

โครงการพัฒนาถนนจากไร่สู่ตลาด (FMR) ในสาธารณรัฐ ฟิลิปปินส์: วิเคราะห์สัญลักษณ์ในอุดมการณ์เสรีนิยมใหม่ ที่ครอบคลุมมณฑลประธาธิบดีมาคอส

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บทคัดย่อ

โครงการสร้างถนนจากไร่สู่ตลาด Farm-to-Market Roads (FMRs) ถือเป็นโครงการที่ผู้นำในประเทศฟิลิปปินส์ใช้เป็นเครื่องมือสร้างเศรษฐกิจแบบเสรีนิยมใหม่ เนื่องจากโครงการนี้ส่งผลกระทบต่อเศรษฐกิจและสังคมเป็นอย่างมาก

การศึกษานี้เป็นไปเพื่อวิเคราะห์วาทกรรมของผู้นำฟิลิปปินส์ในเรื่องที่เกี่ยวข้องกับโครงการพัฒนาถนนจากไร่สู่ตลาดในระหว่างปี 1986-2016 ที่เป็นดั่งเครื่องมือในการรับมือกับการลดความยากจน การพัฒนาการเกษตร และสร้างความเจริญเติบโตทางเศรษฐกิจ โดยใช้วิธีการวิเคราะห์แผนการลงทุน สุนทรพจน์ ประกาศจากทางราชการ เอกสารทางการที่สามารถสืบค้นได้ และเอกสารทางวิชาการอื่น ๆ

การศึกษานี้ใช้วิธีวิทยาในการวิเคราะห์วาทกรรมของผู้นำเป็นหลักเพื่อแสดงให้เห็นถึงเป้าหมายในการเพิ่มผลผลิตและรายได้ ซึ่งแสดงให้เห็นถึงความสอดคล้องในแนวทางอุดมการณ์เสรีนิยมใหม่ และยังชี้ให้เห็นชัดถึงความตั้งใจที่จะใช้โครงการนี้เป็นเครื่องมือทางการเมือง ที่ชี้มุ่งไปข้างหน้าด้วยการเจริญเติบโตภายใต้วาทกรรมการพัฒนา

คำสำคัญ: ผู้นำฟิลิปปินส์ ประธานาธิบดีฟิลิปปินส์ ถนนจากไร่สู่ตลาด Farm-to-Market Roads (FMRs) ลดความยากจน การพัฒนาเกษตรกรรม อุดมการณ์เสรีนิยมใหม่ สัญลักษณ์นิยม

Farm-to-Market Road (FMR) Development Programs in the Republic of the Philippines: Analyzing the Prevailing Neoliberal Ideology Symbolisms in a Post Marcos-Era

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Abstract

Farm-to-Market Roads (FMRs) can emerge as a central element in which presidents build their neoliberal ideology to achieve the Philippines' overall poverty reduction and rural economic growth agenda due to its significant socio-economic impact among its beneficiaries. This study has two objectives. First, it shows the Republic of the Philippines' Presidents' narratives surrounding their respective FMR development programs from 1986 to 2016 as a panacea in increasing agricultural productivity and income to gain legitimacy and represent their neoliberal ideology. Second, it also scrutinizes how presidents used FMRs as a central technical solution to achieve overall poverty reduction, agricultural development, and economic growth, as manifested in their development and investment plans, public speeches, and official statements. Presidents have adopted images of growth and progress to frame FMRs as a symbol of political resources and signs of necessity, progress, and development.

Keywords: Philippine presidents, farm-to-market road, poverty reduction, agricultural development, ideology neoliberalism, symbolism

Introduction

The Republic of the Philippines' president occupies a powerful, cohesive, independent position, with little competition from countervailing power centers. Consequently, he has the most potent economic interest having significant social and political power using the formal organization as his primary source of political power. He can create programs and policies that can significantly affect the citizenry. Hence, a study that aims to contribute to the knowledge of how he builds support for major programs and uses those to show their ideology and increase their political capital should be considered.

