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EMPOWERMENT AND CHALLENGES OF WOMEN AS RECIPIENTS OF THE LAND REDISTRIBUTION PROGRAM

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Abstract

This study examined the empowerment and challenges of women Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries (ARBs) under the land redistribution program in Pudtol, Apayao. Using a mixed-methods research design, data were gathered from 54 women ARBs through survey questionnaires and interviews. Findings revealed that women ARBs demonstrated high levels of empowerment in decision-making, access to resources, economic participation, and community involvement. Respondents actively participated in farm operations, household financial decisions, and leadership activities within their communities. However, several challenges continued to affect their empowerment, including limited access to agricultural loans, inadequate farm tools and inputs, insufficient training and institutional support, weak market access, and climate-related problems. Despite these constraints, land redistribution contributed positively to the socio-economic condition of women beneficiaries. The study recommends strengthening financial assistance, agricultural support services, gender-responsive programs, and climate-resilient interventions to further enhance the empowerment and productivity of women ARBs.

Keywords: *women empowerment, agrarian reform, land redistribution, rural development, gender equality*

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Introduction



Agrarian reform is widely recognized worldwide as a key strategy for addressing rural inequality, improving agricultural productivity, and enhancing the socio-economic conditions of farming communities. Globally, land redistribution programs aim to provide secure land access, increase rural incomes, and strengthen food security. However, studies show that despite the increasing recognition of women's role in agriculture, they continue to face structural barriers in land ownership, access to resources, and participation in decision-making, which limit the full realization of their empowerment in agrarian reform programs (FAO, 2020; World Bank, 2009; Kabeer, 1999; Sen, 1999).

In many contexts, women's empowerment in land-based programs goes beyond legal land ownership. It includes actual control over land, access to productive resources, participation in decision-making, and involvement in community and economic activities. However, research indicates that gender norms, institutional constraints, and socio-cultural factors continue to restrict women's ability to fully benefit from land redistribution initiatives, even when legal frameworks exist to support gender equality in land access (Alkire et al., 2013; Putnam, 2000; North, 1990).

In the Philippines, agrarian reform is a constitutionally mandated program implemented through Republic Act No. 6657 (CARL) and Republic Act No. 9700 (CARPER), which promote equitable land distribution and recognize women as legitimate agrarian reform beneficiaries. These laws also guarantee access to support services such as credit, training, and infrastructure. Despite these policy provisions, implementation gaps persist, particularly in ensuring that women beneficiaries achieve meaningful participation and control over agricultural resources (Republic Act No. 6657, 1988; Republic Act No. 9700, 2009; DAR, 2023).

At the local level, particularly in Apayao and the municipality of Pudtol, agriculture remains the main source of livelihood, and many women have been awarded Certificates of Land Ownership Award (CLOAs). While women actively participate in farming activities such as planting, harvesting, and processing, their involvement in formal decision-making, leadership roles, and access to institutional support services remains limited. Traditional gender roles further influence land and resource management, where men often dominate key farm and financial decisions despite women recognized beneficiary status (World Bank, 2009; DAR, 2023; Kabeer, 1999).

Despite their legal recognition as agrarian reform beneficiaries, women in Pudtol continue to face challenges such as limited access to training, low participation in farmers' organizations, restricted leadership opportunities, and inadequate access to financial and institutional support. These conditions reveal a gap between policy-based land ownership



and actual empowerment outcomes. Moreover, there is limited localized research that explores the lived experiences of women beneficiaries after land redistribution. This study therefore examines the empowerment and challenges of women agrarian reform beneficiaries in Pudtol, Apayao, focusing on their roles, participation, and outcomes in order to contribute to more inclusive and gender-responsive agrarian reform policies and programs (Sen, 1999; Quisumbing & Pandolfelli, 2010).

Statement of the Problem

Generally, this study determined the level of empowerment of women ARBs in land redistribution, particularly in relation to their roles, experiences, and participation in agrarian reform initiatives.

