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RESEARCH REPORT

HOW ARE AFAD AND ITS MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS AFFECTED BY THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON SHRINKING CIVIC SPACE?

GLOBAL PROJECT AND CHANGE MANAGEMENT
WINDESHEIM UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES
MANAGING PROJECTS IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD
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MANILA, MAY 02, 2023

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Introduction

This study is conducted as applied research for the human rights organization, Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD), in cooperation with a student team from Windesheim University of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands. The aim is to investigate shrinking civic space and how that affects AFADs and its member organizations. The term civic space refers to “the set of conditions that allow civil society and individuals to organize and participate and communicate freely and without discrimination” (Keutgen & Dodsworth, 2020). On the contrary, shrinking civic space refers to these rights being violated; the rights that seem to be most clearly at stake are freedom of association, the freedom of assembly, and the freedom of expression (Buyse, 2018). Shrinking civic space seems to be a global challenges, according to Civicus (2023) 158 of the 197 assessed countries do not have an open civic space which refers to a state which enables and safeguards the enjoyment of civic space for all people. Shrinking civic space can have severe consequences on civil society organizations (CSOs). Therefore, it is important to gain a deeper understanding of shrinking civic space to support AFAD, so they are able to continue their work.

This study is carried out by a research team which consists of five researchers, Dayenne Deumer Fay Goedbloed, Elisa Haaijman, Frédérique Hoogland, and Marie Joost, who are all third-year students studying the program Global Project and Change Management. The students all conducted individual research connected to the topic shrinking civic space. They choose these topics based on feedback from AFAD, their project coach and after reading literature. This paper will contain a background, a literature review, a research design, an analysis of the research results, a discussion and conclusion.

Background

1.1. Stakeholder analysis

After having briefly explained the project's core idea, it is worth presenting the clients of this project. The main contact persons for the project team were Daphne Navelino, AFAD project coordinator and research officer, and Xerxes (Tet) Arcenal who is the program manager for the organization. However, the team is considered complete after the introduction of Jose Marie (Joey) Faustino and Christopher J. (Amats) Salgado. Joey is AFAD's secretary general and Amats is the admin officer of AFAD. Since they all hold high power and high influence on the project, the project team maintains regular contact with the clients by having regular online meetings, giving weekly updates, and exchanging feedback via the chosen platform *Signal*. During the stay in the Philippines, the project team worked regularly in the office of AFAD to generate close interaction with the clients.

Nevertheless, member organizations also held high relevance in this project. As the WIDEN concept, created by AFAD, reveals, member organizations (MOs) face similar challenges in the context of shrinking civic space which gave those organizations a high potential for high influence on the project. Yet, it must be considered that the content of the project and information about AFAD had to be dealt with confidentiality, especially when approaching stakeholders. Therefore, stakeholders could only be engaged when the client(s) confirmed the contact. This means the stakeholder map was an evolving document that needed to be approved by the client(s). Next to AFAD, respondents of the individual interviews represent a crucial part of the stakeholder list. The list of interviewees who were involved in the studies can be found in Table 1. Next to the name of the stakeholder, the table (Table 1) reveals the organization, such as the context, the respondent's expertise and the specific role in this project.

Table 1

Stakeholder List

Name	Organization	Context	Role in the project
Xerxes Arcenal	AFAD	n/a	Client, Program Manager
Daphne Navelino	AFAD	n/a	Project Coordinator and Research Officer
Jose Marie Faustino	AFAD	n/a	Secretary General
Christopher J. Salgado	AFAD	n/a	Admin Officer
	KontraS	Member Organization	Interviewee
	DHRPK	Member Organization	Interviewee
	Odhikar	Member Organization	Interviewee
	PAHRA	Researcher and Consultant	Interviewee
	FOD	Member Organization	Interviewee
	Advocacy Forum	Member Organization	Interviewee
	n/a	Professor at university	Interviewee
	n/a	Professor at university	Interviewee
	n/a	Filipino psychology expert	Interviewee
	Donor organization	n/a	Interviewee
	Donor organization	n/a	Interviewee
	Donor organization	n/a	Interviewee

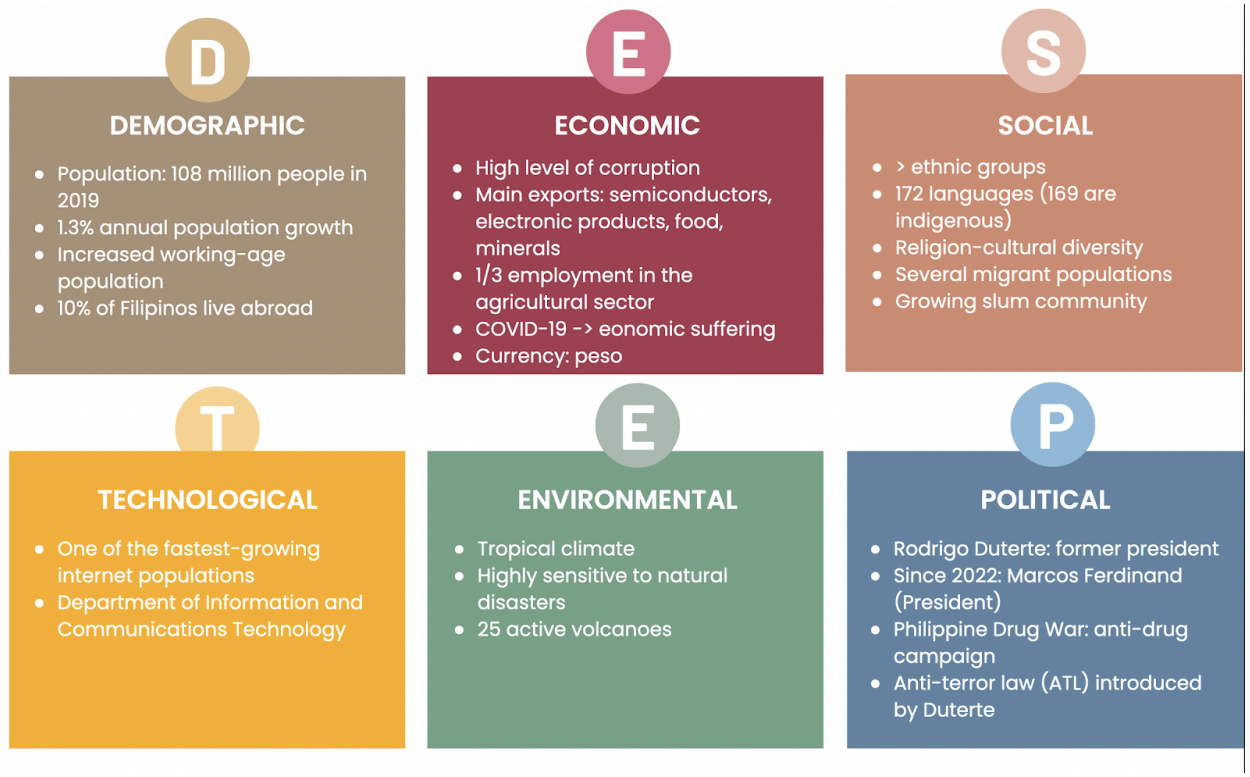
	United Nations	Special Rights Rapporteur	Interviewee

1.2. **DESTEP**

The team chose to conduct a DESTEP analysis (Figure 1) to gain a better understanding of the external factors that influence the activity of an organization. Therewith, the team intends to identify opportunities and threats for AFAD since the causes of shrinking civic space may be found in several domains. Moreover, the term civic space specifically refers to the political, legislative, social, and economic environment (Suisse, et.al, 2021). Therefore, looking at the demographic, economic, social, technological, environmental, and political factors seemed to be helpful in order to gain a holistic view of the issues that impact AFAD.

