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Push and Pull Factors in Rural Filipino Youth's Outmigration from Agricultural Communities

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ABSTRACT

Rural youth outmigration is a phenomenon that can change the agricultural landscape of farming communities. The Philippines has witnessed an unprecedented youth exodus from rural to urban areas in past decades. This paper explored this issue in rice farming communities in two Philippine provinces, Aurora and Albay. Sixty-eight farmers' children aged 13–21 years old participated in this research. This paper analyzed the level of youth involvement in farm work and their perceptions on farming, which can ultimately inform their decision to migrate or continue farming. Parental discourses influencing youth decisions to migrate were then investigated. This research used mobility maps, time transects, photovoice outputs, in-depth and key informant interviews, and group discussions. While intentions to migrate were high, young individuals had a strong desire to remain connected to their family's farms. Hence, policymakers would do well to assist those who leave the rural areas and return after some time. Equal attention should be given to those who may not return to rural areas but are willing to invest in farming to employ their poor relatives. Migrants can often raise the resources needed to finance the input-intensive rice farming operations.

Keywords: youth, outmigration, education, return, leavers

JEL classification: O, I20, Z

INTRODUCTION

The Philippines has a long history of migration that started in the 19th century during Spanish colonization when Filipinos manned the ships of the Manila-Acapulco trade (Samonte et al. 1995). Orbeta and Abrigo (2009) noted that the country's strong ties with the United States (US) have also made it a favorite destination among Filipinos wanting to migrate. Between 1975 and 1985, male Filipino migrants dramatically increased, particularly in the Middle East where a construction boom required architects, engineers, and other skilled migrants. However, in recent years, female Filipino migrants have outnumbered males (Bautista 2002; Gultiano and Urich 2005; Orbeta and Abrigo 2009) due to the demand for nurses and caregivers in developed countries (Puyat 2010) and for domestic workers and entertainers in other Asian countries, particularly Japan (Bautista 2002; Orbeta and Abrigo 2009). According to the Philippine Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), demand for overseas Filipino workers (OFW) will be greater in the future as more caregivers are needed in developed countries with aging population (Ang 2008; Bautista 2002). Sea-based employment has also increased, with close to 267,000 Filipino sea-based workers in 2007 (Orbeta and Abrigo 2009).

While information on the number of migrants from agricultural families is scarce, some evidence attests to the youth's decreasing contribution to agricultural labor in recent years. Canlas and Pardalis (2009) note that agricultural youth involvement dropped 15 percentage points, from 48.9 percent in 1988 to 33.8 percent in 2006. At the same time, the gross domestic product (GDP) contribution of agriculture, fishery, and forestry decreased from 23.6 percent to 18.8 percent. Paris et al. (2010) reported that among rice farming households in the Philippines, adult sons and daughters

tend to migrate. Particularly, those with some education tend to look for and take on jobs in key cities, even jobs where farming would have been more profitable (Paris et al. 2010). Indeed, most young Asians aged 15–24 years old are more likely to be working in non-agricultural communities (Hettige 2010).

Current trends in outmigration in the Philippines suggest unfavorable labor scenarios for its agricultural landscape. Presently, the country has aging farmers (Amongo et al. 2011) and decreasing enrolment in agricultural courses (Tuquero and Quimbo 2008; Quismundo 2012). Departure from rice farming or agriculture among the youth is not unique to the Philippines. This trend has also been observed in other Asian countries such as Vietnam, China, and India (Hettige 2010; Punch and Sugden 2012).

In the context of the culture of migration, this paper aims to contribute to the debate concerning youth outmigration from agricultural communities. Towards this, first, the paper explores the level of involvement of young Filipinos in the rural landscape, paying particular attention to rice farming. Second, it argues that there are many contextual factors that influence the decision of young people to migrate with respect to their place of origin. Education, which is not a popular reason in other studies concerning youth in agricultural communities, and parental interventions contribute to these contextual factors. Third, it argues that attention must be given to the returners or those who decide to leave, but may return after some time. This argument was drawn from the classification of the Filipino youth in agriculture: leavers (Gultiano and Urich 2010) and returners (Manalo and van de Fliert 2012). Fourth, it pays particular attention to those belonging to the “will-stay-no-matter-what” category. The Philippines, along with most Asian countries, is known to have a “youth bulge” (Hettige 2010; Gultiano and Xenos 2004) or a preponderance of young

individuals aged 15–24 years old. In 2010, there were 21 million young Filipinos in a total population of 90 million (NYC [National Youth Commission] 2010). Finally, this paper contributes to discussions concerning an increase in attention given to education that enables young individuals to command better work conditions as skilled migrants (see Punch and Sugden 2012).

RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODS

Research Context

The paper was based on empirical data from a research conducted in 2011 among farmers' children aged 13–21 years old in two Philippine provinces, namely, Aurora, which is 237 kilometers (km) north of Manila; and Albay, which is 522 km south of Manila. The terms “children,” “young people,” and “young individuals” were used interchangeably in this paper to refer to people belonging to the aforementioned age group. The two provinces were selected based on their contrasting characteristics in terms of access to information, major economic activities, and level of urbanization.

Study Sites

Aurora province is a mountainous area in northern Philippines, where some 80 percent of the population lives in rural areas (Provincial Government of Aurora 2011). Farming, particularly coconut and rice, and fishing in the Pacific Ocean are its major economic activities. Specifically, the research was conducted in lowland and upland villages in the town of Ma. Aurora.

Lowland areas in Ma. Aurora have access to paved roads and are relatively connected to basic facilities such as hospitals, markets, churches, and schools. The town center of Ma.

Aurora has plenty of computer access points. It is also where the Municipal Agriculture Office (MAO), where agricultural technologists are based and information on rice farming are available, is located.

The upland villages were Kadayacan and Bayanihan. Travelling from these upland villages to the town center is expensive, with transportation cost at about USD 1, a significant amount as most Filipinos live on less than USD 1.35 daily (ADB [Asian Development Bank] 2008). Roads leading to these villages are unpaved and impassable for ordinary vehicles. Ethnic minorities such as *Igorot* and *Ilongot* dominate the two villages. The elders are authoritative especially when it comes to decision-making. Access to information and communications technologies (ICT) is not readily available. While mobile phone ownership in the Philippines is high among young individuals, some of the youth in the villages did not own phones during the time of data collection. The nearest shopping malls from Ma. Aurora are in San Jose (121 km) and Cabanatuan (177 km) cities, which are 4–5 hours away via public transportation.

On the other hand, Albay, located in the Bicol region, is better off than Aurora. Roads in Albay are paved, keeping the villages connected to key cities such as Legazpi and Naga. Computer access points are readily available around the province. People have diverse sources of livelihood and can easily migrate to Manila. Rice farming remains one of the dominant sources of income for many of its rural dwellers.

The research was conducted in lowland and upland areas. The study sites were Sta. Teresa and San Francisco villages in the town of Malilipot; and Hacienda and Agñas in San Miguel Island, Tabaco City representing lowland and upland areas, respectively. The town of Malilipot is accessible from the city

center by boat (15–20 minutes or about 20 km). At the time of data collection, a community high school in San Miguel Island recently acquired new computer sets, which students could use free of charge. Before the acquisition of these new computers, there was only one computer in the area owned by a school teacher. Despite its isolation, people are able to access information from the outside, owing to frequent boat trips to and from Tabaco City.

Research Participants

Research participants were selected based on the following criteria: 15–24 years old; a child of a rice farmer; and belongs to a household whose livelihood depends on rice farming. High school teachers and the Albay-based chapter of Children International, a global nongovernmental organization whose thrust is child sponsorship, recommended the research participants for Aurora and Albay, respectively. Altogether, 68 young people participated in the study.

Research participants from Aurora were all high school students aged 13–16 years old while those from Albay were aged 13–21 years old, 27 of them university students. Several adjustments were made along the way, which would explain the presence of participants below 15 years old. Some of the teachers made a mistake in conveying the information relating to the participants to be invited during the data collection. In some instances, participants who were below 15 just turned up, and hence they were not sent home. In Aurora, participants from lowland areas were students of Ma. Aurora National High School while participants from upland areas, who were mostly Igorot and Ilongot, were students of Bayanihan National High School. Of the participants in both provinces, 51 were from middle-class families; the rest were from poor households living on less than USD 1.35 daily.

A key limitation of this study is that participants were either high school or university students. Worldviews of participants who go to school will certainly be different from those who are out of school. The authors recognize that this has significant repercussions on the data that would be generated.

