

# (Re/Co)Constructing the Filipino praxis in development work for agriculture and rural development in a grounded theory

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## ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 phenomenon presents new challenges, including uncharted territories and opportunities, in which development work may be understood, planned, and practiced. As a Filipino-centric inquiry, this study attempts to challenge current assumptions on development work. Centering on civil society organizations in Luzon, Philippines where 12 trailblazing development workers within the agriculture and rural development sector co-participated in intensive sequential e-dialogues, this study serves as a (re)discovery of their roles as sites of emergent agency during a public health crisis.

These preliminary findings established the foundations in the (re/co) construction of a substantive theory called (Post-)pandemic Resilient and Inclusive Community Engagement and Communication for Development (RICE C4D) through the rigors of the sociocultural and critical traditions of communication theory, interwoven into Kathy Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory. RICE C4D proposes four emergent critical components: *sociocultural leadership* (component 1) that acknowledges a new breed of community actors; *multi-stakeholder coaction* (component 2) that recognizes the complementary roles of emergent communication and (in)formal coalitions; *strategic rural participation* (component 3) that encourages the genuine engagement of rural and urban communities in the planned and judicious practice of development work through granular community immersion as legacy spaces and virtual communication as digital spaces leading to the creation of an online village; and *emergent solidarities* (component 4) that fosters the power of agency toward the (re)creation of physical and social spaces for development and the purposive pivot to digital spaces for communication.

As a reflexive journey and with the goal to be of eventual practical utility during and beyond the pandemic, this grounded theory welcomes dialogical-

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dialectic encounters, collaborative (re/co)construction, and continuing reimagination of our common future.

**Keywords:** *constructivist grounded theory, development communication, agriculture and rural development, civil society organizations, community engagement, pandemic*

### Introduction

Infectious diseases have been around for centuries. Historical actualities show how people survived and died from outbreaks, epidemics, and pandemics such as bubonic plague, cholera, avian flu, human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS), severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS), and recently, the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which began as an outbreak in Wuhan, China as early as December 2019 and reclassified as a pandemic in March 2020, has revolutionized not only the face of education, local economy, and tourism but also the landscape of development practice. As the world's poorest populations have become vulnerable to the impacts of the crisis on sociocultural, economic, and political structures, the COVID-19 pandemic presents what is easily one of the most devastating challenges ever faced by civil society organizations (CSOs) within the agriculture and rural development (ARD) sector in the Philippines. Jones et al. (2017) pointed out how farmers carry the brunt of "new economic systems and corporations" as introduced by the "growth of neoliberal capitalist market." Exacerbating this dilemma are the millions of agricultural damages incurred by the country due to the devastating typhoons in 2020 (Brul, 2021) and the wide-ranging impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. ARD remains to be a major engine of local development, food security, and poverty alleviation among Southeast Asian countries. Gregorio and Ancog (2020) held that the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic "threatened overall capacity of the sector to achieve productivity and...sustained contribution to food security."

Consequently, the pandemic has immobilized the processes of communication planning and implementation among CSOs within the ARD sector due to human (im)mobility. While development workers have long engaged models and frameworks in project cycle management, this pandemic clearly challenges the established methodologies and communication acts that guide development work within the field of development communication (Devcom).

This study explores the roster of frameworks, models, and concepts within the fields of Devcom and community development throughout the decades and the paucity of literature on their applicability at a time of a novel phenomenon like the pandemic. These foundations serve as springboard for social theorizing that may establish the practices on the ground and guide new and emerging organizations who work for ARD and other relevant sectors.

### **Communication and communities in reimagining development**

Given the massive literature on communication and community engagement and with the changing dynamics of development work in the Philippines, no studies have been found that problematize and theorize the communication processes and interventions of CSOs within the ARD sector that can potentially guide new and emerging organizations in navigating the COVID-19 pandemic.

With the crucial role of communication in the development discourse and practice since the 1940s, it has also evolved into many forms. Participatory rural communication appraisal (PRCA) was developed in the mid-1990s to identify and prioritize community needs that could support the design of communication programs and strategies (Anyaegbunam et al., 2004). As communication needs changed, Bessette (2004) laid out the gold standard in doing Devcom work in communities through the strategic use of the power of theater, rural radio, songs, and interpersonal communication as forms of legacy media. Mefalopulos (2008, p. 85), on the other hand, explored the concept of communication-based assessment (CBA) as the foundational phase in Devcom methodological framework that “offers a comprehensive investigation of a situation and should be the first step of any development initiative, regardless of the sector.” Essentially, CBA scaffolds the development of communication strategies, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. In a quest to locate Devcom within social justice and social change, Melkote and Steeves (2015, p. 395) emphasized the challenge of “creating active agency at the larger societal, community or individual levels” by ensuring that the economic, political, and social issues of “contemporary societies are addressed.” The new avatar of Devcom pursues an “agent-oriented view of individuals and communities engaged in directed social change” (p. 395). Meanwhile, USAID et al. (2010, p. 16) noted the challenges affecting the implementation of programs in environments with “ongoing instability, mobile populations, lack of or damaged infrastructure, minimal resources, and typically short donor funding cycles” which may not extend in novel phenomena like the pandemic.

Recent studies center on the application of previous communication models (Anyaegbunam et al., 2004; Food and Agriculture Organization, 2017; Mefalopulos, 2008), current communication mindsets (Benson & Mupiganyi, 2020; Bonsu & Losai, 2020; Maher & Murphet, 2020), and community engagement models (Blackman, 2003; European Commission, 2001; Food and Agriculture Organization, 2001). With the changing dynamics of development work in the Philippines, however, there is a need to systematically theorize the new dynamics to inform new and emergent organizations who continue to conduct in-person interactions and other mobile activities given the limitations on social mobility.

### **Social theorizing in Devcom**

Theorizing is the foundation of any “mature science” (Kuhn, 1962). Filipino-centric philosophies and theories guided the scholarship of Devcom throughout recent history, but there continues to be a propensity for Western paradigms (Dissayanake, 2009; Wang & Kuo, 2010). Arguably, these non-Asian theories are detached from the local realities of Filipino communities and may inadequately explain the conditions of poorest populations in the Philippines.

The act of theorizing may best represent what Fuchs and Qiu (2018) called “praxis communication” that transcends the transmissive and transactional nature of communication and embraces the use of communication for social change and

transformation. They invite us to “understand practice as transformative praxis that aims at social change toward a better world that defends and extends democracy and participation, and that works toward a good life for everyone” and to act as “critical, public, organic intellectuals” (p. 227).

As scholars in the field of Devcom, we have an important obligation for underprivileged and invisibilized communities. Based on Flor’s (2007) reflections, Devcom invites us to focus on three important areas: theory, policy, and practice. Today, these tasks remain true and timely, heavily infused in the bloodstreams of Devcom scholarship. With these areas, the most recurring issue confronting Devcom is social theorizing. However, there is likewise an urgent need to situate our theorizing efforts within the current conditions of development work in the Philippines.

As a rejoinder to the efforts of Devcom scholar Librero (2012), De Torres et al. (2021) analyzed the status of Devcom research among graduate studies in 2008-2015. The review revealed the predominance of the cybernetic tradition and mixed methods approaches, demonstrating “heavy use of linear, one-way communication models.” Meanwhile, the review also showed that these studies used case study methods, field observations, storytelling, and focus group discussion, rising to the challenge of Librero (2012) to explore qualitative methodologies. Librero (2012, p. 238) held that studies “must be pursued toward generalizations and formulation of research hypotheses or theoretical propositions” that will strengthen Devcom as a field of theory and practice.

Based on this review, we ask the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the emerging interventions of CSOs across the various phases of development work during the pandemic?

