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# From Adversity to Recovery: Adaptive Capacity Experiences of Middle-Class Farmers amidst the Implementation of Rice Tarrification Law

**Novee G. Esmediana**

Graduate School Student, Master of Arts in Education-Major in Teaching Social Studies, Holy Cross of Davao College, Sta. Ana Avenue Corner C. De Guzman Street, Brgy. 14-B, Davao City, Philippines

**Abstract**

In my study, I explored how the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) has significantly affected middle-class farmers by inundating the market with cheaper imported rice, which has lowered farmgate prices, reduced their income, and impacted their overall experiences during its implementation. Using a phenomenological approach, I purposively selected ten middle-class farmers, and through my analysis, I identified key themes. I found that the adversities they faced included rising farming costs, decreasing income, and increasing debt and financial strain. I also observed that adaptive strategies involved diversifying farming practices, adapting sustainable methods, and accessing government assistance. In terms of recovery, I saw that economic diversification, self-sufficiency, and building financial independence were essential. For future research, I suggest focusing on the experiences of landless farmers under Rice Tarrification Law and quantitative research may use the emerging themes to determine the factors of recovery, and the sub-themes as indicators.

**Keywords:** Adversity, Recovery, Adaptive Capacity Experiences, Middle-Class Farmers, Rice Tarrification Law

## 1. Introduction

During my interview with middle-class farmers, I perceived directly how the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) severely impacted their livelihoods. They shared how the influx of cheaper imported rice drove down farmgate prices, leaving them with little to no income. Some of them could no longer compete and had to give up rice farming entirely. Even though rice became cheaper for consumers, the farmers I interviewed still faced increasing production costs, which made it harder for them to sustain their work and support their families.

Their experiences reminded me of a study from the Central District of Edo State in Nigeria, where Omofonmwan and Kadiri (2017) found that rice trade liberalization made fertilizers too expensive for local farmers. Just like in the Philippines, reduced government support and the pressure of competing with imported rice created serious problems for small-scale producers. This showed me that the impact of trade policies like RTL isn't just local—it affects farmers in many parts of the world and threatens national food security.

In my conversations, farmers often mentioned how rice prices dropped dramatically during the implementation of RTL—from ₱19 to ₱20 per kilo in 2018 down to just ₱12, as noted by Dela Peña (2022). This price instability made it hard for them to plan for their families' needs and future planting seasons. Like Alvarez et al. (2022) explained, unstable rice supply and unpredictable market prices created stress and uncertainty in their lives, which I clearly witnessed in their stories.

### Theoretical Lens

In this study, I centered my analysis on the Resilience Theory of Norman Garmezy. According Grigorenko (2024), this theory provides a strength-focused on how people manage to recover from adversity. It also emphasizes the adaptive capacity of individuals and communities when facing adversity. It acknowledges coping strategies in challenging situations.

Through this lens, I explored how farmers responded to the experiences brought by the Rice Tariffication Law. I examined the specific coping strategies they employed, such as diversifying their agricultural activities, relying on government support, or engaging in additional livelihood options beyond rice farming to sustain their income. This theory allowed me to analyze not just the adversities farmers faced but also their ability to adapt and recover their livelihoods.

## 2. Methods

In this research, I used a qualitative method utilizing phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences of middle-class farmers amidst the implementation of Rice Tarrification Law. Grounded in a phenomenological framework, the study aimed to understand farmers' lived experiences and perspectives. The study was conducted in M'lang, North Cotabato, a first-class municipality in the SOCCSKSARGEN Region known for its agricultural productivity and rice farming, the research examined how middle-class farmers employed adaptive strategies and pursued recovery efforts to combat the adversities brought about by the implementation of the Rice Tariffication Law. Using purposive sampling, I selected participants who possessed direct experiences and insights relevant to the study, ensuring that their perspectives were aligned with the statement of the problem and contributed meaningfully to the findings. A total of ten farmers participated in the study—five engaged in In-Depth Interviews (IDIs), while another five contributed to Focused Group Discussions (FGDs), which facilitated in-depth, collaborative discussions. Ethical considerations were central to the process, as I secured a certificate approval from the Society for Moral Integrity and Legal Ethics (SMILE) and the HCDC Graduate School Dean, secured informed consent from participants and focused on establishing trust and rapport to create a secure and open environment for the research.

