challenges, especially within the participant's agricultural community, concluded the primary challenges Davao City farmers faced while accessing and utilizing such agricultural policy solutions.

That is why the participants practiced strategies and coping mechanisms to address the challenges they faced. Most of them applied self-reliance and diligence to survive with their agricultural endeavors. In fact, alternative solutions and organic farming were another way for the participants to cope with the challenges, not to mention that organic farming is known for being the best agricultural solution (Gamage et al., 2023). Considering that the Philippines is a religious country, participants considered their faith in the Almighty as another coping strategy, as it gave them hope and guidance from the start until harvesting their crops. Essentially, they have considered this their last resort that kept them from collapsing completely. These strategies and coping mechanisms were essential to mitigating the challenges the participants faced. This is a manifestation of the innovation and resilience that Davao City farmers have demonstrated.

Lastly, the participants' valuable recommendations must be considered to ensure a more efficient way of implementing and distributing the government's agricultural policies. The consensus of the participants highlights that the Philippine government, both national and local government units, including the bureaucratic agencies, especially the Department of Agriculture (DA), must prioritize the neglected agriculture sector. Technically, the need to prioritize farmers and the agriculture sector was the first valuable insight and recommendation the participants shared. It is concerning that the country's agriculture sector used to be the training ground for its neighboring Southeast Asian countries. However, farmers today who provide food for the rest of the country end up hungry (Benito, 2020). Moreover, the participants raised their demand for a

higher and more sufficient budget, which is essential to meet their agricultural needs, as well as the call for more consistent and fair support mechanisms. That is why recognizing the need for a higher and sufficient budget in the sector is essential to ensuring that the implementation of agriculture policy solutions will be consistent and fair. Despite the challenges they faced from their experiences, Davao City farmers are a living testament to the resilience of the country's agricultural community.

### Implication

Agriculture is the backbone of the Philippine economy but is also considered the country's most neglected and poorest sector. Considering that agriculture determines food security and food security is a matter of national security, prioritizing the agriculture sector and providing the necessary needs and support to every farmer, regardless of how big or small their agricultural land, is vital. The country's President, Ferdinand E. Marcos Jr., led the Department of Agriculture for several months after he was elected, which was a testament to this administration's focus on prioritizing the sector of agriculture (SunStar Philippines, 2023). However, the farmers of Davao City have experienced insufficient and unequal support from the government, not to mention the primary challenges that occurred when they received and utilized the agricultural programs, and these problems became an issue in their agricultural endeavors. That is why the findings of this study hold significant implications for Davao City farmers, as it allowed them to voice out their lived experiences. It could pave the way for an inclusive decision-making process where the livelihoods and well-being of the farmers are prioritized and improved.

Furthermore, this study serves as the primary source of information for the country's national and local legislators. To address the farmers' challenges, the Philippine government must review their implementation and distribution processes and prioritize addressing the need for policy reform. To enhance the current agricultural policy solutions the government is implementing, more specialized and effective approaches or strategies must be enacted to deal with the challenges and help society's most vital yet most vulnerable sector. Besides, this study may help the government create new policies or reform existing ones, especially those that address the issues of the insufficiency, inconsistency, and impartiality of agricultural policy solutions for farmers because of the previously described challenges. The findings of this study deserve the attention of the Department of Agriculture in reviewing how they currently implement these policies. By understanding the lived experiences and challenges and delving into the recommendations from the results, DA can tailor its programs and policies and strengthen its efforts to support the farmers.

Above all, the results of this study may be helpful for future researchers who would like to expand this study by using phenomenological inquiry under the qualitative research method, especially those who wish to do in-depth and comprehensive investigations on the topic to understand the lived experiences of the farmers of Davao City about the government's agricultural policy solutions with their indicators. Moreover, future research may apply this study to a specific agricultural policy solution, such as seed distribution or financial subsidies. A future study may also use the in-depth interview method to include or consider the amount and area of farmers' agricultural land. This means that many topics can be started using this study.

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