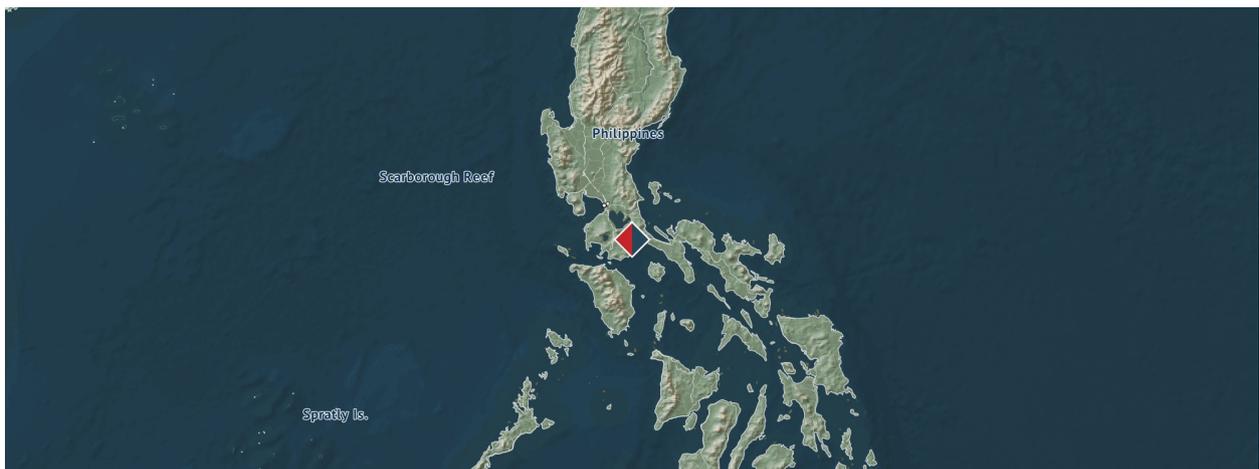




Conflict Factsheet

Land Conflict in the Philippines

Type of conflict Main	Intensity 2
Conflict Locality South Eastern Asia	Time 1944 –ongoing
Countries Philippines	Resources Agricultural / Pastoral Land, Forests



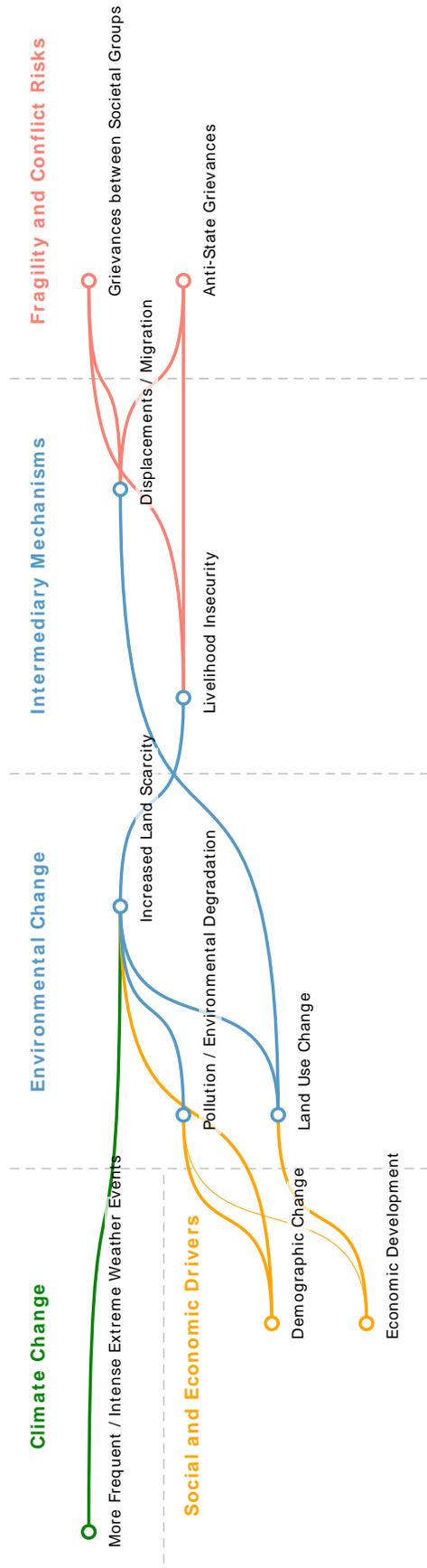
Local resource
competition

Conflict Summary

Land distribution has been a salient issue for decades in the Philippines. In recent years though, population growth and degradation of productive land has led to increased stress and tensions between small farmers, wealthy landlords and the state.