The study employed qualitative research methods such as time transect, mobility map, photovoice, and individual and key informant interviews. Beazley and Ennew (2006, p. 194) describe time transect as useful in exploring issues related to “how people spend their time—time as a factor related to seeking services, time for being involved in work activities, and time spent looking for food/resources.” Participants were asked to construct a pie chart of their usual activities in a week. Mobility mapping, on the other hand, is useful in investigating issues related to “mobility of men, women, and children in rural and urban areas” (Beazley and Ennew 2006, p. 194). Participants were asked to draw a map highlighting the places they usually visit weekly. Meanwhile, Photovoice is a “process by which people can identify, represent, and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique” (Wang and Burris 1997, p. 369). Participants were instructed to take photos of anything that would represent their dreams for themselves or for their families. Cameras were lent to them for this exercise.

Participants were then asked to individually present their outputs in a group. After which, probing questions were asked. Group discussions minimized the risk of misinterpreting individual outputs. Individual interviews were carried out to probe into themes that emerged during group discussions. The interviews helped flesh out information from participants who were not comfortable sharing their thoughts in groups. Key informant interviews were also conducted to help shed light on issues that transpired during

data collection. All group discussions were filmed (except for upland Aurora) and audio-recorded with their permission. All interviews were audio recorded. The direct quotes were translated to English for the purposes of this article. Great care was observed in ensuring that the translated material remains faithful to the context and the original text.

All participants were asked to formally consent to their participation in the study. They were also allowed to withdraw their participation from the research at any point of time. Anonymity in writing this paper was strictly observed by using pseudonyms for the research participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Involvement in Rice Farming

While rice farming is a major source of livelihood in both provinces, young people's actual involvement in it varies, with upland participants more involved than lowland participants. The mobility map (Figure 1) shows rice farming as one of the major activities of a male participant in upland Aurora.

Farming in upland Aurora is a family enterprise, with each family member assigned specific tasks to perform. Almost all of the participants reported that they accompanied their parents to visit their farm. Accordingly, these farm visits enhanced their familiarity with

Figure 1. Mobility map showing rice farming as one of the main activities of a male participant



farm tasks. Meanwhile, most of the lowland participants, particularly the girls, were either not involved in farming or merely assigned to deliver food to farm workers.

In Albay, almost the same results were observed. The upland participants performed tasks such as cleaning the store room, fixing drainage, and preparing seedbeds. Lowland participants in Albay were hardly involved in farming. Most of them were focused on their studies, with no other responsibilities, while a few worked in cottage handicraft industries. Albay is home to abaca or Manila hemp, the fibers of which are key materials for export-quality bags and sandals. Some male participants sold stones from quarry sites in the province. In all group discussions, except in upland Aurora, the participants reported that they were more involved in the farm when they were younger. Specifically, university students stayed in the city on weekdays, and only went back to San Miguel Island on weekends. The following quotes from university students during the group discussions capture this:

"I used to help in picking up golden apple snails. I can't do that now since I am now in the university. I am busy with my studies."
(Lina, 17, Hacienda)

I go back to San Miguel Island on weekends to ask for allowance. I also help in the farm.
(Male participant, 17, Agñas)

I go back to San Miguel Island every week. I'm there... every Sunday to ask for money... I help in doing farm chores... well, just seldom now. (Male participant, 17, Hacienda)

Punch and Sugden (2012) observed a similar trend in China, Vietnam, and India, where children were highly involved in the farm during their early years in school, but became less involved when they reached high school so they could focus on their studies. Findings also show that upland dwellers from Aurora were heavily involved in all stages of

rice production. However, this requires further inquiry as unfavorable sites such as rain-fed and upland areas display higher migration incidence than favorable ecosystems (Paris et al. 2010). In addition, findings contradict Punch and Sugden (2012) who observed loss of traditional agro-ecological practices among young Vietnamese in the uplands.

In terms of policy, findings seem to suggest that the Upland Rice Development Program (URDP) of the Philippine government is in the right direction. It aims to "harness the potential of the upland rice ecosystem as one source of the country's rice supply; promote sustainable farming systems and practices in the upland communities, thus increasing the farmers' income; develop the upland peoples as self-sufficient food communities; and establish a seed propagation program and protocols for traditional and modern rice varieties released for cultivation in the upland ecosystem" (Biag 2011, pp. 5–6). However, the program needs to critically weigh the benefits of improved upland rice production against its potential damage to the environment, particularly forest degradation. In Aurora, burning forest areas for rice farming is a rampant practice (Figure 2).

