

WORKERS RIGHTS, WELFARE, AND GOVERNANCE: INSIGHTS FROM A MANGO INDUSTRY IN THE PHILIPPINES

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Abstract

Major concerns centered on the working sector's governance stem from issues and challenges in protecting workers' rights and welfare. This case study discusses the challenges faced by the workers in the Guimaras mango industry and the local government's role in addressing the gaps in protecting the workers' rights and welfare. Findings from the 35 key informant interviews with the workers show significant gaps concerning workers' rights and welfare that still need to be addressed despite the government's efforts to provide the necessary program, projects, and legislation for the industry. The local government has pursued public services on agricultural support and mechanisms for addressing some of the mango producers' needs and local legislation on mango production, harvesting, and consumption to protect them and the industry. Major workers' rights and welfare Primaryrns are mainly on hazardous and dangerous work practices. The mango industry's undependability as a primary source of income, low wage, and the unstable contractual-hiring of mango workers during the mango season have to undermine to meet the supply needed as demanded by the market. To infer, the workers are essential vital players of the mango industry; thus, their rights and welfare need to be appropriately protected. In addressing social justice, fairness, and equality, local governments, humanitarian groups, and helping organizations are encouraged to center their agenda on advancing their rights, interests, and welfare.

Keywords: Governance, Mango Industry, Philippines, Rights, Welfare, Workers,

Introduction

Governance is central to many studies conducted in the field of public administration. As per the definition of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), it entails "the institutionalization of a system through which citizens, institutions, organizations, and groups in a society articulate their

interest, exercise their rights. It also mediates their difference in the pursuit of the collective good." [1] Moreover, it is a society's mechanism to provide or create an avenue for people to voice their concerns, interest, and accountability responsibilities. Perhaps, the workers' rights and welfare are vital to establishing a responsible way of governance

of Local Government Units (LGU). Looking after the welfare of the marginalized and vulnerable sectors is vital in achieving social justice and equality.

Notwithstanding, the most significant problems faced by the working sector in the current socio-political set-up is marginalization and non-representation in advancing their fundamental rights such as on humane labor conditions, living salary and wages, and welfare such as basic health safety nets, among others in either local and national political stage. It is alarming that our society has been discrediting the working class's essentiality, labor, and value in building and developing our economy.

Kaufman, Kraay, and Zoido-Lobaton (1999) point out that governance is the "tradition and institutions by which authority is exercised."^[2] Specifically, the authors suggested the more precise definition of governance where one of which this study has taken into focus. This research on the mango industry's governance focuses on the government's capacity to effectively formulate and implement sound policies and the respect of citizen and the state for the institution that govern economic and social interaction among them.^[2] Moreover, Kaufman, Kraay, and Mastruzzi (2008) identified worldwide governance indicators. As proved to be relevant in the study of governance, these indicators emphasized that voice and accountability or government participation. It also emphasized political stability and absence of violence,

government effectiveness, or civil service quality. Additionally, it emphasized policy formulation and implementation, regulatory quality, or government's commitment to sound implementation of policies, the rule of law or the citizen's confidence in and abiding of laws, and control of corruption is present and deemed to be excellent in a society.^[3] These indicators are relevant in asserting the protection of the worker's rights in the mango industry, especially that local governments are for inclusive and collaborative good governance to achieve sound public service delivery. More likely, in achieving such, the legislative and executive agenda of the LGU is also geared towards sound governance. According to the Philippine-Canada Local Government Support Program (2004), for the executive agenda to be practical, there should be an aligned and corresponding legislative agenda that supplements and supports the executive's initiative.^[4] Moreover, the coordination of the executive and legislative departments of the LGU in setting up their priorities is vital. As such, the executive-legislative agenda in local governance and development has a lot to do in answering the local mango industry's problems.

ELA is one of the major contributing factors for the development of the local economy and industry. The mango industry, as part of the agricultural priorities and ELA of the province, has potentialities in boosting the local economy; thus, governance and development of agriculture are central.