To analyze the data, I employed Braun and Clarke's thematic approach, systematically coding the interview transcripts to uncover key themes that reflected the core of the farmers' experiences. This method ensured a structured interpretation of findings while maintaining the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the study. Comparing the interview transcripts with the audio recordings to ensure consistency and enhance the reliability of the data. All audio recordings were securely stored as part of my research data, with digital copies kept on a protected Google Drive folder (https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/13CJHuk9BuNUqDLNwUH4vyYC7J9BBRVMV). Ethical guidelines were rigorously followed, in compliance with both national and institutional research standards, to ensure the protection of participant confidentiality.

## 3. Results and Discussion

As I explored the participants, I gained a deeper understanding of their lived experiences amidst the implementation of Rice Tariffication Law. Through analysis, I uncovered the adversities they faced and the adaptive capacities they employed to recover. I reviewed the goals of the Rice Tariffication Law and its unintended challenges for farmers. The research presented a modified paradigm that highlighted sub-themes related to adversity, adaptive capacities, and recovery, offering insights into how farmers' resilience shaped their response to these challenges. In capturing these experiences, I aimed to highlight the complex ways in which adversity, adaptive capacity, and recovery are connected.

### Adversity

Farmers experienced adversities such as rising cost of farming inputs, decreasing income and debt and financial strain.

### Adaptive Capacity

Farmers relied on diversification on farming practices, adapting sustainable agricultural practices and accessing government assistance and subsidies.

### Recovery

Farmers recovered through economic diversification, self-sufficiency and building financial independence.

The findings underscored the farmers' ability to adapt and recover from the adverse effects of the Rice Tariffication Law. Despite economic hardship, the farmers demonstrated resilience through various coping strategies. These responses reflect their internal strength, problem-solving skills, and determination to maintain their well-being and sustain their livelihoods amid policy-driven challenges.

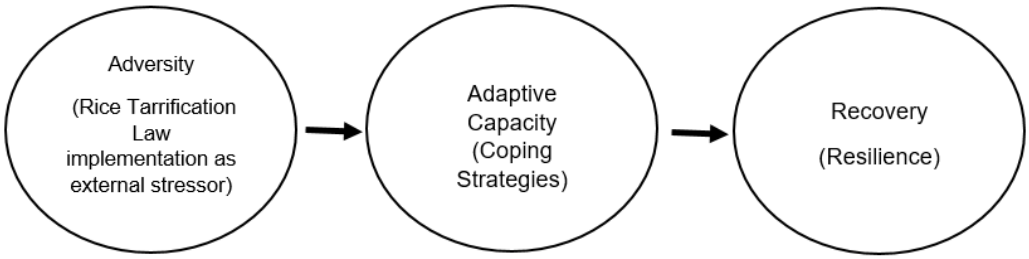


**Figure 1: Adversity to Recovery: Adaptive Capacity Experiences of Middle-Class Farmers amidst the Implementation of Rice Tarrification Law**

