

The Politics and Materiality of Coordination: Philippine Village Leaders Responding to the Spread of a Global Plant Disease in Banana

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Abstract

Leadership is the process of directing and influencing, and it involves taking actions and producing change, in both informal and formal settings. In the Philippines, there are village leaders elected in a political position. *Barangays* (villages) are the smallest political administrative unit in the country and are led by a *barangay* captain. This paper investigates leadership, not only as an exclusive result of politics and social structures, but relates it to the problem-solving practices and managing interdependencies modified by a global plant disease in banana. The Philippine banana industry caters to both domestic and export markets, making it an important economic commodity. A virulent global plant disease in banana, *Fusarium oxysporum* f.sp. *cubense* Tropical Race 4 (Foc TR4), is threatening the producers in Philippine villages. Case studies of village leaders examine their actions in relation to nonconstituents, particularly with the Foc threat. Settings were four villages where export-oriented banana companies were present, mingling with local players. The common denominators in all these villages were the presence of export-oriented banana plantation and recorded incidence of Foc. The village leaders' handling of the gravity and importance of problem still leaned largely on how their political influencers perceived the problem. The multinational companies, on the other hand, were not able to fully articulate the importance of the problem to the village leaders. These companies kept much of their researches and studies to themselves and shared only what was necessary. As a result, the village did not have complete information on how to treat or understand the problem.