Efforts in having an ELA bring forth sustainability to the programs and projects of the LGU. Moreover, the process of coming up with an ELA is an avenue for various stakeholders to come up with a collaborative effort in addressing issues and concerns of the LGU. Collaborative governance towards developing agriculture and producing a more substantive ELA towards the industry's concern is essential.

The country's agricultural industry confronts various issues that challenge the industry's inclusive and sustainable development and sectors. As a tropical country, the economy's significant drivers are undeniably dependent on the agricultural activity wherein the processes of governance in such a case have drawn an enormous influence in the dealings of the state, market, and the sector. It has significantly influenced how the agricultural industry is motivated to produce necessary products and supply as demanded by the market. Though a hefty amount of development is attributable to the industry's capital-drivers, the workers, laborers, farmers, and the like, who are into manual labor, are also in need of representation and acknowledgment. Inclusive growth requires boosting workers' incomes in agriculture, either by shifting them to better-paying jobs outside agriculture or raising wages within agriculture.[5]

Nevertheless, workers are an essential key player in the agricultural industry. They are part of the major stakeholders of the

local economy; thus, it is vital to involve them in the processes of governance. Rasche (2016) has underscored the definition of collaborative governance as the inclusive multi-stakeholder led coordination and collaboration in the processes and institutions towards a collective agenda.[6] Albeit, the workers' sector is not the lone stakeholder of the industry; however, they are the ones who are disenfranchised and marginalized. For instance, their rights and welfare are evaded through unjust labor conditions, lower wages, etc. to perform their work in the industry.

As such, public policies are essential for inclusive governance that will cover the marginalized sector's interests and uphold their rights and welfare. Thus, it should be coupled with good governance principles to highlight accountability, participation, predictability, and transparency in the development of public policies.[1] Consultative and stakeholder-based or participation through the sector's involvement ensure that governmental decision and policymaking are central to advancing workers' rights and welfare. Brillantes and Fernandez (2008) further argued that "good governance is indispensable for building peaceful, prosperous and democratic societies," which will lead to the just and equitable governance of rights and welfare for local and agricultural development.[1]

A study on "Global governance and labor rights: Codes of conduct and anti-sweatshop struggles in global apparel

factories” in Guatemala and Mexico explored how the working class’s voices heard in creating the code of conduct in the different industries.[7] It found out that union as the representative of the workers gained momentum due to neoliberal and corporatist attacks on the sector. Furthermore, a more on a tangent study conducted by Egels-Zanden (2009) explore the global governance of workers’ rights and welfare, where it identifies researches focuses on transnational governance of workers’ rights at the macro-level country to country or Transnational corporations TNCs.[8] A study in the Philippines by Ofreneo (2013) highlights that the country has dramatically expanded its informalization of labor or veering towards contractualization as an employment trend. [9] Significantly, Ofreneo (2013) highlighted that the agricultural sector is often the ones who suffer from the drawback of this trend, specifically those hired to serve for a length of time in production processes. [9] It is essential to assess mango industry governance’s responsiveness to the protection of workers’ rights and welfare since it is a crucial player in the country’s agricultural economy. According to Golez (1995), the province’s mango industry confronted major concerns such as logistical, technical, and legal. He highlighted one of which is on the workers’ plight in their assertion towards just labor practice.[10] This study is relevant to the workers’ socio-political realities to know further and significantly help solve their

problems. Likewise, the study will help the local government and help groups identify doable agendas for the sectoral development and advancement to know further rest vital to the mango industry.

Objectives of the Study

This study analyzes the workers’ rights and welfare of mango workers’ in the lens of local governance. The study aims to provide an understanding of the following objectives:

1. To define the existing legislation, programs, and projects of the local government on the mango industry.
2. To analyze the participation and involvement of workers in the local government agenda.
3. To identify the issues and concerns on the rights and welfare of workers in the mango industry.
4. To discuss the importance of executive-legislative agenda in advancing the rights and interests of the marginalized sector.
5. To provide recommendations for the humanitarian organizations, the sector, and governments to consider advancing workers’ rights and welfare in the mango industry.