Figure 1

DESTEP Analysis



Demographic

With 108 million people in 2019 (Population Dynamics, 2021), the Philippines counts as one of the most populated countries in the Asia Pacific (Statista, 2023). However, the Philippines has reached its lowest population growth since 1947 (Hannes Seidel Stiftung, 2022). In fact, the annual population growth rate in 2023 is about 1.3% which, in perspective to the previous years, represents a further decline (Philippines Population 2023 (Live), n.d.). Next to that, the Philippines population is among the youngest worldwide, considering that 52% of the total population is below 24 years old which results in an increased working-age population (Population Dynamics, 2021). Nevertheless, there is a trend to leave the country which has created a culture of emigration. In this context, it can be stated that 10% of Filipinos live abroad (Asis, 2017).

Economic

Despite legitimate economic growth the Philippines never became one of the Asian tiger economies as a result of government corruption. Some economists contend that the country could be labelled as an Asian tiger cub economy instead. The main exports consist of semiconductors and electronic products along with some food and minerals. One third of the population is employed in the agricultural sector, rice being the dominant crop. The nation also established the fourth largest shipbuilding industry in the world. The mining sector remains a big industry (Asis, 2017). With an English-speaking population and low labour costs the Philippines became the call centre capital, even exceeding India (Geodiode, 2021). Alike most countries around the world, the Philippines suffered economically from the Covid-19 pandemic. Economic growth decreased and recovering since 2021 (Worldbank, 2022). Finally, the national currency is the Philippine Peso.

Social

More than 70 ethnic groups can be found on the islands. Besides the emigration culture, there are, namely, several migrant populations such as the Chinese, Indian, Spanish, and American (Castro, 2015). Despite the resulting high religion-cultural diversity

(AFAD, 2012), Christianity counts as the main religion (Miller, n.d.), and due to colonialization, the Christian groups are associated with more political power. Whereas there are 172 languages used in the Philippines, 169 are indigenous to the country (Castro, 2015). However, the rapid population growth in combination with ethnic and religious conflicts results in many sociocultural challenges (Castro, 2015). Moreover, the regions of Calabarzon and the National Capital Region indicate the highest number of inhabitants nationwide which, in this case, results in an increased income disparity.

Technological

The country has one of the fastest growing internet populations in the Asia Pacific region due to improved internet infrastructures. Filipino internet users also log on for the longest periods of time, 10 hours or more on an average day. It is predicted that in 2028, 77,81 percent of Filipinos will have internet access (Statista, 2023). Moreover, the policy of Duterte believed that increasing business sector of ICT would create better wealth for Filipinos. In May 2018, Duterte signed the Ease of Doing Business and Efficient Government Service Delivery Act (RA 11032) to improve the business climate and support its digital transformation initiatives. In order to demonstrate its steadfast support for the ICT sector, the Philippine government established its own Department of Information and Communications Technology (RA 10844) in 2016. The country's growing middle class and young people are the main drivers of IT demand. The Marcos administration intends to continue the previous Duterte Administration's digital transformation program (Giray, 2022).

Environmental

The Philippines enjoy a tropical climate whereas the highlands in Luzon are slightly dryer compared to the Visayas and the South. It sadly means that the country is also highly sensitive to natural disasters. The country has been dealing with yearly earthquakes and typhoons. An average of 20 typhoons are hitting the islands every year, with the eastern Visayas being the most vulnerable. Furthermore, the country counts 25 active volcanoes to this present day (Geodiode , 2021). Disaster response mainly consists of mitigation

strategies that are dependent on early-warning systems that usually only government and accredited NGOs have access to (Mina, 2021).

Political

The executive of the unitary state is led by the president which is chosen by the population for a six-year term, having an upper house of 24 senators and a lower house of 304 representatives that represent individual districts across the country (which are elected for a 3-year term). The supreme court consists of 14 justices appointed by the president from lists nominated by a council. Unique to the Philippines are the Barangay's being the smallest unit of administration with over 40,000 in the country. They can be compared to small municipality houses (Geodiode, 2021). Rodrigo Duterte was the former president, since 2022 Marcos Ferdinand took over. Duterte is known for starting the Philippine drug war: the intensified anti-drug campaign of his administration. A complementation on this campaign is the anti-terror law (ATL) that puts harsher penalties for even 'suspected' terrorists, this being an obstacle to freedom of speech, for example. The law was introduced by Duterte in 2020. The war on drugs has led to, among others, a ridiculously high rate of forced disappearances, unjustified killings and government corruption. One can conclude that the country is dealing with political instability and a human rights crisis. It comes not as a surprise that according to the CIVICUS monitor and many other resources the Philippines are a repressed country (CIVIUS, 2022).

1.3. The general focus area of the MPGW project

This project aims to execute extensive research that is focused on finding potential responses for AFAD to combat shrinking civic space. Human rights are inextricably linked to shrinking civic space because it undermines the ability of individuals and civil society organizations to advocate for and defend these rights. Individuals and groups find it more difficult to speak out against human rights violations, advocate for justice and accountability, or participate in decision-making processes that directly affect their lives when civic space is restricted due to restrictive laws or policies, harassment, intimidation, or violence by state or

non-state actors. This can lead to a cycle of repression and violations in which individuals or groups remain silent while abuses of power occur. Human rights organizations strive to ensure Human rights organizations work hard to ensure that human rights are respected, protected, and fulfilled. Civil and political rights, economic, social, and cultural rights, women's rights, children's rights, refugee and migrant rights, and minority rights are all areas in which human rights organizations can work. They may engage in activities such as research, documentation, advocacy, litigation, and capacity building to promote and protect these rights.

1.4. **Individual research focus areas**

For the individual research, the team has determined five topics to complement the understanding of the main project. To create a thorough and in-depth understanding of the project, several dimensions of civic space were examined and connected to the foundational pillars of civic space and human rights.

Firstly, typologies and elements of shrinking civic space were discovered by examining the norms and values of the Filipino culture. The perception on civic space can therefore be explored from a national perspective, and provide an overview of complexity per region, which accommodates a variation of civic space contractions and its impact. In addition, the impact of Covid-19 was studied to explore the connection between shrinking civic space and governmental restrictions which create hostile environments and undermine democratic principles. Since shrinking civic space is perceived as a global trend, another approach was focusing on shrinking civic space in a global context. This individual research explored the Asian trends which drive shrinking civic space to shrink further and elaborate on the causes. To enhance the identification of trends, international relations which harm and/or benefit civic space were examined by exploring and comparing former, as well as current, laws in Asia. In addition, due to shrinking civic space being a global trend, many organizations have been forced to develop strategies to deal with this phenomenon. It was of value to collect best practises for protecting existing civic space and necessary to

understand civil society responses. One of the research areas therefore identified best practices incorporated by civil society organizations, in which the political and cultural situation was considered to ensure a suitable response. Lastly, a more detailed look is provided on effective donor responses. CSOs are currently highly reliant on funding, whilst restrictive measures obstruct access to financial resources. Therefore, this research focused on providing systematic guidance to support an enabling environment for donors and organizations.