RQ2: What is our interpretation of the (re)emerging praxis and processes of CSOs during the pandemic that surfaced from our e-dialogues with development workers?

### **Methodological Grounding**

What we strived to bridge with this study is to transcend text reading, which is an equally significant enterprise in qualitative research, and deep dive into praxis, into grounded theory. Grounded theory served at the forefront of the “qualitative revolution” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, as cited in Charmaz, 2000, p. 509) and at a critical point in the history of social sciences.

Kathy Charmaz’s constructivist grounded theory as an offshoot of the classic grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) “assumes the relativism of multiple social realities, recognizes the mutual creation of knowledge by the viewer and the viewed, and aims toward interpretive understanding of subjects’ meanings (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Schwandt, 1994, as cited in Charmaz, 2000, p. 510).

With this methodology, we developed a *substantive theory* which is confined to one substantive or specific area of inquiry (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). We gathered qualitative data using intensive sequential e-dialogues and multi-sited data. Research activities received approval (No. CB-21-35, effective from November 2021-2022) and final report approval (June 2, 2022) from the Philippine Social Science Council–Social Science Ethics Review Board (PSSC-SSERB).

For this study, we define Luzon Island, Philippines as the focal community of the research participants and their CSOs (Figure 1) located mainly in Region I and III, National Capital Region, and Regions IV-A and IV-B. This decision is appropriate given our current geographical location and the intensive agricultural challenges and opportunities in the Island.

### *E-dialogues and Multi-sited Data*

The concept of responsive interviewing “which emphasizes the importance of working with interviewees as partners rather than treating them as objects of research” guided the conduct of intensive sequential interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. xv). Interviews, or referred to as e-dialogues in this study, were facilitated through the following flow we developed in navigating the process of theory development: (1) *laying the ground*, (2) *understanding CSOs and underprivileged communities*, (3) *exploring reflections*, and (4) *ending the conversation*.

Two to three sessions were held with each development worker during the stages of data gathering and analysis. Each e-dialogue lasted between 50-60 minutes at minimum to 120-180 minutes at most. Asynchronous responses were also elicited through e-mail and Facebook correspondences for clarifications and corroborations.

To triangulate the e-dialogues is an examination of various multi-sited data by examining “multiple kinds of data from a particular situation of inquiry” to better represent the “increasingly complex, diffuse...dispersed aspects of research topics” (Clarke, 2005, pp. 164-165). The selection of multi-sited documents as research data was decided through four criteria (Scott, 1990, as cited in Flick, 2018): authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning—and if we may infer: *constant and critical reflection*.

### *Research Participants*

Sampling is a critical phase throughout grounded theory research. Purposive sampling, contextually defined as the identification of individuals who have experienced a phenomenon, guided our process of selecting development workers as research participants.

We interviewed 12 development workers who belong to CSOs, which refer to organizations pursuing “public interest agenda, rather than commercial interests” (Hall-Jones, 2006, as cited in Young & Dhanda, 2013, p. 221) within the ARD sector. They are those whose positions require their involvement in communication functions and processes and have had access to underprivileged communities via online and offline platforms. They may be graduates of programs

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in the natural sciences or social sciences but whose roles and functions in CSOs involve communication for social change.

### *Analyzing E-dialogues*

In making sense of the intensive sequential e-dialogues, coding as an organizing scheme is an efficient strategy to critically examine texts as data. Generally, we began the manual coding through initial coding by collapsing the data into parts before deliberating the grounded codes into salient and overarching categories through focused coding. From these categories, axial coding allowed us to establish the relationships of all categories that represent the CSOs' processes and practices during the pandemic, leading into the co-development of a substantive theory.

Our reflections by means of analytic memo writing were also logically woven as a significant process of the analysis. Clarke (2005, p. 202, as cited in Saldaña, 2009) viewed memo writing as a “site of conversation with ourselves about our data.” In this study, our memos range from frustrations, “aha” moments, insights, conversations, and questions.

**Table 1**

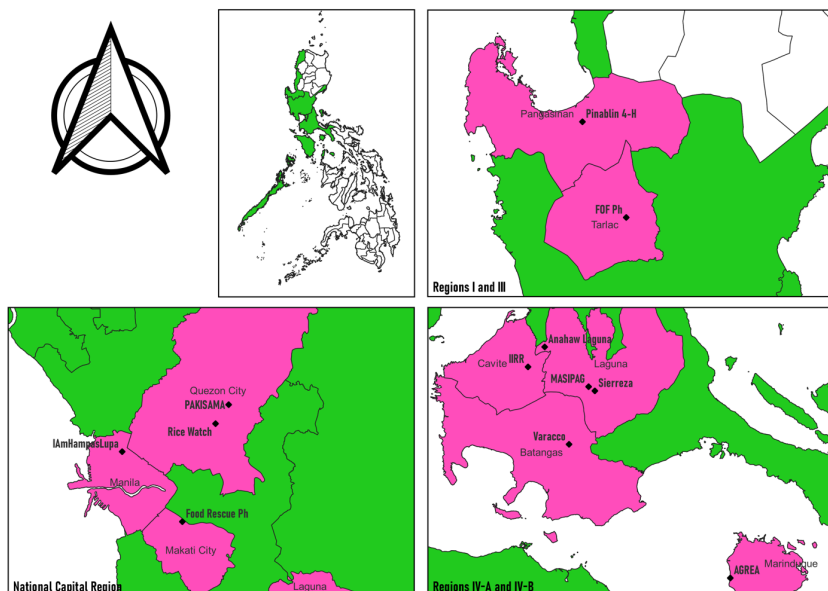
*Introducing the development workers as ARD trailblazers*

<b>DEVELOPMENT WORKERS</b>	<b>CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS</b>	<b>ROLES/ POSITIONS</b>	<b>EDUCATION</b>
<i>Cherrys O. Abrigo</i>	Sierreza Zero-Waste Store and Artisan Café	Founder	BS Engineering (UPLB)
<i>Ariestelo A. Asilo</i>	Varacco, Inc.	Co-founder	BS Nutrition (UPLB)
<i>Ryan M. Bestre</i>	IAmHampasLupa Ecological Agriculture Movement, Inc.	Campaigner/ Founder	BS Environmental Science (BSU)
<i>Jordan G. Calura</i>	For Our Farmers Ph, Inc.	Head of Operations	BS Agriculture (CLSU)
<i>Mac T. Florendo</i>	Food Rescue Philippines	Founder	BA Communication (Silliman U)
<i>Justin D. Interno</i>	Anahaw Laguna	Founder	BS Agriculture (UPLB)
<i>Christine F. Jodloman</i>	AGREA Agricultural System International, Inc.	Associate Director	BA Communication Arts (UPM)

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DEVELOPMENT WORKERS	CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS	ROLES/ POSITIONS	EDUCATION
<i>Melissa A. Obias</i>	Pambansang Kilusan ng Samahang Magsasaka	Program Coordinator	BS Devcom (UPLB)
<i>Cris C. Panerio</i>	Magsasaka at Siyentipiko Para sa Pag-unlad ng Agrikultura	National Coordinator	BS Engineering (UPLB)
<i>Gerald L. Qunit</i>	Pinablin 4-H Calasiao Inc.	Federated President	BS Agriculture (Pangasinan SU)
<i>Magnolia M. Rosimo</i>	International Institute of Rural Reconstruction	Program Manager	BS Social Sciences (UPB)
<i>Hazel A. Tanchuling</i>	Rice Watch Action Network Inc.	Executive Director	BS Community Development (UPD)

