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## **Foregrounding Marginalized Voices: Evaluating Deliberative Capacities in the Policy Process of the Agricultural Sector in Siquijor, Philippines**

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### **Abstract**

This paper critically evaluates how agricultural sectors in Siquijor, Philippines, navigate around deliberative policy analysis and deliberative capacities to correspond to participatory policy processes. In a case study through informant interviews and secondary data, we identified sectoral involvement in the policy process (agricultural agenda, involvement in policy-making, and implementation), which is linked to how the sector and society advance deliberative capacities. Mindful of the deliberative approach principles, the work contends that deliberative capacities of the marginalized are critical in genuinely addressing sectoral problems and public concern - that is, fundamental to strengthening within the sector-civil society-government dynamics of doing policy analysis.

**Keywords:** agriculture; deliberative capacity; marginalized group; policy process

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## 1. Introduction

Agriculture is at the center of discourses in policies that link to augmenting livelihoods, boosting economic activities, and integrating collaborative practices into environmental protection (Fallah-Alipour et al., 2018). After all, agricultural progress links with other sectors, such as manufacturing industries, marketing, distribution, and logistics (Timmer, 1992). Hence, a strategic policy consideration in agriculture creates a rippling effect on the economy and commercial systems, allowing robust economic growth, poverty eradication, and environmental sustainability (Oya, 2009). However, like the common development rhetoric, participatory governance must precede any attempt to ameliorate living standards, which applies to agricultural development policies.

The Philippines primarily relies on agriculture, where around 30 million hectares, or a total of one-third of its land area, is utilized for agricultural purposes. It also accounts for 20% of the country's total gross domestic product (GDP), approximately 46% of the total employment, and 24% of the total export earnings in the past 15 years (Malaque & Yokohari, 2007). However, problems in rural and agricultural communities have permeated throughout history. In various contextual analyses, for instance, hierarchical structures of patronage and clientelism hampered the participatory potentials of doing policies for the agricultural sectors, among other marginalized groups (Brown & Ashman, 1996; Ricks, 2015). However, contemporary developments in governance have linked participatory values necessary to effectively organize and link laborers and farmers to forward demands and influence the policy process (Castillo, 1983). Politicking and policy-making at the local levels even necessitate deliberation, as the deliberative democracy of Curato et al. (2018) extensively suggests.

While these participatory principles are in place, there is compelling evidence and contentions that these are good as “mere advocacies” tending to be superficial and not applied on the ground. More so, there are assessment reports that in policy implementation, lower participation accounts for various policy processes like monitoring and evaluations (Gera, 2016). These pitfalls are somehow attributed to the public at the local level seeing political decision-makers as experts (who were highly regarded because of high educational attainment, knowledge, and resources) in making crucial choices for the community, hence jeopardizing the whole participatory potential of people-centered governance (Maleza & Nishimura, 2007). The query of identifying and looking into the deliberative capacities of the people, specifically those who come from marginalized and disenfranchised groups, is imperative in understanding a more inclusive public policy process. While the deliberative approach pushes toward a more inclusive and participatory policy process, this study argues that the deliberative capacity of the marginalized sector is vital and complementary to genuinely addressing sectoral problems and public concerns.

## 2. Objectives

This study critically evaluates the deliberative capacity of the agricultural sector in Siquijor, focusing on the extent to which the local governance structures facilitate authentic, inclusive, and consequential deliberation. Particularly, the study will:

- 1) Identify the formulation of agricultural agendas, the accessibility and availability of programs and assistance, and the existence of grievance mechanisms.
- 2) Understand and analyze the challenges in the deliberative policy process in addressing stakeholder engagement and participation.
- 3) Explore the sector's deliberative capacity is ensuring and valuing inclusive and participatory deliberation within the agricultural sector-civil society-government dynamics in policy analysis.

## 3. Literature Review

### 3.1 The current policy process: Agricultural sector under the Philippine Local Government Code (LGC) of 1991

The devolution of power in the Philippine Local Government Code of 1991 moved the agricultural extension services closer to the basic unit of governance, which gradually changed the

agricultural administrative landscape of the Philippines. Under the devolved functions, local government units (LGUs) lead the implementations of micro-level agricultural developments and policies, including several provisions of support services like financial aid and deployment of human resources (Shair-Rosenfield, 2016). Moreover, the LGC commands a fair share of annual monetary distribution to LGUs via Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA) to augment public servicing at the local levels. As to human resources, there are additional employees per LGU as the devolved agricultural extension requires more capacity to handle agrarian program implementations and interventions (Pagsanghan, 1993). However, there are also recurring problems in the promise of devolution. Among the main challenges lies in the capability of LGUs to enact and embody the LGC's visions and provisions. It placed the local government leaders in a litmus examination of competencies on how they can effectively utilize staffing and financial resources to withstand autonomy and generate sufficient income for bettering their specific localities.