1.5. Individual research

Since it was found that the covid-19 pandemic has an impact on civic space in Asia, it was considered beneficial to dive deeper into the exact consequences on AFAD and its member organizations. In this context, it seemed relevant to extend the knowledge of the risks and opportunities that the pandemic brings. This means this research adds to the understanding of the issue that AFAD wants the project team to address, and it delivers concrete input on the final deliverable of the project, which is an advisory report on how to work in difficult environments.

Literature Review

Introduction

There are fundamental rights that allow individuals to express their opinions which contributes to a functioning democratic society. These rights can be categorized into the freedom of expression, assembly, and association. According to the German Institute for Global Area Studies (GIGA), this freedom has globally declined in 2020 compared to the state in 2019 (Lorch et al., 2021) which might be due to the Covid-19 pandemic (Lorch & Sombatpoonsiri, 2022). In fact, prior studies have identified that there is a connection between the pandemic and civic space. This, in turn, can be defined as the political, legislative, social, and economic environment (Suisse et al., 2021) which creates freedom for individuals, as just discussed. There are the following elements of civic space: legal restrictions, violence and intimidation, digital surveillance, stigmatization and discrediting,

and economic discourse, which form the framework of this literature review since previous research confirms that some of those factors were reinforced during the pandemic. Nevertheless, as civil society is a term that is commonly used in this field of research, it is worth explaining that first. Civil society is a set of non-governmental institutions that are self-organized and independent of the state (Lorch & Sombatpoonsiri, 2022). It seems to represent a positive factor contributing to the well-being of society, whereas it also holds the potential for negative effects, which is then called an uncivil society (Keutgen & Dodsworth, 2020).

This literature review intends to reveal existing research on the impact of the covid-19 pandemic and civic space in the Philippines. It is aimed to gain an overview of existing literature and thus, find a gap for complementary research. In this regard, 14 articles are used in order to discuss the findings. The academic articles were found on databases including google scholar and the Windesheim media center. However, next to the academic literature, many reports from organizations, such as the United Nations or the Westminster Foundation for Democracy were used to extend the knowledge.

1.1. Covid-19 in the Philippines

On the one hand, shrinking civic space has already taken place as a pre-covid-19 trend due to the democratic decline in the Philippines (Lorch & Sombatpoonsiri, 2022). On the other hand, researchers claim that civic space has not uniformly shrunk but it has often been sustained during the pandemic due to the creation of needs-induced space which is, according to Lorch and Sombatpoonsiri, represented in the 9,000 Covid-related protests which took place throughout the pandemic worldwide (Lorch et al., 2021). However, the Philippine response to the crisis can be considered one of the longest and strictest lockdowns in the world. In March 2020, the first lockdown was initiated. Then, from June to July 2020, the restrictions were used due to the economic development of the country. Yet, it was decided to return to a lockdown in August 2020 (Hapal, 2021). Next to the lockdown, there are different ways of how the government responded to the pandemic which then

limited the freedom of society. In this context, the Open Society Foundation found out that governments underestimate the importance of public space, especially in times of change (Open Society Foundations, 2015). Avoiding this response might pose a challenge for the government which is reflected in the paper by Hayes et al., who raises the question “How can government support civic space and human rights defender initiatives while adopting repressive domestic policies” (Hayes et al., 2017).

1.2. Legal restrictions

The lockdowns can be considered one example of a severe limitation of the freedom of assembly (Bethke & Wolff, 2020). Even though the lockdown and other civil and political rights restrictions were seen as necessary for health protection, it seemed to be a convenient opportunity and justification for the government to impose restrictions for political purposes. It was found that the Philippines have established the most covid-related legal measures (Lorch & Sombatpoonsiri, 2022). These included non-health-related goals Ainembabazi et al., n.d.), with which, according to the GIGA, non-democratic leaders tried to fight against oppositional civil society (Lorch et al., 2021). In this context, laws such as Anti-Terror Law are worth mentioning which indicate the transition to violence and intimidation practices.

1.3. Surveillance, violence, and intimidation

The fact that the Anti-Terror Law (ATL) was introduced in 2020 is another example of how the government exercises suppression. In fact, the law allows harsher penalties for even suspected terrorists which can be seen as an obstacle to the freedom of speech (Suisse et al., 2021) by discouraging or preventing civil society actors from participating in public activities (Hayes et al., 2017). When analyzing the Philippines’ Covid-19 responses, Hapal concluded that the government invokes wartime-like emergency responses. In connection with this, the research by Lorch and Sombatpoonsiri reveals that the pandemic was identified as an existential threat that allowed president Duterte to express his power

with wartime-like forces (Lorch & Sombatpoonsiri, 2022). In his speech during the first lockdown, Duterte himself referred to warlike narratives by calling the population soldiers who need to obey the police and military. In addition to that, the president advocated killings and allowed mass arrests in order to discipline society (Hapal, 2021). Next to surveillance, violence, and intimidation practiced by the police, digital surveillance is another factor of high relevance. A report which focused on covid-19 and shrinking civic space in Africa announced that the pandemic caused a high dependency on digital technologies. Given the combination of violation of freedoms of speech and access to information, the authors declare the future need for a “universal, open, affordable, secure, and stable internet” in order to protect human rights (Ainembabazi et al., n.d.)

1.4. Stigmatization and discrediting

The Minority Rights Group International emphasizes that the pandemic made clear that minority communities and their defenders are affected the most by the reduction of civic space (Minority Rights Group International, 2020) which confirms the assumption that the government purposely suppresses society (Hayes et al., 2017). The title of research conducted by Hapal even describes the disciplining of the pasaway, which is a term in the Philippines to describe individuals who do not follow rules or regulations and thus, disregard authority. The researcher claims that this targeting is rooted in deep-seat class prejudices in combination with Duterte’s authoritarian tendencies (Hapal, 2021).

1.5. Economic discourse

Even though it was already discussed that governments might have underestimated the power of civil society (Open Society Foundations, 2015), it still depends on the delivery of services provided by civil society organizations (Lorch & Sombatpoonsiri, 2022). This can be the distribution of masks and sanitizers, education about covid, food packs, and financial support. However, this is dependent on the openness of the political system and the willingness of the government to accept this support (Lorch & Sombatpoonsiri, 2022). If this

is not given, it results in the implementation of legalizations which, in turn, might limit the freedom of these organizations. Additionally, the (financial) capabilities of the civil society organization play an essential role in providing support during the pandemic (Lorch et al., 2021). In this regard, the organizations mostly rely on funds, especially in times of the pandemic. Yet, there is a shift in the funding which creates a funding gap. This is led by powerful private sectors intensifying their interest in becoming allies to the government (*How Covid-19 Has Shrunk Civic Space*, 2022) which again lacks accountability. While researching the impact of covid on civic space in Africa, Ainembabazi et al describe the lack of transparency as unresponsiveness to citizens about the outflows of the funds, given the fact that curiosity is seen as a crime (Ainembabazi et al., n.d.).