Research Methods

As this case study focuses on the workers’ rights and welfare of the mango industry, it has considered an open-ended critical informant interview with the farmers

and workers. A case study is utilized in this research since it will provide in-depth analysis and understanding of the phenomenon in-focus.[11] Case studies are essential to social science research since it is an empirical methodology looking at the subject's socio-political realities in focus. The study locale is the Province of Guimaras in Central Philippines. The province is a significant economic, agricultural, and tourism driver of the country's mango industry; hence, it is vital to unravel workers' conditions and their plight for their rights and welfare. The study purposively invited 35 key informants for a key-significant interview using a semi-structured open-ended interview guide. With the consent of the participant, the interview was recorded. The recordings were transcribed, translated, and will process through descriptive qualitative data analysis (QDA) involving thematic analysis for data processing and analysis. Likewise, secondary data sources and reference materials will be considered, such as information from the local government such as ordinances and policies with the *sanggunian* (local legislative council), programs, projects, and activities from the local development council related offices, among others. The secondary data will support this study's arguments and highlight the necessary agenda that should be taken into consideration by the local government unit LGU. The study's findings were also triangulated with the discussion of authors in the related literature and studies

review. The study is limited to analyzing narratives of those who have purposively invited informants, which may not represent the sector's views and opinions in general. Similarly, the research environment's scope is extensive, making the researchers failed to reach every member of the sector in the mango industry.

Discussion

Habito and Briones (2005) stress that there is "this crying need to make Philippine farms efficient and competitive as global competition intensifies into the next century and millennium, and ensuring that such efficiency and competitiveness translates to the broadest benefits for the Filipino population." [12] Alas, the agricultural community and the sector involved in this industry still have this dire need for appreciation and development in the Philippine economy. One of the biggest challenges confronting the agricultural industry is our workers' plight for just and equal treatment and a humane labor condition. It cannot be discredited that the industries' capitalist is the major drivers for developing the mango economy. However, it is essential to revisit workers' status since they are the significant facets of production and that the supply produced depends on their performance in terms of their labor.

The following findings, as divided into four discussions, were generated in the conduct of this study. Firstly, this

study reviews the policies instigated in the past decade by the local government to address the gaps, as seen in the Guimaras mango industry. Research on Philippine agriculture, specifically on fruit economies, has highlighted the dire need to redirect the focus on the promotion workers' welfare and rights, thus revisiting local policies will unveil the effort whether this agenda has been given attention. Secondly, a discussion on the local government's programs and projects towards the mango industry, specifically for the workers and farmers, is highlighted. Thirdly, the study highlights the persisting issues confronted by the mango farmer and workers in the mango industry that challenges their rights and welfare. Lastly, a discussion will provide insight into the role of the executive-legislative agenda (ELA) in promoting the workers' rights and welfare and a guide to the Guimaras mango industry's development plan agricultural-tourism.

Local Legislation and the Workers' Rights and Welfare

The LGU provided local legislation, including ordinances, resolution, and policies that respond to the local mango industry's needs. Table 1 presents local legislations on the mango industry in the past decade as provided and made available from the records of the secretary of the *sanguniang panlalawigan*.

In the previous decades and administration of the province of Guimaras on the mango industry, legislative measures are towards protecting the industry from problems concerning socio-political dynamics, environmental and bio-hazards, and foreign infestation breed mango fruit, among others. Likewise, these measures also focus on promoting the Guimaras mango in the national and international communities to boost the local and country's economy further. Despite these innovative measures, it

Table 1. Local Legislation on the Mango Industry

Ordinance Number	Ordinance Title	Sector in Focus
2011-003	An ordinance amending ordinance No. 03, series of 2010, regulating the harvesting and sale of immature mango fruits intended for table ripe consumption in the province of Guimaras	Business Sector
2017-003	An ordinance regulating the production, harvesting, and marketing of Guimaras Mango Fruits	Business Sector
2017-006	An ordinance declaring the province of Guimaras as a special quarantine zone for Guimaras mango and providing funds therefor	Business Sector & Environment
2017-007	An ordinance amending section 12 of ordinance 2017-003 entitled: "An Ordinance Regulating the Production, Harvesting, and Marketing of Guimaras Mango Fruits."	Business Sector & Environment

Source: Sanguniang Panlalawigan of the Province of Guimaras (2018)

was found out that most of these legislations are centered on protecting the environment, promoting the business sector, and protecting the breed of Guimaras mangoes. There lacks the focus or local legislation on the rights and the welfare of the workers. Dominantly, the business sector's interests are the priority agenda in the local legislation for the mango industry to secure high profit and income.