In some cases, the reliance on administrative officials of LGUs to correspond to the archipelagic needs of each locality has been reduced to conniving malpractices like partisanships, patronage, clientelism, rent-seeking, and corruption (Cheung, 2005). It then hinders direct participation from the grassroots and the marginalized communities from influencing policy outcomes deliberatively. It coincides with the agricultural policy landscape in the country, where the inability to participate in transformative changes, regardless of how viable and promising it may be, leads to neglect of grassroots demands.

The alienation of the policy process from actual stakeholders' experience is often faced in adherence to the policy targets. Hence, it is undoubtedly that the country's productivity growth has lagged behind that of any Southeast Asian country despite the promise of devolved administrative power that focuses explicitly on agricultural needs per locality (OECD, 2017). Consequently, these are gaining attention among the policy technocrats in the country. For instance, in the general assembly of the League of Municipalities of the Philippines (LMP) on 2 March 2022, Secretary William Dar of the Department of Agriculture affirmed the necessity of multistakeholder integration in agricultural development,

“Agriculture development is a challenge [that is] too big for the Department of Agriculture (DA) to face alone. We need you in our advocacy to transform Philippine agriculture into a resilient, modern, industrialized, and globally competitive sector.”  
(DA Communication Group, 2022)

This corresponds to the assessment by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which raised key policy recommendations found from critical observation of the agricultural institutions and governance systems' landscape in the country, including: a) strengthening institutional coordination between the DA and other relevant departments and institutions that implement programs supporting agriculture; b) strengthening transparency and accountability of publicly-funded programs; c) accelerating efforts to build a solid policy-relevant statistical system; and lastly d) embedding monitoring and evaluation mechanisms into the policy process (OECD, 2017). Noticeably, there is a need to harness coordination in engaging the grassroots to contribute to agrarian changes.

In sum, the current policy process in Siquijor is structured around the Local Government Code of 1991, which involves multiple stakeholders, including LGUs, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and people's organizations (POs). Policy formulation and implementation are conducted locally, with LGUs leading micro-level agricultural developments and support services. However, challenges such as patronage, clientelism, and limited resources hinder the effectiveness and inclusivity of this process. Unlike the current process, the deliberative approach seeks to engage a broader range of stakeholders in open, reasoned discussions, ensuring that all voices, particularly those of marginalized groups, are heard and considered. The Siquijor, Philippines case will give us insights into the significance of deliberative capacity in policy analysis.

### **3.2 Deliberative Capacity and the Agricultural Sector**

In non-western democracies, one of the challenging hurdles that policy practitioners encounter is the public's weak (and sometimes lack of) participation (Egorov & Sonin, 2020). Numerous scholarly works in the Global South have noted that policy analysis entails significant consideration of culture, traditions, and authority (Donnison, 1994; Yanow, 2000). Hence, putting up a deliberative approach to policy analysis can somehow be challenged by these contextual realities and dynamics brought about by socio-political conditions. However, deliberative scholars have asserted that deliberations do matter in non-western democracies; thus, a critical element to pursuing democratic principles in doing policy analysis and addressing public problems (Boossabong & Chamchong, 2019; Boossabong & Fischer, 2018; Curato et al., 2018; Sacramento & Boossabong, 2023).

Deliberative policy analysis (DPA) scholars have reiterated that to provide alternatives to a highly technical paradigm in policy analysis is by fundamentally considering bringing the process to people and better accounting for public voices in thinking about alternatives to address public problems affecting society (Fischer, 2010; Sacramento, 2024). Critically, these participatory and deliberative elements of policy analysis are crucial when we situate the marginalized sectors in the picture. Similarly, this policy approach veers away from a technical expert-oriented policy process and moves towards a more inclusive and consultative one that caters to opinion and collective consensus. Hence, the deliberative approach presents a mechanism gauging a policy analysis process that focuses on the authentic public agenda and concern (Curato & Böker, 2016). This remains integral in seeing how the agricultural sector's representation and participation in governance are either augmented or lessened with or without deliberative initiatives.

With the growing confidence and romanticism of the DPA paradigm, scholars may have utilized this to overly mainstream that addressing complex and uncertain problems can “only be” approached through a deliberative approach. Considering these tendencies, the study positions that there is no ideal and appropriate approach to understanding and addressing public problems. However, understanding the deliberative capacities of those coming from the grassroots is essential to further see how we navigate around the policy analysis process and to look at this process holistically. The environment's contextual conditions and the nature of public problems may also command how we unpack and see potential alternatives. To see deliberative capacities holistically does not only qualify within the confines of a deliberative approach but as an effort to further navigate complex policy analysis (especially when society clings to power and highly expects technical expertise to address problems).