1.6. Impact estimation

Research about patterns and consequences of covid-19 and shrinking civic space acknowledges the contribution of the pandemic to a further de-democratization of countries that have already been unstable before (Bethke & Wolff, 2020). However, this research also claims that covid-19 related restrictions are difficult to sustain over time which means that there is no lasting closure of the civic space. On the contrary, other sources highlight the risk of the opportunities that the pandemic has to offer. The Christian Aid Organization states that the consequences of covid tend to aggravate existing conflicts. Nevertheless, the positive impact of the pandemic on civic space is also highlighted in this paper. In fact, it concludes that the failure of the state might bring opportunities for civil society such as the emergence of activism in different fields. The organization claims that civic space rather changes or even grows through the pandemic. In addition to that, civil society organizations are presented as being the “two-way conduits” (*How Covid-19 Has Shrunk Civic Space*, 2022) between communities and governments. However, this perspective seems to be conflicting with the results of other researchers and organizations.

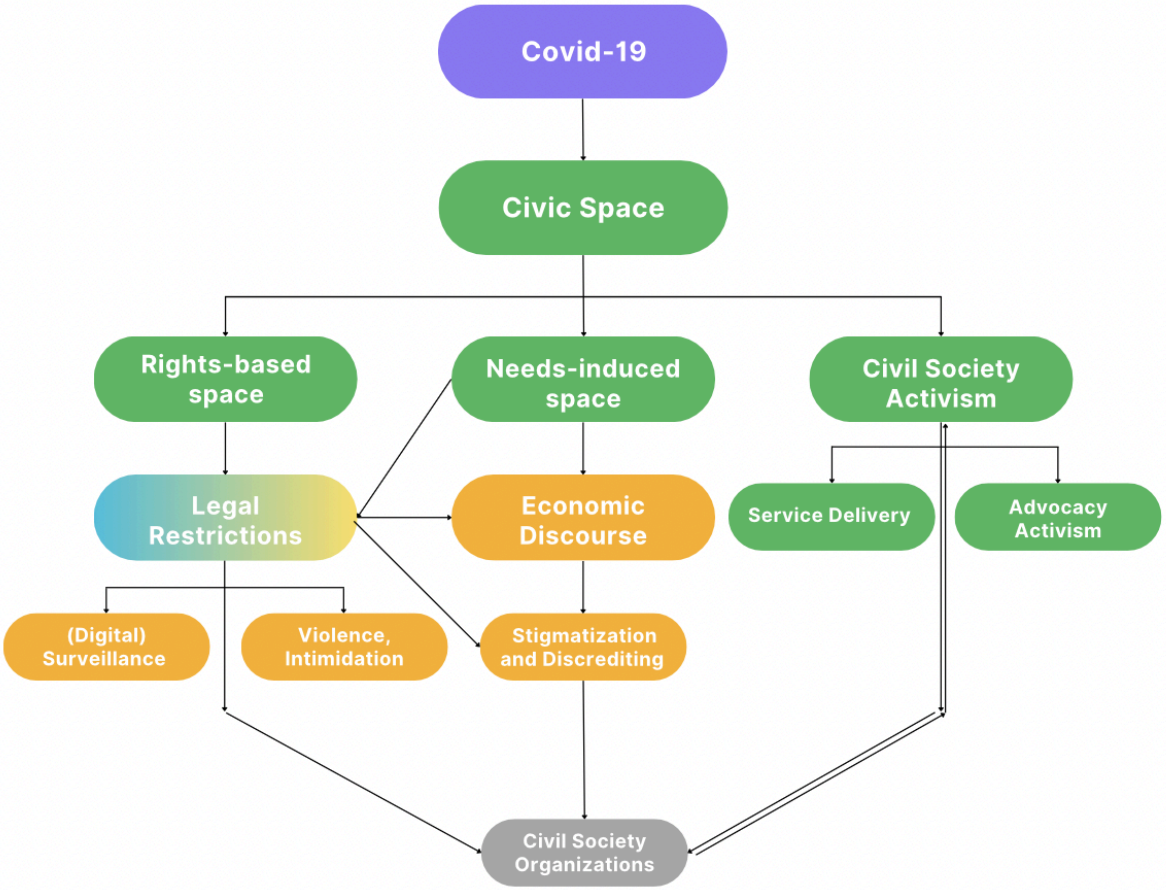
1.7. Conclusion

The articles that were used in this literature review touched upon some elements of civic space that were impacted by the covid-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, they do not expose the impact it has on the Philippines specifically. Therefore, it is advised to conduct research in the field of this region, since the organization to which this research is dedicated is located in this country. Moreover, to provide more information regarding AFAD and its member organizations, it is very essential to do further research on how those have experienced the consequences of the pandemic. In this regard, it was important to concentrate on their perspectives in order to be able to present future suggestions.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 2

Conceptualization of Covid-19 impact on civic space



Source: Author

In their paper, the researchers claim that legal restrictions are not the sole factor in shrinking civic space. Since this aligns with the findings presented in the literature review of this paper, Figure 2 was created by the researcher of this research, Marie Joost, in order to clarify the impact of covid-19 on civic space. Next to this, the conceptual framework emphasizes the role of civil society organizations which is particularly relevant to assess its impact on AFAD. The core of the research conducted by Lorch, Onken, and Sombatpoonsir (2022) is represented in Figure 2 as the color green. The orange elements refer to the additions made by Marie Joost. These represent the findings of the literature review of this paper which display the five main elements of shrinking civic space. However, the main findings of the research conducted by Lorch, Onken, and Sombatpoonsir will be briefly explained before the idea of the complete conceptual framework will be introduced.

First of all, it is worth mentioning that the researchers define three determinants that shape civic space. In this context, rights-based space refers to legal restrictions which were declared during the pandemic. According to the researchers, these particularly restricted the work of CSOs. In fact, the Philippines established the most covid-related measures whereas some are seen as an attempt to fight against CSOs (Lorch et al., 2022). In addition to that, legal restrictions intertwine with space created by needs-induced space. The latter describes socioeconomic needs such as basic requirements for a decent life. Lorch, Onken, and Sombatpoonsir (2022) claim that this space should specifically respond to the health and economic needs of society. However, next to rights-based space and needs-induced space, the third determinant of their study is defined as civil society activism. This can be divided into service delivery and advocacy activism which mutually influence each other. The researchers describe the failure of the governments as an opportunity for the emergence of activism, which the government even relies on. To give an example, the researchers found that CSOs actively supported the government in times of the covid pandemic by providing services such as the distribution of face masks. This means CSOs are not only affected in

the sense that shrinking civic space restricts their work, but it also enhances civil society activism. Thereby, CSOs contribute to sustaining civic space by making use of the opportunities provided to them (Lorch et al., 2022), which creates the mutual relationship represented in the figure (Figure 2).

In addition to the findings of the research (Lorch et al., 2022), the five elements of shrinking civic space, explained in the literature review of this paper, are displayed in the conceptual framework (Figure 2). It was found in the desk research that a lot of legal restrictions during the pandemic impacted the freedom of assembly (Bethke & Wolff, 2020). This, explicitly enforced by surveillance measures, restrict the efforts of civil society organizations. In general, it can be concluded that a lot of restrictions seem to foster (digital) surveillance, violence, intimidation, stigmatization, and discrediting. For an explanation of the relationship between legal restrictions and the other elements of shrinking civic space, it can be referred to the literature review of this paper. Next to this, the economic discourse during the pandemic was reinforced by legal restrictions which predominantly affected marginalized groups, slums, and the low-income class. This stigmatization and discrediting, in turn, impact civil society organizations.

