

SOWING HOPE:

AGRICULTURE AS
AN ALTERNATIVE
TO MIGRATION FOR
YOUNG FILIPINOS?



A report of the



SCALABRINI MIGRATION CENTER

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SOWING HOPE: AGRICULTURE AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO MIGRATION FOR YOUNG FILIPINOS?

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The aging of farmers and the question of generational succession is a concern not only in the Philippines but in many countries. In the Philippines, the retreat of the youth from agriculture is happening in the context of a lagging agriculture sector (most of the country's poor are in this sector), rising education of young people, and high outmigration which inclines young Filipinos to imagine life beyond the national borders. The participation of young Filipinos in international migration is worrying because of their concentration in less skilled (and also less protected) jobs and the mismatch between their education and the jobs they work at. A dynamic agriculture sector at home can open many opportunities for young Filipinos

whose participation in the sector will also help address the aging of Filipino farmers.

Against this background, the study sought to explore how agriculture can be an alternative to migration, especially international labor migration. This question was examined by looking into the programs and policies aimed at encouraging youth involvement in agriculture and by exploring whether these initiatives do contribute in encouraging Filipinos to participate in agriculture as workers, movers and leaders. Toward this end, the study sought to: (1) survey the programs and actions intended to attract or retain young people in agriculture; (2) examine how selected programs may have contributed to creating opportunities for

the youth to get actively involved in agriculture, and document examples of young people as innovators in agriculture; and (3) conduct dissemination activities to contribute to policy-making, curriculum development, and training programs with the participation of young people.

The study adopted a qualitative approach to address these questions. Conceptually, the study was informed by the life-cycle perspective in understanding youth involvement in agriculture. Following the suggestion of AKATIGA and White (2015), the study also focused on the factors that shaped young Filipinos to choose farming. After the literature review and initial discussions with the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) of the Department of Agriculture, the research team selected ten cases which provided insights on programs aimed at encouraging youth participation in agriculture (n=3), young farmers (n=3), and young innovators in agriculture (n=4). The literature review and primary data collection—key informant interviews, group interviews and focus group discussions, supplemented by participant observation of selected activities—were carried out between July 2018 and January 2019. A

total of 21 key informant interviewees and 66 individuals took part in group interviews and focus group discussions. The research participants included young farmers, officers of the national 4-H Philippines, officers, members and advisers of selected local 4-H clubs, key officials and personnel of the Department of Agriculture and ATI, agriculture students, participants of agricultural training programs, founders of agriculture-related initiatives, key staff of organizations included in the study, and some beneficiaries or key partners of organizations profiled in the study. The collection of primary data entailed fieldwork in Metro Manila and the provinces of Laguna, Nueva Ecija, Rizal, Zamboanga del Sur, Isabela, Antique and Negros Occidental.

The literature review confirmed the increasing numbers of Filipinos leaving agriculture as well as the increasing mean age of Filipino farmers (57 is commonly cited; other reports mention 59). Since 1995, the service sector has overtaken agriculture as the top sector employing workers. The youth's declining interest in agriculture is also indicated by declining enrollment in agriculture-related programs in higher education, technical-

vocational training programs and senior high school.

Findings from existing research have identified several factors that hinder young Filipinos' involvement in agriculture: negative views associated with agriculture ("anti-beauty, a difficult task to perform, and a not so glamorous venture"); lack of family support; and structural factors (i.e., constraints in accessing (1) knowledge and education; (2) land; (3) financial services; (4) green jobs; (5) markets; and (6) engagement in policy dialogue. Research participants in this study mentioned similar reasons; they also added the lure of technology and non-farming employment options made possible by their higher level of education. Youth farmers liked the autonomy offered by farming, and they saw farming as work that contributes to society. The research participants were of the consensus that it is challenging to attract young people to farming. Thus, at this point in time, agriculture cannot yet be a viable alternative to migration.

The ATI has introduced many programs to encourage youth participation in agriculture: training programs (including Internet-based training programs),

scholarships, and awards and recognition of outstanding young farmers and young farmer organizations. It also supports the 4-H Club, which happens to be one of the longest running and far-reaching youth organizations focused on the training and empowerment of rural youth, inspired by the 4-H Club which was established in the United States. The private sector and non-governmental organizations also support youth-focused initiatives, mostly by recognizing outstanding youth or youth organizations in the field of agriculture. Overall, most initiatives are training-related, which responds to one of the six structural constraints, the lack of access to knowledge and education.

The ten cases provided some insights about involving young Filipinos in agriculture. The 4-H Club continues to be a major youth organization that promotes an appreciation of agriculture among young Filipinos. Outstanding local 4-H Clubs (such as the Taluksangay 4-H Club of Zamboanga City) are inspiring examples of how 4-H can develop and enhance the capacities of the youth. The approach of schools dedicated to training young farmers, such as the Kaneshige Farm Rural Campus Foundation, is a good model in providing hands-on training and

post-training support. The three young farmers who are profiled in this study attest to how 4-H Clubs can promote and nurture the interest in agriculture among young people. All three young farmers are 4-H Club members and got introduced to activities and training programs that not only nurtured their interest in agriculture, but also contributed to their empowerment. The last four case studies highlight the innovations introduced by young people, most of whom come from a non-agriculture background: improving farmers' access to capital (Cropital), promoting youth participation in policy dialogues (Young Professionals for Agricultural Development Philippines or YPARD Philippines), linking farmers to markets through Community Supported Agriculture (Good Food, Inc.), and empowering indigenous communities (Sierreza - Los Baños Community-Supported Agriculture/ Sierreza Zero-Waste Store & Artisan Café).

The youth are largely viewed as recipients or beneficiaries of agriculture-related programs, and less so as actors and innovators. Improving the youth's access to land, financial services, green jobs and markets will also unlock more spaces for the active participation of young Filipinos in a wide range of agriculture-related activities, not just in farming or food production. In this scenario, the youth can take on roles as trainers, investors, entrepreneurs, researchers, scientists, advocates, policy-makers, bridges between farmers and investors, and bridges between farmers and markets, among others. The disengagement of youth from agriculture may change in later years. With due attention to address the structural barriers to youth participation in agriculture, the sector can develop into a dynamic, viable option where young Filipinos can prosper and thrive.

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

The agriculture sector occupies a paradoxical place in the Philippines. Agriculture provides food on the table and yet, farmers are not valued and are among the poorest in the country. Given this state of affairs, those in agriculture, particularly the young, are voting with their feet, leaving agriculture in the hopes of finding better alternatives elsewhere. The retreat of young Filipinos from agriculture coupled with the aging of Filipino farmers—whose average age is 57-59—has generated concerns about generational succession and food security in the foreseeable future.

Domestically, the declining interest of young Filipinos in agriculture can be linked to several key trends: (1) the Philippines being a young country, (2) the declining contribution of agriculture to the Philippines' gross domestic product (GDP), and (3) the Philippines as a country of emigration.

- The Philippines is a young country, as indicated by a median age of 24.09 years (as of 2015), which means that half of the population fall below and above this age. In addition, young Filipinos have high levels of education compared to older cohorts. According to the 2013 Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS), Filipinos in the ages 20-24 and 25-29 have the highest share of having completed high school or higher education and those who can read, write, compute and comprehend (PSA, 2015).¹ The young are also more wired compared to the older population, which allows them access to a variety of information. About half—47 percent of the Filipino population—are active social media users, of whom, those in the ages 20-29 are most active users of Facebook. Social media have become an important platform not only to connect with family and friends, but also as a source

¹ Based on the 2013 FLEMMS, 74.9 percent and 73.1 percent of the 20-24 and 25-29 age groups, respectively, have completed high school or higher education, compared with the 50-59 (51.2 percent) and the 60-64 (43.1 percent) age groups. Also, in terms of the literacy indicator of knowing how to read, write, compute and comprehend, those in the youth groups (86.9 percent of the 20-24, and 84.8 percent of those 25-29) have higher literacy than the older age groups (70.4 percent of the 50-59 and 62.9 percent of the 60-64) (PSA, 2015: 37).

of news, for buying products and services, and for finding jobs.² Being young, more educated and more Internet-savvy expose young Filipinos to various life options; for those living in rural areas, young Filipinos now have more possibilities to consider making a life outside of agriculture.

- The Philippine population is still largely rural, 55.71 percent as of 2016,³ in which agriculture is the major economic activity. For a country with immense agricultural potentials, the share of agriculture to the country's GDP has been on a long-term decline. As of 2017, agriculture accounts for the smallest share of GDP—9.4 percent—relative to industry, 30.8 percent, and services, 59.8 percent. In the same year, the share of agricultural products to total exports stood at 9 percent, with total value amounting to USD5.28 million. In comparison, the share of agricultural products to total imports and the total value were higher, at 14 percent and USD12.519 million, respectively.⁴ Other than declining productivity, the quality of life of workers in agriculture has also been on the decline. A third of the poor in the Philippines is concentrated in the rural sector and are employed in low-skilled and low-productivity jobs in agriculture. These conditions have rendered agriculture unattractive, and as a result, the sector is losing workers. In 2016, agriculture employed 11.06 million people or 27 percent of total employment. In addition, agricultural workers are aging—the mean age of farmers is 57-59 years old. The young are moving out of agriculture, opting for internal and international migration in search of alternative employment.
- Young Filipinos' retreat from agriculture has been happening in the context of sustained and large-scale international migration from the Philippines. Temporary labor migration from the Philippines has gone uninterrupted since the 1970s (IOM and SMC, 2013; OECD and SMC, 2017; Asis, 2017). The migration literature has established the higher propensity to migrate among the young and those with more

² "Understanding Social Media in the Philippines: A Year End Report," 22 December 2018. Available from <https://houseofit.ph/understanding-social-media-in-the-philippines-a-year-end-report/>. Another source cites a higher percentage of Internet usage, 55.5 percent (<https://tradingeconomics.com/philippines/rural-population-percent-of-total-population-wb-data.html>)

³ <https://tradingeconomics.com/philippines/rural-population-percent-of-total-population-wb-data.html>

⁴ <http://countrystat.psa.gov.ph/?cont=3>

education, which, incidentally, are characteristic of the Filipino population. A study on youth, employment and migration documented the participation of Filipino youth in international labor migration—15 percent of new hires are accounted for by those below 25 years old, based on deployment data for 2010–2015. Almost all of the under 25 years old migrants are in the 20–24 age group. Additionally, two out of three young migrants are women (Asis and Battistella, 2013: 46). According to the Gallup survey in 2017, 13 percent of Filipinos in the ages 15–29 wish to migrate if they could. The participation of young Filipinos in labor migration raises concern because of their concentration in less skilled, vulnerable occupations. Considering their high educational background, the concentration of young Filipino migrants in less skilled occupations reflect a mismatch and brain waste (see also Battistella and Liao, 2013).

The interest to migrate to other countries is a global trend. This is suggested by UN data indicating the increasing number of the stock population of international migrants over the years: in 1990, the estimated stock of international migrants stood at 152.5 million; in 2017, the number has risen to 257.7 million.⁵ If adults in different countries could migrate to another country, the number of international migrants desiring to migrate would be much higher, according to Gallup surveys conducted since 2010. In 2017, more than 750 million people would like to migrate if they could (Esipova, Pugliese and Ray, 2018). The youth in other parts of the world are as keen as young Filipinos (in some countries, youth intentions to migrate are much higher than 13 percent) to migrate to another country. Another global trend is the aging of farmers. In some countries or regions, the average age of farmers is higher than the average of 57–59 years in the Philippines—for example, in Korea, it is 62.3 years;⁶ in Japan, it is 67 years;⁷ 57.5 years in the United States,⁸ and 60 years in Africa despite its young population.⁹

⁵ https://migrationdataportal.org/data?i=stock_abs_&t=2017

⁶ Taeho Lee (2015) The Aging of Agriculture and the Income Instability of Young Farmers, 8 June 2015. Available from http://ap.ffc.agnet.org/ap_db.php?id=441

⁷ Japan's Farming Population Rapidly Aging and Decreasing, 3 July 2018. Available from <https://www.nippon.com/en/features/h00227/japan%E2%80%99s-farming-population-rapidly-aging-and-decreasing.html>

Although the current picture may look bleak, agriculture presents potentials to create decent employment and entrepreneurial opportunities (OECD and SMC, 2017)—if these can be catalyzed, agriculture can be a viable alternative to international migration. As a step in this direction, this research explored this possibility by focusing on current programs to attract or retain young people in agriculture and whether these meet their intended purpose of shaping young people as future workers, leaders and movers of Philippine agriculture.¹⁰ Toward this end, the research sought to:

1. Survey the programs and actions intended to attract or retain young people in agriculture;
2. Examine how selected programs may have contributed to creating opportunities for the youth to get actively involved in agriculture, and document examples of young people as innovators in agriculture; and
3. Conduct dissemination activities to contribute to policy-making, curriculum development, and training programs with the participation of young people.

⁸ Average age of farmers continues to rise, Morning AgClips, 14 April 2019. Available from <https://www.morningagclips.com/average-age-of-farmers-continues-to-rise/>

⁹ Agriculture needs a makeover to lure young people back to farming, 22 August 2016, Reuters. Available from <https://www.reuters.com/article/africa-farming-food-idUSL8N1AR4WS>

¹⁰ The United Nations defines the youth population as those in the ages 15-24 years; the Philippines defines the youth population as those in the ages 15-30 years (Youth in Nation-Building Act of 1994, Republic Act No. 8044). The project adopted a broader age group, 15-39, to cover more of the economically active population.

METHODOLOGY

This research employed a qualitative approach to address the research objectives. Materials and data were drawn from the literature and the collection of primary data:

- First, a review of relevant literature, policies and data concerning the agriculture sector in the Philippines was conducted to situate young people historically and prospectively in this sector.
- Secondly, a case study of ten examples of programs to encourage young people to enter or remain in agriculture was done to extract insights on how these programs may have created interest or opportunities for young people to get involved in agriculture. Upon discovering young Filipinos who are introducing innovations in agriculture, four of the ten cases highlight young people not as target beneficiaries but as movers and leaders in the field. Although insights from the case studies are not generalizable, they may suggest good practices and lessons that can inform policy-making.

Information on programs targeting young people and innovations by young people were obtained from a review of the literature, online search, and consultations with key stakeholders in agriculture. The research team consulted with the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI), the training and extension arm of the Department of Agriculture (DA), for information about the government's programs directed at young Filipinos. Through discussions with ATI, the research team learned about the continuing existence of 4-H Clubs in the country, was able to participate in some meetings of the national officers of 4-H and received valuable advice and suggestions in moving the research forward.

The materials for the case studies were derived from primary data and the existing literature. Between July 2018 and January 2019, the project conducted 21 key informant interviews and 14 group interviews (with fewer than six participants) or focus group discussions (with six or more participants), which involved the participation of 66 persons.

The research participants included young farmers, officers of the national 4-H Philippines, officers, members and advisers of selected local 4-H clubs, key officials and personnel of the DA and ATI, agriculture students, participants of agricultural training programs, founders of agriculture-related initiatives, key staff of organizations included in the study, and some beneficiaries or partners of organizations of interest. The collection of primary data entailed fieldwork in Metro Manila and the provinces of Laguna, Nueva Ecija, Rizal, Zamboanga del Sur, Isabela, Antique and Negros Occidental. The interviews were supplemented by participant observation in selected activities of the organizations profiled in this study. In the discussions and interviews with participants, the research team encouraged them to share photographs of their agricultural activities or photographs that reflect their thoughts, hopes and concerns about agriculture, and to share further views and ideas about agriculture even after the interviews. A platform for this purpose was created on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/KAYAAgri/>). While this did not generate much interest and participation, it served the purpose of providing updates of the research and sharing information which might be of interest to the group members.