Specifically, this sought answers to the following questions:

1. What was the socio-demographic profile of women farmers in terms of:
 - 1.1 Age
 - 1.2 educational attainment,
 - 1.3 household size,
 - 1.4 farm size, and years under agrarian reform?
2. What was the extent of empowerment of women Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries (ARB's) in terms of:
 - 2.1 Decision-making roles
 - 2.2 Access to and control over land and financial resources
 - 2.3 Economic self-sufficiency, and
 - 2.4 Involvement in community leadership and development activities
3. What challenges were faced by women farmers in maximizing the benefits of land redistribution?
4. What strategies were recommended to enhance the empowerment of women farmers under agrarian reform programs in Apayao?



Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on several complementary theories that explain women's empowerment in agrarian reform. Feminist Theory highlights gender inequality and explains how social norms and power imbalances limit women's access to land, resources, and decision-making (Kabeer, 1999; DAR, 2023). The Capability Approach emphasizes that development should be measured through expanded freedoms and capabilities, focusing on how land access improves women's decision-making and economic participation (IFAD, 2016).

The study is also guided by Social Capital Theory, which underscores the importance of social networks and participation in organizations in improving access to resources and support (Putnam, 2000). Institutional Theory explains how government policies and institutional support systems influence women's access to services such as credit and training (North, 1990). Lastly, Empowerment Theory focuses on enhancing women's ability to make choices and transform them into meaningful outcomes in decision-making, economic participation, and community involvement (Alkire et al., 2013).

Together, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing how social structures, institutions, and community participation influence the empowerment of women agrarian reform beneficiaries, while also considering persistent gender and power inequalities (FAO, 2020).

Conceptual Framework

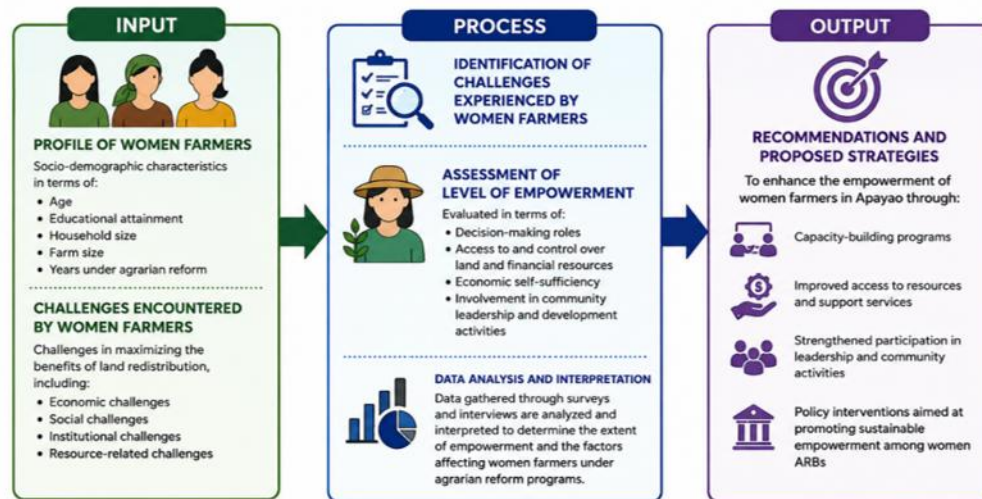


Figure 1: Research Paradigm

The study utilized the Input–Process–Output (IPO) Model as the framework in examining the empowerment of women Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries (ARBs) under agrarian reform programs in Apayao.

The Input of the study consists of the profile and challenges experienced by women farmers. The profile includes the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents in terms of age, educational attainment, household size, farm size, and years under agrarian reform. The study also considers the challenges encountered by women farmers in maximizing the benefits of land redistribution, including economic, social, institutional, and resource-related problems.