In conclusion, with the addition made by the researcher of this study, the concept seems to provide a holistic insight into the impact of covid-10 on CSOs. It provided a framework for the interviews which were conducted for this research. Therewith, an in-depth understanding of the consequences of the covid-19 pandemic on CSOs could be gained. Moreover, the researcher was able to relate the experiences of the interviewees to the components of civic space. With this information, specific suggestions can be created for AFAD about how the organization can respond to the impact and possibly build more resilience.

Research Objective

The purpose of the study is to identify how the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on shrinking civic space affects AFAD and its member organizations.

4.1. Research Question

How are AFAD and its member organizations affected by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on shrinking civic space?

- Which elements of civic space in the Philippines were impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic?
- How do AFAD and its member organization experience the impact of Covid-19 on the shrinking civic space?
- How do AFAD and its member organizations respond to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic?

Research Design

5.1. Research approach

The study intends to explore the effect that AFAD and its member organizations experience from the impact of the pandemic on shrinking civic space. Given the nature of this inquiry, the methodology adopted is qualitative, primarily relying on the subjective and first-hand experiences. To gain a comprehensive insight into the situation, researchers who have investigated the governmental response to covid-19 were involved as respondents. As the research design entails examining the unique lived experiences of organizations and their relation to the given phenomenon, the phenomenology approach was chosen for this research.

5.2. Research methods

A total of 6 semi-structured interviews were held for the collection of data in order to clarify the research question. This means the interviews consisted of open-ended questions

to foster flexibility and interactive dialogue. All interviews were conducted in English and, with the exception of two in-person interviews, virtual communication tools were utilized to overcome the geographical dispersion of participants. An interview guide was sent to the respondents prior to the interview and four interviews were conducted solely by the researcher of this study, Marie Joost. However, given the expectation that two participants would offer valuable insights for the individual research from two members of the project team, two interviews were held with one more team member.

5.3. Sampling method

Purposeful sampling was used since the selective sampling of participants who provide in-depth and detailed information about the issue was needed. With an ultimate focus on both member organizations and AFAD itself, AFAD's network was utilized. To this effect, an endorsement letter (Appendix 1) was provided by the client which was sent attached to the interview request to potential respondents. A sampling inclusion criterion required the respondents to be involved in AFAD's network or the being familiarized with components of this study. This includes the understanding of the study and the willingness to express knowledge and experience. It should be noted that the geographical location of the respondent was not considered as an exclusion criterion in the selection of interviewees, as it was certain that AFAD's member organizations are located in different countries in Asia.

5.4. Methods for data analysis

Since there is existing research on the phenomenon, which was touched upon in the literature review, this research has a deductive design. To be more specific, this qualitative research intends to expand existing theories, which the development of the conceptual framework has already indicated. The consequences of the pandemic can only be studied since 2020 and thus, the data collection process, especially about AFAD, has not previously been studied in depth before. To this effect, explorative research in combination with a deductive design was used for this research. With this information, suggestions can be

developed on how AFAD can respond to potential external influences in the future. However, the interviews were transcribed and coded. In order to understand the sense of wholeness, the data was classified into clusters. Based on the examined themes relationships among those clusters could be identified. In this regard, thematic analysis was used. This describes the process of identifying patterns and themes within qualitative data. Therewith, the data is not only summarized but it is also interpreted. To gain an understanding of that process, Braun's and Clarke's six-phase framework for doing a thematic analysis was used as a guideline. This framework consists of 6 steps, which will be briefly elaborated. Starting with familiarization with the data, the researcher re-reads the transcripts of the interviews. Subsequently, initial codes are generated whereas the step is based on open coding. This means, there are no pre-set codes, but they are modified throughout the coding process instead. The researcher intends to code each segment of data that captures something about the research question. In the third step, themes are created which will consist of several codes. Thereby, it is worth mentioning that a theme is mainly characterized by its significance. However, the researcher must keep in mind that using the main interview questions as the themes is considered a pitfall in this process. Afterward, themes are reviewed in terms of whether the data supports the chosen theme. Then, the themes are defined, meaning that the essence of what each theme is about is identified. The last step consists of the research report. Braun and Clark describe this step as the writing up.

5.5. Quality assurance

Since the research deals with confidential information, it was of high importance to ensure consent at every step of the process. Given the researcher's close involvement with the subject matter, which involved working at the client's office for the duration of the research, maintaining credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability throughout the analysis process was pivotal. These criteria are the basis of Lincoln and Guba's Evaluative Criteria of Trustworthiness which will be briefly explained, starting with credibility, which deals with confidence in the truth of the findings. Even though this might seem like a

subjective matter, there are different methods to assure the credibility of this research. Since multiple researchers worked on the project for AFAD, comparative analyses of individuals' findings were completed. In this regard, using several sources of information is called investigator triangulation. Furthermore, according to Lincoln and Guba, transferability is relevant in order to prove the applicability of the findings in other contexts. Despite the fact that covid-19 plays a crucial role in this research, the concept of the study is not necessarily dependent on the pandemic. This means the elements represented in the conceptual framework do not solely rely on crises such as the pandemic. This, in turn, is closely connected to the dependability criterion which ensures that the findings are consistent and could be repeated. In this regard, another researcher will review the paper to provide insider analysis and feedback before the paper is published. In this case, this person is a member of the project team who collectively works on the project and the research coach from the Windesheim University of Applied Science. Lastly, confirmability represents the fourth criterion of Lincoln's and Guba's concept. Confirmability concerns a degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not the researcher's bias, motivation, or interest. To provide maximum neutrality, the analyst triangulation approach was used. This is used by several analysts to review whether the findings are comprehensible or whether there are several interpretations of seeing the data.

5.6. Ethical issues

The study acknowledges the potential occurrence of ethical concerns, particularly relating to the privacy of both the respondents and AFAD itself since the operations of AFAD and its member organization have to be dealt with high confidentiality. To mitigate any ethical concerns, clear communication about the interview's scope and the limit of confidentiality can be expected. To ensure transparency, it is adhered to the Nuremberg Code by creating an informed consent form which can be found in the appendices (Appendix 2). The form entails an introduction of the researcher, it reveals the purpose of the study, and the length of the interview. In fact, transparency is considered a core principle and therefore the form

revealed how the data is used. In this context, it is ensured to protect the participants from possible harm by dealing with the data in a confidential way. This means, the researcher committed to use pseudonyms for each participant to avoid making identifying factors public (Table 2). The informed consent form was sent to the respondent prior to the interview, and it intends to inform the respondent about the rights as an informant, such as refusing to participate, withdrawing and access their data. Next to confidentiality and informed consent, justice is also a key consideration in this study, with the researcher acknowledging the significance of the respondents' contributions in terms of time and knowledge. Therefore, it is of priority to ensure that the respondents are given the opportunity to publicize their expertise through this research.

Results

This section reveals the analysis of the research results based on the thematic analysis. This means, the most relevant codes were identified and build the outline for this chapter.

6.1. Background participants

A total of six in-depth interviews were conducted, whereas one was held with the secretary general of AFAD and three individuals each representing a member organization of AFAD. Furthermore, two interviewees with researchers were undertaken upon the impact of political interference and its impact on Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) during the covid-19 pandemic. Due to the confidentiality of the research topic, pseudonyms were applied to each respondent, as indicated in Table 2.