Deliberative capacity was defined by Dryzek (2002), as the extent by which established structures facilitate the dimension of authenticity (the degree of reflexivity and absence of coercion in the deliberation process), inclusivity (referring to the facilitation of equal opportunities to participate amongst all involved actors), and consequentiality (the impact of deliberation to a perceived policy outcome). We view that the deliberative capacity of individuals encompasses a wide array of purposes—that is, to complement the participatory policy process, to provide expert advice, and to push for technical know-how from the grassroots and those with rich experience. Further mechanization by Dryzek (2009) on deliberative capacity building involves transferring information from the public sphere to an empowered setting and ensuring that the empowered space remains accountable to the public sphere. Thereon, its goal is to foster genuine, all-encompassing discussions leading to meaningful outcomes. To achieve authenticity, it is essential to thoughtfully consider preferences without applying pressure, connecting specific arguments to broader principles, and engaging in reciprocal communication. Hence, this is important to consider when dealing with individuals from diverse backgrounds and those in the marginalized sector (Sacramento, 2023b).

Looking at the deliberative capacity discourse, we see that it is much more relevant to contexts rooting for bigger representation and navigating around policy processes involving the marginalized sector. For once, the concept of deliberative capacity corresponds to the idea of deliberative democracy (the emphasis on rational discourse and public reasoning in decision-making) pioneered by Habermas

(1987) and Dryzek (2000). While participatory democracy seeks to increase the participation of citizens in governance processes, emphasizing direct engagement in decision-making, deliberative democracy concerns itself with democratic legitimacy arising from the quality of deliberation among citizens, where arguments are exchanged, and different perspectives are considered to reach a reasoned agreement or consensus (Fung & Wright, 2001; Pateman, 1970). Deliberative democracies are classified according to their political system's ability to support effective deliberative processes and increase the quality of integrating public reasoning—that is, the deliberative capacity.

In democratic societies (even more in weak democracies), deliberative capacities are imperative in engaging those people from below to have the drive to engage and participate in the policy-making process, specifically in addressing pressing public problems (Button & Mattson, 1999; Warren, 2007). It is specifically relevant to look at the context of the Philippines, specifically that of the Siquijor island province, where the archipelagic conditions of the country and the limited reach of developments in far-flung island communities dampen bureaucratic and distributive efficiencies (Singgalen et al., 2018; Valderrama & Bautista, 2012; Fox, 1990). Hence, deliberative capacity has to be revisited in this setting, especially as how it is approached in terms of the policy process (the formulation of agenda setting), accessibility and availability of programs and assistance, and the existence of grievance desks or plausibility of requesting forms of agrarian support. All of these encompass how the deliberative capacity facilitates genuine and responsive participation from the grassroots agricultural sector to the policy entrepreneurs.

#### **4. Research Methodology**

The study employs a qualitative research design that delves into how participants subjectively perceive actions and policy processes as they understand them (Fossey et al., 2002). It also uses the case-study method in exploring and depicting narratives in the intrinsic circumstance of the case at hand (Cousin, 2005). For the data collection, the research utilized the open-ended Key Informant Interview (KII), which treats pre-determined “key informants” as data sources for the webbing, dynamic, and complex topics related but not limited to kinship, organization, economic system, religious practices and beliefs, and the political structure (Tremblay, 1957).

The research locale is the Siquijor province in central Philippines. The Siquijor province in the Philippines makes a compelling case, considering its culturally ingrained agricultural orientation (Bulloch, 2017) and its marginalized socio-economic position from the country's urban centers. The informants of this study are two farmers from the Siquijor agrarian community, two government officials from Siquijor LGU, and two leaders of civil service organizations in the Siquijor island, which are selected through purposive and snowballing sampling. In qualitative research, the adequacy of sample size is often determined by the principle of data saturation, where additional data collection does not yield new insights. According to Creswell (2013), phenomenological studies might include 5 to 25 participants, while grounded theory research often involves 20 to 30 interviews to reach saturation. Given the context of your study, which involves evaluating deliberative capacities within Siquijor's agricultural sector, using six key informants was sufficient since the information provided is rich and detailed enough to cover the research questions comprehensively. Their narratives are then treated through data triangulation to falsify and verify generalizable trends obtained from one data set to another (Oppermann, 2000). It also employs secondary data from existing studies and government records to explicate points and expound narratives.