Philippine Presidents from 1986 to 2016 supported Farm-to-Market Roads (FMRs) as a significant infrastructure development priority as it gives access to both markets for agricultural products, enabling the exchange of goods and services. Their initiatives aligned with Koch, and Movenzadeh's (1979) rural development objectives, which pertain to facilitating infrastructure development for productivity improvement and employment and income generation for target groups while reaching the remote rural poor. As shown in their various Philippine development plans, they facilitated FMR development initiatives to increase farmers' income and harness their farm-level productivity. Amid the existence of FMR projects, only President Fidel V. Ramos institutionalized FMRs as an agricultural development intervention via Republic Act No. 8435 "Agriculture and Fishery Modernization Act of 1997 (AFMA) that connects the agriculture and fisheries production sites to market and production centers. AFMA shows FMR as essential to rural areas' growth by linking agricultural surpluses to deficit areas, connecting farms to agriculture programs, facilitating optimum input use, and maximizing agrarian reform benefits. AFMA also manifests FMRs' performative and discursive effects as part of presidents' consistent discourse on pursuing market-oriented agricultural development and private investment-conducive environment. This study employed discourse analysis guided by Stephanie Lee Mudge's concept of neoliberalism. It focused on presidents and their neoliberal ideology facilitating their FMR development programs. First,

it showed the presidents' narratives surrounding their respective FMR development programs from 1986 to 2016 as a panacea in increasing agricultural productivity and income, legitimizing their neoliberal ideology. Second, it also scrutinized how presidents used FMRs as a central technical solution to achieve overall poverty reduction, agricultural development, and economic growth, as manifested in their development and investment plans, public speeches, and official statements. Hence, it addressed the current research gaps by facilitating a review of related literature and historical analysis of Philippine FMR development programs from 1986 to 2016, exploring FMRs' sociopolitical value and impact issues that have yet to be discussed and offering a critical view of FMRs given the deficiencies.

Research Method:

This study focused on five Republic of the Philippines presidents from 1986 to 2016. It used discourse analysis to scrutinize their rationalities, and narratives in their FMR development programs as manifested in their development and investment plans, public speeches and official statements. The sources include formal documents created by the government and academe to instill ideology in the masses, such as development and investment plans, public speeches, official statements, publicly available government documents, newspapers, and scholarly sources. Specifically, this includes the five Philippine development plans from 1986 to 2016 available on the National Economic and Development Authority website. In all periods, the study data collection method includes general search terms such as roads, road network, agriculture, FMRs, development, agricultural development, infrastructure development, poverty reduction, and economic growth, while subsequently scanning the results for further explanation. Sources show their thinking process helps uncover their ideologies.

Moreover, the study also used online semi-structured interviews with fourteen academic experts, former politicians, and non-government organization representatives from November 2020 to December 2021 to know

the rationale of the FMR development programs for every presidential term. They were selected based on their expertise, background, and availability. Adopting a qualitative approach created an opportunity to learn about FMRs as neoliberal governmentality holistically and comprehensively.

Data Analysis:

Neoliberalism is usually conveyed in economics, which encourages ‘the moral benefits of market society’ and identifies ‘markets as a necessary condition for freedom in other aspects of life. (Fourcade & Healy, 2007) It is a prevalent philosophy pervading public policies in developing countries, such as the Republic of the Philippines.

Moreover, Stephanie Lee Mudge (2008) has categorized neoliberalism into three faces. The first is its intellectual face, emphasizing the market as the source and arbiter of rights, rewards, and freedom. The second is its bureaucratic face that focuses on liberalization, deregulation, privatization, and monetarism processes, aiming to create mechanisms and initiatives that build forces of private market competition. Lastly, it has a political face that pushes for market-centric politics. It has become a common ideology that lies on the premise that unleashing market forces can create an unprecedented era of social well-being. Mudge’s concept surmises that neoliberalism favors the concepts of market participation and efficiency but somehow involves disproportionate accrual of benefits among the non-poor sector. Hence, provides a general framework for understanding politicians and their inclination for FMR development programs to simultaneously achieve poverty reduction, agricultural development, infrastructure development, and economic growth.