Table 2

Overview Respondents

Pseudonym	**Respondent**
A	AFAD

B	Member Organization
C	Member Organization
D	Member Organization
E	Researcher
F	Researcher

6.2. Civic space

First of all, it seems relevant to clarify that every respondent presented the same understanding of the term civic space. This is a space where citizens can express themselves and "claim their freedom, their rights, and of course also their needs" (F, personal communication, May 30th, 2023), whereas four participants described civic space as free or safe space and two people explicitly referred to the freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and freedom of association. It was emphasized that next to the covid-19 pandemic, civic space was one of the major challenges that the Philippines faced in 2020 (A, personal communication, May 22nd, 2023). In fact, as one of the interviewees pointed out, Civicus, an international non-profit organization indicates in his research tool that the Philippines could be considered an obstructed democracy in 2020 (F, personal communication, May 30th, 2023). The conversation with respondent A made clear that the pandemic even contributed to a further shrinking civic space.

6.3. Before covid-19

The core efforts of AFAD and its member organization consist of working in close collaboration with the families of enforced disappearances victims. This reaches from psychological and legal support to the victim's families (B, personal communication, May 11th, 2023), advocacy on the issue of enforced disappearances to the general relevance of human rights (D, personal communication, May 19th, 2023). Therefore, physical activities were of high relevance to maintaining networks, connecting with lawyers, and internal

communication. “There was no hindrance before covid”, was pointed out by respondent B (personal communication, May 11th, 2023) who demonstrated that the organization did not face any barriers before the pandemic. Nevertheless, some member organization experienced constraints even before the pandemic. As respondent D explained, these barriers centered mainly around restricted internet access and detained staff members due to expressed criticism of the political situation (D, personal communication, May 19th, 2023). However, respondent A reiterated that the Philippines’ economy was already problematic before the pandemic. The respondent exemplified corruption, poverty, scarcity of food, and immobility as issues that were exacerbated by the pandemic and that contributed to “the civic space [getting] narrower and narrower” (A, personal communication, May 22nd, 2023).

6.4. Political interference

The interviews conducted revealed that the experiences of the respondents and general shifts in the organization’s work environment can be traced back to political influence. Notably, respondent E examined the political motive behind Duterte’s drug war and detected a connection to the government’s response to the pandemic, which will be discussed in the subsequent section on stigmatization and discrediting. However, the authoritarian nature of the Philippine government at the time under Duterte allowed for absolute control over society which respondent E deemed as offering possibilities for the government.

> *“It’s an authoritarian regime […] at that time because the government exerted absolute control over society […]. At that time, the government was enjoying absolute control. I think it was a lot of power for them, so they were able to do a lot of things because of that.” (E, personal communication, May 23rd, 2023)*

The different mechanisms that the government used to respond to covid-19 represent the government’s aim “to control everything” (F, personal communication, May 30th, 2023). Furthermore, several interviewees stated that certain rights imposed during the

pandemic restricted their freedom of expression, assembly, and association. In this regard, the lockdown can be considered as one of the government's responses to the pandemic. This mechanism had significant consequences for both society and the civil society organizations. In this context, one member organization cited the prevention of offline activities as a restriction impacting their core work (D, personal communication, May 19th, 2023). Moreover, it was addressed that opinions and criticism could be easily ignored by the government during the pandemic. This is due to the fact that the power that has been created through protests or other forms of assemblies prior to the pandemic was minimized by the lockdown. These measures did not only affect AFAD and its member organizations but also the victim's families who were supported by the network. During the period of the lockdown, updates on cases that were usually given at the office posed a significant challenge for families who were left without any support and hence, without hope. As one participant mentioned, "It was sort of like a dead end" (E, personal communication, May 23rd, 2023). In fact, victims faced several challenges due to the pandemic, including a lack of access to justice. Instead of closing the justice system entirely, the participant would have suggested to use virtual platforms just like the rest of society who had to adapted to the circumstance (B, personal communication, May 11th, 2023).

6.5. Stigmatization and discrediting

An issue of concern, as identified by AFAD, pertains to the increased prevalence of disinformation (A, personal communication, May 22nd, 2023). According to the researcher who participated in this research, misinformation is characterized by a marked divergence between the actual operations of CSOs and the perception of such organizations by society. The interviewee alluded to a purposeful initiation of this divergence by the government by limiting access to information for the public and sharing its own perspective on CSOs (E, personal communication, May 23rd, 2023)."Legislation results in discrimination" (A, personal communication, May 22nd, 2023) was mentioned in the context of the Anti-Terror Law (2020) which allows the state authorities to hold a person solely on the basis of suspicion.

Participant A noted that the Anti-Terror Law (ATL) is contradictory to the core principles of democracy, wherein individuals are presumed innocent until proven guilty.

> *"They can hold you, they can detain you, even without proving anything" (A, personal communication, May 22nd, 2023)*

The objective of such legislation is allegedly to limit the activities of organizations that seek to inform the public about the truth. Human Rights Organizations were known even before the pandemic for speaking up against the drug war. The ATL simply gave the government the tool to deal with criticism in a way that protects its position and power since it prompted the government to view CSOs as a hindrance to their authority (F, personal communication, May 30th, 2023). Indeed, the supreme court debated whether activism was synonymous with terrorism, a stance that aligns with the observation of respondent E (personal communication, May 23rd, 2023) who identified a war-like-narrative in the way the government dealt with the pandemic. Hence, the researcher has drawn parallels between the government's approach to disciplining society with that of the drug war wherein drug addicts were portrayed as enemies of the state. In times of the pandemic, persons who voiced dissent were similarly marginalized and discredited (E, personal communication, May 23rd, 2023). It is noteworthy that AFAD itself experienced acts of criminalization, including the closure of its bank account in Manila due to mere suspicion of involvement in illegal activities such as terrorism, despite providing all necessary requirements and documentation such as where grants come from or where funds go.

6.6. Violence and intimidation

These acts of stigmatization, discrediting, and criminalization serve to intimidate both society and Human Rights Defenders and have been observed as effective tools in the context of the ATL. Red tagging in particular was utilized as a means of discouraging and instilling fear among those who would engage in criticism of the government (F, personal communication, May 30th, 2023). "[The people] now live in fear" (A, personal communication,

May 22nd, 2023) is an observation of the result of the mechanisms mentioned above. Beyond this, since the quarantine in the Philippines started In March 2020, the implementation of its restrictions further facilitated the military's activity and resulted in the arrest, torture, and displacement of individuals engaged in advocacy work. "So it's real. That threat is fear"

> *"I've spoken to people who were arrested, tortured, and then some of them had to flee the country. Because they were doing their advocacy work. So it's real. That threat is fear." (E, personal communication, May 23rd, 2023)*

As already discussed, a respondent noted that the government's handling of the pandemic can be viewed as disciplinary in nature, with acts such as public broadcasting of fake sex videos serving to "humiliate" (E, personal communication, May 23rd, 2023) and to "dehumanize" (A, personal communication, May 22nd, 2023), as well as to justify legal restrictions that are used to criminalize and intimidate Civil Society. The example of the publishment of a fake sex video represents a form of cyberbullying known as Doxxing, which utilizes personal information to attack critics (C, personal communication, May 11th, 2023). "They [do not] need a lot to charge someone. They just need to catch you" (E, personal communication, May 23rd, 2023), as expressed by one participant. In fact, this has resulted in a Chilling Effect, whereby individuals or groups may be deterred from engaging in expression for fear (A, personal communication, May 22nd, 2023).