Perceptions of Farming

Favorable and unfavorable perceptions of rice farming were surfaced during the interviews and group discussions. In general, most (61 participants) had favorable perceptions, which include seeing farming as a social security, source of income, wealth multiplier, and an honorable vocation. Unfavorable perceptions include seeing farming as anti-beauty, a difficult task to perform, and a not so glamorous venture.

Twenty-seven of the research participants considered farming as a form of social security, which they could resort to if they fail their professional board exams or if they are not able to find jobs in the city. This is an important

Figure 2. Practice of slash-and-burn in Aurora, Philippines

point not just in the Philippines but in other Asian countries as well, where competition for jobs is tough (Hugo 2010; Punch and Sugden 2012; Nguyen 2010). This can mean that if young people are pressed for jobs, farming will be resorted to, whether they fully like it or not. In hindsight, farming therefore can be the hub of people who may not really have the knack for it, but are just bound by circumstances owing to the scarcity of jobs available for them. This will have repercussions on the assistance, especially training programs on farming, the public and private sectors alike should offer, the training curriculum and approach for instance.

Additionally, for five of the research participants, farming had always provided food for their families. Quotes from female participants illustrate this point:

“Of course, farming is enjoyable... even when I’m already rich, I will still buy land for rice farming so I will have a steady supply of it...” (Love, 14, lowland Aurora)

I want to invest in farming because most successful people today are farmers (Maritess, 16, lowland Aurora)

Ten participants considered farming as a wealth multiplier. This could explain their hesitance to sell their land, despite most of them having plans to go abroad. In a similar vein, 60 percent of participants who do not own land wanted to buy land so they could have another source of income. The following quotes illustrate this:

“If it makes your hand dirty, there’s money in it...” (Gina, 15, Sta. Teresa, Albay)

“I want to buy a coconut farm someday... coconut has many uses, and the fact that it continuously bears fruit...we will never be poor again.” (Grace, 16, upland Aurora)

In Aurora, 44 percent of its 8,317 hectares of agricultural land are devoted to coconut production (Provincial Government of Aurora 2011). It seems that young individuals have

recognized the numerous uses of coconuts, from medicine to handicrafts. Meanwhile, a few regard farming as an honorable vocation:

“... because farming as a vocation is something you can be proud of, and the fact that it helps a lot of people.” (Clarisse, 13, Kadayacan, Aurora)

This seems to suggest that some young individuals still have high regard for farming despite not being a lucrative profession (see Hettige 2010; Punch and Sugden 2012;) and many people abandoning farming.

While favorable perceptions about rice farming abound in all study sites, the quotes below reflect a few participants' dislike of farming:

“I told my mother that I can't do it since I could not stand the scorching heat of the sun. My mother told me that I should get used to it since that's what I will be doing in the future. I told her that I will work hard to find a better job.” (Marie, 14, Kadayacan, Aurora)

“Those who are dark-skinned will even get darker [because of farming]...” (Christine, 15, Bayanihan, Aurora)

“It makes my fingernails dirty... so dark! [referring to picking golden apple snails] (Anne, 15, Hacienda, Albay)

“I am afraid to farm since there are lots of leeches in there!” (Tina, 15, Agñas, Albay)

The quotes above seem to suggest that the participants see farming as anti-beauty, especially in a country where a lighter skin complexion is favored over dark. This may be related to Punch's (2007) research which found that girls prefer to migrate to Argentina as domestic workers as opposed to staying in Bolivia where they had to take care of animals, which was considered to be a difficult and unglamorous job. Meanwhile, the youth in this research lamented the fact that they had to bend down the whole day, especially during transplanting. In connection with this, one of the

research participants in Albay took a photo of a beautiful sofa during the photovoice exercise to express his desire to live a more comfortable life someday. It was found that the boy was fetching water daily from a deep well several kilometers away from their house.

There were a few participants who felt that they belonged to a lower social class solely because they came from rice-farming households. The quotes below capture their sentiments:

“I'm a farmer's daughter, and I feel like I'm so low. I want that after I finish school I am always on top.” (Marian, 13, Bayanihan, Aurora)

“One of my friends said in no way will he get into farming in the future. He has big dreams... he has seen his parents, who are farmers, in dire poverty all their lives...” (Group discussion participant, Albay)

A male participant lamented that rice farming alone could not meet their family's needs, and that if he could have his way, he would sell off their land:

“I want us to just sell our land... because farming alone could not meet the growing needs of the family. Sell the land and start a business... money is faster that way.” (Mario, 17, San Francisco, Albay)

Although generally participants held positive perceptions about rice farming, policymakers should remember that contextual factors surrounding young people can very easily sway them to pursue other directions (Punch 2004). After all, perceptions do not always translate to actions.