Figure 1  
Mapping the locations of CSOs in Luzon, the Philippines





## Findings and Discussion

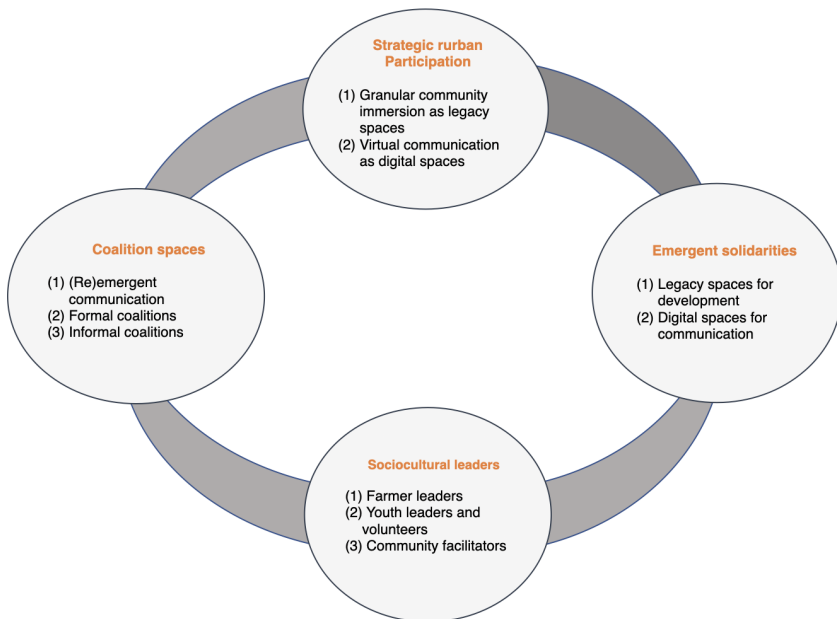
While countries across the globe vary in political decisions, including public health realities on the ground, underprivileged communities continue to experience varied forms of oppression every day. As a qualitative research examining issues of inclusion for underprivileged sectors and communities in the Philippines, this study is a decolonial representation of doing grounded theory in the context of Devcom as a homegrown discipline in the Philippines. Along this process, we were guided by Dr. Nora Quebral's (2012) advocacy for social justice by fostering "equity and the unfolding of human potential."

The COVID-19 pandemic provides CSOs with opportunities to engage in a critical rethink by examining their current communication and community engagement practices. Turning to the rigors of Kathy Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory, this substantive theory called **(Post-) pandemic Resilient and Inclusive Community Engagement and Communication for Development (RICE Communication or RICE C4D)**.

With the goal to be of eventual practical utility, we are forwarding four general, emergent critical components of the substantive theory that articulate the possibilities of ongoing processes and practices on the ground as seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2

*(Post-)pandemic RICE Communication for Development: A substantive theory*



### *Component 1: Pamumunong Pangkomunidad*

#### *(Elevating Sociocultural Leadership as an Emerging Form of Community Representation)*

As the scientific community continues to understand the epidemiology of COVID-19 for its prevention, management, and cure, there is also an opportunity for CSOs to reflect on how to better lead in development work through pandemics and other crises. Navigating through this time has tested the applicability of extant leadership models. Oftentimes, these models were created on the pretext of managing big private corporations which are entirely different from communities of practice whose realities on the ground are founded on marginalization and oppression.

During the pandemic and based on the sequential e-dialogues, this phase precedes community immersion as a convention in recent decades in development work. Within the contexts of the CSOs, this phase particularly invites the participation and leadership of various stakeholders like farmers, youth, women, and development workers as community leaders.

On the pretext of safety and familiarity to local and Indigenous knowledge, (1) *farmer leaders*, (2) *youth leaders*, and (3) *community facilitators* constitute sociocultural leadership to represent the interests of underprivileged sectors who live in precarious circumstances. While this term is not particularly new, it is an approach to leadership that finds its relevance at a time when CSOs are invited to rediscover the role of grassroots communities in local development. Further, Kirk and Shutte (2004, p. 235) encourage CSOs to look closely at the imminent tension “between the co-existence of the organizational chief and an acceptance of distributed leadership” when assuming sociocultural leadership. This may be difficult for “managers” of organizations who make all practical decisions across communication and implementation processes. In sociocultural leadership, the power largely lies on distributed and shared leadership with community members and CSOs. Through the creation of adjustment measures that coalesce with local community quarantine guidelines, the key role of *farmer leaders*, *youth leaders and volunteers*, and *community facilitators* as sociocultural leaders is to help reimagine and actualize innovative interventions with communities to create a more just society for everyone.

**Farmers leaders.** *Farmer leaders* may be the most credible community leaders to facilitate authentic communication and community engagement. Jones et al. (2017) pointed out how farmers carry the brunt of “new economic systems and corporations” as introduced by the “growth of neoliberal capitalist market.” Exacerbating this dilemma are the millions of agricultural damages due to the devastating typhoons in 2020 (Brul, 2021) and the wide-ranging impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on human life. As human assets with varied educational background and attainment, farmer leaders have undergone blended learning workshops and webinars on community communication, capacity development, community organizing, community leadership, and business planning to effectively coordinate technical services on the ground with underprivileged

communities. As an organization borne out of the desperate urgency to help local farming families and fisherfolk during the pandemic, FOF Ph has learned from other active CSOs that to be able to engage farmers and fisherfolk in the process of development, local leaders and small farmers should be at the fore and play a crucial role in communication and community engagement.

PAKISAMA, on the other hand, has long invested in the capacity of farmer leaders to address the dearth of extension agents which hampers development services to rural communities. Elaborating on the emerging role of farmer leaders in communication and community engagement, Melissa (PAKISAMA) expressed:

In my opinion, for me, finally after decades, it's only now that farmers are given this much power and decision-making. It's just right because PAKISAMA is really a network of farmers. The dialoguing in the entire organization during the pandemic had a great effect.

In contrast to PAKISAMA and other CSOs whose nature of development work is mostly technical, the development workers of FOF Ph, in close coordination with local governments, continue to guide their farmer leaders in development work. Further, with the formation of informal farmers' organizations, FOF Ph believes that community members may gravitate more genuinely with farmer leaders at the helm of communication and community engagement.

**Youth leaders and volunteers.** In the last decade, much discourse shaped the role of *youth leaders and volunteers* in local decision-making. With the vision of the Department of Agriculture (DA) for diversification and use of modern technologies, the youth as sociocultural leaders may help in the fruition of this agenda. Realizing this vision may also require that the country continue to “empower farmers, fisherfolk, agricultural entrepreneurs, and the private sector to increase agricultural productivity and profitability” (Dar, 2020, as cited in Llorito, 2020).

IAmHampasLupa, Anahaw Laguna, Food Rescue Ph, and Pinablin 4-H heavily depend on the volunteerism and civic duty of the youth who can oversee the local situation and engage farmers in dialogues for eventual planning and implementation of projects. These CSOs have trained the youth volunteers before and during the pandemic to efficiently carry out a crucial role at a complex environment.

This approach to leadership among some CSOs encourages youth leaders to engage in sustainable agriculture and who may eventually replace our aging Filipino farmers. According to a recent study, the Philippines might reach a critical shortage of farmers in 15 years with 57 as the average age of farmers (Palis, 2020) in contrast to the age of 44 as the reported average age in the April 1971 Philippine agriculture census (Castillo, 1979, as cited in Palis, 2020). The same study cited that this aging phenomenon among farmers is specially “true among smallholder farmers in Asia” (Rigg et al., 2019, as cited in Palis, 2020).

**Community facilitators.** CSOs have also revolutionized the rigor of communication and community engagement during the pandemic through the leadership of *community facilitators* who refer to internal and external development workers who serve to ensure community participation in problem identification and project planning. The work of community facilitators as sociocultural leaders involves a deep understanding of social problems surrounding local communities. Alter et al. (2017, p. 20) view community facilitators as “neutral process leaders” in fostering the “co-creation of knowledge and a group-centered exploration of ideas and solutions.”