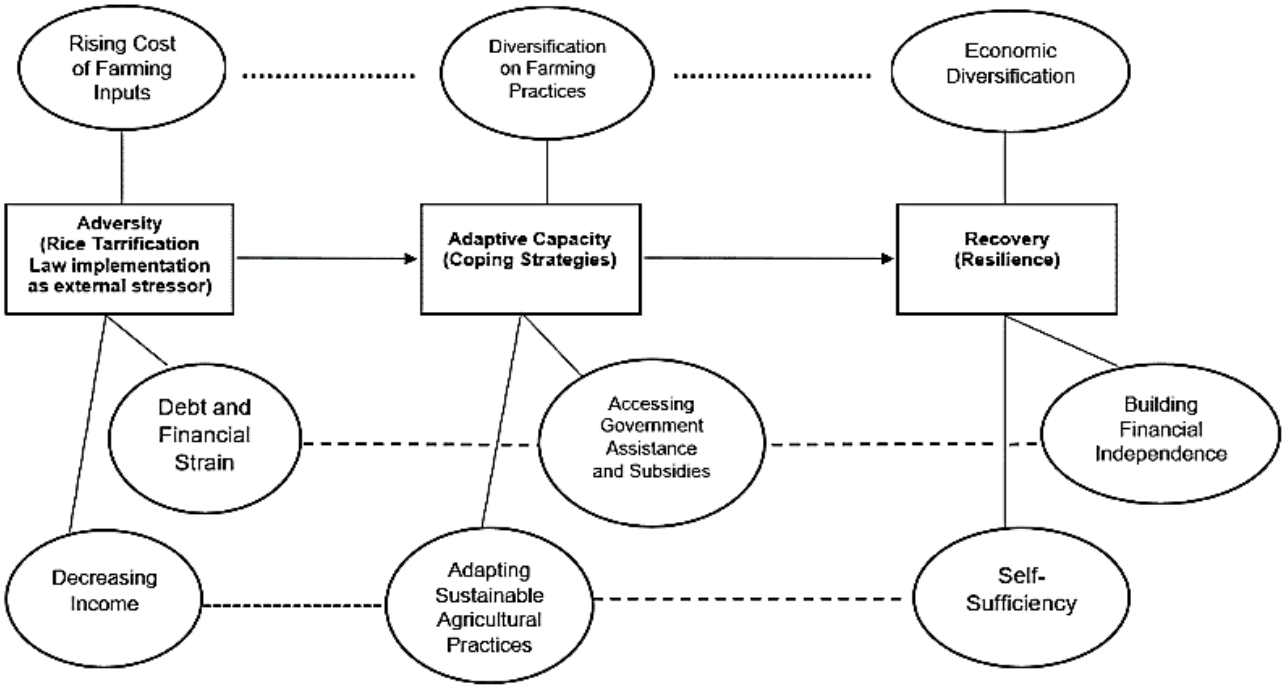


**Figure 2: Themes and Sub-Themes of Adversity to Recovery: Adaptive Capacity Experiences of Middle-Class Farmers amidst the Implementation of Rice Tarrification Law**

## 4. Conclusions

This study shed light on the complex and layered impacts of the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL), particularly on middle-class farmers who, while not the most impoverished, face unique challenges that place them at risk of downward mobility. These farmers often operate without the full protection of land ownership or consistent access to government support, making them especially vulnerable to economic shifts and policy changes. The adversities they encountered—ranging from income instability and rising production costs to market competition—revealed critical gaps in current agricultural policies.

Despite these challenges, the resilience of middle-class farmers was evident in their coping strategies and gradual recovery efforts. Many adapted by diversifying their farming activities, seeking government aid, and engaging in alternative sources of livelihood such as livestock raising, micro-enterprises, or short-term employment. These efforts demonstrate a strong capacity for adaptation and a commitment to sustaining their families' welfare despite reduced earnings from rice farming.

The findings highlight the importance of supporting this segment of the farming population through more inclusive and flexible policy frameworks. Future initiatives must prioritize education, financial literacy, and community-led programs to help middle-class farmers not only recover from adversity but also build long-term resilience and economic independence.

## 5. Recommendations

This study highlights the need for more inclusive and responsive agricultural policies that address the specific challenges faced by middle-class farmers. Although not the poorest, these farmers are vulnerable to downward mobility due to their limited access to land ownership, unstable income, and minimal government support. It is recommended that future policy frameworks recognize this group as a distinct sector requiring targeted assistance—particularly in stabilizing production costs, improving access to subsidies, and creating safety nets during times of economic transition.

To further strengthen their resilience, it is also recommended that government and community-based initiatives promote education, financial literacy, and diversified livelihood training. Programs that encourage micro-enterprises, sustainable agriculture, and alternative income-generating activities can empower middle-class farmers to adapt more effectively to market changes. Investing in these areas will not only support recovery but also foster long-term economic independence and rural development.

Furthermore, given the adverse effects of the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL), future agricultural policies should also be more inclusive, especially for vulnerable groups like landless farmers and those in remote areas. Targeted support—such as subsidies, land access programs, and localized training—must be prioritized to ensure no farming sector is overlooked.

## 6. Acknowledgment

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## 7. Author's Biography

The author is currently a graduate student at Holy Cross of Davao College, pursuing a Master of Arts in Education major in Teaching Social Studies. She has a strong interest in the social sciences, particularly in agricultural and rural development, as she has lived for 29 years as a product of a farming community. Her academic work reflects a deep commitment to promoting inclusive and sustainable practices that support marginalized farmers in the Philippine agricultural sector.

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