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THE INDIGENOUS FARMING PERSPECTIVES OF WOMEN FARMERS IN BARANGAY BAHAY, PASACAO, CAMARINES SUR

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ABSTRACT: *The women's narratives regarding indigenous farming were probed in this study. Notably, their stories were heard as they showed what they experienced in the rice fields. Hence, the objective of the study is to present indigenous farming knowledge generated from the women farmer's narratives. This study employed the Phenomenology research design to illustrate the lived experience of the women farmers In Barangay Bahay, Pasacao, Camarines Sur. The fifteen participants were gathered according to purposive sampling. The study also employed validated guide questions within the concept of Mies and Shiva's Ecofeminism context. The findings were produced according to data saturation and through content analysis. The findings revealed two themes based on the indigenous practices still employed by women farmers: planting procedure and traditional beliefs. The study concludes that women are essential to the farming industry, where their presence must be strengthened. The essence of the farming women's narratives summarized the importance of reliving indigenous farming, which was forgotten due to the modern way of tilling the land.*

Keywords: *Women farmers, Vandana Shiva, Indigenous farming, lived experience*

INTRODUCTION

Farming is usually associated with men. Historically, hard labor and strength are often associated with a patriarchal task. They are the voices of the fields and are often recognized intensively. However, farming is not just a man's field but a poor woman's world. As women shared the same challenges as men, hearing their voices in the field, too, in this study, gives them a chance to introduce their world. Thus, this study aims to elicit indigenous farming perspectives from women farmers.

As women exert their efforts in the field, they "can turn everything into life as she is like a natural incubator" (Young African Leaders Initiative, 2022). With the right education, women should actively participate in conserving and maintaining the natural ecological balance (Bayeh, 2016). Thus, equality in opportunity with women will benefit not just women and nature but also men (Kulshrestha & Nath, 2019).

As this study is anchored in Ecofeminism,

Mies and Shiva (1993) explained that the abuse of women and nature manifests in the foreign invasion of another's land through colonialism. The damage colonialism has done in a particular country directly oppressed women more than men. The destruction of the environment through resource looting by powerful men impacted the world where women lived. The destruction of the environment is a direct assault on women (Shiva, 2016).

As the West adheres to promoting the end to world hunger, they mechanize a new model of promoting the Green Revolution, producing an unlimited food supply to fight the food crisis and a means of globalization for the world food economy (Hamilton, 2018; Clark, 2013). Indeed, the Green Revolution provides a series of advantages in production as introduced by the government. However, the process failed to protect the degradation of nature against hybrid crops and monoculture (Eliazer Nelson et al., 2019), which resulted in the replacement of a thousand years of indigenous knowledge in crop



production, which is far more effective (Shiva, 2016) and the destruction of the local cultures. As technology interacts with nature, it significantly affects the living conditions of women.

Today, women interact with the environment abused by powerful post-colonialism. As families live in a land of depleted soil nutrients and monoculture, women suffer from being less productive in land cultivation (Shiva, 1988). Indeed, the most affected are the farming sectors and the women farmers whose lives depend on tilling the land worldwide.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed Phenomenology, a qualitative research design that focuses on the participants' lived experiences about their knowledge of indigenous farming, carefully examining phenomena encountered (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). The study was conducted in Brgy Bahay, Pasacao, Camarines Sur. It is a place where various kinds of farmers live. The 15 participants are all women farmer residents of Bahay, Pasacao, aged 54 to 69 years of age, with significant experience in rice planting. They are chosen according to their long experience in farming with a minimum qualification of 17 years.

Creswell (1998) suggested that at least 5-25 participants in a phenomenology study are enough in a qualitative study. Participants were identified through snowball sampling. The 15 participants included are determined through data saturation (Sparkes et al., 2012), a methodological element (Fusch & Ness, 2015) in choosing the qualitative participants when no new information emerged from the women farmer's narratives.

The researcher produced validated guide questions, which guided the researcher to acquire the necessary information from the participants through a series of interviews.

Similarly, the personal information sheet and consent letter were sent to the prospective participants as the study adheres to the ethical principle of a qualitative study. The data analysis was done by thoroughly examining concepts (Glasser & Strauss, 1967) to establish a robust organization of reasons as the study employed

content analysis.