Among the CSOs who mobilize their organizational extension workers and external area coordinators in regional and provincial offices to serve as community facilitators are MASIPAG, IIRR, Rice Watch, Varacco, Sierreza, and AGREA. Hazel, the Executive Director of Rice Watch, held that they “had to make sure there are facilitators in every province to attend to project areas... so our adjustment was area-based staffing.” On the other hand, while Varacco engages research assistants as community facilitators who communicate with coffee farming communities, their development workers continue to reach out to “community enterprise organizations (CEOs)” as their partner communities to corroborate the observations of their community facilitators. In retrospect, local and national safety protocols also require the involvement of local governments to ensure their safety while recognizing their role in addressing the health, social, and agricultural impacts of the pandemic, which is reflective of “higher-level leadership” (Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network, 2020, p. 7).

*Component 2: Pagbuo ng mga Makabuluhang Pakikipagtulungan at Pagkilos  
(Cultivating the Influence of (Re)Emerging Communication and (In)Formal Coalitions  
Toward Multi-Stakeholder Coaction)*

Two years into the pandemic, beleaguered CSOs continue to explore possibilities to maintain sustainable programs and projects. It requires a shared vision and sense of purpose to be able to genuinely work with the underprivileged sectors at an extraordinary time. This phase emphasizes **multi-stakeholder coaction** or the conscious participation of various actors such as CSOs, governments, international organizations, and media toward a common action. This concept refers to a conscious agreement among stakeholders to share experiences, ideas, information, resources, assets, and technologies that may affect policy decision-making and (re)action on development issues during and beyond the pandemic. The emergence of (re)emergent communication, formal coalitions, and informal coalitions to facilitate community needs reflects the commitment of CSOs for genuine development practice.

**Building on (Re)Emergent Communication.** This coalition space testifies to the crucial role of the media in the development practice. The synergy of legacy media and new media fosters productive spaces for CSOs to potentially develop formal and informal collaboration with various institutions.

*Lumang midya* (Legacy media). In journalism, the term legacy media collectively refers to the mass media institutions such as print, television, radio, and film that preceded the information era. The decision to become allies with the media has allowed them to amplify their humanitarian initiatives and enhance their visibility among different stakeholders. As previously cited in this paper, local organizations in Africa like Transparency International Rwanda and Foundation for Civil Society in Tanzania have resurfaced the relevance of traditional media as important sources of information and conduit for community support (Benson & Mupiganyi, 2020; Bonsu & Losai, 2020).

In asserting their visibility across legacy media, CSOs acknowledge storytelling as central to human experience. Storytelling manifested in interviews and features across the legacy media. Varacco, FOF Ph, and AGREA have had local, national, regional, and international publicity across leading private and government TV stations, including magazines, newspapers, and radio programs. Meanwhile, Pinablin 4-H appeared in the regional channel of ABS-CBN before its forced closure in August 2020, retrenching 11,000 media workers in 53 local radio and TV stations that broadcast in six languages (International Federation of Journalists, 2021, September 3). The closure has limited the exposure of local CSOs in encouraging potential partnerships. Gerald, the President of Pinablin 4-H, shared their frustration over this closure:

These platforms open opportunities for the public to know more about us. The youth volunteers of Pinablin 4-H are able to share their stories about our initiatives on urban agriculture, our agripreneurial efforts, and the awards that we receive.

Interpersonal communication has also surfaced as a form of coalition spaces for legacy media. With in-person conversations, the adherence to precautionary measures which “necessitated a shift in the communication paradigm” has hindered our “ability of seeing and understanding people’s expressions” (Mheidly et al., 2020). Creating authentic intimacy, rapport, and trust was a challenge for a few CSOs at the onset of the pandemic until they eventually learned the art of virtual interpersonal communication in social distancing.

*Bagong midya* (New media). The sobering impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on all facets of human life have resulted in critical changes in the practice of development work, especially that the “notion of community is disrupted, and at times reconfigured, through the negotiation of physical and digital spaces” (Marlowe & Chubb, 2021, p. 588). The new media offers a wide array of opportunities for CSOs constrained by human (im)mobility. McCabe and Harris (2021) articulated that technology democratizes voice and connects similar people and “possibilities for increased collaboration.” Dependence on smartphones to access social media has grown among Filipinos, especially during one of the world’s longest lockdowns during the pandemic (Chua, 2021).

PAKISAMA organized a *virtual press conference* in December 2020, attended by Philippine Daily Inquirer and ABS-CBN, to condemn President Rodrigo Duterte's decision to veto the coconut levy bill. Two months thereafter on February 26, 2021, Duterte signed Republic Act Number 11524 or the Coconut Farmers and Industry Trust Fund.

Meanwhile, international multimedia platforms like *Africa Business Community* and *Food Navigator Asia* have featured Varacco for their nutripreneurial work in the country, helping local and Indigenous farmers. These platforms embody the practice of digital business-to-business (B2B) publishing, a form of e-commerce that utilizes online platforms and strategies to sell products and services.

Generally, the visibility of these CSOs' development workers in various webinar speakerships has also invited (in)formal collaborations on all fronts. In engendering adaptive communities during the pandemic, they have delivered keynote speeches on an array of agricultural topics for the public.

**(Re)forging formal coalitions.** The pandemic, despite its impacts on all facets of human life, has opened doors for collaborative spaces between CSOs and formal institutions. Recognized in the 1987 Philippine Constitution, the role of CSOs is crucial in nation-building and development. In Section 38, Rule XII of the Implementing Rules and Regulations of Executive Order No. 138 s. 2021 (Official Gazette, 2021) that aims to devolve certain functions of the executive branch to local governments, the latter shall recognize the roles of CSOs in providing feedback on government's projects and implementing capacity development programs.

While maintaining their independence in decision-making alongside communities, AGREA, Pinablin 4-H, PAKISAMA, Rice Watch, and IIRR have continued forging collaborations with *local and national government and agencies* in implementing programs and projects on urban agriculture and climate change while pushing for the inclusion of women in agriculture.

While PAKISAMA and Rice Watch have publicly opposed the laws and policies of the Department of Agriculture, their association with the government agency has been essentially collaborative and objective. Melissa, a program coordinator of PAKISAMA, clarified their position regarding their partnership with the government:

There are really issues and policies of the government that we strongly oppose. But, in terms of access to support services, production and processing facilities, seed distribution for our members, they are all great partnerships with government.

On the other hand, the pandemic has caused a decline in collaborations with local and international NGOs, including the private sector. A recent study on donor withdrawal in the Philippines points out to politics as a crucial factor (Bagas, 2017). Winning through a platform of violence, President Rodrigo Duterte has enabled extrajudicial killings and the passage of controversial laws, provoking

international donors to rethink their partnerships with CSOs in the country resulting in a decrease in international funding. International organizations have since “restructured norms on how countries receiving development aid should implement programs that aim to reach vulnerable communities” (p. 40).

This crisis, however, has also ushered in new and strong coalitions with *local and international organizations* that help IIRR, PAKISAMA, MASIPAG, Rice Watch, and AGREA sustain their locally grounded projects. Some of these coalitions center on the sustainability of programs on food security and nutrition, disaster response, agrarian reform and land rights, urban agriculture, and climate change. Innovations have also dominated these coalition spaces. Rice Watch partnered with a telecommunications company in transitioning from an old platform to a new climate change app for information dissemination while Varacco forged multi-stakeholder partnerships for the development of an app for local coffee growers. Coalitions with *Indigenous communities* are not particularly novel but may be challenging and laborious for many CSOs who have no prior engagement with these communities. Varacco has forged a coalition with the *Bagobo Tagabawa Farmers Association*, an organized farmers association composed of tribal members in Mt. Apo, Managa, and Bansalan, Davao del Sur in Mindanao. Sierreza, on the other hand, has been working closely with the Daraitan farmers in Rizal for community-supported agriculture. Permits, certifications, inception visits, and sustained community engagement were some challenges that confronted CSOs who collaborate with IP communities. During their early immersion in the mountains of Rizal, some IP members were skeptical about their intent. Che, the founder of Sierreza, shared the apathy of some farmers toward most CSOs who enter their communities:

There have been a lot of groups who go there [Rizal]. But every time the funding ends, these groups leave them in the lurch. Whether it is livelihood or dole-out, there's no more support. They are actually traumatized.