A forum was organized on 21 March 2019 to share findings and recommendations from the study. It was attended by close to 50 participants representing government agencies, academe, civil society organizations and international organizations. The forum brought together participants in the fields of migration, agriculture and education, including young farmers and young movers in agriculture. Inputs from the forum have been incorporated in this report.

SITUATING THE FILIPINO YOUTH IN AGRICULTURE

Retreat from agriculture

Based on the 2015 census, a little more than half (51.2 percent) of the Philippine population reside in rural areas (PSA, 2019). As mentioned earlier, a third of the poor in the country are in the rural areas, which in turn, is due to low and unstable wages, low productivity and limited social protection. Data as of 2015 show that farmers, fishermen and children from low-income families have the highest poverty incidence at 34.3 percent, 34 percent and 31.5 percent, respectively (PSA, 2017).

The agriculture sector is dominated by male workers (75 percent), and workers in this sector are older compared to other workers. The share of workers in the ages 15-24 fell from 20.6 percent in 2008 to 18.8 percent in 2015 (Briones, 2017). The aging of Filipino farmers has been a long-time concern in the Philippines. Both Bordey et al. (2016) and Briones (2017) indicated that the average age of Filipino farmers increased to 59 years. It is not only the aging of farmers that is at issue, but the exodus of agricultural workers. Since 1997, the service sector has overtaken agriculture in having the largest number of workers. From the 1990s, the share of agricultural workers to the total population of workers has been progressively declining, from 43 percent in 1995, to 27 percent in 2015, and to 26 percent in 2018.¹¹ Data from the Labor Force Survey reveal a continuing loss of farm workers: 163,000 in 2012, 575,000 in 2015, and 803,000 in 2017 (Briones, 2017).

Another indicator of the youth's waning interest in agriculture is the low rate of enrollment in agriculture-related disciplines in higher education (Table 1). Between 1994-1995 and 2017-2018, the share of students enrolled in agriculture-related programs hover between 2-4 percent.

¹¹ <http://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1038439>

**Table 1. Higher Education Enrollment in Agricultural, Forestry, Fisheries, Vet. Med.: AY
1994-1995 to 2017-2018**

Academic Year	Higher Education Enrollment for all Discipline Groups	Higher Education Enrollment in Agricultural, Forestry, Fisheries, and Veterinary	Share of Agricultural, Forestry, Fisheries, and Veterinary Medicine (%)
1994-1995	1,871,647	59,400	3.2
1995-1996	2,017,972	68,760	3.4
1996-1997	2,061,300	71,228	3.5
1997-1998	2,067,965	64,760	3.1
1998-1999	2,279,314	75,475	3.3
1999-2000	2,373,486	85,266	3.6
2000-2001	2,430,842	87,492	3.6
2001-2002	2,466,056	94,900	3.8
2002-2003	2,426,976	84,609	3.5
2003-2004	2,420,856	78,201	3.2
2004-2005	2,402,315	70,824	3.2
2005-2006	2,489,285	63,744	3.2
2006-2007	2,582,709	59,634	3.2
2007-2008	2,632,935	58,248	2.2
2008-2009	2,627,798	59,208	2.3
2009-2010	2,774,368	59,745	2.2
2010-2011	2,951,195	63,471	2.2
2011-2012	3,044,218	68,098	2.2
2012-2013	3,317,265	81,740	2.5
2013-2014	3,563,396	96,164	2.7
2014-2015	3,811,726	125,526	3.3
2015-2016	4,104,841	143,182	3.5
2016-2017	3,589,484	127,287	3.5
2017-2018	2,981,604	100,922	3.4

Source: Commission on Higher Education (CHED), 2018.

Similarly, enrollment in and completion of agriculture-related courses in technical-vocational education trail behind other courses (TESDA, 2018). The top 10 most popular Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) courses are those in Processed Food and Beverages, Information and Communication Technology (ICT)- related courses, and Metals and Engineering (TESDA, 2018).

Under the K-12 education reforms introduced in 2011, high school in the Philippines has since totaled six years (previously, it was only four years): four years of junior high school (Grades 7-10) and two years of senior high school (Grades 11-12). The first cohort to finish six years of high school graduated in 2016. Senior high school enrollment in the technical-vocational-livelihood (TVL) track shows low enrollment in in the agri-fishery arts strand – 7.5 percent of the total – compared to home economics, industrial arts and information communication technology or ICT (Table 2). This is supported by interviews conducted by the project team in selected communities, where even in farming areas, few are choosing agriculture in the TVL track.

Table 2. Senior High School TVL Enrollment per Type of Strand, SY 2018-2019

Agri- Fishery Arts	Home Economics	Industrial Arts	ICT	TVL- Maritime	Combination	TOTAL
81,385	427,164	248,384	296,962	5,248	26,783	1,085,926
(7.5%)	(39.3%)	(22.9%)	27.3%)	(0.5%)	(2.5%)	(100.0)

Source: Data provided by the Department of Education.

Why the youth are moving away from agriculture

The reasons why young Filipinos are turning away from agriculture have been examined by several studies. A study among 68 farmers' children aged 13–21 years in rice farming communities in Aurora and Albay provinces uncovered both favorable and unfavorable perceptions about rice farming. Overall, most had favorable views of rice farming, seeing farming as “a social security, source of income, wealth multiplier, and an honorable

vocation.” On the negative side, unfavorable views saw farming as “anti-beauty, a difficult task to perform, and a not so glamorous venture” (Manalo and Van de Fliert, 2013: 64). The same study found many young participants (41 out of 68) wanting to migrate to pursue careers in nursing, seafaring, engineering and teaching (p. 68). Compared with the Albay participants, those from Aurora are less inclined to consider migration. Gultiano and Xenos (2004), Berja (2005), Quisumbing and McNiven (2006) and Paris et al. (2010) also noted young people as predisposed to migration to attain their educational and occupational goals. Push factors, largely poverty and family problems, also drive the migration of young people (e.g., Berja, 2005). Although migration intentions run strong among the young, the study by Manalo and Van de Fliert (2013) found that most of them wish to maintain ties to their farming communities.

Family factors are another set of influences that can shape the interest or disinterest of the youth in agriculture. As mentioned above, children growing up in poor farming families will likely look for an alternative to agriculture. Older farmers themselves may discourage their children from going into farming. Veronica Gregorio’s ongoing dissertation research on knowledge reproduction among farming families probes how gender and generation influence the youth’s involvement in agricultural work.¹² In exploring the role of parents in shaping how young people get into farming, based on her research thus far, she has identified three types of parenting strategies: parents who steer their children away from agriculture; parents who involve their children in agriculture; and parents who develop their children’s agricultural skills as a contingency. In view of the larger society’s generally negative views toward agriculture, youth who grow up in families where their own parents are negative about agriculture will likely not be attracted to agriculture.

The Philippines was part of a nine-country scoping study conducted by the Asian Farmers’ Association for Sustainable Rural Development (AFA) which looked into the issues and challenges facing youth in agriculture in the region. The eight other countries of interest were Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Bangladesh, Nepal, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia and Japan.

¹² Interview with Ms. Veronica Gregorio, 30 October 2018. She is pursuing a PhD in Sociology at the National University of Singapore. In addition to the interview, she also shared her ppt presentation, “Cultivating a Generation of Farmers: Parenting strategies and the ‘reluctance’ of the youth in agricultural work.” At the time of the interview, Ms. Gregorio was conducting fieldwork in the Philippines. Her dissertation compares knowledge reproduction in farming families in the Philippines and Malaysia.

Across the nine countries, the following reasons surfaced: (1) farmers' low identity and self-image, a view which stems from the backbreaking, dirty and low-skilled work associated with farming; (2) non-profitability of farming; (3) insecure land ownership and increasing price of land; (4) lack of rural infrastructure; (5) lack of supportive government policies and programs for family farmers; (6) lack of curriculum on land, agrarian reform and agriculture, despite agriculture being a major sector of employment; and (7) lack of organizations for young farmers (AFA, 2015:3-4). In addition, in the Philippines, the following reasons were cited on why young Filipinos are not attracted to agriculture: (1) lack of access to land; (2) lack of access to capital; (3) lack of participation in governance; (4) degraded land because of chemical farming; and (5) lack of crop insurance and social protection in the face of climate-related risks (AFA, 2014: 6).

The multi-country study of FAO, CTA and IFAD (2014) on the challenges and opportunities to increasing the rural youth's participation in the agriculture sector identified similar structural constraints and classified these into the following: (1) access to knowledge and education; (2) access to land; (3) access to financial services; (4) access to green jobs; (5) access to markets; and (6) engagement in policy dialogue.

Legal and policy context

On the legal and policy front, the Philippines has passed several laws in support of the agriculture sector (Box 1). The various laws address agrarian reform (Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law of 1988), the promotion of the modernization and mechanization of the sector (Agricultural and Fisheries Modernization Act of 1997 and Farm Mechanization Law of 2013), the protection of the rights of fisherfolk (Philippine Fisheries Code of 1998), and the enhancement of support services to farmers and fisherfolk (Agricultural Competitiveness Enhancement Fund of 2008 and Agri-Agra Reform Credit Act of 2009).

The interests, concerns and contributions of the youth as a sector of Philippine society are promoted and protected by the Youth in Nation-Building Act of 1994. The law defines the youth as those in the ages 15-30 years.

BOX 1: LAWS ON AGRICULTURE AND THE FILIPINO YOUTH**A. Laws pertaining to agriculture in general**

Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law of 1988. Republic Act (RA) 6657 institutes a Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) which covers all agricultural lands, regardless of crop. The retention limit for rice and corn lands is seven hectares; for non-rice and non-corn lands retention limit is five hectares, while each child 15 years old and above and are actually tilling or managing the land can retain three (3) hectares. Eligible beneficiaries are: owner/cultivators; leaseholders granted permanent use rights over the lands; farm workers who rendered service for value as an employee or laborer.

Agricultural and Fisheries Modernization Act of 1997 (AFMA). RA 8435 empowers civil society groups and the local government units (LGUs) to provide area-specific extension services, and supports 'centers of excellence' for world-class agricultural education and research.

Philippine Fisheries Code of 1998. RA 8550 protects the right of fisherfolk in the preferential use of municipal waters; limit access to the fishery and aquatic resources of the Philippines for the exclusive use and enjoyment of Filipino citizens; ensures the rational and sustainable development, management and conservation of the fishery and aquatic resources.

Agricultural Competitiveness Enhancement Fund of 2008 (ACEF). RA 9496 provides for an ACEF earmarked for the protection of farmers against unfair trade practices and increased productivity of farmers by providing necessary support services.

Agri-Agra Reform Credit Act of 2009. RA 10000 institutes an agriculture, fisheries and agrarian reform credit, insurance and financing system, in which all banking institutions are to set aside at least 25 percent of their total loanable funds for agriculture and fisheries credit, and at least 10% shall be made available for agrarian reform beneficiaries.

Organic Agriculture Act of 2010. RA 10068 establishes a comprehensive organic agricultural program by promoting and commercializing organic farming practices, cultivation and adoption of production and processing methods.

Farm Mechanization Law of 2013. RA 10601 aims to encourage farmers and fisherfolk to use modern, cost-effective and environment-friendly production, processing and postharvest machines and adopt new technologies to enhance their productivity and income.

B. Agriculture law referencing young Filipinos

Rural Farm School Act of 2013. RA 10618 institutionalizes the creation of rural farm schools as a parallel learning system or alternative delivery mode of secondary education to address the needs of young Filipinos in agricultural or fishing areas, and provides that one public rural farm school be established in every province, using the

core high school curriculum of the Department of Education (DepEd) with add-on courses focusing on agri-fishery. Public rural farm schools are free from tuition and other fees, and priority is given to relatives of CARP beneficiaries.

C. Law on the role of young Filipinos

Youth in Nation-Building Act of 1994. RA 8044 defines ‘youth’ as the critical period in a person’s growth and development from the onset of adolescence towards the peak of mature, self-reliant and responsible adulthood, from age of 15 to 30 years. Youth is categorized as urban / rural, and according to four youth sub-sectors: out-of-school youth, in-school youth, working youth and specific youth groups. The National Youth Commission (NYC) is designated as the main agency responsible for coordinating policies on youth development and formulate the Philippine Youth Development Plan (PYDP).

NOTE: The laws and verbatim description of each law are sourced from AFA (2014: 39-40). In presenting these laws, the research team has taken the liberty of classifying the laws by subject (agriculture in general, agriculture laws referencing young Filipinos, and the role of young Filipinos in nation-building).

Another law, the Rural Farm Schools Act, provides for the establishment of rural farm schools as an alternative delivery mode of secondary education to promote sustainable agriculture and rural development. The law is also meant to support the children of the beneficiaries of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) (Republic Act 10618, 2013).

The establishment of rural farm schools as an alternative mode of secondary education and parallel learning system is provided for by the Rural Farm School Act of 2013. Family farm /rural schools were introduced to the Philippines in 1986, drawing inspiration from farm schools that developed in France, Spain and other countries. The educational system of these schools is oriented to rural realities and promoting rural development. The first school was established in Lipa, Batangas in 1988 and later spread to Mindoro, Aurora, Rizal, Camarines Sur, Leyte, Cebu, Iloilo and Lanao del Norte. The law establishes these schools as part of the Department of Education (Gayo, 2013; see also <https://web.facebook.com/PARFEDRuralFarmSchools/>).

During the 17th Congress (from July 25, 2016-2019), two bills have been proposed specifically pertaining to young farmers. In 2017, the Magna Carta of Young Farmers (H.B. 5657, 2017) was filed in the House of Representatives, with Representative Christopher de Venecia as principal author. It recognizes young farmers (15-35 years old) as a separate basic sector which contributes to food security and the national economy. The bill proposes that “the state shall establish mechanisms for the promotion and protection of young farmers’ rights that would ensure their empowerment, productivity and competitiveness in the local and international trade.” In 2018, another bill was introduced by Representative Gary Alejano, the Young Farmers Program Act of 2018 (H.B. 7100, 2018), to encourage young Filipino graduates of agriculture and fisheries to pursue careers in the sector through entrepreneurship and agribusiness. Both bills have not been taken up for later deliberations.

FINDINGS FROM THE STUDY

The foregoing discussion has identified personal, family and structural factors that try to explain why the youth are leaving agriculture. While it makes sense to understand what keeps young people out of the sector, a focus on the young farmers who are in agriculture could be equally useful, especially in revealing pathways that attract or keep the young in agriculture (AKATIGA and White, 2015). Furthermore, youth intentions may change over the life cycle: “But young people’s decisions to farm or not to farm, and to stay in the village or to migrate, are not permanent decisions. Many of today’s older farmers themselves migrated when young, and returned when they had saved money or when land became available” (AKATIGA and White, 2015). These points are helpful in framing and reading the data gathered by the study and in thinking about recommendations.

Agriculture cannot yet be a viable alternative to migration

Agriculture is not attractive enough to pull young Filipinos to the sector. Most of the research participants said that it is difficult to sell agriculture to young people. Several participants remarked that the negative mindset toward agriculture is not limited to young people, but also to farmer-parents who discourage their children from following their footsteps. The fact that young people have more education inclines them to consider other options, such as jobs in call centers. Agriculture also represents the anti-thesis of the high-tech culture that young people are attracted to these days.

The older farmers who were interviewed in the study acknowledged that farming is not easy. Other than the hard work, working in the fields render farmers vulnerable to leptospirosis and snake bites, which make health care and insurance coverage imperative.