On the other hand, politicians create narratives framing their FMR development programs to legitimize their power and help them gain and maintain popular support while promoting neoliberal ideologies. Specifically, as Crawford (2000) denoted, those shapers of politics include their emotions and passions; this study scrutinized how they evoke their passion in enabling their FMR development program as a central component



in their neoliberal ideology. Specifically, it analyzed how the Republic of the Philippines' presidents from 1986 to 2016 disseminated their neoliberal ideology by using their FMR development programs as a symbol of political resource and signs of necessity, progress, and development.

Research Results:

Defining the Republic of the Philippines Presidents' Neoliberal Ideology in their FMR Development Programs

FMRs are part of the presidents' agricultural development strategy. Therefore, it is incorporated in the national development plans where the words, such as FMRs, roads, rural roads, and feeder roads, were used interchangeably. As stipulated: "Good roads are a great convenience in all civilized communities, but in the Philippine Islands, they are regarded as a necessity on which the tranquility of the people and their material progress largely depend." (Census of the Philippine Islands, 1921). Hence, the presidents had varying FMR initiatives, and their consistent discourse on pursuing market-oriented agricultural development and private investment-conducive environment shaped the FMR evolution in the Republic of the Philippines. Below are the presidents after Ferdinand E. Marcos (1965-1986) and their FMR development programs.

Corazon Aquino (1986-1992)

Corazon Aquino's national development strategy (1987-1992) showed her narrative that FMRs are necessary and sufficient conditions to facilitate market-oriented agricultural development. Specifically, she envisioned the infrastructure development supporting agricultural production by promoting industrial, rural development, and rural private sector investments, providing support to agricultural infrastructures and constructing irrigation, FMRs, and postharvest storage facilities. Her 1988 SONA pronouncements showed her inclination to pursue an FMR development program for multifunctional road use in an agricultural landscape, to wit:

By 1992 we intend that three-fourths of the entire road network will be all-weather compared to less than 50% at the beginning of this year... a multipurpose concrete road in each of the 46,000 barangays [village] in the country, serving not only as a road but as a grain drying surface; a recreation area as the first solid evidence in these difficult to reach places that here finally is a government truly their own. (Aquino, C., 1988: para. 62)

Moreover, she also showed that roads served as a vital linkage in a market-oriented economy and its expansion is inevitable, to wit:

We must go on building structures essential to the efficiency and productivity of the economy. The government has improved or constructed 1,124 kilometers of major roads and 7,821 kilometers of secondary and feeder roads to bring markets and producers closer to each other. (Aquino, C., 1989: para. 30)

Grants and budgetary support from Official Development Assistance (ODA) circles poured in during this period as donors subscribed to her narrative on the FMRs' role in economic growth. Her FMR development program was decentralized via the Rural Roads Program implemented by the Department of Interior and Local Government and Regional Industrial Centers of the Department of Trade and Industry to expand and assert her narrative. She also used FMRs to include the promise of interregional growth gap reduction and strengthen sectoral linkages by creating access from the countryside (e.g., production areas with excess) to those in deficit, to wit:

We are supporting our drive for greater productivity with a stream-lined but responsive infrastructure program that placed special emphasis on our countryside. Of the total 6,297 kilometers of roads we constructed last year, 95% were built in the provinces. We have also placed emphasis on infrastructures that would support livelihood in our rural areas. (Aquino, C., 1990: para. 101)

Though she institutionalized the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP), she failed to implement a genuine agrarian reform, a central issue of rural poverty and farmers' landlessness. In turn, her FMR projects only exacerbated the landlords' power and failed to exert a political will to address the needs of Filipino farmers. (Padilla, 1988). Her successor was inclined to a market-oriented FMR development program. However, President Fidel V. Ramos embraced FMRs as a symbol of economic development, progress, and modernity narratives and supplemented it with an Agrarian Reform Community (ARC) development strategy which was considered as an integrated approach of community development.