**Navigating informal coalitions.** CSOs have also continued navigating informal networks for social support, allowing for fluid, informal coalitions to thrive at an extraordinary time. As opposed to formal partnerships bound as legally binding, informal coalitions “represent a new paradigm in relations...and could become the norm in the future” (Pozil & Hacker, 2017). As based on trust, this form of partnership honors “accountability and transparency” as hallmarks of success in development work (Xu & Morgan, 2012).

Collaborations with *educational institutions* are specially sought for knowledge and research support. As learning institutions, state and private universities readily provide foundational support to strengthen the development of programs and projects in various communities. Asian Development Bank (2011, p. 6) regards knowledge partnership to have a particular propensity for the “role of knowledge in accomplishing the common aims of the group...the generation of new ideas

and understanding, and the communication and application of that knowledge.” MASIPAG, Varacco, Sierreza, and Anahaw Laguna are among the few CSOs who coalesce with state universities and colleges, including private universities, who potentially provide the backbone that legitimizes their development work. These informal networks allow all stakeholders to freely assume responsibilities that empower the communities they serve.

CSOs also regard *local governments* as strong allies in the empowerment of farmers. Barangay to provincial government levels were involved in short-term projects for structural support. Others have invited the support of the *private sector* like influential food providers, foundations, and companies for the strategic conduct of food rescue and relief operations.

*Inter-organizational networks* as synergy among CSOs have also been explored profusely, breaking down competitions and rivalries. This synergy allows them to co-exist with other CSOs and acknowledge the limits of their capacity in technological innovations, social preparation, and development work. Further, embracing inter-organizational support through informal partnerships, according to Justin (virtual communication), “refrains from bureaucratic and formal processes which may delay the planning and implementation of projects.”

### *Component 3: Pakikipagkuwentuhan at Ginabayang Pagpapalano Tungo sa Pagbangon (Re)building Communities Through Strategic Rurban Participation in Legacy and Digital spaces)*

With the sociocultural leaders who emerge from the communities themselves, they are at the helm of communication and community engagement, serving as the extension of CSOs in development work. They play a critical role in (re)building communities within the ARD sector.

During the pandemic, some CSOs who only worked for the rural communities before this crisis have broadened their community of practice to include the urban communities, hence the term **rurban participation**. Living at a different time has forced CSOs to shift to **strategic rurban participation**, the genuine involvement of rural and urban communities in communication and community engagement by conforming to a planned and judicious practice in development work to ensure health and safety of all stakeholders.

During the pandemic, there is changing perception on viewing rurban communities as “participants” rather than simply “beneficiaries” of development. Building on this argument has inspired the promotion of sociocultural leaders as emerging leaders, *allowing community members to be at the forefront of the process of change and be the voice themselves*.

To surface diverse community voices, CSOs have explored two spaces in reaching out to more inclusive communities: (1) *granular community immersion as legacy spaces* and (2) *virtual communication as digital spaces*.

**Granular community immersion as legacy spaces.** The significant decision among the CSOs to maintain community immersion during the pandemic is based on the epistemological underpinning that place has power. Observing



and speaking with people in their actual communities reinforces their sense of ownership which is a form of power. The widening digital gap or the unequal access to new information technologies and financial resources among poor Filipino communities also prompted the decision of all CSOs to continue strategic face-to-face communication and community engagement during the pandemic, hence the term *granular community immersion as legacy spaces*.

**Granular community immersion** refers to the strategic rapid conduct of participatory rural communication appraisal (PRCA) or participatory rural appraisal (PRA) held in various methods within rural communities. The current immersion approach deviates from the regular practice of community-based assessment (CBA) which normally runs for months to fully understand the sociopolitical and cultural landscape of a community.

*Dayalogong pangkomunidad* (Community dialogues). In initiating community dialogues as qualitative approaches, the sociocultural leaders facilitate group discussions, focus groups, and key informant interviews as primary forms of communication circles.

The sociocultural leaders during the pandemic convene select community members in open and large spaces, observing health and safety protocols during the pandemic. The pandemic has also encouraged CSOs to strategically schedule dialogues with sectoral groups on shorter time frame to prevent contagion among community members while maintaining the depth and breadth of community dialogues as foundations for planning and implementation.

The farmer leaders of PAKISAMA strategically have conducted community consultations through a cooperative strengthening intervention planning with farmers, including a series of scenario-building and farm planning sessions, that paved the way toward knowledge co-creation.

Meanwhile, multi-stakeholder participation for climate resilience roadmap development was the locus of the community immersion of Rice Watch. Following sectoral consultations, baseline studies were also conducted to determine the physical, natural, and socio-economic impacts of climate change on select communities, alongside the development of storm surge and hazard maps through transect and participatory coastal zoning methods.

Youth leaders have been representing Pinablin 4-H, Food Rescue Ph, IAmHampasLupa, and Anahaw Laguna in engaging their communities in informal community *kumustahan* as a strategy to involve rural farmers in candid conversations. *Kumustahan* is usually held through casual individual dialogues and focus group discussions (FGDs).

For the community facilitators of MASIPAG, AGREA, IIRR, Varacco, and Sierreza, community immersion comes in the form of community orientation sessions, face-to-face participatory scoping, focus group discussion (FGD), brainstorming, and board-and-marker discussion circles to assess, analyze, and plan with local communities.

*Pagsisiyasat na pangkomunidad (Community-engaged surveys).* The documentation of community problems through community-engaged surveys as a systematic collection of information is among the foundational steps in a public health crisis like the pandemic. Conducted by means of rapid standard protocols, estimates, and quantification, PAKISAMA, FOF Ph, MASIPAG, and IIRR have held these forms of community immersion through individual and smaller groups to help them identify risks, develop and evaluate interventions, and implement services and projects. Some forms of community-engaged surveys conducted are rapid house-to-house surveys and interviews, informal phone calls and text messages, and peer-to-peer communication with farming families, farmer learning groups, Indigenous communities, and opinion leaders to have insightful information that may guide the eventual co-development of programs.

These quantitative processes of CSOs bespeak some of the best practices which Harrison et al. (2021) developed in ensuring the credibility of community-engaged surveys during and beyond the pandemic. These best practices include the planning for survey dissemination and the creation of a sampling strategy to ensure community representation.

*Mga estratehiyang pangkaranasan at pagmamasid (Experiential and observational strategies).* The social science and humanistic underpinnings of community-based immersion also surfaced during the pandemic, which are usually held across different open spaces. These forms are the approximation of an ethnographic inquiry founded on humanity, participation, and empathy.

Sociocultural leaders bring into play these strategies to have a grasp of the socio-economic, political, cultural, environmental, and health landscape of a community. During the pandemic, CSOs coordinate efforts on the ground with local government units to ensure adherence to the omnibus guidelines of the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF).

These strategies, as conducted by PAKISAMA, MASIPAG, Varacco, FOF Ph, and IamHampasLupa, manifest in stories, portraits, local histories, and transects to understand the local ecosystem and community structures. These CSOs conduct farm visits for community planning and participation in the regular activities of people's organizations (POs).