The truth is, the government doesn’t have [social protection] plans for us farmers. There was a time when I thought, when I grow weak, will I have pension? So, we organized a petition so that we can have SSS [Social Security System coverage] and

PhilHealth [government health insurance]. Now we pay for those services. Since there is already [government support for] mechanization, soft loan and irrigation, the government should now focus on insuring the farmers and giving them health care because it's important. [Older farmer]

Most participants recommended that agriculture should be integrated in the educational system, starting from basic education. The teaching about agriculture should include an appreciation of the role of agriculture to society, a better understanding of which will promote a more positive view about farmers, other agricultural workers, and the agriculture sector in general.

For us, it's easier because our roots are really into farming. My children may not be into it now, but their minds will mature. Because even I did not think about it until I got married. Maybe what the government should do is really start with the schools. [Older farmer]

Maybe the government should really explore the possibility of using transformative education by incorporating agriculture in the school curriculum, and [providing] training programs and seminars for the youth. [4-H Club member]

Based on my observation and considering the perspective of old farmers and parents, agriculture is a difficult job. But when you know the importance of farming, even if it is hard work, you will become passionate about doing it. I see this as a solution to engage young people in agriculture...The problem with our society, even ordinary people think low of farmers, maybe because it is dirty. They do not see the bigger impact of the contribution of farmers. [4-H Club member]

Many of the young participants had attended training programs through their involvement with 4-H Clubs or accessing programs provided by learning sites. Although these programs have made agriculture more accessible to more people, the motivation or outcome may not be as expected. For example, some enroll in training programs to acquire a National Certificate which would help them secure farm-related job opportunities overseas. Some

participants who joined agriculture-related training programs abroad expressed an interest to go abroad to acquire capital that they will invest in agriculture projects in the future.

The thoughts of young people who have chosen to pursue farming provide insights on the value of farming as work and its contribution to society.

Being a farmer, I see that farming is work which requires one to be a scientist, a chemist, or an engineer to build infrastructure, and of course, to handle the marketing as well. Farming covers many aspects; thus, I don't know why others do not see the value of farmers. [Young farmer]

. . . I found my livelihood in farming. With the training I availed myself of, I realized that farming, coupled with the adoption of modern technology, is the best way to help the community, by producing food that is needed by the increasing population. [Young farmer]

To date, the goal of encouraging young people to get involved in agriculture has focused on the farming or the food production aspect of agriculture. As the cases in this study suggest, there is more to agriculture than farming, which can be of interest to young people and which can benefit from the participation of young people.

Programs to encourage youth participation in agriculture

The DA, mainly through the ATI, has introduced a variety of initiatives intended to entice young Filipinos to agriculture. The 4-H Club, as detailed in the series of case studies, is the longest-running vehicle for organizing the rural youth. ATI has introduced youth-focused programs, many of which are training and capacity-building programs. These include the following:

- *Schools for Practical Agriculture (SPA)*. The SPA is a scheme where farmers are trained as trainers/extension workers in the community and their farm lot is developed as a demonstration area or practical learning site. Eventually, the site will be used for micro-teaching other farmers and out-of-school youth (OSY), especially those who are enrolled in the ladderized course in agri-entrepreneurship. After extensive capacity building in farm entrepreneurship, the farmer trainer will be encouraged to take competency certification tests from the Technical Skills and Development Authority (TESDA). His/her farm lot will also be certified as a practical learning site.
- *Ladderized Course for OSY*. The ladderized program provides scholarships for OSY members of the 4-H Club of the Philippines. They can take a two-year Diploma Course using the DTS (TESDA's Dual Training System). Graduates of the program may qualify to apply for a Bachelor of Science in Entrepreneurial Management or Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Entrepreneurship. Up until 2013, graduates may avail themselves of scholarships under the Youth in Agriculture and Fisheries Program (YAFP) to pursue tertiary education.
- *e-Extension Program*. ATI has designed e-programs to broaden access to training and extension programs which can be delivered any time, any place at any pace. It has three (3) main components namely, e-Learning, e-Farming or the Farmers Contact Center and e-Trading.
- *Young Filipino Farm Leaders Training Program in Japan (YFFLTPJ)*.¹³ Started in 1986, this program targets young farmers, aged 20-27 and at least high school graduates, to undergo an 11-month on-farm training with Japanese host farmers. The training aims to enhance the leadership potentials of youth in agriculture and fisheries through the exchange of knowledge on farming techniques and practices. The program is managed by ATI, in collaboration with the Japan Agricultural Exchange

¹³ Before 2019, the program was called Young Filipino Farmers Training Program in Japan (YFFTPJ). For the first time, three of the 21 participants in the 2019 batch were women (see <http://ati.da.gov.ph/ati-main/news/01302019-1749/21-young-farmers-start-preparatory-course-exchange-program-japan>).

Council (JAEC) and the Japan Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (JMAFF) (Saliot, 2014). Every year, 18-20 young farmers are selected from those who pass the qualifying exams.

- Before leaving for Japan, each batch undergoes a 75-day Pre-departure Orientation Course (PDOC). The PDOC focuses on values formation, computer literacy, Nihongo language, Japanese culture, and technical aspects in the production of various agricultural commodities. Upon their return, the trainees are expected to apply the skills and knowledge they gained from their Japanese mentors. They will be provided with PHP50,000 capital to start their chosen agricultural venture.
- *Glamorizing Farming through Agriculture: Metropolitan Youth in Sustainable and Healthy Living*. This is a recent program which aims to develop an appreciation of farming by young people in urban areas and involve them in agricultural activities through the establishment of 4-H Clubs in their communities (Vizcarra, 2018). This initiative can also be seen as introducing and expanding 4-H Clubs to urban areas. The ATI also seeks to integrate farming into the lifestyle of urban dwellers and develop “champions” to serve as partners of the DA in its advocacies toward the attainment of food security and sustainability (DA-ATI, 2014, 2018; Saliot, 2014).
- *Produktibong 4-H Scholarship of the Youth Empowerment through a Sustainable (YES) Program*. The YES scholarship program provides educational support to poor but deserving children of farming families.
- *Expanded Human Resource Development Program (EHRDP)*. The EHRDP is a local educational/scholarship program which aims to enhance the scientific and technical capability of the country's agriculture and fisheries human resources. It is geared toward producing managers and analysts who will capacitate ATI to fulfill its vision and implement a concerted program to modernize the country's agriculture and fisheries as envisioned by the Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization Act (DA-ATI, 2014, 2018; Saliot, 2014).

Other DA-led initiatives include the annual *Gawad Saka* (Agriculture Award), which recognizes the contributions of individuals and organizations to the development of agriculture. Two categories are specifically for outstanding young farmers and outstanding young farmer/fisherfolk organizations. Also, the DA, through its attached agency, the Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) introduced the Infomediary Campaign in 2012. The campaign utilizes the schools to serve as centers for agricultural extension services and assigns students to become “infomediaries,” who facilitate access to information on cost-reducing and yield-enhancing technologies on rice” (PhilRice, 2016). The youth did not only prove to be effective infomediaries. The experience of sharing agriculture knowledge also gave them a better understanding of agriculture, and as a result, some of the youth infomediaries became interested in pursuing agriculture (see <http://www.infomediary4d.com/>).

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector also do their share in encouraging young Filipinos in agriculture, mostly through initiatives that encourage or recognize their contributions to the sector.

- The East-West Seed initiated a competition in 2017, which challenges university undergraduate and graduate students to develop innovative technology to ease the heavy work of small-holder vegetable farmers. The East-West Seed Innovation Olympics provides the top three teams with seed money of PHP 150,000 each to develop a technological innovation that can be piloted in farming communities. Each team was mentored by an agriculture, business, and technology expert and attended a symposium with successful agriculture innovators (East-West Seed, 2017). In 2018, Team i-Agri Ventures from the University of the Philippines Los Baños emerged as winner with their solar-operated multi-crop dryer. This project was able to address the challenge of the oversupply of tomatoes during peak season by converting excess fresh tomatoes into dried tomatoes. The technology is expected to increase farmers’ profits by 30 percent (East-West Seed, 2018).
- The Villar SIPAG (Social Institute for Poverty Alleviation and Governance) Foundation, pays tribute to exceptional youth organizations which are making

impacts in reducing poverty and improving the lives of poor families in the country. The Youth Poverty Reduction Challenge, which started in 2017, is a search for outstanding youth organizations which have projects dealing with food or agricultural products, recycling waste materials or agricultural waste products, green inventions/environment saving inventions/green technology, water/waste/energy solutions, rural and urban innovations, information technology and livelihood development (*The Philippine Star*, 2017).

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE CASE STUDIES

The previous section provided an overview of the programs and initiatives, mostly carried out by the DA-ATI, but also by several non-governmental institutions, to attract young Filipinos to agriculture. Three of the case studies examine how these interventions influence youth participation in agriculture; another three cases highlight the voices and experiences of young Filipinos who have chosen farming; and the last four cases shed light on young Filipinos from diverse backgrounds who are introducing innovations in the agriculture sector. The presentation of the ten cases has been organized into three themes: programs to attract or retain the youth in agriculture, profiles of young farmers, and youth innovators. For details about each case study, see Annex 1.

1. Programs to attract or retain young people in agriculture

- *4-H Club of the Philippines*
 - 4-H (Head, Heart, Hands and Health) is one of the oldest youth development organizations in the country. Its organization in the Philippines commenced when the Bureau of Agricultural Extension was established in 1952. The very name 4-H and its emblem were copyrighted from the 4-H Club in the United States which was a strong youth organization that started in the 1900s (Rosenberg, 2015). Similar to the 4-H movement in the US, the 4-H in the Philippines organized various training programs for the youth, aged 10-20, both in- and out-of-school. Focusing on agricultural activities, 4-H became synonymous to a movement and organization for rural youth (KCNHS 4-H Club, 2014).

ATI is the government agency that oversees 4-H Clubs in the Philippines and other rural-based organizations. Presently, membership in 4-H is open to youth in the ages 10-30, covering both in- and out-of-school youth.¹⁴ ATI has no firm data on the number of clubs and members throughout the country. Improving the data base of 4-H members is one of the priorities identified in the plan of action drafted by the 4-H national officers in August 2019.

¹⁴ In 2014, the minimum age was lowered from 12 to 10 years (see DA-ATI, 2014).

Interviews and conversations with 4-H officers and members indicate the significance attached by young people to the organization. They cited not only learning from their agriculture projects, but also about leadership and life skills. ATI provides support to provincial, regional and national conferences of 4-H clubs. These conferences include showcasing exemplary agricultural projects developed by different clubs.

4-H Clubs which implement innovative agricultural projects receive citations or awards not only from the DA but from other award-giving organizations (e.g., Taluksangay 4-H Club of Zamboanga City, see below). Involvement in club activities also opened doors for further agricultural opportunities to 4-H members (such as participating in training programs like the Young Filipino Farm Leaders Training Program in Japan, e.g., Ernesto Perlas, Jr. and Rudy Concepcion II, see below).

- *Taluksangay 4-H Club, Zamboanga City*
 - The club was organized in 2012 by the 4-H coordinators of Zamboanga City and the Barangay Council of Taluksangay. The 4-H members of the club are composed of different indigenous ethnic groups in Mindanao: Sama-Banguiguis, Tausugs, Yakans, Kalibugans and Badjaos. The members are involved in seaweed farming, mangrove planting, community clean-up drive, and various community activities.

Being a coastline barangay (village), the club focused on developing seaweed farming in their community. In 2015, they competed and won in the city-wide and regional *Gawad Saka* (Agriculture Award) for Outstanding Young Fisherfolk/Farmers' Organization. They advanced to the national level and won the 2016 national *Gawad Saka* in the same category.

The Taluksangay 4-H Club also won the 1st Villar SIPAG (Social Institute for Poverty Alleviation and Governance) Poverty Reduction Challenge in 2017 for Outstanding Young Social Entrepreneur. The club's seaweed farming project

created an impact for the whole community and inspired other farmers, especially young farmers and young people in the community. The club plans to expand and innovate seaweed farming to help other people in the community.

At the time of interview in December 2018, the first president of the club, Mr. Gamar A. Jailani, and another officer, Ms. Hanan Hassan, were studying at SEED (School for Experiential and Entrepreneurial Development) Philippines. Both were studying how they can improve seaweed farming and develop other products, which they will then share with their community.

- *Kaneshige Farm-Rural Campus Foundation (KFRC)*
(<https://www.facebook.com/Kaneshige-Farm-Rural-Campus-Foundation-1405804236395032/>)
 - Located in Barangay Haguimit, La Carlota City, Negros Occidental, KFRC offers a training program specifically targeting out-of-school youth in the province. The training program started in 2009, with the support of the Alternative People's Linkage in Asia or APLA, an NGO based in Japan that fosters links and partnerships with peoples in Asia in the promotion of self-reliant communities based on agriculture and fishery. APLA has forged ties with Negros Occidental since the 1980s, when the province's economy plunged because of the decline in the price of sugar, the economic lifeline of the province. Along with other like-minded NGOs in Japan and people's organizations in Negros, Kaneshige Farm was established in 1995 as an organic farm and envisioned as a center to train young farmers. From 1995 to 2009, Kaneshige Farm was supported by Alter Trade Japan and then Alter Trade Philippines. When the support from both organizations came to an end, Kaneshige Farm Rural Campus was launched in 2009 to fulfill the goal of training out-of-school youth in agriculture. APLA rents the 5.5 ha-land from Alter Trade and six KFRC staff work on the farm, manage the farm, and run the training program as well.

KFRC's training program is a hands-on, six-month program that covers vegetable growing, piggery, budgeting, marketing, as well as character formation. Youth trainees are nominated by their farmers' association and are screened by KFRC. An important criterion is that a candidate's family must have some farm land so that graduates can put their training to good use. To date, all the trainees are young men. Each batch comprises 3-6 trainees. APLA covers the training costs, food and accommodation. The program does not provide allowances. Trainees can earn while they train when they sell the vegetables or animals (pigs, chickens) they raise during their training period. As of December 2018, about 50 trainees had graduated from the program, about half of whom continue farming and applying what they have learned from the training. At the time of the visit of the research team in December 2018, there were four trainees in KFRC. Their graduation has been rescheduled to July 2019 to coincide with KFRC's 10th anniversary. Learning from their past experience, KFRC has incorporated post-training support to their graduates. Upon graduation, KFRC provides graduates with start-up assistance (e.g., piglets, seeds) so they can continue farming with value-added knowledge gained from the training program. Post-training support also includes monitoring and site visits to their graduates to provide additional support if needed. According to the trainers, the marketing aspect is a continuing challenge for the young farmers. KFRC is discussing with the La Carlota Agriculture Office on how to improve the marketing and distribution of farmers' produce, particularly those that are organically grown. KFRC farmer-trainers said that while their produce is good for the health of consumers, it is challenging to compete with the large volume and cheaper market price of non-organically grown vegetables.