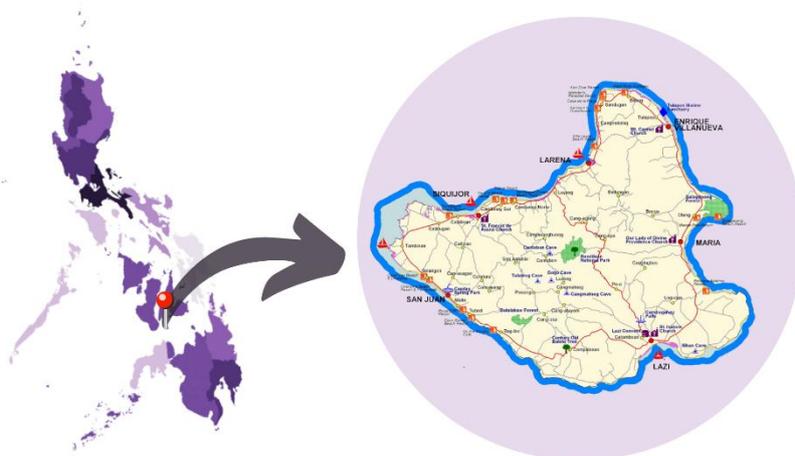
Furthermore, in unraveling the schema of the deliberative capacity of the Siquijor context from involved sectoral stakeholders, the study utilized thematic analysis. The deliberative capacity was operationalized through dimension of authenticity (assessed by examining how farmers and other stakeholders engage in policy discussions and decision-making processes, which include the presence of open forums, the degree to which participants can voice their concerns without fear, and the reflection of diverse opinions in the final decisions), inclusivity (analyzed through the extent different farmer groups are involved in policy formulation and implementation, covering the representation of

various farmer groups in decision-making bodies, the accessibility of participation opportunities, and efforts made to reach out to unaffiliated farmers), and consequentiality (investigates whether the deliberative processes lead to meaningful changes in policies and practices that address the needs and concerns of the stakeholders, i.e., implementation of decisions made through deliberative processes, changes in agricultural policies based on stakeholder input, and the effectiveness of grievance mechanisms in addressing farmers' issues).

Although the research provides extensive research on the deliberative capacity as implied by various sectoral informants, it limits itself from the possible connotations derived outside their narrative and experiences. It also inscribes solely the theoretical assumptions purported by the deliberative policy analysis model. Nevertheless, the researchers also declare that there are no conflicts of interest in the study's conduct. Consent from the respondents is ensured through oral confirmation, as contained in the record files, and signed letters of consent from the involved informants in the study.

## 5. Findings

Siquijor is an island province in the Central Visayas region with a population of 103,395 based on the 2022 Census of Population and Housing (Philippine Statistic Authority, 2023). It is also the region's smallest island province, with a land area of 343.5 square meters. As part of the Philippine archipelago, the Siquijor province has been somewhat isolated from central power and competitive economies in urban areas such as Manila, the capital, and Cebu City, the biggest in the region (see Figure 1). In turn, it marginalized the island in accessing most of the social, political, and economic interventions of the nation's pursuit for development. Despite these social, political, and economic realities, Siquijor survived to create its ecology augmented by a widespread reputation for superstitions and animistic beliefs ranging from the existence of benign faith healers, use of malevolent practices like witchcraft, sorcery, and black magic (Bulloch, 2014).



**Figure 1** Map of Siquijor, Philippines  
Source: Philippines Tour Guide. (2024)

Grounding from the aforementioned rationale, analyzing Siquijor's context offers valuable insights into the grassroots perspectives on the delivery of national and local services, particularly those related to agrarian support, which is a crucial component of the country's overall economy. Imperative to this agenda is to see how deliberative capacities influence the dynamics of stakeholders, specifically on the genuine deliberative involvement of the locals and members of the agricultural sector in the policy process.