The facets of production in the mango industry, which involve the workers' labor, are deprived of the basic benefits and protection that should have been getting in the performance of their work. In the legislated ordinances for the past decade, the agenda of the *sangunian* lacks the drive of pursuing agenda towards protecting workers' rights. The concerns of ordinary workers such as safety nets, health benefits, and insurance in the mango industry were not even raised to the LGU since they were not adequately represented and empowered. Moreover, the *sanggunian* lacks the prioritization of such protection legislation, thus protecting the working sector's rights and welfare as less priority.

Though the constitution and the local government code (LGC) mandates the LGUs to promote the protection of workers' rights and welfare. Those other existing laws on rights and welfare orders the same, a persisting problem on the application and the constitution, and the local government code LGC mandates the LGUs to promote the protection of workers' rights and welfare. Those other existing laws on rights

and welfare orders the same, a persisting problem on application and implementation of legislation exists in the Philippine society. The implementation and execution of national laws and problems are very problematic due to the weak executive arm in the LGU and the lack of various resources. Likewise, there are many good laws the national government mandates and implements on these concerns; however, the main problem of the Philippine society is on putting teeth in the implementation of these laws in the LGUs. Thus, good laws are complicated to translate into substantive bureaucratic action for development agendas if problems due to lack of resources, public servants' commitment, substantive leadership and organization of human resources, and the like. Habito and Briones (2005) even argued that it is often remarked that the Philippine government has no shortage of good plans and programs to address various sectoral concerns, like those of the agricultural sector.[12] They even agreed to the assertion that these plans and programs' problems and failures lie on the implementation. Furthermore, "the idea of governance and bureaucratic reforms, especially in the agriculture bureaucracy and in the local governments, lies at the heart of addressing the age-old constraints to stronger performance of Philippine agriculture." [12]

Existing Programs and Projects for Workers

Though the local government's legislative measures were not that responsive towards workers' rights and welfare, there

Table 2. Programs and Projects in the Mango Industry

Category	Program or Projects	Focus (Sector)
Physical Development	Proposed 10 Million Consolidation Building as a Post-Harvest Facility for hot water treatment, storing, and packaging.	Business
	Farm to Market Roads	BusinessWorkers
Production Inputs	1 Million Revolving Fund Grant to the Mango Cooperative	Workers Business
	Mango Production Inputs: Seedling Distribution	Business Workers
	Augmentation of Fertilizers	Business
	Distribution of Planting Materials	Workers
Technical	Yearly Provision of Inducers to the Mango Cooperative for the production of mangoes for the mango festival	LGU, Business Workers
	Priorities towards Organic Use of Chemicals and Organic Farming	Business
Organizational	Programs for informal education on business and marketing in different municipalities in Guimaras	Business Workers
	Establishment of the Cooperative for Mango Growers and Producers	Workers Business
Administrative/Regulatory	Provincial Commodity Investment Plan- Focusing on infrastructural and livelihood projects in the mango industry of Guimaras.	Workers Business
	Accreditation Mechanism for Mango Farms and Orchards in compliance with existing environmental ordinances and laws and	Business
	The Mango-Chain Analysis	Business
	Compliance with the existing labor laws and declaration that the Province of Guimaras as labor law compliant tourist destination	Business
	Provincial Rural Development Project	BusinessWorkers

Source: Consolidated from key informants’ narratives and secondary data from government reports, archives, and documents

are still programs and projects that were instigated to address the primary concern of the mango industry. The table presented below shows the prioritization of the development agenda of the industry. These are the measures LGU has considered from 2013 to 2019.