The Process involves the identification of the challenges experienced by women farmers and the assessment of their level of empowerment. The level of empowerment is evaluated in terms of decision-making roles, access to and control over land and financial resources, economic self-sufficiency, and involvement in community leadership and development activities. Data gathered through surveys and interviews are analyzed and interpreted to determine the extent of empowerment and the factors affecting women farmers under agrarian reform programs.

The Output of the study is the formulation of recommendations and proposed strategies to enhance the empowerment of women farmers in Apayao. These recommendations may include capacity-building programs, improved access to resources and support services, strengthened participation in leadership and community activities,



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and policy interventions aimed at promoting sustainable empowerment among women Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

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This study employed a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to assess the empowerment of women Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries (ARBs) in Pudtol, Apayao. The quantitative component used a descriptive-correlational design to determine their socio-demographic profile and measure empowerment in terms of decision-making, access to land and financial resources, economic participation, and community involvement, as well as to examine relationships between these variables.

The qualitative component explored the lived experiences, challenges, and perspectives of women ARBs regarding land redistribution, participation in farming, decision-making, and access to support services. By integrating both approaches, the study provided a more comprehensive understanding of women's empowerment by combining statistical analysis with contextual and experiential insights (Alkire et al., 2013; IFAD, 2016; Putnam, 2000).

Locale of the Study

The study will be conducted in Pudtol, Apayao, a predominantly agricultural municipality in Northern Luzon where most residents rely on farming for their livelihood. It is a key site for the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) programs under CARP, with many Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries (ARBs), including women.

Pudtol is a suitable locale for this study as it provides a relevant context to examine the effects of land redistribution on women's empowerment, participation, and roles in agricultural development.

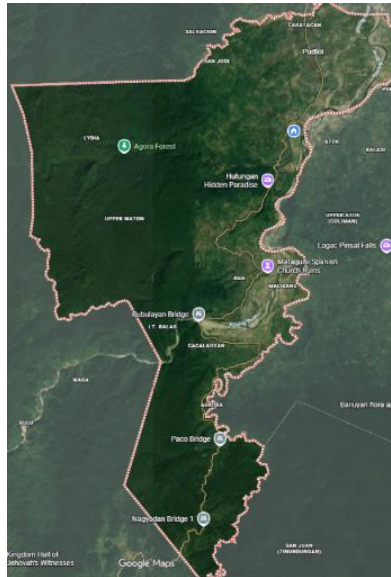


Figure 2. Pudtol, Apayao

Respondents of the Study

The respondents of the study are women Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries (ARBs) in selected barangays of Pudtol, Apayao. They were selected based on their CARP registration, land ownership or co-ownership, residence in the area, and active involvement in farming or related livelihoods.

Using the Raosoft formula, 52 respondents were identified from a population of 114 women ARBs at a 95% confidence level and 10% margin of error.

In addition, key informants from the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) and agrarian reform beneficiary organizations (ARBOs), as well as participants for focus group discussions (FGD), were selected purposively to provide deeper institutional and contextual insights.



Research Instruments

The study utilized mixed research instruments to assess the empowerment of women Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries (ARBs). For the qualitative component, semi-structured interviews were used to gather in-depth insights on respondents' experiences, challenges, and recommendations regarding land ownership and empowerment.

For the quantitative component, the questionnaire was adapted from established frameworks, particularly Kabeer's (1999) empowerment model and the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) by Alkire et al. (2013) and modified to fit the local context of women ARBs under CARP. It was divided into four parts: socio-demographic profile, empowerment indicators (decision-making, resource access, economic self-sufficiency, and community participation), challenges faced, and open-ended responses.

A 5-point Likert scale was used to measure respondents' level of agreement, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5), with corresponding verbal interpretations from very low to very high.