### **5.1 Policy analysis, the grassroots, and the role of deliberative capacity**

The traditional systems and dynamics of the national political landscape have constrained localized deliberations in policy making. However, this work unpacks the Siquijor local agrarian community's role in influencing the broader heuristic framework of multistakeholder integration and policy engagements. This links to Dryzek's (2007) idea of deliberative policy analysis, envisioning a discursive system that substantiates three critical principles for achieving genuine deliberation (authenticity, inclusiveness, and consequentiality). Authenticity means that the deliberation's primary focus is centered on inducing reflection and sharing of preferences in the absence of impending threats or coercive measures; everyone is allowed to share opinions, and those who have contrasting opinions may still find meaning and accept. There is also inclusivity in the deliberation process as the discourse provides the opportunity to discuss the ideas of all affected actors or concerned representatives. And consequentiality, deliberation can make a difference in the overall collective outcome that may influence or determine a system's regulations according to the discourse's deliberative potential. These outcomes may be laws, even codified decisions concerning public policy and international treaties, informal ones concerning governance networks, or those that imply massive cultural changes. However, the three fundamental principles may not be necessarily apparent in the current milieu, which the findings will unravel. Nevertheless, it is imperative to note that critical agenda-setting involves acquiring inclusive, authentic, and consequential policy processes, especially context that may entail significant considerations (such as culture, freedom, and equality) (Sacramento, 2023a).

As an initial point, the findings show that lobbying and "reaching out to power" are initial preparatory steps to starting a viable discussion that is crucial when thinking about stirring discourse and influencing agricultural program prospects. Unraveling the influence of groups is essential as it elucidates matters of communicative interactions in which policy changes originate (Seibicke, 2014). Lobbying in itself is often seen as an indispensable ad hoc coalition that forwards an innate action emanating from an organized body of people with shared visions and interests which then turns to influence policies (Anastasiadis et al., 2018; Kimball et al., 2012). Moreover, "reaching out as a deliberative potential" is an act of lobbying and an effort to affect policy outcomes and curb the gap between policymakers and implementers in the marginalized or grassroots sectors. As a response from key informants, one mentioned that:

"For me, our voice is essential to the government, especially our (as farmers) suggestions... so we lobby for the distribution to be earlier, or it will be rendered futile if it is not handed out before the rainy season. The seeds must be prepared before planting, so they adjusted the distribution to March." (Informant A: English translation of personal communication, 2023)

The narrative points out that they clearly understand the significance of their voices in bringing out a substantial and informed change (in agricultural set-up) in the forms of policy and programs that may directly or indirectly benefit them, especially as it accentuates their initial experiences on the ground. One critical lesson from the deliberative approach is what Fischer and Gottweis (2012) pointed out as the argumentative potential of the paradigm in practicing a communicative public policy analysis. The role of communication and argumentation empowers the public and the marginalized sector to amplify their voices and raise their concerns to those people in power. Hence, these are in line with what Dryzek (2007) pointed out as authenticity, which is focused on people's reflection and sharing preferences freely with no immediate dangers or forceful influences, even if others have different opinions.

Authenticity pertains to a high degree of reflexivity from the absence of coercive means but rather by the exhibition of reciprocity or the conditions of agreeable and acceptable terms to all involved parties in the deliberation process. Authenticity and inclusivity are the foundation of deliberative democracy (Mutz, 2006). While it has been contested that "hearing the other side" as a measure to incorporate all ideas may induce lesser participation, it is without a doubt that a polity

that exhibits a high level of deliberative capacity augments the delivery of public service with precision to what is being demanded (Dryzek, 2007). In means through which deliberative capacity becomes obsolete, detachment and isolation arise between the local policymakers and the community, giving rise to concentrated reliance on technocratic ideals.

While authenticity may be directed to lobbying and reaching out to power, we trace the concept of inclusivity pertinent to deliberative capacity in the problems and agenda set by the agricultural sector in Siquijor, Philippines. For one, conventional lobbying may often be seen as a means to exert influence through direct appeals to power holders, thus, lacking inclusiveness and transparency to embody a genuine deliberative process where stakeholders are engaged in open, reasoned discussions. Deliberative lobbying ensures that all voices are included and considered, thereby contributing to the overall deliberative capacity of the policy process (Dryzek, 2002). Agricultural problems are also not necessarily complex science policies that have been pertained by the wicked problems. However, it remarks the same contestation that policy recommendations from marginalized communities are not only critical but are direly needed in confronting any social predicament. The key informants raised problems that are manifestations of the inadequacy of the deliberative-integrative aspect, resulting in low efficiency in delivering public service. In their narratives, they have pointed out how authorities consider their problems (or not) and provided resolutions; hence, they have helped us trace and infer whether inclusivity in staging these agendas is a critical value.