Generally, these strategies are also reflective of participant observation as parallel to the principles of community-based participatory research (CBPR) which recognizes "that each community should be understood in its own context" (Hammer et al., 2017, p. 439). They also concur that the idea of "getting as close as possible" to community members is significant in "developing a deeper and richer understanding of their experiences" (p. 442).

**Virtual communication as digital spaces.** In this study, online community, also termed as virtual community (Rheingold, 2000; Ridings et al., 2002, as cited in National Institutes of Health, 2011, p. 6), is defined as a group of people "who interact digitally around a common theme, or purpose, within a relatively defined context within the interface confines of the forum" (Dover & Kelman,

2018). Marshall McLuhan's theory of media ecology (1964) is best captured during our current time when communities have been ushered (un)willingly into a global village, a world viewed as a community in which isolation has been reduced by electronic media. Drawing logic from McLuhan's concept, I posit the term *online village* to refer to online communities who convene in different virtual environments to serve as participants of CSOs in community assessment and planning processes.

Embracing the following online platforms for communication and community engagement has also revealed the inequities strongly embedded in Filipino society. As CSOs, they are called upon to cultivate the upscaling and democratization of our digital infrastructure to ensure community participation at a time that calls for digital adoption.

The current crisis necessitates a gradual shift to virtual formats in listening and centering community voices at the heart of development work. This complementary role of the virtual space fortifies the critical role of strategic, granular community immersion.

*Pangbirtuwal na komunidad* (Social networking sites). Social networking sites (SNS) have become sources of unbridled audience sentiment. The concept of "publicness" distinguishes networking sites from other means of communication by encouraging online communities to be accountable and responsible for their personal public pronouncements.

Broadly, the online engagement of CSOs through their Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter accounts extends to a range of posts about sociopolitical critiques, ARD celebrations, social advocacies, invitation to public conversations and events, and public announcements. With their social media presence, CSOs continue to maintain harmonious engagement and communication with the online village through discursive and respectful conversations. In dealing with occasional public ire, interpersonal online engagement is an emerging skill rooted on genuine and conscious dialoguing.

In recent studies, the social media emerged as "places where people converge to gather and disperse timely and relevant information in times of disasters" (Brandt et al., 2019; Jayasekara, 2019; as cited in Arora, 2022) and as a "source of psychological empowerment...and collective participation" (Ling et al., 2015).

*Organisadong grupong birtuwal* (Social networking groups). One monumental development in the formation of social networks is the creation of mobile messaging applications. These interactions help facilitate information exchange and lies in the individual's reciprocal interaction among members of a social group (Putnam, 1993).

During the pandemic, there has been a renewed interest in organized social media groups for mediated community engagement. This transformation has enabled online communities to "form social networks which transcend boundaries of space and time, and which provide sociability, support, information, a sense of belonging and social identity" (Wellman, 2001, as cited in Tyrer, 2019).

These groups were either created as part of previous and current projects before and during the pandemic or as alternative platforms for communication and community engagement. Messenger, Telegram, and WhatsApp are the more popular instant messaging (IM) applications among most CSOs.

The members of these social networking groups include farmer leaders and select community members, ranging from 20-170 members joining the conversations. The focus of conversations ranges from best practices, life-saving information, conflicts and confrontations, and call to action. According to Ling and Lai (2016, as cited in Trethong et al., 2021, p. 131), these interactions may reflect how mobile messaging groups “opened up the communication sphere and provided an opportunity for expressive and instrumental interaction...”

*Dayalogong pangbirtuwal* (Video conferencing applications). Video conferencing applications have also strengthened targeted communication, community engagement, and coalitions of CSOs during the pandemic. Adapting to the new milieu of development work has enabled them to build and cultivate mutual trust with different communities. This form of engagement includes any engagement conducted virtually, beyond physical meeting spaces.

Zoom is the common institutional platform used by CSOs in their foray into virtual communication. A few of them also commonly meet institutionally via Microsoft Teams and Google Meet while Webex and Jitsi are the less popular platforms among CSOs.

For many CSOs, engaging community members online requires a form of consistency not only in meeting schedules but also in platform preferences. They have also held instructive webinar series for Zoom tutorials to engage targeted community members in online conversations more fully through the help of sociocultural leaders.

The development of these platforms should be consciously designed with a particular community in mind. This consideration invites conversations about digital divide (Ibrahim, 2022) which refers to “the gap between individuals...and geographic areas at different socio-economic levels with regard to opportunities to access ICTs.” This divide may preclude some underprivileged communities from genuine participation in communication and community engagement.

*Component 4: Umuusbong na Pagkakaisa sa mga Luma at Bagong Espasyo*  
(Co-(Re)Developing Legacy and Digital Spaces as Emerging Solidarities for Resilient and Inclusive Development)

During the pandemic, we have witnessed how religious sects, cultural institutions, governments, and CSOs have come together to confront the wide-ranging impacts of the pandemic through emerging solidarities, situating philanthropy at the heart of these institutions. At the core of emerging solidarities is agency. It is defined as an “individual’s capacity to determine and make meaning from their environment through purposive consciousness...and creative action” (Houston, 2010, as cited in Parsell et al., 2017, p. 239). In recognizing the agency of all stakeholders, solidarities emerge, hence the term **emerging solidarities for**

**resilient and inclusive development** to refer to the locally grounded programs and projects of CSOs geared toward resilient development and inclusive recovery. This discussion on emerging solidarities reflects and maps the rich array of initiatives of CSOs across *legacy spaces for development* and *digital spaces for communication* with the online village to address the needs of underprivileged communities.

**Legacy spaces for development.** CSOs have maximized legacy spaces as emerging solidarities for technical training, capacity-building, social mobilization, awareness-raising, and community mutual aid, among others. Collectively in this context, **legacy spaces** pertain to platforms that embed common pre-pandemic practices into their development programs and projects. In this study, legacy spaces are categorized distinctly from digital spaces which are emergent and novel in nature.

**Physical spheres for development.** Physical spheres pertain to newly constructed projects of CSOs as hubs and spaces for development. Some of these spheres are development spaces and community gardens where some CSOs have held initiatives for technical training and capacity-building as strategies.

*Development spaces.* Some CSOs have reconvened, reimagined, and rethought the role of development work at a tumultuous time. The need to reassert the power of space as a solidifying force for social capital and cohesion during the pandemic has led to the establishment of new communication, development, and training hubs, including a nutripreneurial restaurant.

Among these physical development spaces are the *FOF Learning Center* in San Carlos City, Pangasinan of FOF Ph, the *communication hub* awarded by the local government of Calasiao to Pinablin 4-H. With a social responsibility to empower Filipino coffee farmers, founder Aries built *Timplado*, a local nutripreneurial restaurant owned and under the patent of Varacco. Nutripreneurship is the practice and process that results in creativity, innovation, development and growth of nutrition businesses (Ochieng, 2015).

On the other hand, AGREA, Rice Watch, MASIPAG, and PAKISAMA are contingent on social, safe, and open areas to provide temporary communication spaces for emerging solidarities. The idea, however, is to convene in spaces where community members may regroup, converse, plan, and implement programs and projects.

*Community gardens.* At the onset of the pandemic, there has been a remarkable interest in organic farming and community gardening, prompting FOF Ph, Anahaw Laguna, AGREA, IAmHampasLupa, and IIRR to develop physical spaces where urban farmers may participate in food systems.

A recent study looks at the embeddedness of this phenomenon in the Global South, specifically in the Philippines, and how small local groups manage these public community spaces to “meet the fast-changing needs...that came about as COVID-19 disrupted local supply chains” (Kampman et al., 2021).

Other studies examine ongoing reflections on community gardens as “spaces to connect and socialize with others outside their social networks and improve their sense of cohesion (Mejia et al., 2020, p. 17) and how community gardening “increase(s) mental resilience” in times of stress (Sia et al., 2022, p. 9).