2. Profiles of young Filipino farmers

- Three of the case studies focused on young farmers under 30 years old: Mr. Ernesto Perlas, Jr. (or JR) of Palayan City, Nueva Ecija; Mr. Rudy Concepcion II (or Rude) of Cauayan City, Isabela; and Ms. Aiza Zacarias of Hamtic, Antique. Their individual

journeys to becoming farmers call to mind the interventions to attract the youth to agriculture amid the lack of societal appreciation of the role of agriculture and farmers in society. All three young farmers share some common characteristics or experiences:

- They are 4-H members, and all of them acknowledged that the activities of the club have fostered in them an appreciation of the importance of agriculture in society. In the case of JR and Rude, their membership in 4-H paved the way for them to participate in the YFFLPTJ, which reinforced their interest and capacity in agriculture and honed their leadership skills as well.
- All three belong to small landholder families, which somehow addresses one of the basic structural constraints to young people, i.e., the lack of access to land.
- All three have families who support their agricultural endeavors. Both Rude and Aiza come from a family of farmers, who involved them in farming activities early on. JR's parents were not farmers; rather, they learned to become farmers, acquiring knowledge about farming through attending training programs.
- All three have received recognition for their contributions to agriculture—JR is a regional *Gawad Saka* awardee, Rude is federation president and national officer of 4-H Philippines, and Aiza was Region 6's Outstanding Young Farmer in Organic Farming in 2018. The awards boosted their pride in their identity and work as farmers.

Government-supported programs, such as the 4-H Club and the YFFLPTJ, and family support are part of the pathways to these young people becoming farmers.

3. Agriculture-related initiatives spearheaded by young people

- *Cropital Enterprises Corporation, Philippines (Cropital)*
(<https://www.cropital.com/>)
 - Cropital was founded in 2015 by two University of the Philippines engineering and computer science graduates—Ruel Amparo and Rachel de Villa—as a crowdsourcing platform to provide financial support to farmers.

Both are urban-based with a technology background, but this did not keep them from pursuing an agricultural venture. By connecting farmers and investors, farmers will have access to needed-funds while investors can support farmers and earn as well. For now, Cropital focuses on supporting rice-farming, primarily small rice-farm families, in seven provinces: Batangas, Bohol, Bulacan, Laguna, Leyte, Pampanga and Pangasinan.

Cropital cooperates with local farmers' associations in identifying farmers to be included in its roster of farms to be funded. In addition to capital, Cropital provides technical support, assured buyers and crop insurance. These factors also contribute to minimizing risks and uncertainties by farmers and investors alike. Investors, on the other hand, can be anyone who completes the registration process online. An investor must put in a minimum PHP5,000 to co-invest in a farm per farm cycle of 4-6 months. For that amount, an investor can earn 3.5% return on investment in 4-6 months computed against investment amount pre-fees (or a return of PHP5,175). CEO and co-founder Ruel Amparo believes that Cropital investors are not purely motivated by economic gains but are also interested in helping farmers.

Farmers and investors meet online. Information on farmers' profile and their farm risk rating (a 5-point scale, with 1 as lowest), the required capital, and whether the farmer has been funded by Cropital are provided. Investors can freely choose which farmers to support and by how much.

As of December 2018, three years after it was founded, Cropital has more than 40,000 registered investors, including Filipinos based abroad. It has made available 800 loans to farmers, with 94 percent repayment on time. As an organization, Cropital now has 10 staff. An important marker of the venture is that by its third year, it is no longer dependent on grants. It is, thus, important to sustain Cropital's community of investors. One major challenge that the Cropital team identified is bracing for the impact of natural disasters on agriculture.

- *Young Professionals for Agricultural Development (YPARD) Philippines*
(<https://www.facebook.com/groups/ypardphilippines/>)
 - YPARD Philippines is a member of the global YPARD which was established in 2006 to provide an international discussion platform among young professionals in agricultural development. Its mission is to “enable and empower young agricultural leaders shaping sustainable food systems” (<https://asia.ypard.net/who-we-are>). The global movement supports young professionals to become effective in their respective areas and “encourage a stronger voice of youth in their own organizations and share their views and ideas with other young professionals in the network” (<https://asia.ypard.net/who-we-are>).

Spearheaded by Jim Leandro Cano, the Philippine chapter was formed in 2015 and is composed of professionals 18 to 40 years old. Among others, the organization recognizes the “problem of generational succession” as one of the most pressing problems in the agriculture sector. It aims to promote youth involvement and contributions in five arenas: research, development and extension, academe, agribusiness (private sector), and agri-policy (public sector). YPARD Philippines has also reached out to various networks in the agriculture sector for potential collaboration. Among others, it has reached out to 4-H Club Philippines, the Philippine Agriculturists Association, and the Coalition for Agricultural Modernization in the Philippines, Inc. (CAMP). Jim has joined the board of CAMP, representing the youth voice in the organization peopled by experts, scientists and agripreneurs. The partnership between YPARD Philippines and CAMP is interesting to watch out for because of the possibilities for intergenerational exchanges and discussions. Stronger partnership between YPARD Philippines and the 4-H Club could also strengthen youth representation in policy dialogues in agriculture.

- *Good Food Co. (GFC)*
(<https://www.goodfoodcommunity.com/>)
 - GFC is a low-key social enterprise with a big goal: to promote a better, more sustainable and ecological system. Founded by Charlene Tan in 2010, GFC supports organic agriculture by small holder farmers. On the distribution side, GFC builds a stable demand for farmers' produce through community shared agriculture (CSA), an alternative distribution model based on farm share subscriptions. Consumers subscribe to buy ethically and organically grown vegetables for a period of 1, 4 or 12 weeks. These are delivered to major hubs in Metro Manila where subscribers can pick up the produce. The “formula” is a triple win because cultivation is ecologically sound, which is a win for the environment; the farmers win because they can earn fairly for their produce; and a win for the consumers who can eat healthy. GFC, thus, builds connections between organic farmers and socially responsible consumers.

A graduate of Civil Engineering, Charlene's experience with SIBAT (*Sibol ng Agham at Teknolohiya, Inc. - Spring of Science and Technology, Inc.*), a non-governmental organization that promotes sustainable development to poor communities through the use of science and appropriate technology, was significant in the birthing of GFC. In 2009, Charlene was working with rice and sugarcane farmers in Capas, Tarlac, during which time, SIBAT started teaching sustainable farming methods. The idea for CSA was planted and GFC was formed in 2010 to integrate the element of a stable and consistent distribution and market for organic produce. The idea and action, thus, extended to link producers to consumers through a subscription system. In 2017, GFC was able to find an institutional partner, a company that specializes in promoting and selling natural products, which expanded GFC's client base.

On the production side, GFC started with the Capas Organic Farmer Producers Cooperative (which had 11 farmer members in 2011, and has since

expanded to 24, mostly women farmers). Over the years, its partner-farmers have grown to include La Organica (an association of 32 farmers in La Trinidad, Benguet) and some indigenous communities, such as the Aetas in Mayantoc, Tarlac and the Dumagats in Daraitan, Rizal.

The transfer of the produce from the farms to Metro Manila, where the consumers are, presents some logistical challenges. Once the produce is in Metro Manila, GFC has a community of volunteers who help pack the vegetables for delivery to subscribers.

GFC has other activities to promote its advocacy for sustainable ecological systems. It holds Good Food Sundays Market in Mandala Park, Mandaluyong City, another venue for farmers, producers of other natural products and consumers to meet and interact.

- *Sierreza-Los Baños Community Shared Agriculture (CSA) and Zero-Waste Store and Artisan Café*

(<https://www.facebook.com/Sierreza/>)

- Ms. Cherrys Abrigo is behind Sierreza, an initiative that promotes CSA, a café that serves healthy, organic produce of farmers from indigenous communities, and a café and store practicing zero waste. Like Good Food Community, Inc., Sierreza-Los Baños CSA operates on principles of fair trade, farming with a conscience, healthy living and supporting indigenous and marginalized farmers in the Sierra Madre. Cherrys, however, modified CSA in Los Baños, such as opting for post-paid arrangements and limiting delivery only under special circumstances. Buyers, thus, come to the store to buy and pick up the vegetables. The fundamental principles of CSA remain—fair trade, creating bridges between farmers and buyers through farm tours or the farmers coming to Los Baños for market tours, and promoting healthy living for farmers and buyers alike. When Cherrys launched Sierreza Café in 2018, she did not think about establishing a branch in other areas. Just a year later, in 2019, Sierreza Café is set to open a branch in Quezon City, upon the

urging of a couple who believed in Cherrys' advocacies. Hopefully, the new café will also be a means to introduce CSA, encourage zero waste, support farmers in indigenous communities, and promote healthy living. Although Cherrys does not have a degree in Agriculture (she finished Chemical Engineering and later took up a masters in Environment Science), her volunteering activities as a student and her passion to empower indigenous peoples led her to CSA and to promote the empowerment of indigenous peoples.

CONCLUSIONS

Findings and insights from the project seem to suggest a scenario marked by contrasting trends. On the one hand, the aging of Filipino farmers, the declining number of workers in the agriculture sector, and the low enrollment in agriculture-related programs in higher education, technical-vocational programs and the agriculture strand in senior high school are cause for concern. On the other hand, although their numbers are few and their activities may not be on a grand scale, the involvement of youth from urban and non-agricultural backgrounds in different facets of agriculture are signs of hope. If agriculture were viewed solely as farming, then youth participation in this aspect is waning. Echoing findings from previous studies, participants in this study noted the challenges of attracting young people to agriculture. If in the past, young people were discouraged from going into farming because of backbreaking work and similar reasons, these days, additional reasons include the lure of technology and other employment options (e.g., working in malls). The bright spot is the counter-trend of young farmers who are active in organic farming. Indeed, the voices of young farmers who have opted to stay in agriculture and are introducing innovations in agriculture need to be heard by other young people.

In contemplating how to avert a generational succession crisis and mitigate threats to the country's food security in the near future, revisiting the six main barriers to youth participation in agriculture can help identify the steps that have been taken and the gaps that need to be addressed: 1) access to knowledge and education; (2) access to land; (3) access to financial services; (4) access to green jobs; (5) access to markets; and (6) engagement in policy dialogue (FAO, CTA and IFAD, 2014).

The first one—access to knowledge and education—seems to have received the most attention, as indicated by the existence of various training programs intended to attract/retain young people in agriculture. The last one, engagement in policy dialogue, seems to be in its infancy, with YPARD Philippines, a youth-led organization profiled in this study, initiating some steps in this direction.

The youth are largely viewed as recipients or beneficiaries of agriculture-related programs, and less so as actors and innovators. Improving the youth's access to land, financial services, green jobs and markets will also unlock more spaces for the active participation of young Filipinos in a wide range of agriculture-related activities, not just in farming or food production. In this scenario, the youth can take on roles as trainers, investors, entrepreneurs, researchers,¹⁵ scientists, advocates, policy-makers, bridges between farmers and investors, and bridges between farmers and markets, among others.

Lastly, the youth's decision not to become farmers now is not necessarily final; they may return to farming or consider farming in later life.¹⁶ For those who sought opportunities elsewhere, their experience in urban areas or other countries may equip them with knowledge, insights, skills and capital that can invigorate agriculture. Some examples from the case studies attest to this: Ernesto Perlas, Jr. and Rudy Concepcion II returned from their training program in Japan with new knowledge that improved their farming practices. Ruel Amparo benefited from the mentoring he received abroad when he was developing Cropital. Cherrys Abrigo's training in Environmental Science was helpful in designing Sierreza and in her engagement with partner farmers. With due attention to address the structural barriers to youth participation in agriculture, the sector can develop into a viable option where young Filipinos can prosper and thrive.

¹⁵ Many young researchers are part of Permaculture Research PH (see <https://www.facebook.com/permacultureresearchph/>)

¹⁶ Interesting accounts of former seafarers who turned to farming are featured in *BAR Digest*, Vol. 20, No. 3, July-September 2018.

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ANNEX 1: YOUNG FILIPINOS IN AGRICULTURE

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4-H CLUB: STAYING ALIVE AND RELEVANT



The 4-H name and emblem were copyrighted from the 4-H Club in the United States.

The launch of the 4-H Club in the Philippines coincided with the establishment of the Bureau of Agricultural Extension (BAEX) in 1952. The very name 4-H (Heart, Hands, Head and Health) and its green clover leaf emblem were copyrighted from the 4-H Club in the United States. 4-H dates back to the 1900s in the US, orienting young people in rural communities on how to be farmers. Eventually, 4-H was introduced to other countries, such as the Philippines as a vehicle for international development (Rosenberg, 2015). Similar to the 4-H movement in the US, the clubs in the Philippines organized various training programs for the youth, aged 10-20, both in and out of school.¹⁷ Aimed at fostering the interest and capacity of young people in agricultural activities, 4-H became identified as a movement and organization for rural youth.¹⁸

BAEX and its successor, the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) of the Department of Agriculture (DA), oversees and supports 4-H clubs and their activities. 4-H clubs, in turn, are the entry and access points of ATI in delivering programs and services to young people in the rural communities. ATI also pins its hopes on 4-H clubs as one of various “desperate efforts to entice young people to agriculture.”

Government support was cited as the main reason for the longevity of 4-H. While one key informant considered the 1970s, the time of the Marcos administration, as the golden years of the 4-H, another key informant sadly shared that the decline of 4-H happened during the Marcos government when it introduced another youth arm that competed with 4-H. Another factor which diminished the standing of 4-H clubs in the country was the transformation of vocational-technical schools into regular high schools or science high schools. This change also sent signals of the “lower” status of vocational-technical programs in relation to the academic-science tracks.

With the changing times, 4-H clubs also have to contend with other interests competing for the attention of young Filipinos. In the past, 4-H clubs were very popular among the rural youth; today, 4-H is less known among the present crop of young people. A key

¹⁷ There is a confusion on whether 4-H is only for rural out-of-school youth or for both in-school and out-of-school youth. The 4-H clubs encountered by the team both had in- and out-of-school youth members. According to a key informant (a 4-H club coordinator), in the past, the membership may have been limited to those not in school, but as more young people are in school, it makes sense to broaden the membership to those in school. In the Philippines, 4-H members are in the ages 10 to 30 years old.