Regarding benefit inequality, informants showed varieties of governmental support or administrative intervention between affiliated and unaffiliated farmers. Affiliated farmers refer to members of farmer associations, agricultural organizations, or cooperatives with several leverages like resource access, training, information, and advocacy. Unaffiliated farmers are those that operate independently. In the statement, the latter deem it difficult to receive support from any bodies, specifically People's Organizations (POs) and Non-government Organizations (NGOs), as they were uncertain whether these bodies could assist. Meanwhile, the affiliated farmers are more optimistic about agrarian assistance offered by states and organizations, citing their experiences of success in terms of lobbying their grievances. In a sentiment:

“I see that there is an inadequacy in the aspect of reaching out to young farmers because... yet, the farmers (especially the individual ones) tend to be misinformed of these services. It becomes selective, and then it does not give equal opportunity to everyone. The policies must be constant, and there must be more extensionists to reach all kinds of farmers, they must not be reliant on POs and NGOs or the first move from the farmers to tell them that certain problems exist.” (Informant B: English translation of personal communication, 2023)

LGUs would manifest that they prefer that all farmers organize their agrarian community or be affiliated with NGOs or POs so it is easier to distribute assistance, training, and resources. From these narratives, reaching out to these independent farmers is imperative for equitable service delivery. This coincides with Christens et al. (2021), who recognize that grassroots community organizing is a distinct but necessary approach for persisting socio-economic inequalities in different societal domains like the agricultural sector. Reaching out can be strategized through governmental initiation as empowered by the LGC of 1991. It can also be paired with the four fundamental strategies of addressing community problems (Beckwith, 2011), specifically nurturing aspects of community organizing, advocacy, service delivery, and development, which is getting the group to deliver the outcome.

“The office offers seed distribution like corn and other vegetables. We also conduct training but only for those who have associations and affiliations and their higher-ups, like the chairperson, whom they expect will also share the body of farmers... However, this is still also priorly given to those who have associations, and those individual farmers could only avail limited resources available to our office whenever they come.

We have a list of authorized organizations which they accredit and approach...” (Informant C: English translation of personal communication, 2023)

This excerpt illustrates logistical concerns, where it narrated how difficult the process of forwarding concerns and availing of existing services was. This was also demonstrated in the statement below.

“I (independent farmer) have yet to receive support from NGOs or POs, yet I know that some organizations offer agricultural support on the island. Yes, there is a difference if the government's resources are scarce, so much more so if the NGOs and POs have more limited funds.” (Informant A: English translation of personal communication, 2023)

This predicament is not new to the Philippine agrarian landscape. Several reforms are in place to improve the bureaucracy, including RA 9485 or the Anti-Red Tape Act of 2007, which attempted to make public service efficient and the governance cluster and the good governance initiatives (Brillantes & Perante-Calina, 2018). With this, it is integral to empower the conduct of assessments to see whether these initiatives still retain their conduciveness and relevance in local settings. The poor government response makes grassroots communities less apprehensive of collaboration and restricts the formation of a deliberative and participatory policy-making system. From the narratives of key informants:

“Yes, I could lobby my demands and concerns, yet, it was not immediate. It took me a month to have the seeds, citing paperwork and logistical concerns.” (Informant A: English translation of personal communication, 2023)

The administrative support to agriculture includes: a) self-finance agriculture (which sums up the informant's narratives on sustaining their agriculture venture autonomously), and b) supply limitations or the awareness of the extent to which the POs, NGOs, and LGUs could support them. These sentiments reflect this statement:

“The main hurdle was the procurement of resources and materials, which would take a long time... The bidding was a struggle, and they had to lobby countless times to realign the project. It took almost 5 years. However, we have now reaped the results, and they will divide 3k quarterly for their production. The government indeed helps, but the farmers have to exert effort to follow up.” (Informant B: English translation of personal communication, 2023)

The hurdles can be attributed to the lack of community organizing initiatives causing distributional resource lapses and the aforementioned bureaucratic processes that peril inclusivity. This specifically highlights the inadequacy of support in the agricultural sector, discouraging new farmers from pursuing agrarian ventures. The poor performance of the Philippine agricultural sector refers to the shortcomings in the institutional and policy environments in which the agrarian sector operates. Manifested in the trade and price intervention policies, institutional and collaborative weakness, and public expenditure allocations (Ofreneo, 2015), the historical landscape of agriculture has incentivized progressive structures for agricultural development (Teruel & Kuroda, 2004).