Parents Do Not Want their Children to Farm

Almost a third (30 participants) reported that their parents did not encourage them to be involved in farming. The following quotes reflect instances when they have been spared from working in the farm:

"I have never been involved in farming because my parents don't require me to help. We just hire people to do that for us."
(Rosa, 16, lowland Aurora)

They [parents] just discuss it [farming] among themselves because I do not have enough knowledge on farming. Oftentimes, I just leave." (Mark, 15, lowland Aurora)

"They [parents] do not want us to help in farming. They want us to just focus on our studies." (Mary Ann, 15, San Francisco, Albay)

The quotes above seem to suggest that parents are not particularly inclined to require their children to help in the farm. For instance, even if Rosa was interested, or at least curious to help in the farm, the opportunity was not presented to her. Meanwhile, Mark and many others were not involved in discussions about farming, which disempowers young people. Participants who were attending university could openly discuss their ideas with their parents. In the group discussions, it was reported that most decisions came from the father, with some inputs from the mother, while children were passive listeners most of the time. On the other hand, what Mary Ann said seems to suggest that parents would prefer their children to finish their schooling instead of getting involved in the farm. Similarly, Punch and Sugden (2012) observed this trend in Vietnam, India, and China where parents were determined to chart new directions for their children by investing in education. It should be noted, however, that these findings were not observed among participants in upland Aurora, where parents elicited the help of their children in the farm.

In the Philippines, rice farming is not as profitable compared to some western countries. Most Filipino rice farmers are landless and mired in poverty, owing to costly inputs, low buying price for their produce, inadequate irrigation facilities, and ambulant traders (Arida 2009). Filipino farmers earn a little more than USD 2.00 per day (PhilRice [Philippine Rice Research Institute] 2008), which is barely enough for their basic needs. While efforts are underway to improve these standards, farm mechanization level has yet to be raised. Hence, the drudgery and poverty attached to farming might have prompted some parents of the participants to abandon farming. Yaqub (2010) notes that migration is a coping strategy among poor households to reduce their vulnerability.

In addition, farming is risky in Albay and Aurora as destructive typhoons frequent both provinces, resulting in flooding and landslides. Participants from San Miguel Island, Albay recalled an incident when after a typhoon, their rice plants lodged and their houses were destroyed. In Albay, volcanic eruption due to Mount Mayon Volcano, one of the most active volcanoes in the Philippines, makes rice farming more uncertain and risky. Quotes from participants in Albay during the group discussions capture this:

"People were unable to harvest anything because rice crops were covered with ashes from the volcano."

"Houses were destroyed, paddies were washed out due to a typhoon... some fishermen also died..."

"It's scary in San Miguel when there's a typhoon. There was a time when farmers were unable to harvest anything... rice lodged... few weeks ago, there was a tsunami alert here..."

While rice farming is a major source of livelihood in the two provinces, uncertainties associated with it may have lured parents to encourage their children to pursue other

careers. Risk as a factor in fisherfolk's decisions to diversify their income sources was also observed in China (Punch and Sugden 2012), and in rice farming communities in Thailand (Paris et al. 2010). The perennial issues on rice farming in the Philippines should not be ignored especially as the country has more than two million rice farmers, whose lives are intertwined with the rice farm.

Education in Preparation for Migration

Proclivity to migrate was high among participants in all study sites. Forty-one of them wanted to leave so they could pursue their dreams such as nursing, seafaring, engineering, and teaching. Although there were others who wanted to stay behind even after they had left to study in a university in another province. The quote below captures this:

"I would like to study [education] in Cabanatuan City, but I would like to return here (Ma. Aurora) afterwards. I want to teach here." (Glenda, 13, lowland Aurora).