The programs initiated by both legislative and executive branches of the local government has provided an avenue for the mango industry to develop further. It

covers the technical, infrastructural, fiscal, administrative, regulatory, and knowledge-based interventions that helped most mango enthusiasts in the province. This claim is verifiable with the list of programs and projects that the LGU has continuously implemented. It brought the mango industry in the limelight as an emerging potential agricultural and tourism industry. Though the LGU has instigated their role in the service delivery and promotion of development in the

industry, the programs and projects have confronted problems in reaching the small mango growers, backyard owners, workers, and laborers whom the majority compose the working sector of the industry.

Firstly, the programs dominantly benefit big businesses and capitalists. Due to the mango financiers' financing capability as the biggest driver of the production, they are well known for and have this strong connection with different state apparatuses, specifically with local government offices. Moreover, with these strong ties and affinities, the programs are directly channeled into the few benefiting members of the sector composed of the value chain's financing class. It leaves the small growers, backyard owners, and the majority of the laborers and workers to benefit less from the programs and agenda of the LGU. It is supported by one of the key informants' claims that "the programs cannot directly benefit them but only those financiers and capital capitalists only. The disparities between the middle man composed by capitalists and financiers, and the mango laborers, small farmers, and workers remain a pressing concern. Despite the efforts of the LGU to equalize the benefits received by the members of the mango agricultural industry, the few powerful financiers are those who only have the voice and are given the most priority. It makes the rest of the workers marginalized and unrepresented in the governance of the industry. Thus, the financiers and middleman's stronghold in the

industry's different aspects and dynamics further divide the workers, resulting in their displacement. To no avail, the small workers, farmers, growers, and laborers express the difficulties in accessing the benefits programs and projects.

Lastly, the protection of workers' rights and welfare was not even emphasized in the local government's development programs and the industry. The agenda in the focus of most of the programs accounted for in the last decade focuses basically on the provision of technical expertise. It also focuses on infrastructural development and administrative and regulatory functions.

Continuing Issues, Challenges, and Problems on Mango Workers' Rights and Welfare

The mango industry has been emphasized to have promoted development agriculturally, in tourism, and the local economy in Guimaras. It has also helped the locals in terms of livelihood through agriculture and tourism to sustain their families' needs. More importantly, it provided an avenue for the workers, laborers, and farmers of the industry to promote mango production and produce and sell their products in the local and international markets. Despite this industry's developments and aside from the previous discussion concerns, this study has further identified the following critical issues and challenges based on the finding from key informant interviews.

On an important note, the workers' rights and welfare were by-passed by the capitalist and financiers. It is also even passed by the mango industry. It includes their rights and welfare on the following, which are found to be problematic:

- a. Health and Safety- Lacks the provision of safety gear and equipment in inducement (spraying), bagging, and harvesting.
- b. Security and Tenure- Rampant contractualization of workers (this includes the sprayer, baggers, harvester, factory workers) due to the seasonal nature of mango production
- c. Benefits- Lack of provision of benefits such as Health Care Insurance (PhilHealth) and Social Security
- d. Living Wage- Low waging scheme rampantly implemented in the industry for the labor of necessary workers
- e. Technical and Knowledge Training- Lack of capacity building for workers in order to update their knowledge on mango production
- f. Alternative Livelihood- Lack of provision of alternative livelihood program for small-scale mango growers, farmers, and laborers
- g. Avenue for Grievances- Lack of avenue to raise concerns with labor rights-related complaints; Disparities between farm prices and market prices of mangoes; Weak avenue for the participation of and consultative measures of marginalized workers in the governance of the industry
- h. Inputs for Production- Limited of augmentation and delivery of farm services; only significant capitalist benefit from the program of the government; Lack of capitalization and significant production cost for small mango producers

As the workers perform an essential role in the industry, they deserve to be included in the development agenda and be given equal rights and privileges in the performance of their work. The demand for equal protection of rights and welfare for most of the working sector and not solely for the industry's financing members is necessary for the mango industry's development. Thus, this agenda's inclusion is essential in the ELA of the current administration and for the local legislation and committees involved to process this assertion to promote inclusive and sustainable governance and development in the mango industry.