The researcher did a series of reading and coding activities from the printed output of the transcribed interviews. The transcribed interviews included 270 phrases and statements that complemented the answers. The second coding aligns similar codes that answer each research question, generating 73 quotes; and the last stage is assigning themes in the coded word groups.

RESULTS

In most women's narratives, their planting cycle goes with cleaning the land, mowing, preparing a portion of the land for the seed sprout, then planting the sprout, visitation, fertilizers, and harvesting. As the interview continued, the women farmer participants shared their known indigenous farming knowledge and practices. It has two emergent themes: the planting procedure and traditional beliefs.

Table 1. Participants knew farming indigenous knowledge

Themes	Subthemes
Planting Procedures	- Must plant according to season - Plant according to the soil type - Thoroughly preparing farming soil is a must - Seeds need to burry deep enough - Plants must be taken care of - Grass as a natural form of fertilizers and pesticides
Traditional Beliefs	- Faith in God - Superstitious beliefs

Planting Procedure

Most women farmers are convinced they are already acquainted with the new technology. Their solution is always providing inorganic fertilizers to their rice plant. However, the high cost of fertilizers make them switch to some indigenous ways they knew. The women participants stated that when their work in the farming rice field settled, they switched to crop planting. They shared that a farmer must plant according to season to have an abundant yield.

Nanay Maria said, *"I plant bananas and rice plants according to their season."*

Most participants declared that one must plant according to the soil type. As every soil must have a different texture, planting crops should suit the type of soil to set up. Nanay Helen stated, *"We plant in a particular soil and observe it, then if we find out that there is no improvement in that soil, we discontinue planting there."* Further, Nanay Remy strongly adhered to the proper procedure. She claimed, *"The secret of planting is the proper caring and procedure. Study first the kind of soil and what plants are suited there."* Nanay Linda insisted that it is important to consider the soil type in planting, *"When you plant, make sure that the soil is fertile."*

Most women emphasized that thoroughly preparing farming soil is a must. They said there should be unnecessary weeds in the rice plant as they will steal the soil nutrition intended for the crop. Nanay Linda said, *"When you plant, take care of it thoroughly. Remove the unnecessary grass from it."* Nanay Mercy summarized everyone's concept: *"Make sure that [farming land] is entirely cleaned."*

The women farmer participants highlighted that the seeds must be buried deep enough to get the appropriate strength in a rice plant. They do not advise scattering the seeds as it will not provide root strength. Nanay Mercy claimed, *"There is a difference between the yield of the scattered and deeply planted seeds. It is better to bury the grain to ensure good root growth. Scattered seeds do not grow well."*

Though being hands-on in whatever one does, most women farmers inferred that plants must be taken care of. Nanay Remy insisted, *"You need to take care of the plants, visit them every three days to ensure that it is not infested with insects, and you can see them progress."* Aside from being the focus of their rice plants, the women farmers admitted to using various kinds of inorganic fertilizers to sustain a better yield.

They observed that without fertilizers, the soil is no longer productive. However, though they seldom practiced, they also believed in organic fertilizers such as grass as a natural form of fertilizers and pesticides. In this narrative, Nanay

Mercy demonstrates her idea: *"When the grass decayed [in the soil] after two weeks, then you can start to create a soil bed for the seedlings."* Nanay Mercy shared madre cacao (*Gliricidia sepium*) and tagbak (*alpinia elegans*) as plant protection for rice plants; her story is presented in these words, *"When my father saw the yellowing of the grass, he would place tagbak (alpinia elegans). He would scatter a Madre cacao (Gliricidia sepium) leaves near it."*

Aware that farming is too expensive today, they realized the difference between the methods used before and today. Nanay Mercy added in connection with the use of tagbak, *"Before, the infestation stopped [when tagbak was placed near the yellowing plants]. Still, today, when you see the yellowing of plants, you will go to the agriculture [office] [to buy fertilizer]. Sometimes I observed that there are a lot of studies in agriculture, and yet the yield is not as abundant as before".*

The women farmers interestingly expressed their confusion about today's technology. While being studied, it provides setbacks in farming soils and rice plant harvests. According to them, the planting procedure is more straightforward today but costly. The machinery is helpful but, then again, expensive. Thus, the expected output is not met. However, the women farmers are strengthened by their internal motivations.