¹⁸ <https://sites.google.com/site/kcnhs4-Hclub2014/about-4-H>

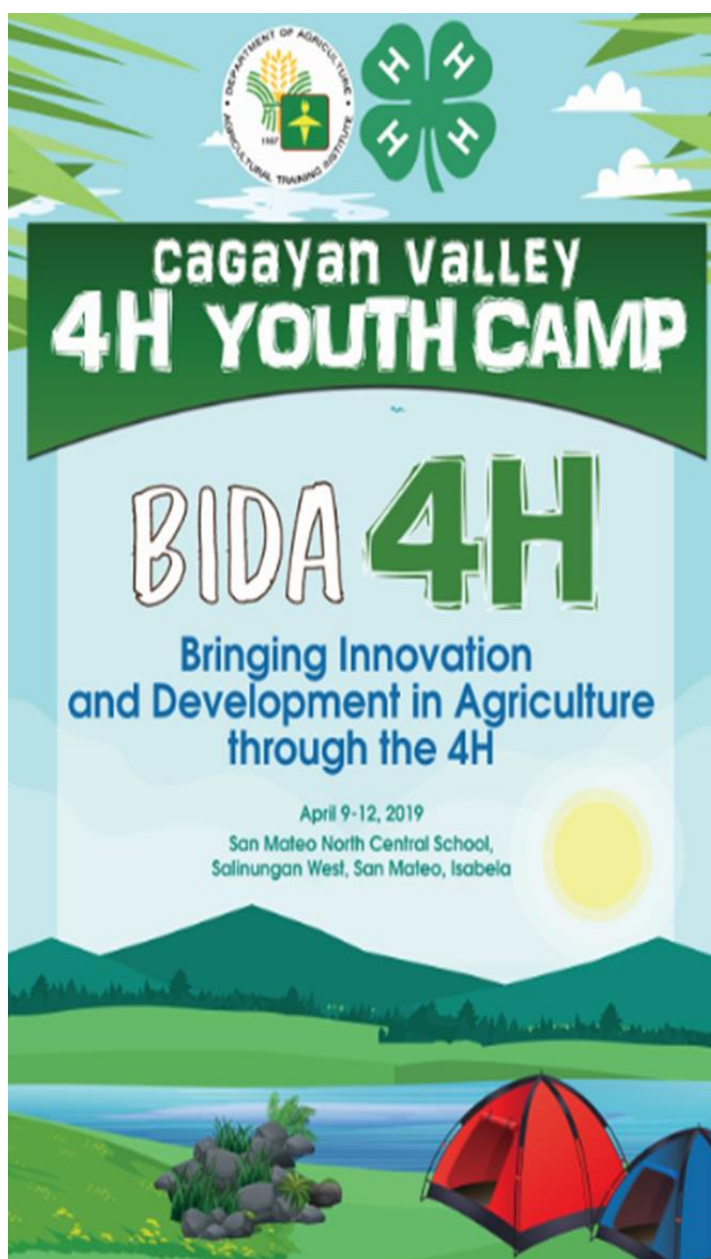
informant observed a notable difference in the orientation and activities of 4-H clubs then and now. In earlier decades, 4-H clubs were more attuned to rural life and the training programs and activities taught young people agriculture-related and life skills. In the key informant's view, current training programs do not seem to have a focus. 4-H National Officers and members of 4-H clubs in selected areas shared a different view. From their perspective, 4-H has oriented them to agricultural activities and contributed to their personal development. As explained by a former 4-H coordinator, 4-H clubs usually apply for funding for their projects from ATI. Other possible sources are local governments as well as barangay funds, or the club can also raise funds. The club decides what project to pursue, e.g., goat raising or calf fattening, after which they develop a proposal for funding. 4-H clubs typically have similar activities. Members are exposed to agriculture-related training programs (crops, animal husbandry, agricultural technologies, livelihood training, entrepreneurship, leadership programs, youth forums, camping and others). The main event is the national convention of 4-H clubs, held in May, the Farm Month. The national convention is attended by 400-500 delegates. ATI allots a budget of PHP 1.5M budget for this event to cover the food and accommodation of 4-H Club National Officers, convention supplies, travelling expenses of invited resource persons and other expenses incurred during pre-event or technical working group (TWG) meetings (i.e., transportation, food and accommodations of selected officers). Moreover, the 4-H Club National Officers, project contestants, 4-H Club Provincial Presidents, 4-H Club VLAP Regional Presidents, ATI Focal Persons and Center Directors, DA-Regional Field Office Coordinators, *Gawad Saka* (Agriculture Award) Regional Winners and selected LGU Coordinators of the different regions participate in the said event. The 2018 national convention, the 66th for the club, was held in Iloilo City and had as its theme, "promoting farm tourism to the youth."

Through multi-level meetings and competitions, members of different 4-H clubs meet and share their activities. Competitions are like talent searches where outstanding, innovative and best practices and initiatives are discovered. In the Department of Agriculture's annual search (*Gawad Saka*) for outstanding young farmer/fisherfolk and outstanding young farmer/fisherfolk organization-awards conferred to those who have contributed to the development of agriculture and



Introducing the KAYA-Agri Project to the national officers of 4-H Club Philippines. Photo courtesy of Chrysalyn Gocatek

fisheries in their regions and in the country—the contenders usually come from 4-H clubs. One of the national winners in the 2016 *Gawad Saka* for Outstanding Young Farmer/Fisherfolk Organization, the Taluksangay 4-H Club, is profiled in this study. The same organization was also one of 11 youth organizations awarded by the 1st Villar SIPAG (Social Institute for Poverty Alleviation and Governance) Youth Poverty Reduction Challenge in 2017, which gave recognition to youth organizations whose activities help address poverty-related issues in the Philippines.



The youth camp is an activity that many 4-Hers look forward to. It is a time to learn about agriculture, but also a time to meet new and old friends. Photo courtesy of Rudy Concepcion II

As a strategy or an entry point to get young people interested in agriculture, 4-H clubs seem to meet this objective. 4-Hers interviewed in the research were aware of the importance of agriculture and were also cognizant of discouraging perceptions about farming and farmers. Their exposure to agriculture-related issues was broadened by various 4-H activities. Many 4-Hers said that their participation in the organization raised their awareness about agriculture, trained them in agriculture technologies, and also developed their personality and leadership skills. As several 4-Hers shared, they were empowered by the various activities that 4-H had exposed them to. However, if the question is whether 4-H clubs attract young people to have long-term involvement in agriculture as farmers/ producers, agri-business entrepreneurs, or agriculture professionals, the answer is not a resounding yes. Particularly after high school, many young people pursue other interests when they proceed to tertiary education and craft lives outside of the agriculture sector.

The 4-Hers who continue their agriculture journey include those who receive further training in agriculture, such as participants in the Young Filipino Farmers Leadership Training in Japan (see Ernesto Perlas, Jr. and Rudy Concepcion II in this series). The club, thus, serves as a way to identify potential candidates for these youth-oriented initiatives, who later become leaders of the 4-H clubs in their area or region, and may eventually hold national-level posts in the federation.



ATI supports capacity development and enhancement of 4-H officers, in keeping with 4-H's motto to "make the best better." Photo courtesy of Chrysalyn Gocatek

Insights

Despite its long existence, it was difficult to find materials on the history of 4-H Club in the Philippines and how the organization may have evolved over the years. Data on the number of clubs, the number and profile of members, and assessments of the organization's contributions to the participation of young Filipinos in agriculture are lacking.

To date, 4-H's programs and activities had been framed to interest young people in agriculture, with ATI and its regional offices shepherding the clubs and providing support

to their activities. In this scheme of things, young people are the target groups or intended beneficiaries of government-supported programs. The activities and programs of 4-H seem poised to the idea of ensuring next-generation workers in agriculture. Young people as stakeholders and as participants in decision-making have yet to be included in the culture and practices of the agriculture sector.

The timing of the study coincided with nascent reflections about the voices of young people in the agriculture sector. The formation of YPARD-Philippines (Young Professionals for Agricultural Development in 2014 and the ongoing discussions between YPARD-Philippines and ATI on 4-H matters may be a step towards more pro-active and more diverse roles of 4-H clubs in the agriculture sector.

Written by M. Asis

Sources:

Interviews with Undersecretary Segfredo Serrano, Policy and Planning, Department of Agriculture; Ms. Elsa Parot, former Assistant Chief, Ms. Althea Defiesta-Perez, Development Management Officer II, Ms. Ansherina T. Torres, ESP Alliance Building and Grants Management Section, Mr. Larry Illich N. Souribio, ESP Accreditation Section, Partnerships and Accreditation Division, Agricultural Training Institute; 2018 4-H National Officers; Taluksangay 4-H Club; Bgy. Evelio Javier 4-H Club

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THE TALUKSANGAY 4-H CLUB OF ZAMBOANGA CITY: EMPOWERING THE YOUTH IN A DIVERSE COMMUNITY

The 4-H Club of Taluksangay, an islet *barangay* (village) in Zamboanga City, is an epitome of an organization that has successfully empowered the youth in productive activities and contributes to the economic conditions of the community. The club has been responsible for involving its out-of-school youth (OSY) and in-school-youth (ISY) members in agricultural activities, particularly seaweed farming, which is the community's main source of livelihood.

This coastline *barangay* has been a melting pot of indigenous peoples, namely, the Sama-Banguiguis, Tausugs, Yakans, Kalibugan and Badjaos who evacuated from Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Basilan islands and Zamboanga del Norte because of peace and economic problems during the martial law years in the 1970s. Despite their diverse cultures, the different groups live in harmony, and inter-marriage was not uncommon. This *barangay* is historically important because this is where Islam first took root in Mindanao and where the first mosque in the Philippines was erected.

The residents of Barangay Taluksangay rely mostly on seaweed farming as their main source of livelihood. Despite the poor economic conditions, members of the community perceive their quality of life as very good and have accepted their circumstances in life (Anies, Demayo, Torres et al., 2012). However, a “culture of migration” exists in the community. Families have members working overseas who remit money to their families. The youth perceive the need to go abroad to augment the meager family income.

Origins

The 4-H Club of Taluksangay is one of the community organizations focused mainly on the youth (both OSY and ISY) in the ages 10-30. The club started on 10 December 2012, taking over the *Sangguniang Kabataan* (Youth Council) organization which ceased operations that year. The club is composed of children of seaweed farmers in the community. The founding president was Mr. Gamar Jailani (2012-2017). He initially had some reservations in leading the organization, but with the support of the Nuño family¹⁹ and officials of the local and national government agencies, he succeeded in recruiting the youth and engaging them in productive activities. Ms. Lorna Bautista, City Agriculturist and Zamboanga City 4-H Coordinator, and Ms. Suraida Usman, 4-H Club District Coordinator for the *barangay*, were personally involved and highly instrumental in organizing the 4-H Club in Taluksangay.

¹⁹ The Nuño family is one of the pioneers in the *barangay* and has played a major role in its history. Members of the family hold political positions and are considered the natural leaders of the community.

4-H members are exposed to several agriculture-based livelihood trainings, such as goat production, poultry raising, baking and the use of coconut by-products. The members also avail of other training activities sponsored by the Department of Agriculture, Department of Science and Technology and Department of Trade and Industry. In addition, the club pursues several self-enhancement and training activities. Apart from the holding of summer camps, which is a major draw for the new recruits, members participate in community development and leadership trainings like the six-month training on functional English. The members also participate in social and community development programs. These include teaching the *Qur-an* (Madrasa School), participating in the campaign against drug addiction, and planting mangrove trees. The club is also active in the weekly cleanliness and sanitation program of the community.



Mangrove planting is one of the club's community projects. Photo courtesy of Chrysalyn Gocatek

The members are encouraged to engage in entrepreneurial activities. Individual members pursue projects such as goat raising, organic chicken raising, *sari-sari* (variety) stores, selling native delicacies and selling fish. The club ventured into goat and chicken raising which increased the club's chances of winning the 1st Villar SIPAG Award. The organic chickens were provided by the local government's Rural Improvement Club.

Seaweed farming

The club's major group activity is seaweed farming which is the community's major source of livelihood. Members are involved in the different aspects of seaweed production—preparing the seedlings, cleaning straw lines, removing impurities, tying the seedlings, planting and harvesting the seaweeds. The Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources provide raw binders, straws for seaweed seedlings, *bangkas* (outrigger boats) and technical assistance in seaweed production. The Nuño family built a processing facility using a solar dryer to keep the seaweeds clean, provided boats for the planting and harvesting of seaweeds, and encouraged the members to add value to seaweeds production. Due to the risks posed by high-tide and unpredictable weather conditions, the members are going into the trading of seaweeds.

Earnings from the club's seaweed farming and entrepreneurial activities are deposited in a bank account. The members have the chance to enjoy their earnings during the Hari Raya Eid al-Fitr, an important Muslim festival which marks the end of Ramadan.



Members who are involved in various aspects of seaweed farming, including drying the seaweeds. Photo courtesy of Chrysalyn Gocatek



The club's farm has 17 goats and 80 chickens (as of November 2018).

Photo courtesy of Chrysalyn Gocatek

City Councilor and former 4-H Club adviser Ms. Lilibeth Nuño sees seaweed farming and youth empowerment as factors that can encourage young people to remain in the community. Some club members realize that seaweed farming can be a gainful economic activity, and for some, it is a better alternative to working overseas and being away from their families. One of the female club members had this to say:

I see it [working abroad] in other people like our neighbors. My mother even said she wants to go back abroad and bring me with her, but I told her, *Ba't pa ako pupunta doon na meron naman dito. Puede naman ako dito magtrabaho* (Why should I go abroad when I can work here). (Farhana, 21 y/o female club member, college graduate).

Seaweed farming as an option for young people to remain in the community is best explained by the club's past president:

... when they go into seaweed farming, they can earn more than what they can earn abroad. But the mind-set of young people and parents is that when you work abroad you will have money every month. They do not see the value of seaweed farming in our community because they are exhausted with farming at sea. Sometimes the price of seaweeds is low but when dried, the price can go up to PhP100 per kilo.... They (parents) feel because they are poor, the children have not finished school or they just need to let them finish high school and send them abroad. They raise their children in such a way that going abroad is the only way to support the family.... They fail to see the opportunities in seaweed farming, that they can earn as much as PhP50, 000 a month vs. PhP18, 000 monthly income from working abroad. (Gamar, 23 y/o, male, former 4-H club president)

The active involvement of the youth in the club attracted other young people to join 4-H. From five members, the club expanded to 70 members in 2015. For many of the members, being part of the club and joining its activities boosted their self-confidence. The members learned to interact and work with others in carrying out the activities organized by the club. Eventually they became active players in programs that contribute to the development of their community.

Awards and recognitions

The focus of the Taluksangay 4-H Club on seaweed farming (rather than conventional farming) and empowering the youth of the different indigenous communities reaped recognitions and awards. It was a recipient of the regional and national *Gawad Saka* in 2016 as the “Outstanding Young Farmer/Fisherfolk Organization” awarded by the Department of Agriculture to distinguished groups and individuals who have excelled and made significant contributions in the agriculture and fisheries sector. The club was also a recipient of the “Most Outstanding Youth Social Enterprise” in the 1st Villar SIPAG (Social Institute for Poverty Alleviation and Governance) Poverty Reduction Challenge in 2017. The cash prizes from these awards (PhP300, 000 and PhP50, 000 from the national and regional *Gawad Saka* awards, respectively, and PhP150, 000 from the Villar SIPAG award) were deposited in a separate bank account. Some of the cash prize was used to buy seaweed seedlings, build the youth clubhouse, set up a *sari-sari* (variety) store, and fund a scholar from the community who was pursuing a law degree.

The awards also opened opportunities for its members. The club's president, Mr. Gamar Jailani and parliamentarian, Ms. Hanan Hassan, are currently scholars of the School for Experiential and Entrepreneurial Development (SEED) Philippines which aims to train and raise the country's next batch of social entrepreneurs, help farmers and create wealth in the rural areas. Both are expected to complete their training in June 2019. Upon their

return to their community, their training will help them to further engage and empower the youth and the community towards more productive ventures.

Next steps and challenges

The 4-H Club now is under the leadership of Sajir Omar. As had been mentioned, the club has ventured into buying and selling seaweeds. The club continues to participate in city and regional 4H camps and trainings in food processing and aquaculture.



Taluksangay 4-H Club members during the national evaluation for Gawad Saka in August 2016. Photo courtesy of Taluksangay 4-H Club

Club members also want the community to be involved in the other parts of the value chain aside from planting and trading, and venture into processing activities like converting agar-agar into powder, snacks or pickle production. Moreover, the members are encouraging farmers to adopt a better way of drying seaweeds.

Taluksangay 4-H Club represented by Mr. Gamar Jailani (President), Mr. Erwin Rodriguez (4-H Club Region IX Coordinator), Ms. Lorna Bautista (4-H Club Zamboanga City Coordinator) and Ms. Suraida Usman (4-H Club Culianan District Coordinator) during the awarding of the National *Gawad Saka* for Outstanding Young Farmer/Fisherfolk Organization in 2016. Photo courtesy of Taluksangay 4-H Club



Sustaining club membership is a common challenge because members who turn 30 get married and cease to be members. However, leaving the club does not mean one cannot pursue similar activities or complement the activities of the club.

Seaweed farming in particular has its share of challenges. One challenge is to involve the 4-H club members as well as the residents in processing and not just rely solely on production. Threats due to turbulent sea conditions and water pollution, which affect the quality of seaweeds, are also imminent. High moisture content, impurities and poaching of seaweeds are common problems. Thus, the *barangay* should find ways to address these issues.