Fidel V. Ramos (1992-1998)

President Ramos' Philippines 2000 national development strategy (1993-1998) highlighted market reforms and private-sector-led development in his FMR development program. His strategy back then was to reduce the government's role to mere private sector participation framework provider by strengthening and linking market agents and accelerating development from industrial centers to other regions. His narratives show that FMRs were a vital component for agricultural productivity, to wit: "In agriculture, to guarantee productivity and profitability of our primary producers, we must speed up building irrigation systems, farm-to-market roads..." (Ramos, 1996, para.4).

Under his term, his FMR development program complemented the needs of land reform beneficiaries by including them in a market-oriented agricultural sector loop. He asserted that FMRs symbolize economic development, progress, and modernity narratives. His program called ARCs provided chosen rural communities with basic infrastructures, such as FMRs, to improve agrarian reform beneficiaries' productivity and income, to wit:

We increased agricultural support services and livelihood assistance to CARP beneficiaries. We encouraged them to organize cooperatives and

to take advantage of economies of scale to enhance their productivity... we launched 257 ARCs nationwide—with at least one in each congressional district in the countryside—where farmer-beneficiaries can better feel the impact of localized support services in terms of higher incomes. (Ramos, 1993: page.62)

He also projected FMRs as vital for agricultural development. Therefore, his agrarian reform included FMR construction, maintenance, and rehabilitation to create efficient agricultural transport systems and achieve agricultural competitiveness. For instance, in his 1996 SONA, he shared that: *“In agriculture, to guarantee productivity and profitability of our primary producers, we must speed up building...farm-to-market roads”* (Ramos, 1996: para.4).

To further assert his narrative, he also strengthened interregional and urban-rural linkages by upgrading national arterial and FMRs to all-weather roads and converting bridges into permanent structures (Llanto, 2002). However, the maintenance of the existing network was of primary concern over constructing new ones (National Economic and Development Authority, 1993). He invested forty percent of total public investment into road and road transport development yet remains insufficient as many regions still had road densities lower than the average. Therefore, in recognizing the need for additional funding, he crafted Agricultural Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (CEF) from the tariff proceeds of the Minimum Access Volumes (MAV) of the Department of Agriculture (DA).

Llanto (2002) shared that the road quality did not change despite hefty road investments under this administration. It is primarily crushed stone (macadam) type surfaces that cannot hold the wear and tear of a growing number of vehicles. As a result, most roads are no match to vehicles that have also increased. Moreover, though FMRs comprise most total roads, only around six percent were paved as of 2001. His successor was likewise inclined to a market-oriented FMR development program.

Joseph Estrada (1998-2000)¹

Like his predecessor, President Joseph Estrada embraced market-oriented FMRs as inevitable and vital in achieving social and economic development goals. However, he had a short-lived development plan (1998-2001). He justified his FMR development program by using it as a symbol of progress towards a better future, to wit:

We continued to lay the groundwork for future growth with continuing advances in the construction and completion of major roads...There are also development funds abroad that can be made available provided they are used for major road projects here in Luzon. (Estrada, 2000: para.94)

He also utilized FMRs as a vital tool in his poverty reduction initiatives. He implemented his FMR development program in a two-pronged approach; first via maintaining and improving existing ones while the second was via expanding the FMR network in far-flung areas, to wit:

Our war on poverty is also in the emphasis on expanding the linkages between farms and markets, and between rural and urban areas, through roads...Last year, we built or upgraded 582 kilometers of roads.... Our target is to see 100% of our national arterial roads paved and 100% of our bridges made permanent by the end of my term. (Estrada, 1999: para.71)

In addition, he recognized FMRs as the vital link for agriculture growth-rural industrialization, but, again, practice lagged his rhetoric. As a result, investment in social and physical capital in rural areas was nowhere as dramatic under his administration as its predecessor. His overall road network was 200,187 kilometers, increasing less than one percent from the previous administration at the same period and maintaining the road

¹President Estrada only stayed until January 2001 due to bribery and corruption charges

density at 0.67 kilometers per square kilometer or 2.62 kilometers of roads for every 1,000 inhabitants. Roads rehabilitated and upgraded were at 29,878 kilometers of the national road, increasing the national paved road ratio and all-weather roads compared to the previous administration at the same period (Llanto, 2002). His successor continued his narrative and enthusiastically aligned it with other social development programs.