“My (as an independent farmer) seeds and equipment are bought at my own expense.” (Informant A: English translation of personal communication, 2024)

This statement connotes the discouragement of agricultural practice due to a lack of support, primarily on logistical needs, especially for start-up farmers. Affirming statements are indicated as follows:

“The main hurdle in lobbying is the scarcity of the materials and resources to accommodate or the delimitation that their office can offer. Lobbying problems and concerns to the government is no problem; we are proactive, yet it is not a guarantee

that we can immediately help.” (Informant E: English translation of personal communication, 2024)

Moreover, a significant observation is how the sector becomes highly invested in traditional agrarian methods. The LGU’s extension work has attempted to connect the grassroots to scientific developments pushed by informed technocrats and scholars. Although motivated by goodwill, it does not transform into actual alleviation of situations of these communities, nor can they adapt immediately. Looking back to the context of deliberative capacity, the value of consequentiality is at the core of integrating new approaches to the already established and preferred traditional practices. However, the scientific community’s input is imperative but not necessarily abruptly imposed. Joint consensus towards common goals must be based on a mutual understanding that such objectives are inherently merit-worthy. As such, this direction links to the process invoked by Habermasian communicative rationality (Lubenow, 2012). If the agricultural grassroots change their traditional ways, it must be motivated by inherently consensual forms of social coordination rather than imposition—or any attempt to assist these people will remain futile.

“There are farmers who are hard-headed who will not listen to our suggestions and would pursue their traditional methods despite all the efforts to educate them... The solution is to talk to the association’s president and ask for help to slowly seep their ideas into the methods of these specific farmers. Though, this is not applicable to all.” (Informant C: English translation of personal communication, 2024)

Fundamentally, this affirms the notion that technocratic maneuvers without foregrounding cultural and discursive conditions intrinsic to a specific context do not immediately translate to transformative changes (Bukusi, 2024). In foregrounding marginalized voices, the objective then is to mainstream voices that are often overshadowed by louder and dominant discourses in policy discussions. These may be in the form of storytelling, cultural expressions, and shared lived experiences that correspond to deep insights into their needs and challenges. In effectively including these voices, participatory-deliberative forums are to be made accessible and welcoming to the marginalized sectors, inclusive public consultations can be done to integrate their values and input, and observance of culturally sensitive approaches is invoked to amplify these intrinsic forms of expression. This implication has been figured out by some of the LGUs in practice, as demonstrated in the following statement:

“The approach towards this [in educating them] must not be aggressive because it will not work. Moreso, it should be through slowly influencing them to participate proactively. The success would really be reduced to their participation and their active adaptation to policies... The season-long training will always be inadequate. So, it must be a patient process.” (Informant D: English translation of personal communication, 2024)

Deliberative capacity is the presence of an authentic, inclusive, and consequential political deliberation that democratizes a given political system (Dryzek, 2009). As described by Fischer and Gottweis (2012), the argumentative turn in the policy analysis is significant to put the deliberative capacity of the powerless to get involved in the policy-making process and governance that will significantly impact their socio-economic well-being. While reaching out to power is a point of authenticity that drives deliberative capacity, it is not solely considered an established absolute indicator. Nevertheless, the entire scope of argumentation posits the tendency to be enclosed to a bargaining game, to which not all farmers have the resources to convince their addressee with their arguments (Jonsson, 2007). This gap in the deliberative process is further explicated as the following themes explore different dimensions of Siquijor’s agricultural landscape.

Moreover, the lack of inclusivity may discourage participation and result in policies deprived of authentic inputs from the policy targets. This has also been illustrated in the administrative

drawbacks that hamper inclusivity in service delivery in the sector. The prevalence of sticking to traditional practices is a manifestation that the deliberative capacity in consequentiality is worth considering. To replace established traditional practices with so-called “advanced and sustainable agriculture methods” offered by experts is a clear manifestation of disregarding consequential deliberative elements, which means having policies informed by stakeholder influence rather than a one-sided regulatory imposition.

## **5.2 The sector, state, and civil society: Collaborations in Deliberations**

From the case point, we emphasized that the role of civil societies, the government, and the grassroots community is crucial to the policy process and the deliberative capacity of the agricultural sector. The government plays a crucial role in the delivery of services. The government navigates around local agrarian programs and projects and mobilizes administrative offices to service delivery. The informants grasped what the local agriculture offices might offer, including fertilizers, seeds, seminars, etc. After all, agricultural extensions in the Philippines are crucial in technology transfer and augmenting farming productivity and income, despite several issues posed by the promise of devolution (Declaro-Ruedas, 2019).

“The office gives rice seeds, fertilizers, and training... On disease outbreaks, when the biological control and traditional farming methods are insufficient, we will hand chemicals to the farmers directly and provide suggestions on particular actions like the pesticide to use...” (Informant C: English translation of personal communication, 2023)

The informants also recognize the role of the grassroots community as a critical component of the policy process as informed by their individual experiences. Hence, if deliberative capacity is targeted for policy improvements, potent collaboration, and adherence, the informants grasp democratic consolidation as a means to curb collective demands.