Numeric Value	Interval Range	Description	Verbal Interpretation
5	4.21-5.00	Strongly Agree	Very High
4	3.41-4.20	Agree	High
3	2.61-3.40	Neutral	Moderate
2	1.81-2.60	Disagree	Low
1	1.00-1.80	Strongly Disagree	Very Low

Data Gathering Procedure

The data collection procedure began with securing permission from the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) and the selected barangays in Pudtol, Apayao, to access women Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries (ARBs) and conduct the study (Agarwal, 1994). Researcher-made and expert-validated survey questionnaires were then distributed through face-to-face administration to accommodate varying literacy levels and to guide respondents when needed. The questionnaires gathered information on socio-demographic profile, land ownership, challenges encountered, and indicators of empowerment (World Bank, 2009).

Data collection lasted approximately three to four weeks to allow sufficient time for distribution, retrieval, and follow-up of questionnaires. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with purposively selected DAR officers and Agrarian Reform Beneficiary



Organization (ARBO) leaders, either face-to-face or through phone or online platforms, depending on participant availability (Republic Act No. 9700, 2009).

Quantitative data were encoded and prepared for statistical analysis, while qualitative interview data were transcribed and analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns related to women's empowerment and challenges. Ethical standards were strictly observed through informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, and the proper handling of all collected data for academic purposes only.

Statistical Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequency, percentage, and mean were used to summarize women farmers' responses on empowerment indicators such as land ownership, decision-making, and economic well-being, providing an overview of trends (Alkire et al., 2013).

Correlation analysis and t-tests were applied to determine relationships between variables, particularly the association between land ownership and levels of empowerment (Kabeer, 1999; Sen, 1999). Qualitative data from interviews were coded and thematically analyzed to identify key patterns and experiences. The integration of both data sets provided a comprehensive understanding of women's empowerment under agrarian reform (IFAD, 2016).

Ethical Consideration

The study observed strict ethical standards to ensure participant protection. Prior permission was secured from the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) before data collection.

Informed consent was obtained from all respondents, who were fully briefed on the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to refuse or withdraw at any time. Participation was voluntary throughout the study.

Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured, with all data presented in aggregate form and no identifying information disclosed (IFAD, 2016). Respondents were treated with respect and dignity, and the questionnaire was designed to avoid discomfort or harm, with participants free to skip any item they were not comfortable answering (Alkire et al., 2013).



RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1. Profile of the Respondents

AGE RANGE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
18-29	2	3.7
30-39	6	11.11
40-49	19	35.19
50-59	17	31.48
60 ABOVE	10	18.52
TOTAL	54	100
CIVIL STATUS		
Single	5	9.26
Married	43	79.63
Widowed	6	11.11
TOTAL	54	100
EDUCATION ATTAINMENT		
Elementary	14	25.93
High School	26	48.15
College or Higher	14	25.93
TOTAL	54	100.01
HOUSEHOLD SIZE		
1-3 Member	11	20.37
4-6 Member	35	64.81
7-9 Member	8	14.81
TOTAL	54	99.99
FARM SIZE		
Less 1 ha.	19	35.19
1-2 ha.	24	44.44
2.1-3 ha.	5	9.26
More than 3 ha.	6	11.11
TOTAL	54	100
YEARS AS ARB		
Less than 5 years	11	20.37
5-10 years	6	11.11
11-15 years	15	27.78
More than 15 years	19	35.19



TOTAL	51	94.45
TYPE OF LAND TENURE		
Individual Cloa	42	77.78
Collective Cloa	11	20.37
Co-ownership	7	12.96
TOTAL	60	111.11
MAIN SOURCE IF INCOME		
Farming	54	100
Livestock	6	11.11
Business	2	3.7
Employment	3	5.56
TOTAL	65	120.37
ACCESS TO SUPPORT PROGRAMS		
Yes	40	74.07
No	14	14
TOTAL	54	88.07

Table 1 Shows the profile of the respondents. Most respondents were middle-aged women (40–59 years old), married, and had completed high school education. They primarily depended on farming, cultivating 1–2 hectares of land. Most had been agrarian reform beneficiaries for more than a decade, indicating long-term engagement in agriculture.

This demographic profile suggests that women ARBs are experienced agricultural workers with stable involvement in farming systems, which strengthens the reliability of their responses regarding empowerment.