The desire to join professional industries in the future was high, as shown in their photovoice outputs. A female from lowland Aurora took a photo of a nurse measuring the height of one of the students while another female from the same area took a photo of her teacher, demonstrating her desire to emulate her in the future. More than half (37 participants) of them took photos of beautiful houses, farms, and variety stores—all depicting a longing for better lives. A desire to help in family finances was also high, as depicted in the following quotes:

I want to study hard so I could find a job, and so I'd be able to help my parents. This is my way of thanking them for all the sacrifice they have made for me. (Marlon, 17, Hacienda, Albay)

Father, if I get a job, just hire someone to do the farm chores... that way, we can continue with our farming venture. This

time, however, you are the one paying them so you can take a rest... (Mike, 18, Hacienda, Albay)

The quote above demonstrates Punch's (2002) concept of negotiated interdependence:

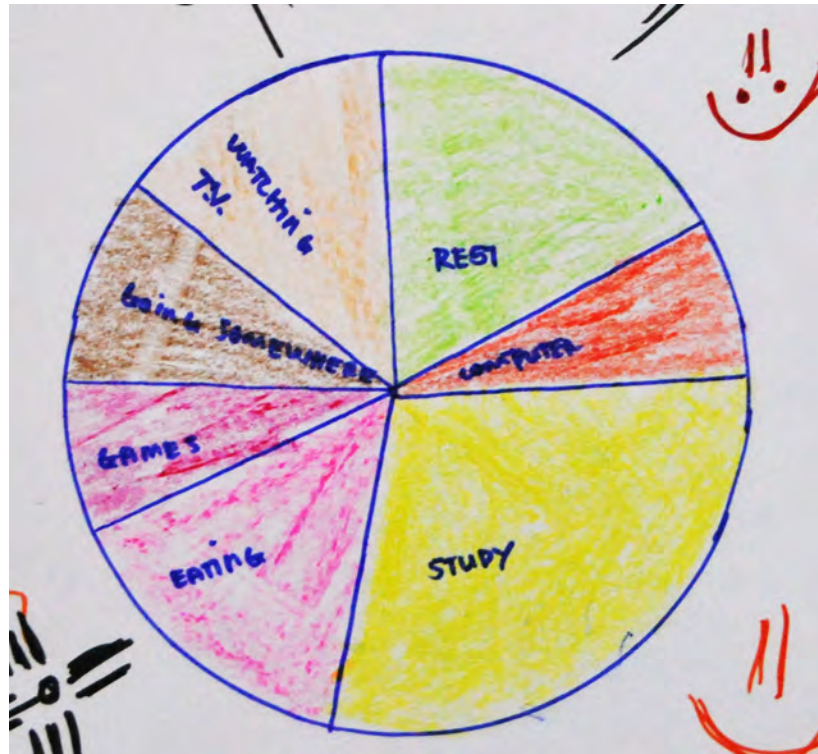
...reflects how young people in the majority world are constrained by various structures and cultural expectations of family responsibilities yet have the ability to act within and between such constraints, balancing household and individual needs. (p.132)

The participants unanimously identified acquiring a college degree as a means to achieve their dreams. This could explain the importance that participants accorded to education. In general, in a given week, participants devoted 25 to 30 percent of their time to studying, as shown in the time transect chart (Figure 3).

Research participants saw education as a means to a better life and to achieve their aspirations in life, which, for many Filipinos, pertains to securing a job abroad. The Philippines has a long migration history that involves skilled and educated migrants. In recent years, countries such as the US have been extremely exclusive in their migration policies. Skilled migrants who can significantly contribute to their economic advancement are favored (Cariño 1994 as cited in Orbeta and Abrigo 2009). Furthermore, the Philippine mass media have consistently glamorized images of grand opportunities awaiting students who finish degrees that are in demand overseas such as nursing and seafaring.

In the Philippines, education has been highly valued for years (see Puyat 2010; Sandoval, Mangahas, and Guerrero 1998;) in contrast to some countries like Vietnam, where parents' strong focus on education is a recent phenomenon (Punch and Sugden 2012). Similarly, in Bolivia, Punch (2004, 2010) found that young individuals were not convinced that education could improve their economic

Figure 3. A time transect showing studying as one of the activities that occupy a significant portion of their weekly schedule



outcomes, and as a result, they cut their studies short and migrated to Argentina for work.

Moreover, findings show that research participants migrated so they could earn a college degree. Migration for education has been documented among upland research participants in Albay and Aurora. For instance, research participants from San Miguel Island, Albay, moved to Tabaco City so they could attend university. This indicates the extent to which young Filipinos value education unlike in other countries such as Bolivia where migration for education is not popular among young individuals. Research participants who would leave only to return in the future typifies what Manalo and van de Fliert (2012) call "returners." The "returners" merit policymakers' attention because while there is strong evidence suggesting that young individuals are determined to migrate, there are

those who would like to return, or who may not return but would like to invest in farming someday.