6.7. Digital surveillance

The covid-19 pandemic has led to an increased reliance on technology, necessitating that Civil Society Organizations adapt to this change (B, personal communication, May 11th, 2023). Therefore, CSOs have been forced to shift their online communication and activities to platforms such as Signals, Proton, and Teams. However, a critical dimension of this technological transformation pertains to online security and safety, which has proven challenging for all respondents. It seemed to be evident that online conversations were being

surveyed which hindered the efforts of respective member organizations. Next to the monitoring, another case presents instances of data misuse that have been reported, with one interviewee noting that Someone stole their identity. It was the government itself" (C, personal communication, May 11th, 2023). While the government gathered sensitive information during the pandemic to track individuals and information, there was no accountability or transparency regarding the provision of support or the use of data.

6.8. Civil society (organizations)

The covid-29 pandemic has had profound effects on the activities of CSOs in providing support to vulnerable individuals and communities. Despite the restrictions imposed on their operations, the lack of government support has necessitated direct service provision by CSOs to address the immediate needs of the people (D, personal communication, May 19th, 2023), such as the distribution of food in communities.

> *The progress was compromised, in a sense, because now you have human rights organizations doing direct service again, when in fact [it is] supposed to be advocacy (E, personal communication, May 23rd, 2023)*

Therewith, the way how the pandemic led to a downscale of operations was being described. Such changes have been observed across all member organizations, including AFAD which shifted its psycho-social support program to assist the families to survive since the victim's families are considered vulnerable to the consequences of the pandemic. Adaptive strategies involved personal precautions such as self-censorship which a respondent intentionally engaged in to mitigate potential risk. "Now I [am less active] because maybe they attack my […] family, […] or DAXING my identity" the interviewee cited her concerns for personal safety (C, personal communication, May 11th, 2023).

The technological adaptation has posed a significant challenge for the victim's families (B, personal communication, May 11th, 2023). Since Signal was a new platform for most of them, the initial platform WhatsApp continued to be used. However, the organization

recognized the need to ensure safety for both itself and the victim's families. Consequently, measures were implemented, such as refraining from sensitive discussions to minimize online exposure. Red-tagging and other restrictions that lead to misinformation feed into the lack of awareness from the public. "People think [Human Rights] do not matter, people do not understand our work" (C, personal communication, May 11th, 2023), resulting from ignorance on matters related to human rights. Respondent E explained that there is no discussion on why Human Rights exist, why it is needed, and why it should not be taken away (E, personal communication, May 23rd, 2023). Next to this, stigmas and fear attached to human rights activism were observed to discourage society's participation in such matters. Participant B stated that "a lot of youngsters do not want to be associated with this" (B, personal communication, May 11th, 2023).

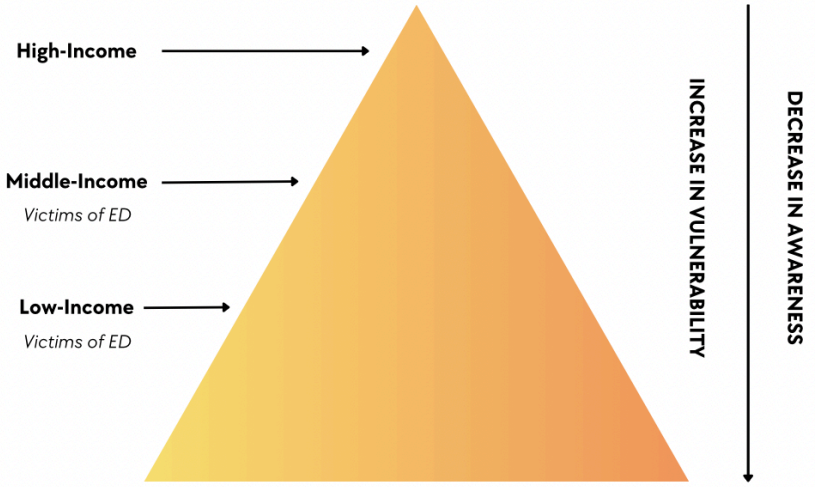
Nevertheless, next to the measures taken by the government to keep civil society from participating in activism, it is worth presenting another factor that contributes to the lack of awareness. This is the societal structure that surrounds people and influences their values and decisions. It is pertinent to note that the lower class in the Philippines is about pure survival, while the middle class does not possess generational wealth which makes their status vulnerable. The pandemic has exacerbated poverty, leading to involuntary hunger and unemployment which made people experience a lot of hardships (F, personal communication, May 30th, 2023). With respect to enforced disappearances, it can be stated that low-income households, particularly male breadwinners, are frequently the targets (B, personal communication, May 11th, 2023). Furthermore, "classism is very much alive" (F, personal communication, May 30th, 2023) which has further widened social disparities, inevitably making the lower Filipino class the most vulnerable. Moreover, respondent E emphasized the relevance of relationships in this context. Whilst poor people mostly have vertical relationships in the system, CSO networks are more likely to have connections with represent power in the system. Therefore, the interviewee sees the lower class as being more at risk than CSOs (E, personal communication, May 23rd, 2023). This was

corroborated by another respondent who revealed that HRO did not feel the consequences as severely as other parts of society (D, personal communication, May 19th, 2023).

In this context, Figure 3 was created to demonstrate the findings above. As stated by the respondents, the figure shows that victims of enforced disappearances and their families mostly belong to the low-income or middle-income class. Due to already existing issues in the Philippines, such as poverty and unemployment, which have been intensified during the pandemic, only a little attention is paid to the status and the need for human rights. As observed by several participants of this study, this leads to a lack of awareness about Human Rights and CSOs. Consequently, the low-income class was identified to be put most at risk, which results in the highest level of vulnerability.

Figure 3

Level of Awareness and Vulnerability in societal classes



Source: Author

However, participant F identified covid-19 as an opportunity for CSOs to continue the discussion and inform people about their rights (F, personal communication, May 30th, 2023). Next to this, the concept of webinars enabled access to a wider audience which was seen as an opportunity to increase awareness in society. Moreover, online platforms were seen as a tool to strengthen the network of AFAD and member organizations and communication was

experienced in an easier and more accessible way. Respondents noted the increased efficiency of online meetings, as online meetings required a stronger focus on the agenda (A, personal communication, May 22nd, 2023). Besides this, respondents identified the importance of the utility of fact-based evidence through documentation and engagement with stakeholders to advance advocacy objectives (B, personal communication, May 11th, 2023). Additionally, reporting mechanisms were set up to address online violence and intimidation (C, personal communication, May 11th, 2023). Respondent F, a researcher, and consultant for organizational development pointed out the relevance of engaging with the community and networking amongst Human Rights activists. Communicating with the public might be considered the best way to deal with shrinking civic space without being provided with public support. Beyond this, the importance of familiarization with the interplay of different policies and the creation of risk-informed plans was emphasized.

Since civic space deals with “every aspect of the lives of people, social and political, [...] and the environment they live in” (F, personal communication, May 30th, 2023), it is deemed crucial to address Working In Difficult Environments (WIDEn) in this context (A, personal communication, May 22nd, 2023). This is a concept created by AFAD which focuses on the political, economic, socio-cultural, technological, legal, and environmental considerations in regard to civic space. It particularly refers to the countries AFAD operates in and gives insights into the status of the civic space of each country. WIDEn enables CSOs to comprehend the context and interrelationships of elements of shrinking civic space and hence it feeds into the organizations’ responses.