Conceptual Model



Context Factors



Agricultural / Pastoral Land, Forests

Unequal Land Distribution

Elite Exploitation
Political Marginalization



Conflict History

Since the colonisation of the Philippines in the 16th century, the agrarian system has been characterised by a growing concentration of land ownership. The colonial system promoted large agricultural properties and discarded small-scale agriculture, disrupting the livelihoods of native farmers (Corpuz, 1992; Kahl, 2006). However, after Philippine independence in 1946, this highly skewed land distribution persisted. Peasant uprisings, requesting land redistribution and greater social justice, have thus been recurrent (Rieginger, 1995). Land issues are crucial for the Philippines, as agriculture is an essential livelihood and difficult access to land tenure is correlated with poverty, a mainly rural phenomenon (ADB, 2009; Binswanger-Mkhize et al, 2009 on page ; Tadem, 2015). Farmers' protests to obtain rights to land have often been met with violence from landlords and security forces.

Rural populations affected by increasing land scarcity

Land in the Philippines is overexploited due to two simultaneous trends: population growth and land degradation. Falling from roughly 3% in the 1960s, the population growth rate in the Philippines is still high, as it has remained consistently above 1.5% every year since 2000 (World Bank, 2016). The quantity of available land per person is thus continuously reduced. As a result, the rural poor have been moving to the uplands where land is ill-suited for agriculture. Cultivation of these fragile lands has led to their ecological degradation, thus increasing land scarcity even further (Kennedy, 2001; Kahl, 2006). Many farmers deprived from their sole livelihood have migrated to the cities, where they often end up as squatters in informal settlements (USAID, 2011).

As a solution to high population growth and land shortages, agricultural intensification policies have been put in place. They have improved land productivity, but also damaged agricultural land (Briones, 2005). Moreover, deforestation in the Philippines has occurred at one of the most rapid rates in the world, driven by population growth and agricultural conversion, but also by large scale logging of wood meant for export. This, in turn, has led to dramatic consequences: destroyed topsoil, disrupted water flows and frequent landslides (USAID, 2011; Kahl, 2006).

Additionally, the Philippines are affected by changes in weather patterns, which also have a significant impact on rural livelihoods. For example, some 37,000 farmers have suffered from hunger after an El Nino-related drought degraded their land in 2015 (Ty, 2016).

These issues are further compounded by the highly skewed distribution of land. Whilst some wealthy landlords in the Philippines own large plantations, including the most productive swathes of land, about 70% of farmers are landless (USAID, 2011). Corruption and resource appropriation by powerful elites reinforce this situation (You, 2014). Rural farmer communities often cultivate land owned by the state and wealthy landlords (Vargas, 2003). This system contributes to livelihood insecurity, as it facilitates the acquisition of large land plots by foreign investors, and makes rural populations very vulnerable to evictions (Oxfam, 2014, see also [Land Grabbing in the Philippines](#)).

Farmers' fight for equal land distribution

Over the last decades, farmers in the Philippines have repeatedly asked for secure land rights and urged lawmakers to pursue agrarian reforms. Protesters have, however, often been considered as criminals



and their demands have been answered with violence. For instance, in 1987, as farmers marched and demanded genuine land reforms, security forces killed 13 protesters (Curaming, 2013; Pagulong, 2012; Manahan, 2014; Tadem, 2016).

Relations between landlords and tenants have also been strained and cases of landlords using coercive means to evict tenants with the help of local public authorities have been reported: harassment, incarceration and killing of many farmers asserting their rights to land (Tadem, 2016).