Gloria Macapagal Arroyo (2001-2010)

Vice President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo immediately took over when President Estrada stepped down. She was known for her neoliberal economic philosophy. She supported neoliberal agricultural policy and vowed to deepen and widen such reforms as her Medium-Term Philippine Development Plan (2001-2004) emphasized her FMR development program narrative as a necessary tool for poverty alleviation by supporting agriculture modernization.

Accordingly, her road network plan was consistent with Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization Act for the recognized Strategic Agricultural and Fisheries Development Zones. It focused on FMR investments in regional growth centers, key tourism development areas, and economically lagging regions, especially Mindanao, where road densities and paved road ratios were below average. For instance, she also shared that FMRs increased its share in the budget pie; “Along with massive rice production, we are cutting costs through more efficient transport. For example, for our farm-to-market roads, we released P6 billion in 2007” (Arroyo, 2008: para.62).

She asserted that FMRs are significant component of rural development in stimulating local growth and helping integrate the rural economy into the whole economy. Her FMR development program was under the Rural Industrialization Program and Rural Road Network Development Project, so linking the production areas to major markets, to wit:

We are constructing farm-to-market roads across the archipelago to increase our agricultural produce and we would not need to import



from overseas. Due to the budget allocation for farm-to-market roads: two thousand kilometers in Mindanao; two thousand kilometers in north Luzon, since there are agricultural areas; one thousand kilometers in Central Philippines, Bicol and Visayas; one thousand kilometers here in Luzon, in Southern Luzon, Southern Tagalog and in Central Luzon in Bulacan. These farm-to-market roads will be constructed because we have allotted 7 billion pesos for farm-to-market roads. Moreover, to increase our harvest, we will invest 8 billion pesos for irrigation. The seven billion for farm-to-market roads and eight billion pesos for irrigation are included in the 23-billion-peso allocation for agricultural modernization. (Arroyo, 2008: para.15)

Moreover, she also used FMR as part of her BAYAN-ANIHAN concept² for facilitating agriculture development. She used it to efficiently deliver agrarian support services to farmers and their eventual transformation to agrarian reform zones and progressive farming. For instance, she prioritized agricultural FMR construction while maintaining the existing road network to promote her partnership and convergence strategy. It improved and constructed 1,300 kilometers of national roads and 19,771-meter line bridges. As a result, the agricultural sector expanded as the 2 million hectares of land were developed into agribusiness complemented by the regional road framework plans execution. In addition, the local and regional development councils, the Department of Agriculture (DA), and the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) constructed and rehabilitated FMRs that complemented the national roads to facilitate the agricultural produce market and distribute farm inputs. These initiatives supported the Philippine Road network expansion (Llanto, 2002).

²Bayan means people while Anihan means harvest and Bayanihan means working together. This program pertains to a united people working together for successful implementation of agrarian reform. It aimed for the transformation of the Philippine Countryside into vibrant and dynamic communities through focused intervention under the ARC development strategy.

Like Ferdinand E. Marcos, she also used FMRs as a political resource. She facilitated her FMR development program to support her “super regions” program. To demonstrate her inclination to give local politicians more options, she increased local government units’ Internal Revenue Allotment- local funds- with 20 percent devoted to development funds specifically for infrastructure and social services. Hence, giving them more incentives to pursue FMR development in their area, to wit, *“The Internal Revenue Allotment for local governments from the fiscal budget is P210.7 billion. I hope that local officials, including the different barangays, would utilize 20 percent of your development funds for infrastructure and social service”* (Arroyo, 2008: para.21).

