

Women and Food Security: A Southern Philippine Experience

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Abstract

"Women and Food Security: A Southern Philippine Experience" examines the complex landscape of food security in the Philippines, particularly in the Bangsamoro region and Lanao del Sur province. Despite concerted efforts at national and regional levels, persistent challenges such as climate change, conflict, and implementation gaps hinder progress towards food security. This study emphasizes the crucial role of women in addressing food insecurity and proposes targeted interventions to empower women and enhance local food systems. Drawing on policy recommendations, including the establishment of community gardens and sustainable food systems, the study underscores the need for multi-stakeholder collaboration and public awareness campaigns to combat food insecurity effectively, especially in vulnerable regions like Lanao del Sur. Through these initiatives, the study aims to contribute to broader efforts to achieve sustainable food security and improve livelihoods in the Southern Philippines.

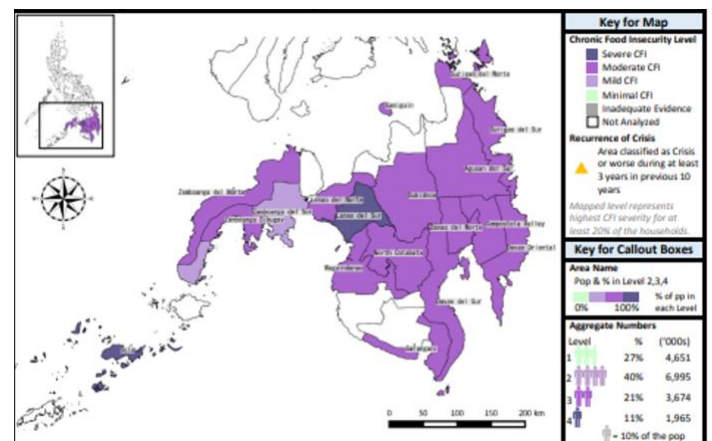
According to the Food and Agricultural Organization [FAO], beginning in 2017 the improvements seen in global food security over the last decade begin to decline. The number of people living in food insecurity increased from 804 million in 2016, to almost 821 million in 2017. Worldwide, phenomena like climate change, demographic growth, environmental degradation, and unstable peace and order situation are complicating the food security and nutrition situation.

In the Philippines, the challenge of achieving food security has long been recognized by the government, together with domestic agricultural productivity. In the past years, the administration's goal is to achieve food security and food self-sufficiency by 2016. The Food Staples Sufficiency Program (FSSP) 2011-2016, initiated by the Department of Agriculture, aimed to attain self-sufficiency in food staples, thereby enhancing food security. FSSP's primary goal was to meet domestic food requirements by 2013. In its efforts leading up to 2013, FSSP sought to bolster resilience against climate change impacts to boost food staples production (Esteban, 2015). Aside from FSSP, the Philippine government had implemented various policies directed towards self-sufficiency and food security after the 2007-2008 global food price crisis. Despite this, the Philippines continues to face challenges in achieving food security and building resilience to climate change, primarily due to implementation gaps and inadequate coordination among government agencies. Consequently, the feasibility of the Food Staples Sufficiency Program's (FSSP) objective is called into question. Additionally, findings indicate that food security has deteriorated rapidly following the government's rice imports. Weather volatility and the high costs of agricultural inputs further hinder food production. Moreover, Filipino farmers are not

adequately prepared for regional trade, given the fragility of the domestic market (Asum & Cimene, 2024). Furthermore, although Philippines has a high potential, it still has no comparative advantage when compared to its neighbors such as Thailand and Vietnam.

In the present administration, the Department of Agriculture revived former President Ferdinand Marcos' KADIWA which aims to strengthen Food Security in the country. KADIWA represents a marketing strategy launched by the Department of Agriculture (DA) and executed via the Agribusiness and Marketing Assistance (AMAS) program. It aims to strengthen the agricultural sector by establishing a streamlined and efficient farm-to-consumer food distribution network.

Figure 1. Food Insecurity Situation in Select Provinces in Mindanao



Source: https://www.ipcinfo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ipcinfo/docs/1_IPC_Philippines_Mindanao_ChronicFI_2015Jan20182020.pdf?fbclid=IwAR115OpEbLVIRF3QM4KSGxAtf96Q_Ko_OwUJcomGnTwGbOr_A8f2t1GpkXA

This approach minimizes the number of intermediaries involved in marketing, enabling farmers to increase their income by selling their products directly to

consumers, as cited by the Allanigue (2022) and the DA-AFID (2022). It reduces marketing expenses, thus making the fresh and quality products more affordable for consumers.

Over the past few decades, the Bangsamoro region has faced persistent challenges with poverty and malnutrition. According to ReliefWeb (2020), BARMM has the highest rate of household food insecurity, reaching 84.1 percent, when compared to other regions (see Figure 1). This situation then calls for aggressive, efficient, and effective convergence among government agencies and institutions for feasible, viable, and sustainable realization of a self-reliant, food-secure, and resilient Bangsamoro. Hence, the BARMM Food Security and Nutrition (FSN) roadmap is a need and will serve as main foundation of this study.

The Food Security and Nutrition (FSN) Roadmap of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao is the brainchild and handiwork of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Agrarian Reform (MAFAR), the Bangsamoro Development and Planning Authority (BDPA), and the United Nations World Food Program (WFP), with support from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). This initiative is the result of collaboration among various organizations aiming to utilize the region's restructuring and transition phase to improve and advocate for the food security of the Bangsamoro population (BARMM, 2020) and nutrition situation in the coming years. The Food Security and Nutrition Roadmap envisions a self-reliant, food secure, and resilient Bangsamoro. Its mission is to uplift the living conditions of the Bangsamoro people by efficiently providing quality services based on moral governance to achieve food security and nutrition towards sustainable development.