The Role and Importance of Local Legislative-Executive Agenda

According to the Philippine-Canada Local Government Support Program (2004), the executive-legislative agenda or ELA of every administration is essential for inclusive and sustainable development of the local government unit. [4] It includes the priorities of the cohesive and collaborative agenda of the local executive and legislative for an

administration term. In Guimaras, it is likely for both the executive and legislative to include in their agenda the promotion of the Guimaras mango industry since the industry has made the province well-known locally and internationally it continually boosts the local tourism and economy.

The ELA uses to lead the executive and the legislative branches towards a unified vision, mission, goals, and objectives. It is also to enable the executive and legislative branches to agree on priority problems and issues. Moreover, it helps the LGU focus on a set of interventions towards attaining a standard set of objectives and goals. Furthermore, to increase the chances of implementing priority programs of the executive department and for the legislative branch to formulate ordinances in support of these programs, and likewise to speed up the implementation of priority projects.[4] Such a measure will significantly help the mango industry flourish and for the workers' rights and welfare to be promoted and protected.

Despite the greatness that the ELA will provide in the LGU, this study has found out that the province of Guimaras could not come up with a substantive executive-legislative agenda. From the interview conducted with the *sanguniang panlalawigan* through the presiding officer, the ELA was not given attention due to the strong division and segregation of efforts of the two branches of the LGU. Likewise, they were not even informed about the ELA, its

purpose, and its significance in the local governance. Though the separation of powers [13] is highly emphasized in the dynamics of governance of the LGU and that the local legislative branch is only expected to perform oversight functions [14], it is necessary to involve collaborative mechanisms. Rasche (2010) has defined collaborative governance as "a mechanism covering one or more of rule-setting elements – for example, design, development, and implementation, including enforcement." [6]

Thus, sustainability and collaborative efforts towards ELA are essential in the mango industry's governance for development through implementing and enforcement of public policies. Though the ELA is a mechanism of an incumbent administration for its term in framing priority program, it still is essential in addressing society's pressing concerns. On the one hand, the ELA's sustainability is identified as a problem since the local government dynamics of the province do not provide an ample avenue and that the continuity of the previous administration's effort is not considered every time there is a change in the administration on the other. It calls anew for a collaborative and LGU sustainable dynamics in both the executive and legislative branches for a culture of administration and public service beyond traditional politics.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The mango industry of the province of Guimaras is seen not only as an economic

driver of the local agricultural economy but also as a potential contributor to agritourism and farm tourism development. It can help the province generate income and resource generation to sustain the island's needs for development. Thus, due credits to these developments shall also be attributed to the labor and efforts of our farmers, growers, and laborers who continuously fuel the process of production to meet the needed supply for every year.

This case study highlights that the workers are unrepresented, deprived of some of their fundamental rights, and lack the protection of their welfare in performing their labor. The workers' safety was taken for granted, and they are even left unsecured since they are only contract-hires during mango season. Moreover, the production's primary control is left to the prominent capitalist and business owners through financing the costs, which result in disparities in the industry.

The local government's development agenda towards the mango industry has been exclusively focusing on economic development, leaving less attention to workers' labor conditions. The role of the executive-legislative agenda of the LGU is critical in addressing the workers' concerns; thus, due representation of the sector in governance processes is necessary to promote further and inclusive and collaborative efforts towards development.

The study infers that the existing social order—the dominance of the elites-

capitalist class— has hindered workers' full emancipation, representation, and realization of their rights and welfare. The central concern is on the business and production; thus, the working class was overshadowed by the industry's developments. It is essential for governments to substantively address social injustices, lack of decent work, and issues on labor rights and welfare since workers are central to the nation's human capital development and economic growth.

As a primary step towards addressing workers' rights and welfare, there is a need for them to be organized. The organization of the community of peasants in the mango industry is necessary to realize the exploitation committed by the capitalists, elites, big business owners, and even by the government for the sake of profit. With this, various activities are to be considered in addressing this concern:

They facilitate a community education for the mango sector to understand their fundamental rights as members of the country's marginalized community and sector.

They are facilitating community organizing that will help them understand the need to communicate with other sectors or industry members and the need to form one body to address their concerns.

For the sector to organize themselves as a people's organization and an interest group, they are mobilized to promote their cause and interest in the pursuit of addressing their

concerns and pushing for benefits that are necessary for the development of the lives of the member of the sector.

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