Table 2.1 Extent of Empowerment of women ARBs in Terms of Decision-Making Roles



DECISION MAKING ROLES	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
I participate in decisions regarding farm operations.	4.26	Very High
I have a say in household income spending.	4.17	High
I can make independent decisions on how to use my land and its produce.	4.15	High
I am consulted in major household decisions related to farming and finances.	4.09	High
Overall mean	4.17	High

Table 2.1 shows that women Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries (ARBs) have a high level of involvement in decision-making, with an overall mean of 4.17 (“High”). This indicates active participation in both farm and household decisions, reflecting empowerment in their roles.

The highest-rated indicator was participation in farm operations ($M = 4.26$, “Very High”), showing strong involvement in agricultural planning and management. Other indicators, such as household income spending ($M = 4.17$) and independent use of land and produce ($M = 4.15$), were also rated “High,” indicating significant financial and resource decision-making authority.

Women ARBs are likewise consulted in major household decisions ($M = 4.09$), suggesting consistent inclusion in discussions, though with slightly less influence compared to direct farm-related decisions. Overall, the findings indicate a high level of empowerment in decision-making, particularly in farm and household financial matters, reflecting the positive role of agrarian reform in promoting women’s participation and autonomy.



Table 2.2. Extent of Empowerment of women ARBs in Terms of Access to and control over land and financial resources

Access to and Control Over Resources	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
I have full access to my awarded land for cultivation.	4.13	High
I can access agricultural loans or credit assistance when needed.	3.35	Moderate
I can decide how to use the income generated from my farm.	4.28	Very High
I have access to training, extension, or technical support related to farming.	4.04	High
I have equal rights as men in accessing land and farming resources.	4.37	Very High
Overall mean	4.034	Agree

Table 2.2 shows that women Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries (ARBs) have a high level of access to and control over resources, with an overall mean of 4.034 ("High"). This indicates generally favorable conditions in land use, income control, and agricultural support.

The highest-rated indicator was equal access to land and farming resources ($M = 4.37$, "Very High"), followed by control over farm income ($M = 4.28$, "Very High"), reflecting strong gender equality and financial autonomy. Access to land and agricultural support services were also rated "High" ($M = 4.13$ and 4.04), indicating generally good but not optimal availability.

However, access to agricultural loans and credit assistance was rated "Moderate" ($M = 3.35$), highlighting a key limitation in financial inclusion. Overall, while women ARBs have strong access to land and income control, improving access to credit remains necessary to further enhance their economic empowerment.



Table 2.3. Extent of Empowerment of women ARBs in Terms of Economic self-sufficiency

Economic Outcomes	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
My income from farming meets my family's basic needs.	3.7	High
I can save part of my income for future use.	3.52	High
My economic condition has improved since receiving land.	4	High
Overall mean	3.74	High

Table 2.3 shows that women Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries (ARBs) experience high economic outcomes, with an overall mean of 3.74 ("High"), indicating that land redistribution has positively contributed to their economic well-being. The highest-rated indicator was perceived improvement in economic condition after receiving land ($M = 4.00$), followed by income sufficiency for basic needs ($M = 3.70$), suggesting that farming generally supports household livelihoods.

However, savings capacity was the lowest ($M = 3.52$), though still interpreted as "High," indicating limited ability to set aside income after expenses. Overall, while agrarian reform has improved income and living conditions, the findings suggest the need for continued support in financial stability, income enhancement, and livelihood diversification among women ARBs.

Table 2.4. Extent of Empowerment of women ARBs in Terms of Involvement in community leadership and development activities

Community Participation and Leadership	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
I am an active member of a farmers' or women's organization.	4.35	Very High
I hold or have held leadership roles in my community or organization.	4.2	Very High
I am confident in expressing my opinions in community meetings.	4.19	High
Overall mean	4.25	Very High



Table 2.4 shows that women Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries (ARBs) have a very high level of community participation and leadership, with an overall mean of 4.25. They are highly active in farmers' and women's organizations ($M = 4.35$) and often hold leadership roles ($M = 4.20$), indicating strong organizational involvement.