The main objectives of the FS Roadmap of BARMM are: (1) expanded markets and value chains; (2) improved livelihoods and household income, with focus on agricultural productivity; (3) enhanced dietary quality and nutrition; (4) increased resilience of vulnerable populations and communities; (5) improved policies, institutions, and implementation capacity. Among these objectives this capstone study capitalized and connected with (2) improved livelihoods and household income, with focus on agricultural productivity.

The province of Lanao del Sur accounts for the highest percentage of population that are chronically food insecure, with less than 15% of households classified as food secure and around one in two households moderately or severely food insecure (see Figure 1).

These households tend to have poor food consumption, both in terms of quantity and quality, throughout the year and very high levels of stunting. While lack of adequate energy consumption is a major issue only for those populations that are classified in Level 3 and 4 of chronic food insecurity (about 30% of households), the quality of food consumption and diversification of food are generally poor and a major problem throughout the province, affecting around 75% of the households.

At the Regional level, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Agrarian Reform (MAFAR) thru its Agriculture and Marketing Assistance Division (AMAD) is implementing the MAFAR LENDS as one of the strategies in addressing the food insecurity issue in BARMM in general and its provinces and municipalities in particular. In Lanao del Sur, the MAFAR -LDS has linked some of its noted Farmer Cooperative and Associations (FCAs) to avail of this flagship project with identified commodities namely: coconut, livestock, upgraded goat and other high value products.

Much has been done in addressing food security issues, mainly in a "focused" perspective in order to understand better certain identified impact variables.

The issues dealt with are diverse and include among others food supply, food access, food adequacy, or the provision of safety nets to respond to transitory food security crises. For each of these issues, the linkages among them and those with the environment, population, economic growth, poverty have been seriously investigated. Yet a significant gap still exists in relating food security issues at the household and individual levels, particularly that covering the interrelationships from production to consumption, which capture a comprehensive set of food security indicators. Since the global issue of Food Security is a very wide and vague topic, this capstone study focused on strengthening the significant role of women in food security.

In Lanao del Sur Province, although a second class provincial LGU, most of its municipalities are at the lowest class especially the municipalities of Lumbatan, Lumbanayague and Sultan Dumalondong and yet these municipalities are very rich in agriculture and fishery products. Despite its rich natural resources, it remained as one of the poorest of the poor province and municipalities in the country.

Moreover, the study highlights the significant role of women in agriculture in Lanao del Sur. Women in this region play an active and crucial role, primarily in subsistence farming, focusing on cultivating root crops to ensure their families' food security. This involvement

is often not a matter of choice but a necessity, as many men are occupied in other professions to meet the family's financial needs. This finding aligns with the research conducted by Fatura *et al.* (2020), which highlighted the significant participation of women in organic farming across various provinces in southern Philippines. Their study indicated that a substantial portion, more than half, of farmers practicing organic agriculture in these provinces are women.

The challenges faced by these women were further exacerbated by the displacement caused by the Marawi siege (Cimene *et al.*, 2017). This crisis forced many families to rebuild their lives from scratch, adding to the already demanding nature of agricultural work for women. Despite these hardships, the study observed a resilient trend among women, particularly those raising children without the presence of their husbands, who turn to agriculture as a means of livelihood and sustenance.

Policy recommendations / conclusions

Food insecurity is a significant challenge that has deeply impacted developing nations. It hinders their progress as they struggle to ensure food security for their populations. The complexity of addressing food security has led many developing countries to struggle in effectively tackling this problem (Chawarika, 2016).

Furthermore, the emerging issues of climate change, GMO'S and bio-fuels have increased the vulnerability of these countries to achieve food security. There is therefore no clear framework on the nature and extent of how these complex factors have affected the developing countries in achieving food security. The resulting effect of these factors have resulted in food insecurity in most developing countries particularly in this study the selected municipalities of Lanao del Sur.

One important factor is climate, specifically global warming. Rainfall is increasing in some places, but decreasing in others. Farming becomes challenging due to increased temperatures and unpredictable rainfall, particularly affecting farmers on marginal lands who already face survival challenges. Advanced countries (ACs) are also susceptible to drought impacts. When countries suffer drought there is less food available globally and global food prices increase, leaving the poor most vulnerable.

Another significant factor to consider is armed conflict such as the Marawi siege in 2017 (Cimene *et al.*, 2017). Exposure to armed conflicts results in strongly adverse and often irreversible short- and long-term effects that

may transmit across generations. Armed conflicts directly cause food insecurity and starvation through the disruption and destruction of food systems, the reduction of farming populations, the destruction of infrastructure, the diminishment of resilience, and the increase of vulnerabilities. Furthermore, armed conflicts lead to disruptions in access to markets, the escalation of food prices, or the unavailability of goods and services altogether.

In this regard, the following policy recommendations are made:

- Create local farming initiatives/encourage and support community gardens for women. This should aim to establish a community garden in a low-income neighborhood within 6 months; and to provide fresh produce to 50 families weekly, reducing their reliance on processed foods.
- Establish sustainable food systems for women. Convergence with the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAFAR) as the agricultural arm of the region- which provides agricultural inputs in promoting the community gardening.
- Improve public awareness on food insecurity among women. Launch a social media campaign within the next two months that educates the public, particularly the women on hunger issues and ways to support community gardening.

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