Traditional Beliefs

The women farmers are rich in cultural heritage and traditional beliefs. It is what makes them live a life full of hope. It is where they are known for being steadfast. Most women farmers are full of life's inconveniences. Still, they have faith in God more robust than other women in various fields of expertise. Majority of the women respondents expressed their strong belief in God. As Nanay Helen summarized, *"On top of everything is our faith in God."* Nanay Rose further elucidates this claim, *"I asked God for guidance."* Since the women farmers sometimes felt helpless, God is the only shelter they have in life. The deep religiosity is rooted in their narratives, as Nanay Mercy added, *"Even when you work hard, nothing will happen if God does not give you His blessings."*

Another traditional belief observed with the women farmers is their practice of superstitious beliefs. They admitted to having various beliefs that provided them good harvest. Nanay Julieta openly affirmed good weather when planting, *"I have my superstitious belief that good weather [with a cirrocumulus cloud] is the best time for planting rice plants or any crops. Even on the 18th of the month, when there is good weather, that is a time to grow a yield."* Nanay Margie shared another set of superstitious beliefs that cause interruptions of a good yield. *"My parents do not want any yield to be openly praised [as it will result in a stunted plant growth]."* Nanay Linda also stated, *"I was told not to plant cassava on Tuesday and Friday because that is the saying. Others believed that growing gabi on Thursday would produce a leafy vegetable"*. Nanay Margie was even proud of practicing these superstitious beliefs as she said it was her parental inheritance. *"My parents left me with a superstitious belief in farming."*

Most of the women farmers have their own superstitious beliefs guiding them throughout their farming activities. They admitted that nothing is wrong when they follow the wisdom of the old, as they are told that it is also what makes their elders succeed in farming. Considering that the women farmer participants reside in rural areas, indigenous farming was highly expected in the narratives. However, there were only two ideas met. The result gave way to the introduction of planting procedures and traditional beliefs. Notably, the interview and manuscript reading presented no farming innovations. What the women knew was to follow only the farming cycle. To prepare the farming field, plant the seedlings, spray fertilizers and insecticides, and take care of the rice plant until the scheduled harvest. They are dependent and contented with the agricultural sector's program in their years of cultivating the land. They are also limited to today's farming style due to a lack of financial sustenance.

Hence, the women participants' farming is between indigenous and modern practices. The rural area farming folks followed the discovered trend but combined it with indigenous farming practices when there was a lack of financial

resources. Hence, farming today largely depends on inorganic fertilizers that damage the soils and alter the course of rice production. It brought various challenges to the farmers, too, including the question of how efficient modern farming is to the old ways, where the harvest and production before the introduction of technology were more liberally advantageous.

Most of the women farmers have lost the details of the so-called indigenous farming knowledge and practices, which leads to the deprivation of the rich cultural heritage they received from their ancestors. The women participants are also aware that indigenous farming provided them with better yields, according to the narratives of their elders. However, the unique and effective pattern of the old days of agriculture is already in extinction.

Faith in God and superstitious beliefs prove that women are one with nature. Mies and Shiva (1993) and this study remained the same in the perception of women's strong faith, originating in respecting nature just as nature respects every human by giving out its abundance. Since the Almighty created the ecology, the manifestation of women's practice of faith and superstition is asking permission from the Almighty that the people will cultivate the land and the hope of having a plentiful harvest. As Mies and Shiva (1993) opposes using GMOs and fertilizers since it devalue the nutritional quality of plants and soil, the present study exhibited that women farmers are already accustomed to it. They are aware of the devaluation of land and ground through fertilizers and pesticides but they are powerless to make a change. The farming land's presence only recognizes the dominance of male figures in it. The decision is still theirs while women are just an assistant in the farming field. They are needed to be educated, heard, and empowered with their male counterparts.

Though women experienced a certain level of happiness, creativity, and productivity in farming, they were limited by appearance, physical strength, and societal roles. Growing up in the farming field, equal to men, they still have a longer road to travel.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Knowing the farming practices of women equates to understanding the need for the indigenous farming revival. Therefore, it recommends that (1) the findings can encourage further research on the tagbak plant and Madre cacao to enhance its effectiveness in today's farming style and (2) the findings can be a valuable tool to create research in discovering more about indigenous farming in the region.

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