“For me, my opinions and voice are crucial because, as a farmer, our needs and concerns are crucial in formulating agricultural approaches, especially since it is the backbone of the economy.” (Informant E: English translation from personal communication, 2023)

Meanwhile, the role of NGOs as a mediating entity between the grassroots communities and the government is significantly illustrated by the informants’ narratives. Instead of reaching out individually to local offices, the affiliated farmers would discuss it first with their respective NGOs and would expect that the NGOs would forward their concerns to the LGU office. In the same way, government officials or the LGU would also expect these initiatives in the localities and would not reach out to individual farmers. Instead, they would immediately refer their services to the NGOs and existing POs, undermining the unaffiliated farmers. Surprisingly, this sectoral dynamism has always been the case, especially in similar cases on agricultural and extension services research conducted in Colombia, Chile, and Bolivia. In these contexts, it has been revealed that NGOs fill the gaps in weak government regulations and programs (Bebbington & Farrington, 1993).

“On reaching out to them to ask about their needs and problems or to hand out basic services from the government, they can always call for community meetings through organizations and associations... Most of the NGOs already exist, so we did not take the initiative to form one. We will just assist and coordinate with these NGOs to extend their services. For far-flung areas, we highly encourage NGO formation for facile integration.” (Informant E: English translation from personal communication, 2023)

Notions of collaboration among the mentioned agents, as inferred from the findings, underline that how policy actors perceive development vis-à-vis their distinct historical derivation of values and conceptions is crucial to facilitate a balanced and comprehensive understanding of matters in contestation, specifically in the context of agrarian policies and development (Alroe & Noe, 2008). This notion was furthered in the statement below:

“Usually, the NGOs and Pos reach out to the LGU first, and the LGU will recognize them as point organizations to tap into whenever there are policy programs and services that will help farmers.” (Informant F: English translation from personal communication, 2024)

The findings depict the dynamics of civil society-government-grassroots sector interaction. This tripartite mechanism involves civil societies or LGUs assisting a farmer group and deploying a community organizer to facilitate bookkeeping, training, and management. This is often perceived as effective in most communities, where it is comprehended and integrated (Schmitz, 1995; Willis, 2011). More so, it connotes the necessity of including NGOs in the policy formulations concerning the facile delivery of services or augmenting socio-civic participation.

Overall, evaluating the deliberative capacities within Siquijor's agricultural sector reveals fundamental areas that need to be developed. In inclusivity, all stakeholders, covering both marginalized and unaffiliated farmers, must be encouraged to participate in deliberative processes. This can be achieved through participatory forums, outreach programs, and the use of local languages and culturally relevant methods of communication. For transparency, trust in the deliberative process by making all discussions, decisions, and rationales must be fostered through clear communication of policy decisions and their reasoning. Lastly, capacity building, institutional support, and facilitation need to be sustained to ensure that there is enhanced engagement through increased education on policy issues, negotiation skills, and access to information, strengthened institutional frameworks to support deliberative procedures, and facilitators are skilled enough to guide discussion towards constructive outcomes.

## **6. Conclusion**

In this study, we revisited the conception of deliberative capacity and focused mainly on what Dryzek (2007) emphasized: authenticity, inclusivity, and consequentiality considerations. By illustrating the case of Siquijor, Philippines' agricultural sector, the study delves greatly into the discourse of deliberative capacity. Preliminary notes reveal how the dynamism of the national policy process affects local governance, especially under the LGC of 1991. The findings of the study position that “reaching out” as part of the authenticity derivatives of deliberative capacity has commonly been understood by sectors as instrumental in channeling their concerns to those in power. The lack of inclusivity traces to the lack of authentic inputs from various stakeholders in working on policy targets, and the lack of consequentiality is often from making alternatives by expert implementers and decision-makers beyond stakeholder influence and is more of a one-sided regulatory imposition. With these, the case study contributes to DPA as a pragmatic application providing insights into how deliberative processes can be implemented in contexts that differ significantly from urban or more developed areas, which are commonly studied in DPA literature. It also identifies specific barriers to effective deliberation, such as the lack of resources, logistical challenges, and limited access to information among unaffiliated farmers. Lastly, focusing on the voices of marginalized farmers, the study argues that for deliberative processes to be genuinely inclusive and effective, they must actively seek to engage those who are often excluded from policy discussions.

Also, the work emphasized that sector-civil society-government dynamics are critical to the policy process and the deliberative capacity of the agricultural sector. This confirms that as the deliberative approach pushes for an inclusive and participatory policy process, the marginalized sector's deliberative capacity is vital and complementary to addressing their concerns. Strengthening the sector's deliberative capacity is to ensure and value the process of inclusive and participatory deliberation, as exemplified in an authentic, inclusive, and consequential process within the sector-civil society-government dynamics.

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