The Returners

While many of the participants in both provinces expressed intent to leave the country, most of them (80%) expressed a desire to avoid severing ties with farming completely. While they hardly saw themselves doing farm work, someday they would still like to buy land and employ their poor relatives. The quotes below capture this:

"I will buy land so I can employ our poor relatives." (Marriot, 16, Kadayacan, Aurora)

"I agree. Investing in rice farming is the way to go. Our poor relatives can benefit from it. In our place, what happens is we divide the harvest. Having wider rice area means

more rice to divide among the farmers in our barrio.” (Mario, 16, Hacienda, Albay)

In McKay’s (2012) study on Ifugao migrants in the Philippines, it was found that locals who had migrated to Hong Kong and Canada sent money to purchase land so their relatives back home could continue with rice farming. McKay (2012) documented how these migrants borrowed money from lending institutions abroad.

Strong family ties is a traditional Filipino value, which can mean extended family structure (includes grandparents and other blood relatives). This is reflected in the very high personal remittances of OFWs for their families in the Philippines (Bautista 2002; Gultiano and Ulrich 2000). Likewise, Thorsen (2010) notes that cash remittances from young female migrants in Burkina Faso were considered as forms of love and affection. Thorsen (2010) documented the strong desire of migrants to send money despite their unfavorable circumstances in their host country. Similarly, research participants’ desire to find work was fuelled by a longing to contribute to the welfare of their family.

Meanwhile, 11 percent of the participants declared that “once a farmer, always a farmer!” A senior high school student’s photovoice output (Figure 4) taken in Aurora captures this argument. The participant, who wanted to study in a city, said the photograph reflects his gratitude to rice farming, which he would relay to his children someday to remind them that success is possible through rice farming.

Figure 4 shows a painting of a rice farm serving as a reminder that success is possible through farming

CONCLUSION

While there is consensus that poor people tend to migrate to urban areas either locally or abroad to reduce their vulnerability, upland rice farming communities in Aurora are an exception. Migration was not a recurring theme during group discussions with participants from poor households. Their deep involvement in farming and strong attachment to their home may suggest that, at the time of data collection, permanent migration was not a preferred option for them. However, contextual factors might sway them to pursue other directions in the future, as argued by several scholars (Bhabha 2010; Camacho 1999; Punch 2010). Therefore, continuous and serious engagement with them is necessary to maintain their interest in farming. Using the school as the nucleus of agricultural science, for instance, is in the right direction (Manalo 2013).

With farmers struggling to provide the needs of their households, they encourage their children to focus on their education rather than on farming in the hope of better employment outcomes for them. This should be a cause of concern among policymakers as future food production may be in jeopardy. Finding ways to make farming more profitable might inspire farmers to encourage their children to pursue farming as a source of livelihood.

While education for future success is not a very popular option for young individuals (see Punch 2004), this study has documented cases where education is highly valued as a path toward better paying jobs domestically and abroad, except in upland Aurora. Valuing education is not a new theme in Filipino youth research, as opposed to it being considered as a recent phenomenon in Vietnam (Punch and Sugden 2012). As argued earlier, it is the so-called Filipino dream to get a university degree in the hope of securing a stable income and improving one’s living standards, although

Figure 4. Painting showing a rice farm

in many instances it is not always the case. Education in the context of the research participants is very important even if pragmatic benefits are not always realized. Camacho (1999) notes how young Filipinos work to support their education.

Despite a strong desire to migrate, either temporarily or permanently, participants were reluctant to sever their ties with farming. Policymakers in rural development may see this as an opportunity for future investors in the rice farming industry. The input-intensive rice farming operations in the Philippines are hindering farmers from optimizing rice yields. Young individuals who plan to migrate may ultimately have the skills and finances needed to maintain these operations. However, they have to be engaged with to ensure that they will always have an incentive to farm or invest in farming. Meanwhile, creative strategies to continuously engage young individuals

who plan to stay in their family farms despite migration options are needed. Client-specific approaches in agricultural extension, more specifically those that are sensitive to the information needs and learning behaviors of young people, are necessary. This study calls for an approach that challenges the traditional by developing new agricultural extension modes. It is important, however, to remember the contextual factors surrounding the desire of young people from agricultural communities to stay, leave, or return.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to thank Constante T. Briones for editing the manuscript, and Frezzel Praise Tadle, Art Martinez, and Jong Belano for providing some literature cited in the paper.

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