6.9. Conclusion

The response of the government to the pandemic has had a significant impact on Civil Society Organizations. Although the imperative need to secure the population’s health has been a governmental concern, the political objectives of the government seem to have influenced the handling of the situation, in a manner that disregards Human Rights guidelines. This has been viewed as “a battle of urgency for health service and […] looking

after the political future (F, personal communication, May 30th, 2023). AFAD and its member organizations' advocacy of Human Rights were evidently conflicting with the objectives of the national authorities, hence legislations that restrict CSOs' efforts. It is increasingly noticeable that there exists a need for greater awareness of Human Rights principles and wider acceptance of initiatives of CSO in order to increase CSOs' effectiveness, particularly after the pandemic.

Discussion and Conclusion

This section intends to answer the research question concluded from the analysis of the research results.

How are AFAD and its member organizations affected by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on shrinking civic space?

During the covid-19 pandemic, AFAD and its member organization experienced several constraints regarding their freedom of expression, freedom of association, and freedom of assembly. These constraints were rooted in the government's response to the pandemic and have been carried out in various ways. The lockdown seems to be the most evident limitation for Civil Society Organizations in its restriction of any physical activities, which is the core work of AFAD and its member organizations. However, another significant effect on respective CSOs was carried out by the government through violation, surveillance, stigmatization, and discrediting measures. These led to intimidation of both Civil Society and Civil Society Organizations.

Furthermore, these constraints necessitated an adaptation from AFAD and its member organizations. It can be described as a downscaling of their operations by compromising their efforts. To give an example, AFAD and its member organizations had to shift their communication to virtual platforms which conflicted again with the lack of online safety, and digital surveillance but also the unfamiliarity with technologies by the victim's families. Next to the transformation of communication platforms, Civil Society Organizations

had difficulties aiming for the achievement of their objectives since the governments did not sufficiently respond to the needs of society. This resulted in CSOs shifting their efforts from advocacy services to service delivery. In this context, the research revealed another challenge which is the vulnerability of Filipino society. The pandemic emphasized already existing issues such as poverty. In combination with the fact that most victims of enforced disappearances belong to the low/middle class posed significant challenges for CSOs.

7.1. Review of conceptual framework

The conceptual framework was useful in the sense that it allowed the researcher to understand the connectedness of the elements of shrinking civic space. It provided the researcher with a framework that was exemplified by the practical experiences of AFAD, its member organizations, and researchers who have investigated the political interference of the government during covid-19. The insights revealed that the influence of the pandemic that the CSOs experienced were predominantly rooted in rights-based space, meaning legislations set up by the government. Next to rights-based space, the needs-induced space also had a significant impact on AFAD and its member organizations by creating a feeling of necessity which resulted in service delivery instead of limiting the efforts to advocacy. In this context, the conceptual framework determines the contribution of civil society activism to civic space. Even though the research did confirm this assumption, it was proven wrong that the pandemic provided civil society with more civic space. Instead, shifting the efforts to service delivery hindered the effectiveness of achieving the organizations' efforts. Lastly, the relevance of the economic discourse during covid and its role in shrinking civic space, and its impact on civil society could not be analyzed due to the limited information gathered throughout this research. This creates a need for further research.

The interplay between shrinking civic space and civil society organizations has received limited attention in academic literature. However, observations on the development of civic space, particularly in the wake of the covid-19 pandemic, have brought to light the need to study the control mechanisms carried out by national regimes during times of such

crisis. As such, this contribution examined the possibilities for authoritarian regimes to further restrict civic space and limit CSOs' activities during a time of crisis. By analyzing the current state of civic space during the pandemic and determining its impacts on CSOs, this study contributes to the scant literature in this field and provides an impetus for further research. Ultimately, such research is critical to comprehending the intersection between civil society and governance in the context of crisis so that communities and/or organizations can be better equipped to navigate the complexities of the modern world.

Contribution to Managing Projects in a Globalized World Project

Since AFAD experiences a shrinking civic space which affects its efforts, the project intends to provide insightful recommendations to assist AFAD in operating in difficult environments. As a prerequisite, it is crucial to grasp the key components of shrinking civic space and the impact it exerts on the organization. By delving into this issue, the research provides the project team with an in-depth understanding of AFAD's connection to the phenomenon of shrinking civic space. While this study focuses on AFAD and its member organizations' experience during the pandemic, other project team members' research encompassed exploring best practices and successful strategies to respond to shrinking civic space. Combining the findings of the studies, the team can effectively identify and prioritize recommendations aligned with AFAD and its member organization's needs, circumstances, and capacities.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Endorsement Letter

Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances
afad.asia@protonmail.com www.afad-online.org afad.online @AFAD_Updates (+63) 922 737 6877

April 26, 2023

XXX

Dear XXX,

Greetings from the Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD)!

We are writing to endorse the graduate students of Windesheim Honours College (WHC) in Zwolle, Netherlands who are currently interning at AFAD.

AFAD is hosting them from April 3 to June 31, 2023, to conduct a study on responding to working in difficult environments. This collaboration is part of the federation's long-term partnership and solidarity with the WHC. The interns' research project contributes to the federation's research and documentation, and campaign and lobbying efforts for and with the victim families of enforced disappearance.

Dayenne Deumer, Elisa Haaijman, Fay Goedbloed, Frédérique Hoogland, and Marie Joost are third-year college students of WHC, currently taking their courses in Global Project and Change Management. The main study objective is to identify the elements and typologies of shrinking civic space that would enable the Federation to design appropriate and responsive programs and projects for victim families of enforced disappearance.

XXX is a key element in our desire to be as comprehensive as possible in our understanding of the unfortunate phenomenon of shrinking civic space and difficult environments for human rights defenders. Hence, our endorsement for the interns is to reach out to your kind office.

For questions or clarifications, you may get in touch with Ms. Daphne Navelino, Philippine Project Coordinator, at phcoordinator.afad@protonmail.com, 09152958420, or 8658 4756.

Thank you very much for your time, and we hope you will be available on the date of their request.

Sincerely yours,

(signed)
Jose Marie Faustino
Secretary-General

Appendix 2

Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

Dear XXX,

I am Marie Joost and together with my colleagues I am doing a study on shrinking civic space. Since the research is being conducted for the Windesheim University of Applied Science and the Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD), the publishment of the results is up to them.

My study aims to identify how the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on shrinking civic space affects AFAD and its member organizations. In this regard, I will investigate the elements of civic space, how AFAD and its member organizations experience the impact of Covid-19 on the shrinking civic space, and how they respond to this impact.

I request your time and cooperation to be a key informant for an in-depth interview. The interview will focus on your views and experiences with the impact of Covid-19 on civic space and I expect the interview to last approximately 1 to 1.5 hours.
You may choose not to answer any questions during the interview. It will be conducted in a conversational style where no answer is wrong although follow-up questions may be asked at certain points of the interview.
We assure you that your answers will not be linked to you personally and that all data files will be secured and kept confidential. I will video record the interview, with your consent, to ensure the accuracy of data collection. However, transcriptions of the interview will be anonymized to ensure confidentiality.

Thank you very much.

Marie Joost
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Consent

I have understood the information provided to me by the researcher and I give my free consent to participate as a key informant.

Name _____ Place _____

Signature _____ Date _____