Resolution Efforts

From CARP to CARPER: A long-lasting agrarian reform

Legal reforms are essential to improve the situation of farmers in the Philippines. Throughout the 20th century, Philippine governments made successive attempts to reform land ownership, albeit without achieving satisfying results (Dolan, 1991). Efforts to address the land issue continued after colonial independence, the latest to date and most controversial being the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP). The CARP was implemented in 1988 for a ten-year period to promote a more equitable distribution of land and improve productivity, income as well as farmers' self-reliability. Thus, the reform consisted mainly of public and private land redistribution in favour of landless farmers. The state has been buying land from landlords, to then sell it to landless farmers at a price they could afford (Binswanger-Mkhize et al, 2009 on page). However, important delays of the reform, due to financial and technical difficulties, made it necessary to extend the programme in 1998 and again in 2009 (Valencia, 2015).

In an attempt to address the shortfalls of the programme, the Philippine government launched, with the support of the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) and the German Technical Cooperation Agency (GTZ), the CARPER - *CARP Extension with Reforms* - reform in 2009 (Flores-Obanil, 2010). Compared to the CARP, it contains more favourable provisions for farmers, as it acknowledged, among other points, the indefeasibility of awarded beneficiary lands and women's rights to land, and is committed to faster land attributions. However, the law still contains provisions that impede the efficiency of the programme, such as a transaction scheme remaining more convenient for landlords than for small farmers (Olea, 2009; Tadem, 2015; Focusweb, 2015).

Therefore, while the CARPER reform formally ended in 2014, its success is still subject to debate. The government claims that it has distributed an equivalent of 88% of the total land subject to the programme and has ensured that even after expiration, the planned distribution would be completed (Official Gazette, 2014). Meanwhile, heated discussions on a third extension have been ongoing, further opposing landowners and farmers (The Philippines Star, 2015; InterAksyon, 2015).

Mixed outcomes of the agrarian reform

Debated success

Several studies funded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the European Union (EU) assessing the initial twelve years of the programme concluded that it had a positive impact on land ownership and poverty reduction (FAO, 2002; Binswanger-Mkhize et al, 2009). Other studies, however, put the positive economic impact of the reform into question (e.g. Gordoncillo, 2012).



On the other hand, many civil society actors have judged the reform a failure and have denounced a 'pro-landlord' bias, stating that the CARP aimed at providing compensation to landlords rather than promoting effective land redistribution (Sonny Africa, 2006; Tadem, 2016; Yap, 2015). The programme has presumably also had different impacts across regions, as, in some areas, vast plantations have remained unaffected to avoid production shortfalls (De Lataillade et al., 2006; Banzuela et al., 2015).

Conflicts within civil society

Attempts to mitigate high inequalities within Philippine society have generally been hampered by wealthy landlords, unwilling to see their land taken, even with appropriate compensation. The distribution process planned by the agrarian reform has thus been slowed down by their resistance, which occurred through evictions and harassment of CARP(ER) beneficiaries (Tadem, 2016). Clashes have also appeared among farmers as some land plots have been reattributed from small holders to landless farmers (Banzuela et al., 2015). A group of civil society organisations (CSOs) conducted an international fact-finding mission on human rights violations in the Philippines related to this agrarian reform and pointed out big landowners' abuses and the State's failure in protecting rural populations (IFFM, 2006).

Furthermore, the reform has encouraged farmers to fight for their rights to land. They have brought their claims to court as landlords' opposition has often hindered the land redistribution process. Many cases were filed calling on the DAR to effectively implement the agrarian law. While sometimes successful, farmers were often restrained by landowners, filing complaints against them on assumed trumped up charges and in an attempt to delegitimise their fight. Small farmers tend to lose their cases even with sufficient material evidence, since landlords use of their influence on the judiciary, deepening the asymmetry of power (Morilla and Corpuz, 2010; Olea, 2014). The CSOs formerly mentioned recommended to end criminalisation of agrarian reform cases as they mostly discriminate against the farmers (IFFM, 2006).

Cooperation and empowering opportunities for farmers

CARP(ER) beneficiaries are often confronted with lack of financial support and services, making it difficult to enter the market and compete with large farms. They have sometimes no other option but to sell their land back to the former landholder. To overcome this problem, farmers are gathering in cooperatives to pool resources. The Land Bank of the Philippines is indeed more inclined to offer loans to organised farmers (Banzuela et al., 2015). Cooperatives often appear successful in ensuring farmers' independence from large landholders and in improving their economic opportunities (Araullo, 2006), suggesting that this method could be replicated on a larger scale to further reduce land inequalities in the Philippines (Quillooy, 2015; The Philippines Star, 2015).