Taluksangay 4-H Club receives support from the community. Photo with former Conf. Lilia M. Nuño, Ms. Lorna Bautista, Ms. Suraida Usman, Ms. Merida Garcia, other representatives of the Office of City Agriculturist, and members of Taluksangay 4-H Club. Photo courtesy of Chrysalyn Gocatek

Insights

The success of the 4-H Club Taluksangay has been attributed to the perseverance of the club officers and the support of officials from the local government, government agencies and influential families in the barangay. The 4-H club has been a venue for the youth to develop their self-confidence and be productive members of society. With their exposure and active involvement in different club activities, particularly seaweed farming, the youth were empowered and they also see that seaweed farming can be a viable source of income to support their families.

Written by A. Feranil

Sources:

Focus group discussions with male members of the 4-H Club of Taluksangay (Asmin, Aljieber, Ben-Yasher, Hamjalun, Kamar and Sajir, the current president,) and female members (Nikayla, Alma, Delfa, Nannang, Farhana, Zainab) (21 November 21, 2018); conversation with Ms. Lilibeth Nuño, City Councilor and former adviser of 4-H Club Taluksangay (22 November 2018); interviews with Ms. Carmencita Sanchez, Acting City Agriculturist, Zamboanga City (23 November 2018); Ms. Lorna D Bautista, Agriculturist II, Chief Institutional Development Division, Office of the City Agriculturist, Zamboanga City and Zamboanga City 4-H Coordinator (23 November 2018); Ms. Suraida Usman, 4-H Club District Coordinator of Barangay Taluksangay (22 November 2018); Gamar Jailani, founding president of 4-H Club Taluksangay (2012-2017) and Hanan Hassan, past parliamentarian (2016-2017) (8 December 2018).

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KANESHIGE FARM RURAL CAMPUS FOUNDATION: TRAINING YOUNG FARMERS IN NEGROS OCCIDENTAL

Background

The Kaneshige Farm Rural Campus Foundation (KFRC) is located in Barangay Haguimit, La Carlota City, from where one can glimpse the arresting Mt. Kanla-on, an active volcano, some 50 kilometers away. KFRC was established in 2009 with the specific aim of training young farmers in Negros Occidental. Named to honor the memory of Mr. Masaji Kanashige, former director of Green Co-op Consumers Union, a Japan-based cooperative which buys organically grown bananas and other products from the Philippines, the farm has had a long association with Japanese NGOs.

The Japanese connection started in 1986 with the involvement of the Japanese Committee for Negros Campaign (JCNC) to help the many sugar cane workers who lost their jobs when the price of sugar plummeted in the global market. With its economy largely reliant on sugar cane production, the province of Negros Occidental suffered. Not only were sugar cane workers displaced, the province also experienced famine. Initially, JCNC was heavily into relief and assistance, but later shifted towards providing alternative employment to former sugar cane workers. This led to the cultivation of *balangon*, a banana variety which was exported to Japan, and the organization of farmers in the area into the Banana Growers' Association. The disastrous outcome when *balangon* was hit by a disease was one of the reasons that led to the decision to turn organic.

In 2009, another Japan-based NGO, the Alternative People's Linkages in Asia (APLA) succeeded JCNC in continuing the support to farmers in the province. APLA aims to promote links between Asian peoples in creating self-reliant communities based on agriculture. By this time, the cultivation of *balangon* gave way to the development of integrated farming. APLA rents the 5.5- hectareland from Alter Trade Philippines and introduced the technology of bacteria mineral water (BMW). Since then, about 3 hectares had been cleared for vegetables (beans, eggplants, tomatoes, squash), supplemented by raising free range chickens and hogs. KFRC was registered as an organization in the Philippines' Security and Exchange Commission. The farm is operated by six people – Nang Chita, Nang Pingping, Nong Carlos, Elimar, Jonel and Rene. The last three are alumni of the first (Elimar and Jonel) and second (Rene) batches of the farm's training program. In 2016, Elimar became the secretary-general of KFRC. All six staff members have been with KFRC for 9-10 years. They all share the work and management of the farm and they also serve as trainers of the young farmer-trainees.

The training program

Since its inception, the training program of KFRC was oriented to the training of young farmers in the province of Negros Occidental. In the past, the program also accepted young people who had completed college education, but they noticed that some were just after the certificate of completion.²⁰ Also, since the program is supported by a Japanese NGO, some applicants thought that the training program will be a way to go to Japan. Thus, they considered restricting the program to those not in school who are more likely to be in need of training and employment options. The selection criteria also include being nominated by a people's organization and the candidate's family must have a farm. The latter criterion has wisdom: having a family farm means that graduates of the program can apply what they have learned from the training, and the family farm will benefit from new knowledge and techniques acquired by the trainees.



The KFRC staff celebrating their 9th anniversary in July 2018. Photo from KFRC Facebook

²⁰ KFRC staff who have attended other training programs observed that the participants' motivations for taking the training had less to do with farming as acquiring a certificate for promotion or for reasons other than to use the training to improve their farms. They also observed that the training lacked actual or practical component.

During the six-month training program, the trainees live on the farm, acquiring hands-on training on organic vegetable growing and poultry/hog raising, Bacteria Mineral Water or BMW (which was introduced by their Japanese partners), financial aspects and food processing (e.g., *tocino* [sweet cured meat], *longganisa* [sausage]). An important component of the training is to bolster the trainees' confidence and pride as farmers. The typical perception of farmers is that they are poor and that those in farming do not have any other option. By stressing the importance of agriculture – the fact that food is essential to survival – the training program hopes to raise awareness and appreciation of the trainees' view of agriculture and their role as farmers.

Every batch has 4-6 trainees. Up until now, all the trainees had been male, mostly because the facilities cannot accommodate both male and female participants. The training is free, thanks to the support provided by APLA. The trainees do not receive an allowance. They can earn from the sale of vegetables they grow in their assigned plots or the pigs under their care.



Two of the 2018 batch of young trainees tending their plots. Photo from KFRC Facebook

Over the years, the program added features to strengthen the training program and to provide post-training support. About 50 participants have completed the training program since it started in 2009; about half of the graduates have remained in farming. Some grew tired of farming; others stopped because they could not sell their produce (Interview with Shun Terada, APLA, 7 December 2018). In response to these challenges, the program has added post-training support. To help the graduates get started, KFRC offers support like providing seedlings, and where conditions are right, piglets and the construction of pigpens are provided, to facilitate the graduates' transition to full-time farming. As a practical advice, the

trainers encourage diversification, i.e., combining the growing of vegetables and hog raising; the former provides a steady source of food and income, especially during the period of waiting for the pigs to grow. KFRC also visits their graduates to see how they are doing and to know what other support they might need. Graduates can also contact KFRC through mobile phones or SMS in case they have questions or need advice.

Acquiring knowledge about farming is not enough. As noted earlier, some graduates discontinued their farming activities because they did not have a market for their produce. Marketing is a major challenge. The market of KFRC for their produce is the local community. It is not easy to link with supermarkets because these outlets require huge supplies and moreover, many of them also have their own farms. Another challenge is the stiff competition with non-organic vegetables which are cheaper. Thus, in terms of pricing, KFRC staff said that there is little difference in the price of their vegetables from non-organic vegetables, otherwise, they will lose out to the latter. KFRC had to educate buyers about organically grown vegetables and their health and nutritional advantages to cheaper non-organic vegetables. The farm has already built a customer base in the local community; thus, they do not have a lot of wastage. If there are unsold vegetables, these are used as feeds for the pigs. For graduates who live near KFRC, they can bring their produce to KFRC which maintains a store for their produce (in addition to delivering the vegetables to regular buyers).

Apart from their trainees, the farm provides immersion for senior high school students of La Castellana High School who have taken the agricultural track. The farm also partners with Haguimit Elementary School, where students are taught how to grow vegetables. It also hosts Japanese students from Nihon University and other visitors from partner organizations in Japan. In 2016-2017, KFRC was part of APLA's project of fostering youth farmer leaders toward the practice of natural circularity agriculture in cash crop cultivating areas. The project involved study exchange visits of young farmers in the Philippines, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Japan and Timor Leste. KFRC was represented by Elimar, Jonel and two trainees. Elimar and Jonel learned a great deal from this exchange.

Recently, KFRC started to have discussions with the La Carlota City Agriculture Office on how the office can assist in developing a stable market for agricultural products and the process of acquiring certification as an organic farm.

The trainees' perspective

During the visit to KFRC in December 2018, there were four young men (aged 14, 15, 17 and 29) who were on their third month of training. All four had discontinued schooling for various reasons. The youngest, Alex,²¹ stopped schooling after the second grade because he felt that he could do better in farming. He had been helping in their family farm, but learned more about farming and hog-raising when he qualified for one of the slots in KFRC's training program. He did very well in piggery and had already sold pigs during the program. Another young trainee, 15-year-old Dan, had not completed elementary because his parents separated and he and siblings were left in the care of various relatives. Dan was left on his own when his grandparents passed on. His grandparents own some land which is planted with bananas and corn, which is how he has been able to support himself. After completing the training program, he plans to continue with farming and to be able to have a better income so that he will have the means to reunite with his other siblings.



A senior high school student gets hands-on training in animal production at KFRC. Photo from KFRC Facebook

All the trainees said they have learned about organic farming, budgeting, how to sell their produce, and in addition, they have learned to be independent. Nang Chita and Nang Pingping have also become their mothers, teaching them how to do marketing, cook and take care of themselves. Aside from their farm training, the trainees are assigned chores (cooking, dishwashing and house cleaning).

They were aware that their contemporaries are not keen on pursuing farming. Young people are put off by farming because money does not come easy. Despite the trend of

²¹ Except for the names of the KFRC staff and Shun Terada, the names of the trainees had been changed to protect their privacy.

young people opting to work in the malls or at anything except farming, the trainees have a positive view of farming. For them, farming will not only help themselves, but also their families and their communities. Interestingly, this is the same view held by former trainees now trainers Elimar, Jonel and Rene. As they put it, the training program opened their eyes to the importance of farming, particularly the health benefits of organic farming. Nilo, a recent graduate of the program, added that farming allows one to be his/her own boss.

The trainees are looking forward to the completion of their training program in March 2019. Hopefully, the four will be part of the next generation of farmers who will contribute to sustainable farming and will also be amply rewarded for their contributions.



KFRC regularly hosts Japanese students who volunteer during their visit. These students are Nihon University. Photo courtesy of Shun Terada

Insights

Many training programs are being offered to attract Filipinos to farming. Among others, this is indicated by the emergence of learning sites and schools for practical agriculture in different parts of the country. KFRC's training program is distinctive in its intent and focus on young farmers, particularly, the out-of-school youth. From the selection process to the content of the program, the training aims to build the knowledge base and interest of young people about organic farming. The requirement that applicants must have a family farm is an important detail which helps to ensure that graduates of the program can apply what they have learned.

KFRC's post-training support (providing seedlings and piglets, funding assistance for the construction of a pigpen) and monitoring of the graduates are strong elements of the program. Many training programs do not have a mechanism for monitoring what happened to their graduates.

Thus far, the trainees and graduates have all been male. Due to lack of facilities, KFRC has yet to open the program to young women. Investing in additional facilities to accommodate female trainees will also be an investment in attracting young women to agriculture.

Written by M. Asis

Sources:

Focus group discussion with KFRC staff (Nang Chita, Nang Ping, Nong Carlos, Elimar, Jonel, Rene, 27 December 2018); group interview with the four trainees, 27 December 2018; Interview with Shun Terada, staff of APLA, 7 December 2018

Other source:

Kanashige Farm Rural Campus Foundation. Available from <https://www.facebook.com/Kanashige-Farm-Rural-Campus-Foundation-1405804236395032/>

JR PERLAS: TAKING THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED



JR as a trainee in Japan, 2014. Photo courtesy of JR Perlas

The Perlas family of Palayan City is recognized as a family that farms together. In 2017, the family was awarded the Regional *Gawad Saka* Outstanding Small Farm Family (Central Luzon). The family was not always into farming. Ernesto Perlas, Jr. or JR set his heart to becoming a nurse. Neither his father, Ernesto, Sr., or his mother, Josephine, was a farmer. His father was a soldier and he later worked in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; his mother was a nurse. After returning from Saudi Arabia, Ernesto, Sr. decided to go into farming. Originally hailing from the province of Rizal, he found an opportunity to acquire agricultural land in Palayan City. Together with his wife and three sons, the family worked together in preparing the land for farming. JR and his brothers would help their parents in

clearing the land after school or on weekends. What the family lacked in experience, they made up for by attending various training programs offered by the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) of the Department of Agriculture. The knowledge they acquired got them started in farming and it became the family's main source of income. Farming supported the schooling of JR and his two siblings.

JR's involvement in full-time farming was accidental. At one point, all three siblings were in college and finances were running low. This also coincided with JR encountering a problem in his nursing program. He decided to temporarily stop schooling to reduce expenses and to help full-time in the farm. It was during this period that JR was introduced to 4-H. He

got cajoled into attending the first few meetings because of the promise of free food and t-shirts and the persistence of the 4-H coordinator. But as he attended more meetings and participated in various events, his interest grew. He learned more about agriculture which he was able to apply to their family farm. He became an officer of the local 4-H club, and the organization opened doors for him to be part of the Young Filipino Farmers Leadership Training in Japan Program (YFFLTJP), batch 2014. The selection process entailed examinations at different levels: municipal, regional and national. Eventually, there were 20 selected for batch 2014. The 11-month training in Japan was an eye-opener about farming practices in Japan, the use of technology in farming, and on the side, learning about Japanese culture.

Embracing agriculture

JR's 4-H membership and the opportunity to be selected as one of the trainees in the YFFLTJP may have contributed to his continuing engagement in agriculture. 4-H activities were a source of new knowledge and honed his leadership skills. In preparing for Japan, JR and his batchmates underwent a training program in the Philippines which were provided by ATI, University of the Philippines Los Baños, East-West and hands-on experience in a farm in Ilocos Norte. In addition, the group also received training in Japanese language. Before leaving for Japan, the program tried to match the trainees' profile with their Japanese farmer host. JR was assigned to a dairy farm with three hundred cows. He was able to establish rapport with his host family and other Asian trainees (he was the only Filipino). He handled heavy machinery while he was there.

Upon returning to the Philippines, he was not able to transfer what he learned from his experience in the dairy farm. It was not feasible to start a dairy farm because raising cows requires a temperate climate. Among the valuable lessons he carried from his Japan experience are: (1) the way farmers take great care of their work, and (2) the importance of value-adding production, i.e., creating different products from their base product. He also appreciated the government support given to Japanese farmers. The various training programs equipped JR with new learnings which enabled him to tread new paths.

Aside from farming, JR became active in other agriculture-related activities. Their family farm has become a learning site that provides practical skills to support and improve farmers' agricultural practices. Like his parents, JR is now a trainer, a role that he enjoys because it gives him the opportunity to share with others what he has learned. He has also taken a new step by representing the youth sector in the City Agriculture and Fishery Council.