Like past administrations repeatedly did in their respective initiatives for agrarian reform, President Macapagal- Arroyo found the instrumental worth of FMRs aligned with her BAYAN-ANIHAN concept as a means of the mass campaign for both national and local elections. This situation supports Wales & Wild’s (2012) claim that FMRs could facilitate new patron-client relations. It demonstrates its sociopolitical value as politicians used it to reward their supporters. It also enabled national and local politicians to reach remote areas while boosting their political capital by providing the project beneficiaries access to economic opportunities, state services, and political mobilization. On the other hand, it also manifests the Philippine politics’ “business-as-usual” mode fueled by patronage, clientelism, and traditional politics.

Despite her rhetoric, the income disparity between the rich and the poor widened. For example, in 2003, the top 10 percent received an average income 20 times greater than the income of the bottom 10 percent income deciles, higher than the 1994-level, leading to further marginalization of the poor (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2003). Moreover, she was jailed after her term due to several corruption cases, including misusing funds allocated to provide material assistance to farmers (Fertilizer Fund Scam) to conduct the 2004 elections.



Benigno Aquino (2010-2016)

Benigno Aquino's narratives continued his predecessors' market-oriented development strategy. He used FMRs as a vital tool for agricultural productivity and linkage with industry and services. He pinpointed that one of the constraints to agricultural productivity and market expansion was inefficient connectivity. He reiterated that FMRs are a vital part of a market-oriented agricultural development with a promise of economic growth. Hence, he developed the domestic market faster by constructing and rehabilitating FMRs to strategically connect rural and agricultural areas with markets and distribution centers and pursue agricultural efficiency, to wit:

Our government is also constructing the necessary infrastructure to facilitate the growth of agriculture in the country. For example, farm-to-market roads, or FMRs, constructed and rehabilitated from 2011 to June 2013, have linked 1,147 barangays to main road networks and markets, benefiting 300,000 farmers. (Aquino, B., 2013: para.8) Like previous administrations, the development strategy was also

towards infrastructure development regionalization. For example, the regional development plan in region IV-A recognized that FMRs have a critical role in the region's overall economic development as its absence has been a constraint on regional development, especially on rural development. Moreover, as of 2016, 477 kilometers out of 2,206 kilometers of national roads and FMRs in Mindanao were funded.

Road infrastructure was still included in the priority programs. As of 2015, 31,242 kilometers of national roads (97.19 percent), 15,377 kilometers of city roads (61.80 percent), and 31,075 kilometers of FMRs (28.65 percent) were paved. However, in terms of quality, the World Economic Forum-Global Competitiveness Report (WEF-GCR) 2015-2016 ranked the Philippines 97th out of 140 countries. In 2015, 6,549-kilometers of FMRs were constructed by the Department of Agriculture to enhance the inflow and outflow of agricultural produce.

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The Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) was officially designated as the principal agency in FMRs' outlays to decentralize its implementation while enhancing its technical designs to strengthen and expand the president's FMR narratives in the countryside, to wit:

We have fixed more than just roads; our DPWH has fixed its system. Just by following the right process of bidding and procurement, their agency saved a total of 10.6 billion pesos from 2011 to June of this year. Even our contractors are feeling the positive effects of our reforms in DPWH. According to the DPWH, "the top 40 contractors are now fully booked." I am hopeful that the development of our infrastructure continues unimpeded to facilitate the growth of our other industries. (Aquino, B., 2012: para.58)

As a result, FMRs were constructed and rehabilitated to strategically connect rural and agricultural areas to market towns and production areas. Lastly, he also justified his FMR development program to include the promise of economic growth while strengthening his anti-corruption measures, to wit:

We will not build our road network based on kickbacks or favoritism. We will build them according to a clear system. Now that resources for these projects are no longer allocated haphazardly, our plans will no longer end up unfulfilled—they will become tangible roads that benefit the Filipino people. When we assumed office, 7,239 kilometers of our national roads were not yet fixed. Right now, 1,569 kilometers of this has been fixed under the leadership of Secretary Babes Singson. In 2012, an additional 2,275 kilometers will be finished. We are even identifying and fixing dangerous roads with the use of modern technology. These are challenges we will continue to address every year so that, before the end of my term, every inch of our national road network will be fixed. (Aquino, B., 2012: para.57)