**Social spheres for development.** In times of disruptive emergencies and crises, including pandemics, development prospects are also paralyzed. At an extraordinary time like the pandemic, different forms of support are initiated by local and international CSOs to respond to ongoing structural issues.

In development parlance, humanitarian aid is “designed to save lives and alleviate suffering..in the immediate aftermath of emergencies” which may be comparative to short-term projects while development aid is “focused on economic, social, and political development” which may be tantamount to long-term projects (Humanitarian Coalition, 2021). During the pandemic, the planning and implementation of programs and projects are contingent on resilient and inclusive measures, hence, the term *strategic humanitarian work*.

*Strategic humanitarian work.* During the pandemic, CSOs have implemented humanitarian work as support services to the most affected communities. To distinguish from the initiatives held through digital platforms, these projects, spanning from quick emergency response to educational efforts, were generally conducted in physical spaces. The communication and collection of the humanitarian aid, however, may have taken place online due to mobility restrictions.

FOF Ph, Anahaw Laguna, IAmHampasLupa, Sierreza, AGREA, Food Rescue Ph, and Varacco have led **food support and community pantry initiatives** for their immediate communities. Founded on the concept of Filipino *bayanihan*, community pantry pioneer Ana Patricia Non set up a bamboo cart with fresh vegetables and a spark of hope along Maginhawa Street, Brgy. Teacher’s Village, Quezon City on April 14, 2021. Anahaw Laguna and IAmHampasLupa have explored permutations from the movement to create *community plant-ry* and *community pan-tree*, respectively, as their commitment to urban agriculture. AGREA and Varacco have also held similar efforts by providing *ayuda* (relief goods) as forms of food and nutrition support for farming communities.

As the major thrust of their operation, Food Rescue Ph has worked with 30 local establishments in the distribution of healthy and safe food surplus to about 30 communities within Metro Manila, Laguna, and other parts of the country through crowdsourcing. In promoting zero food waste, AGREA created the AGREA Rescue Kitchen (ARK) to provide food for 4,594 front liners and 69,427 Filipino families from unsold fruits and vegetables through their Move Food initiative. With disruptions in agri-food delivery movements, UN Philippines (2021) reports the “increased incidence of food wastage due to spoilage of highly perishable commodities” affecting supermarkets and the informal sector due to the lack of food processing infrastructures. Further, some CSOs have also reorganized **interactive and strategic in-person forums** and series of technical

training in support of local recovery and development.

In their *FORWARD (Finding Opportunities and Roles of Women in Agriculture and Rural Development) Project*, AGREA recently held a series of training for 165 farmers from four (4) barangays in Majayjay, Laguna. Varacco has hosted conversations on coffee production and marketing as part of their community education through the support of local government units and other stakeholders. Through a collaborative project, Anahaw Laguna also co-hosted the implementation of the *Community-Supported Integrated Bio-farming for Local Landscapes Empowerment (CommunitySIBOL)* in strengthening their advocacy on urban agriculture.

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have also been exacerbated by devastating tropical cyclones. In different capacities, MASIPAG, AGREA, Food Rescue Ph, FOF Ph, and Pinablin 4-H have responded to typhoon-affected and displaced local farming communities through **quick emergency response**. Humanitarian help from local and international organizations assisted MASIPAG in donating relief aid and power supplies to farming communities in the Visayas region. AGREA distributed around 2,600 seed packs in seed-giving activities while Food Rescue Laguna, a localized chapter of Food Rescue Ph, sourced new donors and informal partnerships. FOF Ph launched *Project Sagip*, a crowd-funding initiative that has raised over a million pesos to date to provide relief goods, hygiene packs, and subsidies to local farmers who lost their crops to typhoons. Pinablin 4-H, on the other hand, facilitated a similar effort by launching *4-H Care for a Cause*, a donation drive initiative to distribute food packs and medicines to typhoon victims.

Viewing seeds as commons has also served as a middle ground for some CSOs during the pandemic. Most CSOs interviewed in this study have (un)consciously been contributing to the **promotion of seed commons approach** within the ARD sector. Some CSOs have expressed that the founding of their organizations was deeply rooted on the urgency to return the control over seeds, agriculture, and rice culture to the farmers. Kloppenburg (2014) and Wattnem (2016, as cited in Tschersich, 2021) held that the “loss of access to and control over seeds especially of small farmers in the Global South presents a fundamental threat to food sovereignty.” Some of the initiatives that targeted the reinforcement of seed commons include the *Project Ani* of FOF Ph, *Nutrelief* of IIRR, and *HampasLupa Para sa Pagtatanim, Pagsibol, at Pagkain* (HAPAG) of IAmHampasLupa. The *Project SWAP (Sustaining Ways toward Achieving Plant, Plant, Plant Program)* of Pinablin 4-H and AGREA’s partnership with the Department of Agriculture (DA) seek to intensify the use of quality seeds, appropriate inputs, and modern technologies. Meanwhile, PAKISAMA worked their way through seed distribution for their farmer members in Luzon through the support of DA regional directors. They clarified their firm position against the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF), as created by the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) or the Republic Act 11203 (Official Gazette, 2019), to supposedly improve rice farmers’ income amid the liberalization of the Philippine rice trade policy. The government aims

to diversify the country's market sources through lowering the tariff rates on rice imports, but reports held that farmgate prices of *palay* for January to June 2021 ranged from P16-P17/kg due to the deluge of imported rice (Miraflor, 2021; Ochave, 2021).

**Digital spaces for communication.** In our current milieu, digital spaces “offer a great potential for...the global South” while posing challenges to the potential “exacerbation of inequalities” (Bonina et al., 2021). The same authors recognize the significance of these platforms for societies in developing nations but there is an ongoing debate on the way in which they “can trigger specific positive effects for development.”

Digital spaces pertain to platforms using the technology to play significant roles in cultivating emerging solidarities. While these spaces reshaped the central role of global communications across different facets of human life decades ago, the lockdown and quarantine measures have reinforced the digital adoption among CSOs and communities.

*Technology for critical communication.* As communication traverses an interpretivist tradition concerned with the value of understanding and interpretation, the field also recognizes its role for critical reflection, thus the term critical communication. Critical theory is concerned with the deconstruction of “how knowledge is produced, whose knowledge is valued, and how control of such knowledge equates to power in society” (Ryoo & McLaren, 2010).

Among the CSOs who are critically involved in digital organizing as a new domain in navigating the sociocultural and political issues of our times are Rice Watch, IAmHampasLupa, FOF Ph, Anahaw Laguna, PAKISAMA, and MASIPAG.

Rice Watch has hosted *Nagkakaisang Boses Laban sa RTL* to oppose the Rice Tariffication Law and *Agri 2022 Online Forum* to scrutinize the platforms of local and national candidates, among an array of sociopolitical activism online events during the pandemic. IAmHampasLupa also hosted *Love, 52: Youth and Elections Movement* to examine the current and future concerns of the ARD sector. They also explored *artivism* through *Pangarap Hindi Panaginip* as a form of social activism through the arts.

FOF Ph and Anahaw Laguna also joined the critical bandwagon on *#Tumindig online movement*, created by Tarantadong Kalbo, as a battle cry among various sectors in raising their grievances during the Duterte administration. These activist efforts were considered by some groups as grounds to maliciously allege some CSOs as part of a communist group.

Equally productive in social activism before and during the pandemic is PAKISAMA who organized a *virtual press conference* in December 2020 to condemn President Rodrigo Duterte's decision to veto the coconut levy bill. Two months thereafter on February 26, 2021, Duterte signed Republic Act 11524 or the Coconut Farmers and Industry Trust Fund.