His parents' active engagement in agriculture-related endeavors may have also encouraged JR to continue his own engagement in agriculture. His parents are leaders in their community – his father spearheaded the formation of a farmers' association which has, among others, secured a loan to purchase farm machinery that the members can avail of, while his mother heads a women's association. According to JR's father, although he is not a

born farmer, he learned to be a farmer not only by experience but in attending various training programs. JR has also imbibed this openness to keep on learning and using knowledge from these training programs to enhance their agricultural practices. For example, after learning about organic agriculture, JR's family transitioned to organic practices two years ago. The family has also taken to heart the importance of integrated diversified farming and value-adding farming. The family cultivates rice and corn, grows vegetables, raises poultry, hogs and cow, and constructed a fishpond. They have taken steps to innovate and go beyond production. The family has started to make fruit wines (watermelon, dragon fruit and *duhat* or Java plum) and natural vinegar under the name "Los Palayanos." JR led his group, the Aulo Working Youth Club, in developing a peanut-based spread called "Peanut Better." Thus, from their peanut harvest, the club developed a product which can be marketed for a higher price. They submitted their experience in developing this product which earned the group the Most Outstanding Youth Social Enterprise award in the 1st Villar SIPAG Youth Poverty Reduction Challenge in 2017. With his ICT skills, JR is in-charge of marketing their family's and club's products through Facebook.

This accidental farmer has gone a long way from just being curious about what the 4-H club does to a dedicated and confident young farmer. JR has received several awards: Regional *Gawad Saka* Young Farmer 2018 (Central Luzon), *Dangal ng Kabataang Nobo Ecijano* (Honor of Novo Ecijano Youth) 2018, and was a finalist in TOFARM Outstanding Young Farmer 2018. These awards make him happy; for him, the recognition is also a responsibility— that whatever he has received, it is important that he shares knowledge with others.

Hopes for the future

JR hopes that Filipino farmers will be more open to the use of machinery and technology in agriculture to promote food security. He saw that in Japan, through farm mechanization, farmers are able to make the best of their situation despite limited cultivable land area and few workers. He is also hopeful that achieving good agricultural practice certification will broaden the market for Filipino farmers. However, this will require government support. Based on what he has experienced thus far, JR is convinced that there is a good present and future in agriculture. Innovation is key: we need to develop value- added products from agriculture.

To encourage young Filipinos to appreciate and contribute to agriculture, JR believes in engaging them when they are still young, first in their families, and when they start school. Subjects about agriculture can be made more interesting through farm visits, for example. Children's curiosity about the things around them—e.g., questions like where do fruits come from—can be starting points to introduce discussions about agriculture and its importance in putting food on the table.



JR and his family have branched out into wine-making from *duhat*, watermelon and dragon fruit. They named their wines “Los Palayanos” (Sons of Palayan). Photo courtesy of JR Perlas

Insights

JR’s 4-H experience and the training program in Japan attracted his interest in agriculture. His family’s active engagement in agriculture and his parents’ mentorship played an important role in JR’s continuing involvement in agriculture. 4-H casts a very wide net among young Filipinos and for many, it does serve as an entry point and an introduction to the big world of agriculture. JR’s journey in agriculture was reinforced by his acceptance to the YFFLTJP which provided him intensive training prior to departure and exposure to farming in Japan. The program’s hopes to train and retain young farmers who will play a



Son and father in their family farm in Palayan City. Photo courtesy of Chrysalyn Gocatek



JR as *senpai*, a senior, providing advice to the 2019 batch of trainees. Photo courtesy of JR Perlas

leadership role in the country's agriculture sector are somehow dampened by the fact that some returnee-trainees opt out of farming. JR is among the returnees who is showing the way for other young people that agriculture is not a lost cause (see also Rudy Concepcion, in this volume). The support and influence of his parents cannot be overstressed. His parents saw farming as economically viable and by their example – their faith in agriculture, their continuing efforts to gain new knowledge, their example of giving back to the community, and their pride as farmers – JR also chose the same path.

Written by M. Asis*Sources:*

Interviews with Ernesto Perlas Jr., Ernesto Sr. and Josefina Perlas (12 September 2018)

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JR Perlas. Available from <https://web.facebook.com/jr.perlas.3>

RUDY CONCEPCION II: A YOUNG FARMER IN A GRAYING AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

Isabela, the Rice and Corn Granary of the Philippines, is the home of the Ilokano, Tagalog, Ibanag, Gaddang, Paranan and Yogad ethno-linguistic groups and of the farming family of Rudy “Rude” Concepcion II. Rude’s family used to own a 5-hectare land where they planted rice and where his love for farming started. Originally from Nueva Ecija, his father moved to Isabela and later became a farm leader. When his father died, the family continued to develop the family farm but the land was divided among the children. His eldest brother inherited the biggest chunk of 2.5 hectares but later on sold the property to become an overseas Filipino worker while another brother inherited one hectare.

Unlike most of the children in their neighborhood who were busy playing, Rude spent his teenage years learning how to plow the field and working on the 1.5-hectare farm he inherited. He learned the potential of earning an income from agriculture at the age of 11 when his neighbor paid him for helping out on his farm, which encouraged him to work in farming. Despite his mother’s resistance, he worked as a farmhand in their community and nearby provinces like Kalinga and Ifugao to earn extra money for his school allowance and to help his family. Through farming, Rude supported his own education since Grade IV until he finished his Diploma in Agricultural Technology. Currently, Rude develops his integrated farm by planting rice, practicing crop rotation of various vegetables (i.e., tomatoes, eggplants, chili, and string beans), herding livestock with his sister, and maintaining a pond which is a source of fresh fish for the family’s consumption.

Attracting the youth to agriculture through the 4-H Club

As of December 2018, Ms. Lydia Bilgera, the designated 4-H Coordinator, related that in the whole province, only 13 out of the 34 municipalities are actively participating in the 4-H Club and there are only eight clubs out of the 65 barangays in Cauayan City. She was proud to say that Isabela has been producing outstanding young farmers who were either graduates of the Young Filipino Farm Leaders Training Program in Japan (YFFLTPJ) or winners of the prestigious *Gawad Saka*. She highlighted that young women in Cauayan City are also participating in agricultural activities through the Green Ladies Organization at the local level and through the Rural Improvement Clubs (RIC) at the national level. For Ms. Bilgera, attracting the youth to agriculture would entail involving them in hands-on agricultural training.

Rude has been an active member of the club since 2013. He became Federation President for Region II and a national officer in 2018. He came to know about 4-H when he joined and

won the poster-making contest hosted by the club in 2013. Through the club's coordinator, he was introduced to the club's activities (i.e., seminars, local exchange of knowledge and information on farming, excursions and youth camps). He admitted that he never missed any event because he enjoyed the hands-on training. Through the 4-H Club, Rude acquired additional skills and knowledge about farming which he can share with fellow farmers. 4-H taught him many things which boosted his interest in agriculture and in the club.



Rude (farthest left) with the 4-H Club of the Philippines national officers during the Sustainable Rural Development Conference last 5-6 November 2018. Photo courtesy of Rude Concepcion

When asked about the value of the 4-H Club, all participants in the focus group discussion appreciated the knowledge, experience and exposure to agriculture that they have gained.

The 4-H Club has given me knowledge and has made me experience things I need to experience. My parents have also benefitted from the additional knowledge which they use to improve the things they are doing in the farm. Although I may not be able to apply all these learnings yet, I will be mindful of them for my future use. – 4HII5, female, 20 y/o, Bataan

Becoming a member of the club made me realize of its importance to the youth. I learned a lot of things during the course of my membership which I can also share with other young people in our community. I can also encourage these young people to join the 4-H Club. – 4HII6, male, 20 y/o, Batanes

Before, I did not know that the 4-H Club is related to agriculture and that there are modern technologies available in farming. The club made me appreciate the value of agriculture and made me realize that agriculture can be cool. – 4HII3, female, 20 y/o, Aurora

Since all the participants were recipients of the Produktibong 4-H Scholarship of the Youth Empowerment through a Sustainable (YES) Program²², they recognized that the scholarship was instrumental in helping them to earn a college degree. One female participant related that she stopped studying after graduating from high school because her parents cannot afford to send her to college. She moved to Manila to find employment and became a domestic worker for two years. The scholarship enabled her to continue her studies.

For me, taking up Bachelor in Agricultural Technology at Isabela State University helps young people like me to understand agriculture better and realize its importance especially the food security of the people. – 4HII1, female, 21 y/o, Cagayan

Before, I only stayed at home and was active in catechism. The ATI scholarship gave me another chance to continue my studies. Now, I can see a bright future for myself and for my family because of the opportunities available to someone who finished a four-year course. – 4HII2, male, 26 y/o, Aurora

Rude admitted that as the 4-H Club continues to grow and evolve, it also faces challenges, such as, dependence on government to support its agricultural activities and the uncertainty of whether the members will continue their farming activities.

Attracting the youth to agriculture through YFFLTPJ²³

Through 4-H, Rude learned about local and international scholarships, including the YFFLTPJ, which caught his interest. In 2015, he joined the Adopt-a-Farm Youth Program to qualify for the scholarship, and later, he was conferred the Outstanding Young Farmer award. In 2016, he aced the national exam for YFFLTPJ. In 2017, he began his training and became the batch leader among 18 trainees.

From the training he had undergone from his host farmer in Kobayashi City, Japan, he learned about new technologies in farming. He applied these upon his return to the Philippines but modified the application to suit available resources in their farm. As much as he can, he tries to incorporate newly-acquired knowledge in farming practices and encourages other farmers to try it to make their agricultural activities easier. In addition, he learned about Japanese culture and society and the value of discipline. The experience also honed his leadership skills. He acknowledged the YFFLTPJ for developing his self-confidence to become a resource speaker and share his learnings with local farmers. His

²² The YES scholarship program is part of ATI's programs for the youth; it opens educational opportunities to poor but deserving children of farming families and to members of 4-H Clubs nationwide.

²³ It was formerly known as the Young Filipino Farmers Training Program in Japan (YFFTPJ) and was handled by the Philippine Council for Agriculture and Fisheries for 25 years. It was transferred to ATI in 2014.



Rude (4th from right) with the YFFLTPI Batch 2017 and Mr. Samuel Animas, Agriculture Attaché, Philippine Embassy in Tokyo, Japan. Photo courtesy of Rude Concepcion

training in Japan opened his eyes that farming can be profitable, in contrast to the poverty experienced by farmers in the Philippines.

After completing the 11-month training in February 2018, Rude received PHP 50,000 as startup capital for a livestock project. The capital is part of ATI's post-training support. Since coming back, he has been busy sharing what he has learned in Japan and his experiences as a young farmer to various audiences. He also currently serves as a resource speaker for the various training programs organized by the Cauayan City Agriculture Office targeted for farmers.

From a former farm worker to a farm owner, today, Rude hires 50 workers aged 25-40 years old to help him during planting season. Apart from being a farmer, he is also active in doing volunteer work related to his many roles: as a National Officer of the 4-H Club, as Federation President for Region II, as an agricultural extension worker (AEW) in the City Agriculture Office (CAO), and as an active member of the Provincial Youth Development Council. He is also collaborating with *barangay* officials, *Sangguniang Kabataan* (SK-Youth Council) and other youth organizations to



Rude de-weeding the rice field in Kobayashi City, Japan. Photo courtesy of Rude Concepcion

maintain the 900-square meter community garden in Barangay Nagrumbuan. In spite of his busy schedule, he finds time to devote to farming, lead an organization, build the capacity of farmers—old and young—and work on putting up his learning site. Once established, the learning site will be a venue to share the knowledge and skills he obtained from all the training and seminars he has attended, thanks to the 4-H Club and the YFFLTPJ.

Challenges faced by young farmers

As a young farmer, Rude has to contend with a number of challenges. One is the challenge posed by natural calamities. In 2018, two super typhoons, Ompong in September and Rosita in October, hit Isabela. According to Mr. Constante Barrosa, the City Agriculturist, their office distributed hybrid corn seeds while the DA provided vegetable seeds as assistance to farmers who were affected by the typhoons. However, these were not enough to enhance farmers' resilience to the damages brought by disasters and drought. For instance, the hybrid rice seeds distributed by the CAO cannot withstand typhoons. Rude hopes that the government will provide farmers with support that will enable them to face calamities and will help them plan for post-disaster situations. Rude also cited other challenges, such as, climate change, which affects the planting and harvesting season, and farmers' inability to avail of crop insurance with the Philippine Crop Insurance Corporation or the DA.

Mindful of these challenges, the CAO has been helping young farmers and young people in Cauayan City by providing technical and extension services through research, extension development initiatives, training, exposure to new technologies and other innovations that tackle food sufficiency. It supports the 4-H Club in terms of organizing, strengthening and empowering the club while the DA has programs offering financial support. Both the SK and the OSYs were recipients of their livelihood projects. Other interventions given to the OSYs were provision of vegetable seeds and seedling with technical assistance on growing, linkages to markets for selling their produce, capacity-building activities, and scholarships. Many OSYs received grants from the ATI through the Academic and Technology Integration – Education Program (ATI-EP) which gives opportunities to finish elementary or high school education through the Alternative Learning System (ALS) of the Department of Education. Overall, the key informants from the CAO believed that providing livelihood to OSYs is also a key intervention to draw young people to agriculture.

Prospects for young farmers and farming

Rude learned the importance of farm planning from the various training programs and seminars he has attended in the Philippines and abroad. He applies what he has learned in his own farm and he also shares these lessons with other farmers. When asked about other things that he wanted to do, Rude disclosed that:

I do have some other things which I want to do, like painting, and I was good at it. It was a dream to pursue an art degree, but my family cannot afford to send me to college. I found my livelihood in farming. With the training I availed for myself, I realized that farming, coupled with the adoption of modern technology, is the best way to help the community, by producing food that is needed by the increasing population.

He also revealed some thoughts on leaving and staying in the community. During his college years, migration was popular in their area: the men worked abroad mostly as construction workers while the women worked as domestic workers in Qatar. Rude witnessed how some of his neighbors started to earn big money, which allowed them to build better houses, and this in turn, made him think about migrating too. However, he did not perceive any difference in terms of the income that he would earn abroad and what he could earn at home. He observed that farming in the Philippines gives the farmer flexibility when it comes to time management. According to him, farmers can also earn more if they have initiative, a systematic plan for the cropping season, and sufficient technology in farming.

Like Rude, majority of the club members who shared their insights were very optimistic about the future of agriculture in the Philippines. They saw agriculture as key to the country's development by alleviating poverty and securing food for the population. Three participants cited technology as a critical element to the sector's success.

I am optimistic because the government can introduce technology and knowledge to facilitate the progress of the sector and to help increase the knowledge of agriculturists. – 4HII6, male, 20 y/o, from Batanes

I am optimistic if we will adopt modern technologies which will make farming easy and productive to sustain the needs of the families. – 4HII1, female, 21 y/o, Cagayan

I can see a promising future if we will utilize modern technologies in agriculture like what Japan and Canada are doing. The use of modern technology in agriculture reveals the ingenuity of the agriculturists. –4HII2, male, 26 y/o, Aurora

One participant pointed to the significance of partnerships and another one cited the encouraging example of teachers and mentors who have become successful.

The success of agriculture can be attained if the government will coordinate and collaborate with different organizations or different institutions. People today are more adaptive, more innovative and more passionate about agriculture. – 4HII4, male, 21 y/o, Nueva Vizcaya

Our teachers and mentors who keep on pushing us, they themselves have become successful and have acquired lands, houses, car and other properties. In addition, agriculture is vital to poverty alleviation and to food security in the Philippines. – 4HII3, female, 20 y/o, Aurora

Young people's disinterest in agriculture is an issue that is tackled by 4-H Clubs. As a leader of the 4-H Club, Rude considers the out-of-school youth as untapped resources in the agricultural sector. He wants to encourage them to maximize the scholarships offered by the ATI, the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources and other agencies. He plans to have accurate data of 4-H members, develop an ID system, register with the Securities and Exchange Commission, strengthen youth camps, organize an "Araw ng Kabataan" (Youth Day) in Region II, and maximize the use of hubs provided by the ATI to display the different products of the members and to find markets for these products.