Discussion and Conclusion:

Farm-to-Market Road (FMR) supports the trade theory, which specifies that people who engage with the market through surplus selling on a comparative advantage benefit from the direct welfare and economies of scale production. It is one of the predominant program in the Philippine agriculture sector with at least 6.97 percent of the Philippine agriculture's budget is devoted to it. Based on the narratives, It emerged as a central element in which presidents built their neoliberal ideology to achieve the Philippines' overall poverty reduction and rural economic growth agenda due to its perceived significant socio-economic impact among its beneficiaries. The Philippine president's FMR narratives demonstrated a neoliberal ideology by facilitating a proactive involvement in the market of goods and services meant to reduce poverty and improve growth in the long run. They showed FMR's significance as it allowed smallholder farmers to efficiently use resources, goods, and services to derive benefits. They believed that smallholder farmers needed FMR to move out of poverty and increase income by commercializing farming activities, accessing cheap production inputs, and enhancing productivity and food security. Moreover, they also believed that it secured more jobs for those unwilling to participate in the farming sector by participating in other related sectors such as mining and industry.

The analysis of the presidents' narratives surrounding their respective FMR development programs from 1986 to 2016 showed that most tend to underscore their symbolic and sociopolitical value in recurring themes. For example, 1) FMRs as a symbol of progress, 2) FMRs as vital and inevitable, and 3) FMRs as a political source.

All Philippine presidents framed FMRs as vital and inevitable. They described their implementation as a panacea as it becomes necessary and sufficient condition to improving agricultural productivity and income, demonstrating their capabilities and achievements and legitimizing their image. They stipulated their narratives on their state documents such as development

and investment plans, public speeches, official statements, publicly available government documents, and scholarly sources. This situation aligns with what Molle et al. (2009) shared regarding the classical means of promoting projects by presenting meta-justifications such as national goals, modernization, and economic growth promise. For instance, presidents denoted FMR ‘as a critical enabling condition for market participation in isolated agricultural areas. Specifically, they highlighted FMR’s importance in addressing their agricultural challenges and achieving the Philippines’ overall poverty reduction, agricultural development, and economic growth. It is noteworthy that some such as Presidents Ramos and Macapagal Arroyo’s FMR development programs linked to their social development programs, enticing the citizenry to accept the program while strengthening the FMRs’ existential significance to a certain extent.

Second, some presidents framed FMRs as a symbol of national progress. They used the rhetoric of a functioning FMR as a symbol of effective spur of agriculture development and as a foundation of every agricultural community, signifying a modernism ideology marked by confidence in the development of scientific and technical knowledge. For instance, President Ramos assumed that FMRs paved the way for better transportation links and created businesses and jobs in profitable sectors, such as agriculture, forest, and mining, as stated in their development plans while President B. Aquino considered it a vital tool for agricultural productivity and linkage with industry and services addressing the agricultural productivity constraints. These observations support Scott’s (1989) observation that the common carriers of high modernism were powerful actors or state leaders who usually favored development planning.

Lastly, some presidents framed FMRs as a political resource. For example, President Macapagal- Arroyo boldly showed how she used FMRs to create political capital. It was aligned with Mark Thompson’s (2010) observation that patronage politics could exist by funneling government



patronage funds directly to local politicians, recentralizing clientelist networks, and directing funds to regions seen favorable to the state leader.

This study shows that the Republic of the Philippines' presidents learned to love their FMR development program through consistent and repetitive discussion of their neoliberal ideology on all platforms. Therefore, aside from providing a full review of related literature and historical analysis of FMR development programs in the Republic of the Philippines from 1986 to 2016, this could also serve as a foundation for understanding the sociopolitical value of FMRs that has received little attention and present critical view of FMRs given its deficiencies.

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