They also show confidence in expressing opinions in community meetings ($M = 4.19$), though slightly lower than other indicators. Overall, the findings indicate strong community engagement and leadership among women ARBs, reflecting the empowering effect of agrarian reform.

Table 3. Challenges Faced by Women Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries in Maximizing the Benefits of Land Distribution

Challenges Faced by Women Farmers	Frequency	Rank
Limited access to capital or agricultural loans	42	2
Lack of farming tools, equipment, or technology	40	3
Limited training and support from DAR or LGU	25	6
Gender bias or discrimination in the community	8	9
Lack of access to markets or buyers	32	5
Land disputes or unclear land titles	12	8
Limited access to farm inputs (e.g., seeds, fertilizer)	38	4
Climate-related problems (drought, flooding, pests)	44	1
Balancing farm work with household responsibilities	24	7
Limited decision-making power in household/community	12	8

The findings reveal that the most common challenge faced by women farmers was climate-related problems such as drought, flooding, and pest infestations, with a frequency of 44, ranking first. This indicates that environmental and climate conditions greatly affect agricultural productivity and the livelihood of women Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries (ARBs). Limited access to capital or agricultural loans ranked second (42), highlighting financial constraints that restrict women farmers from investing in farm improvements and expanding production. Lack of farming tools, equipment, and technology ranked third (40), showing that inadequate agricultural resources continue to hinder efficient farming practices.

Limited access to farm inputs such as seeds and fertilizers ranked fourth (38), while lack of access to markets or buyers ranked fifth (32), suggesting that both production and



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marketing difficulties remain significant concerns. Limited training and support from the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) or Local Government Units (LGUs) ranked sixth (25), indicating the need for stronger extension and capacity-building programs. Balancing farm work with household responsibilities ranked seventh (24), reflecting the multiple roles carried by women farmers.

Meanwhile, land disputes or unclear land titles and limited decision-making power in the household or community both ranked eighth (12), while gender bias or discrimination in the community ranked lowest (8). Although these issues were less frequently reported, they still affect the empowerment and participation of women farmers in agrarian reform programs. Overall, the results suggest that women ARBs continue to experience economic, environmental, and social challenges that may limit the full benefits of land redistribution programs.



CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Summary of Findings

This study found that women Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries (ARBs) in Apayao are generally empowered in terms of decision-making, access to land and resources, economic participation, and community involvement. Most respondents are middle-aged, married, high school graduates, farming small landholdings, and have been ARBs for more than 10 years.

They show high to very high empowerment in decision-making and community leadership, with strong involvement in farm, household, and organizational activities. Access to land and support services is generally high, but access to credit remains moderate. Economically, land distribution improved income and living conditions, although savings capacity is limited. Community participation is very high, especially in organizational membership and leadership, while confidence in public expression is slightly lower.

Key challenges include limited access to credit, inadequate farm inputs and technology, weak market access, climate risks, gender barriers, and heavy household responsibilities.

Conclusion

The study concludes that agrarian reform has generally enhanced the empowerment of women ARBs in Apayao in terms of economic, social, and decision-making roles. However, their empowerment remains constrained by financial limitations, institutional gaps, gender inequality, and environmental risks, indicating the need for continued support to sustain and strengthen these gains.

Recommendations

The study recommends that the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) expand access to credit, farm tools, land tenure security, and leadership training. The Department of Agriculture (DA) should strengthen training, climate-resilient farming, and market access support. The Philippine Commission on Women (PCW) should intensify gender equality



programs, while Local Government Units (LGUs) should provide community-based support systems and strengthen local agricultural services.

Therefore, a coordinated effort among agencies is needed to ensure that land redistribution leads to sustained empowerment and improved livelihoods for women ARBs.

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