MASIPAG also shares similar sentiments with Rice Watch and PAKISAMA. With their commitment to reclaim the integrity of agriculture, MASIPAG holds



an *annual online mobilization* to condemn the corporate control of International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) and Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) to seed and agriculture. Anti-Golden Rice dialectic has also dominated the discursive online campaigns of some CSOs.

*Technology for educational communication.* The presence of an online village has made educational communication possible during the pandemic. The COVID-19 lockdowns have moved many in-person activities online, escalating the use of video-conferencing platforms. With this shift of knowing, relearning, and rediscovering, CSOs ensure their adherence to ethical safeguards and to protect the online village from threats of cyber security and privacy violations (Paul, 2020).

Educational communication, as one of the major domains in development communication, is guided by the principles of participation, social justice, and authentic dialogue. It is fundamentally concerned with the facilitation of learning with all sectors using communication principles and strategies in (non)formal educational activities.

During the pandemic, CSOs have engaged the online village in blended learning. This form of learning is the “integration of face-to-face and online instruction” (Graham, 2013, as cited in Dziuban et al., 2018) adopted not only across higher education, but also in education and training among CSOs as evidenced in the popularity of this emergent pedagogical opportunity.

AGREA (*AGREA Farm School*), Rice Watch (*Climate Resiliency Field School*), and Pinablin 4-H (*Project e-YAKAP*) continue to capitalize on the transformative use of technology in sustaining learning at a critical time. These CSOs recalibrated their approaches by producing computer-mediated teaching aids and instructional materials to complement the limited face-to-face sessions with local farmers.

Educational webinars were also on distinctive rise and popularity (Adipat, 2021), opening unprecedented possibilities for the online village while disrupting the traditional form of education. According to a global report, CSOs are among the industries adopting webinars for online communication, alongside the sectors of education, healthcare, information technology, and telecommunications, among many others (ClickMeeting, 2020, p. 30).

Some CSOs like Varacco, FOF Ph, Anahaw Laguna, and IAmHampasLupa have turned to technology during the pandemic to host webinars on coffee education, media literacy and information, agricultural laws and policies, and urban gardening, among many other advocacies within the ARD sector, opening opportunities for reflexive thinking and knowledge sharing.

*Technology for science communication.* The proliferation of science communication (scicom) initiatives during the pandemic has been redirected toward science literacy as a strategy among a few CSOs. More particularly, emergent CSOs have been more engaged in the development of communication materials on science literacy targeting different publics. For the last few decades, there has been a relatively fair appreciation to the role of scicom in agriculture and other

industries (Aarts et al., 2014; Clarke, 2003; Lacy & Busch, 1983; Tibasaaga & Zawedde, 2018).

Some CSOs have made great strides in bridging the gap between scientists and the public(s) and raising awareness across various platforms by promoting public understanding through the development of short message service (SMS) platforms, including the reconfiguration of websites and social media. Rice Watch is changing the face of scicom during the pandemic by creating *Sagip Buhay at Saka*, a SMS platform designed to communicate climate-based warnings to farming communities. Varacco and IIRR, on the other hand, have partnered with Packetworx, a social IT enterprise in the Philippines, for the eventual development of an internet-based technology that could help 400 coffee farmers to monitor and manage their farms.

*Technology for agripreneurial communication.* This new complex environment has ushered CSOs to a new decade of merging agriculture and entrepreneurship toward authentic communication through community-supported agriculture (CSA) as a strategy. In a study on innovative ambidexterity typology of Filipino agripreneurs, de Castro and Depositario (2021) forwarded three emerging classifications of agripreneurs: exploratory (fast and radical innovative behavior), exploitative (slow and incremental innovative behavior), and ambidextrous (exploratory and exploitative behavior). Findings showed that most Filipino agripreneurs are “purely exploitative” except for a few regions in Mindanao who are ambidextrous, a phenomenon reflective of the changing dynamics in agripreneurship.

This finding, however, does not necessarily reflect the situation of other social enterprises. As modern vanguards of a food revolution, AGREA and Sierreza have recalibrated their processes during the pandemic to support communities through sustainable agripreneurial and livelihood programs. Also called food entrepreneurs, these social enterprises have often been regarded as “the quiet revolutionaries” who drive the value chain under the current situation (United Nations Food Systems Summit, 2021).

During the pandemic, AGREA developed the *Move Food initiative*, an online fresh food ordering platform, to help reduce post-harvest loss among farmers and provide fresh produce to isolated communities due to the imposition of community quarantine protocols. This innovation teaches struggling social enterprises in the country the influence of agility, local alliances, social media, and government efforts (Scaling UP Nutrition Movement, 2021, pp. 2-4).

In 2018, Sierreza opened to the public to support the Daraitan farmers in Rizal while supporting communities in Laguna with fresh farm products. During the pandemic, Sierreza switched to a *mobile store*, keeping *kumustahan* and storytelling alive at a time when the human side of social entrepreneurship has been dimmed by lockdowns.

*Technology for development support communication.* During the pandemic, technology has also been used predominantly for development support

communication, an interdisciplinary field committed to enhancing development initiatives using media and other methods while it is also criticized for considering communication as a handmaiden component “used only to support other projects’ components” (Mefalopulos, 2008, p. 33).

In embracing development support communication, the brainchild of Erskine Childers at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), CSOs employ information, education, and communication (IEC) as a strategy. Most CSOs have strategically produced social media posts and infographics—including brochures, posters, and TV spots as legacy forms—for information dissemination and advocacy across their social networking sites.

In ensuring their visibility across social media, CSOs like AGREA, IIRR, Rice Watch, IAmHampasLupa, Varacco, FOF Ph, and Anahaw Laguna have been equally vocal and supportive of wide-ranging issues confronting agriculture and in advancing quality of life among women and farmers. Among their advocacies is the promotion of the rights of rural women farmers who make up close to 50 percent of the world’s agricultural labor force (Corteva Agriscience, 2019; World Bank, 2017) and who face “pervasive gender discrimination” causing “female-run farms to be 30 percent less productive than those owned and run by men” (Food and Agriculture Organization, as cited in Corteva Agriscience, 2019).

Hashtags like #BreakTheBias and #HindiKaBabaeLang have flooded the postings of these CSOs. They also echo global calls to honor the achievements of farmers as players in sustainable food systems, agricultural education, and local family farming during Labor Day celebrations. IAmHampasLupa and Anahaw Laguna have particularly taken to the forefront their environmental initiatives during earth hour and World Environment Day celebrations. In a post, IIRR has repeatedly spoken out on violence against women and girls across the globe in celebration of women’s history month and women’s day.

### Conclusion

The scholarship of Devcom inspires many of us to continue trailblazing the Los Baños legacy by making sense of novel phenomena and exploring the promise of theorizing as part of our continuing quest in our field and discipline. COVID-19 presents new challenges—including new paths and opportunities—for ways in which development work is understood, planned, and practiced. The reimagination of the future of development work has inspired practitioners, academics, and researchers to understand the complexities of this crisis that may guide the theory and practice among emerging and new CSOs during and post-pandemic.

RICE C4D as an emerging substantive theory is composed of emergent critical components that articulate the possibilities of ongoing development work praxis on the ground. The possibilities for the development work to flourish more inclusively among underprivileged rural communities during and

beyond the pandemic are endless. What I consider as *nowhere near conclusion* refers to the ever-changing landscape of development work from post-war to crises and pandemics. The application of this substantive theory may be explored more rigorously in a similar health crisis but its potential for utility even in a post-pandemic environment is encouraging.

Based on the findings, this study recognizes the *emergence of a substantive theory that (re)defines the praxis of development work during a public health crisis*. New and adaptive processes have been strategically embedded in development work to complement the changing landscape. This emergence, however, does not totally replace the conventions but reevaluates their limits within the current phenomenon.

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