Through the successive stages of the reform, public consultations at national and regional levels have been implemented, improving transparency and giving a voice to the different interests involved (Flores-Obanil, 2010). Further inclusion of all members of the society in the reform process can be supported by CSOs

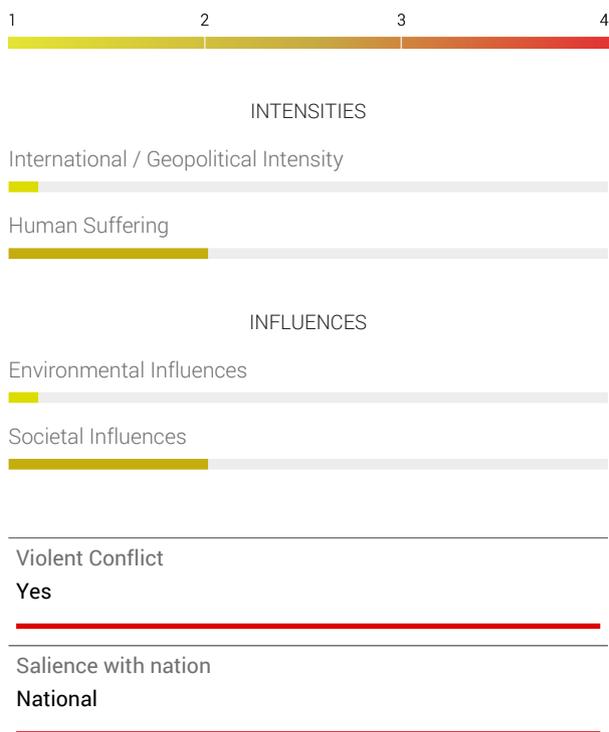
, which have showed to be successful in uniting communities and raising awareness to resonate with decision makers (Banzuela et al., 2015). The Philippines have numerous thriving CSOs, with skills in network capacity building and important links to government officials. As recommended by the Asian Development Bank, these organisations should be trained further and supported in building strong systems of internal governance in order to have a strong positive impact (ADB, 2013).



New political hopes for a successful reform

The new government coming into office on June 30, 2016 represents great hopes for farmers. Many harshly criticised the poor management of the agrarian reform under the outgoing Aquino's government. Thus, the designation of Rafael 'Ka Paeng' Mariano as secretary of agrarian reform under the incoming Duterte's government resonates as good news since he comes from a peasant family himself. Mariano was chairman of the main Philippine Peasant Movement Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP), where he blamed the CARP for strongly degrading the situation of farmers. He even stated that 664 farmers were killed as a result of this reform while asserting their rights (Cervantes, 2014). In his new role, Mariano has already announced a review of agrarian law in favour of small holders' interests. Departing from prevalent policies, including the controversial CARPER reform, might however prove to be difficult (Tadem, 2016; Billones, 2016).

Intensities & Influences



Resolution Success





Entry Points for Resilience and Peace Building

Mediation & arbitration

1

Farmers have filed claims in court demanding the implementation of an agrarian law and against landlords who have hindered the land distribution process. However, small farmers tend to lose their cases due to corruption and the asymmetry of power between landlords and farmers.

Social inclusion & empowerment

2

Farmers are gathering in cooperatives to pool resources and improve their economic opportunities by applying for loans, thus ensuring their independence from large landholders. This method could be replicated on a larger scale to further reduce land inequalities in the Philippines.

Strengthening legislation and law enforcement

3

The Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) was implemented in 1988 to promote a more equitable distribution of land and improve productivity. In an attempt to address the shortfalls of the programme, the German Technical Cooperation Agency (GTZ, now GIZ) supported the Philippine government in the elaboration of the CARP Extension with Reforms (CARPER) in 2009. While the reform contained more favourable provisions for farmers, its success is still being debated after its completion in 2014.

Promoting social change

2

The Philippines has numerous thriving civil society organisations (CSOs), with skills in network capacity building and important links to government officials, which should be trained further to have a strong positive impact. Thanks to these CSOs, the state has made efforts to include local communities into decision-making processes.

Resources and Materials

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[Land Grabbing in the Philippines](#)

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Further information

<https://factbook.ecc-platform.org/conflicts/agrarian-conflict-philippines>