Insights

Rude is a shining example of a young farmer who is playing a catalyst role in encouraging youth involvement in agriculture.

Through scholarships to children of poor farmers and fishers, the 4-H Club is contributing to efforts in attracting a new generation of workers and professionals in agriculture. The exposure to agricultural knowledge, skills and technology provided by 4-H has raised young people's appreciation of agriculture. Moreover, the efforts of the 4-H coordinators have been crucial in encouraging youth participation in 4-H Club activities and other agriculture-related programs.

Thus far, the government has supported many capacity-building programs for young farmers. In cooperation with young farmers, it would be worthwhile to identify their needs and capacity gaps in other aspects, such as sustainable production of high value crops, mechanization, value-adding agriprenueurship, business development, and marketing.

Written by C. Gocatek

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AIZA ZACARIAS: 2018 OUTSTANDING YOUNG FARMER, REGION 6



Aiza introduced lettuce in her community. She wrote her thesis on lettuce and she applied what she learned from her research when she ventured into lettuce growing. Photo courtesy of Aiza Zacarias

Passion for farming

As far as she can remember, 28-year-old Aiza Zacarias had always liked farming. Her parents are farmers and farming had enabled them to support Aiza and her nine siblings. She grew up helping her parents in the farm. When she was a child, she thought that the land they tilled was theirs. She happily shared that her family now owns, Raya, the 2.4-ha. farmland in Hamtic, Antique. She became a member of the 4-H Club Hamtic chapter when

she was in high school at Funda. And in college, her passion for farming was furthered when she chose to take up BS Agriculture, majoring in Crop Science at the University of Antique- Hamtic Campus. She completed her studies in 2012, graduating cum laude.

She wrote her thesis on lettuce growing and its response to vermicompost using the different plant sources of nitrogenous substrates. And after the conduct of the study, she put this to good use when she started to cultivate lettuce in their farm. At the time, in 2012, lettuce was rather unheard of in their community, where the staple vegetables were beans, eggplants, *pechay* (a variety of cabbage) and the like. Aiza introduced lettuce to her community and before long, she and her mother were able to establish a market for lettuce. She and her family continued growing lettuce—growing the loose-leaf variety during some months and the iceberg variety from December to March-- until 2017. They did not grow lettuce in 2018 because the seeds did not germinate and the screenhouse they had been using for years was destroyed by a typhoon that hit Antique.

To help her family, in 2014, Aiza migrated to Sta. Cruz, Laguna, where she found work in a business development company providing support to entrepreneurs. She was earning, but

she missed being a farmer. In 2016, she decided to resign from her job, but this did not push through because her company was going to open a branch in Antique, and she was tapped to join the Antique team. She accepted the offer and was reassigned to her home province. But still, she missed farming. In 2017, she bid farewell and returned to farming to help her parents. Of the 10 children, Aiza and an older brother are the ones who are very involved with the family farm. When needed, the other siblings also help out in the farm. The family practices diversified farming. They grow vegetables like *pechay*, okra and string beans and rice production. They also engage in native swine production, raising native

chicken and livestock, and tilapia growing. She was able to apply what she learned from her course and various training programs to their farm. They started to practice organic farming in 2012. Until now, organic farming is not yet widely practiced in Antique.

“Just a farmer?”

While Aiza was happy being a farmer, other than her family, she felt sad that her work was not valued. Having graduated cum laude, she received quizzical reactions why she “just became a farmer.” This personal experience revealed to her how farming is looked down upon. The lack of support, however, did not stop her from pursuing her passion.

The Municipal Agriculture Office of Hamtic came to know about her efforts to practice organic farming. Following an interview with her, she was nominated for the Outstanding Young Farmer in Organic Farming category in Region 6 (Western Visayas). A year later, in September 2018, Aiza received the award. She received PHP30,000 and a plaque. More importantly, for Aiza, the award was an acknowledgment of the work of farmers like her.



The award helped boost Aiza's pride as a young farmer.

Photo courtesy of Aiza Zacarias

At the time of interview (December 2018), Aiza was working at the Provincial Agriculture Office (PAO). She was hired in July 2018 and was assigned to handle high value crops development. She works at the PAO during the week, but on weekends, she continues to work in the family farm. Thus, she describes herself as a weekend farmer.

When asked about the challenges of farming, Aiza cited the difficulty of finding workers. She also mentioned the losses brought about by weather changes. If farming were the only source of income, she acknowledged that it cannot cover the needs of their family –only 0.25 hectare is allocated to rice production and income from raising animals is not stable. Farming has to be combined with other sources of income. These challenges did not discourage Aiza from persevering in farming. For her, farming is a way of life. She derives joy in taking care of plants and watching them grow. These are the reasons that keep her in farming.

Insights

Aiza’s seemingly “ordinary” story as a farmer suggests some insights on the attractions as well as the challenges of farming. In fact, a woman farmer is not ordinary in a male-dominated field. Her reference to farming as a passion reflects a deep regard for farming as a way of life and its significance in society. Although she now works at another job, she continues to farm on weekends. On the challenge side, Aiza personally experienced the low regard for farmers. When she identified herself as a farmer to those who would ask her what she was doing, people wondered why she was “just a farmer.” According to various key informants, including young farmers, this kind of mindset is one of the major reasons why young people opt out of agriculture. Even as she loves farming, Aiza also noted that a family has to diversify their sources of income because farming alone is not enough to support the needs of the family.



Aiza (third from left) and her family preparing vegetables that will be distributed to their customers. Photo courtesy of Aiza Zacarias

Sources:

Interview with Ms. Aiza Zacarias (30 December 2018); focus group discussion with 4-H Club Barangay Evelio Javier and former 4-H coordinator in Hamtic, Antique (30 December 2019)

CROPITAL: CONNECTING FARMERS AND INVESTORS

Although a certified techie, Manila-born Ruel Amparo spent summer vacations in Bulacan where he came to know about farmers who were always in need of capital to be able to farm and grow food. To raise capital, farmers are dependent on loans. They are unable to avail of formal credit offered by banks and rural banks because they lack collateral. They may have access to traders or informal lenders, but the interest rates are very high. A third alternative must be possible, and this is where the idea for Cropital was born. For a project in their technopreneurship class at the University of the Philippines College of Engineering, Ruel, Don Jazzper Ramones and Everett Ubiadas, put their techie heads together to find a way to help farmers access capital. After graduation in 2014, the three started working, but Ruel kept returning to their project idea. The opportunity came in 2015 when Ruel applied for and was accepted in an incubation program in Malaysia called the Malaysian Global Innovation and Creativity Centre (MaGIC). Several grants and further mentoring later, Cropital was launched in November 2015.

Cropital is a crowdfunding platform dedicated to helping farmers, but it is also more than that. In addition to linking farmers in need of capital and investors who have money to invest, Cropital provides farmers with technical assistance and insure them to minimize risks for farmers and investors alike. Once the funds are released to farmers, Cropital holds monthly meetings with the farmers until harvest time to see what other needs they might have. Cropital partners with communities and farmers' groups, the Philippine Rice Research Institute (for providing technical support to farmers), and the Philippines Crop Insurance Corporation (to insure farmers). The organization is exploring to link with the Agricultural Guarantee Support Fund to provide coverage for loans without collateral (as is the case with the farmers funded by Cropital). Its engagement with local government units has been limited mostly to informing the Municipal Agricultural Unit of its presence in the community.



Ruel Amparo (leftmost, CEO and Founder) with Rachel de Villa (Chief Technology Officer and Founder) and Everett Ubiadas (Ruel's groupmate in technopreneurship class and co-founder). Photo courtesy of Cropital

How Cropital works

Cropital focuses on funding rice growing farmers in selected provinces: Batangas, Bohol, Bulacan, Laguna, Leyte, Pampanga and Pangasinan. The Visayas provinces were additions in 2018. For now, Cropital is limiting its operations to these provinces while trying to improve the model and the system. The partner farmers of Cropital are males and females between 25 and 75 years old, and smallholder farmers with 0.5 to 4 hectares of land.



Cropital provides financial as well as technical support to farmers. Photo courtesy of Cropital

While the use of ICT is important in its operations, Cropital works with various partners to implement the facility. It partners with farmers' associations in the area to identify farmers in need of capital, followed by a vetting process to screen and select farmers who will be included in the list of farmers whose farms will be up for investment. Farmers pay interest rates from 8 to 12 percent for a cycle duration of 4–6 months. A profile of the farmer and his/her farm and an assessment of risk (which ranges from 1 to 5, 5 indicates the most risk) are posted in the platform.²⁴ Investors browse and choose which farm to invest in from the listing prepared by Cropital. Investors can invest for a minimum of PHP5,000, which is then pooled with funds put in by other investors. Once the needed capital is met, the platform flags the farm as fully funded. Most farms get funded within 24 hours (Interview, Ruel Amparo, 31 July 2018). In fact, one of the problems they encountered before was the limited number of farms for funding (Interview, Genesis Valencia, 7 December 2018).

As of December 2018, Cropital has some 40,000 registered investors (strictly speaking, a pool of interested investors, out of which, 4,000 are actual lenders). Some 30 percent of

²⁴ According to Bernard Valderon, the farmers funded by Cropital are in the ages 50–60. Only a few are aged 30 and below. The youngest farmer funded by Cropital was 22 years old (Interview, 7 December 2018).

registered investors is overseas Filipinos. Investors' ages range from 21 to 60 years old; about 60 percent are in the ages 18-34. An investor can earn 3.5 percent return on investment after 4-6 months of short-term funding. Cropital aims to build a sustainable and long-term relationship with investors. Cropital investors are not just motivated by the promise of earning interest, but they also want to lend a hand to farmers (Interview, Ruel Amparo, 31 July 2018; Interview, Genesis Valencia, 7 December 2018). This type of investing is similar to investing in a social enterprise where earning money is not the only consideration.

Milestones, challenges and future plans

Asked about what Cropital has achieved in its first three years (2015-2018), Ruel has this to say:

Some of our major milestones are the following: one is finding the model that would work for us. BWe started with different crops but when we focused on rice, that was when we were able to scale up and move forward. Another one is that, this year (2018), we were able to sustain Cropital rather than relying on external funding. We have released more than 800 loans to farmers and we have around 4,000 lenders. In terms of payment rate, we do not have any write-off, and we are at around 94 percent on time full payment, which is comparable to the payment rates [of other institutions]. (Interview, Ruel Amparo, 31 July 2018)

Thus far, Cropital has released PHP 40 million to more than 500 farmers with a repayment rate of 94 percent (as of February 2019).



Promise of a good harvest (left) and rice packets from Bulacan farmers (right) on display during the 2016 IdeaSpace Demo Day. Photos courtesy of Cropital

On the other hand, Cropital also has to contend with challenges:

In terms of challenges, it's always those things that we cannot prevent from happening, such as weather conditions, pests, etc., since these are the things that also hinder us from being able to pay on time. These things would also continue to persist and the only way to overcome it is to have proper mitigation strategies (Interview, Ruel Amparo, 7 December 2018).

Farmers have expressed concerns about weather fluctuations, experiencing continuous rain for a period of time, and later experiencing drought. There is need for Municipal Agricultural Units to step up their assistance on preparedness and mitigation strategies and resilient farming.

As mentioned earlier, they did not have write-off cases. Mostly the repayment problem has more to do with delayed payments due to force-majeure instances (Interview, Genesis, 7 December 2018). When they explain the reasons for the delay, investors generally understand the situation. In relation to investors, Cropital aims to develop a sustainable community of investors which will provide vital support to farmers for the long-term.

Apart from expanding to two Visayas provinces, a new support to farmers was added in 2018—linking farmers and buyers— which will help in addressing another challenge to farmers. This was already introduced in Bohol and Leyte, where committed buyers have emerged. The arrangement with the farmers is similar to contract growing.

Cropital has reaped many awards for its services to farmers and innovative service delivery. It has received the following accolades: national winner in the 2015 Startup Summit Philippines Competition organized by the Young Entrepreneurs Society Philippines (YES Philippines); one of the Top 12 Startup Picks in MaGIC's ASEAN Track Demo Day 2015; Grand Workshop Winner in the Youth Entrepreneurship Development Workshop (YEDW)-Business Idea Category 2015; winner of Esquire Financing Inc.'s Fueling the Dream Business Model Competition 2015; Best Social Enterprise of the Year in the Philippines, 2016 Ricebowl Startup Awards; one of the Most Outstanding Youth Organizations in the in the 1st Villar SIPAG (Social Institute for Poverty Alleviation and Governance) Youth Poverty Reduction Challenge in 2017; and first runner-up, Dsion Startup Challenge 2018. Co-founder Ms. Rachel de Villa was named one of Forbes Magazine's '30 under 30' Asia list of 2016 in the Finance and Venture Capital category and was one of the 26 Inspiring Filipinas 2017 in the Inclusive Business Category.

In the future, Cropital hopes to cover more provinces. It is careful with scaling up because the people behind it want to improve the current system. Future plans include financing corn growing farmers and working towards a more integrated support package for farmers. The young people behind Cropital are bullish about the future of agriculture in the Philippines. An enabling environment which allows the participation of young Filipinos can help unlock solutions to problems that have long troubled the agriculture sector.

Insights

The example of Cropital emphasizes a number of points to ponder on youth involvement in agriculture: (1) young people can be a source of innovation – highlighting in this case, the innovative use of technology to help farmers access capital and interest young investors, who were reached by this platform; (2) urban-based young people are also getting involved in agriculture, although in ways other than cultivation and production; and (3) the lack of dialogue, thus far, between Cropital and the Department of Agriculture (DA) may indicate that the DA might be losing sight of what young people could bring to the table.

Written by M. Asis

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YPARD PHILIPPINES: INCLUDING THE VOICES OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN AGRICULTURE

The Young Professionals for Agricultural Development Philippines (YPARD Philippines) is part of an international movement, YPARD Global, founded by and for young professionals interested in contributing to agricultural development. YPARD operates as a network that provides support to young professionals, promotes exchange, and enables them to shape sustainable food systems in their respective areas and globally.

The idea of youth representation in debates and discussions on agricultural development started in the European Forum for Agricultural Research for Development and the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) in 2005. The idea was fleshed out over several meetings and was launched at a side event of the Global Forum for Agricultural Research conference on 8 November 2016, in New Delhi, India. Following the launch, YPARD developed its first charter, established regional units, developed the website to facilitate exchange among members, participated in conferences, and organized workshops and other activities in selected regions. YPARD Global is hosted by the Global Forum for Agricultural Research at the FAO in Rome, while YPARD Asia Pacific Regional Coordination Unit is hosted by the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences (CAAS).

YPARD Philippines was established in 2015. Founder Jim Leandro Cano learned about YPARD in 2014 and soon after inquired how a chapter may be set up in the Philippines. He is currently pursuing MS in Development Management and Governance and serving as a Teaching Associate at the Agricultural Systems Institute of the College of Agriculture and Food Science, University of the Philippines Los Baños. YPARD's vision of empowered youth engaged in agricultural development resonated with Jim's vision for young people and their role Philippine agriculture. Together with his core team, Jim submitted the requirements for the Philippines' application; YPARD Global validated the Philippine chapter in March 2015.

Carving spaces for young professionals in agriculture

In setting the agenda for YPARD Philippines, the core team was guided by Philippine realities: the lack of interest in agriculture among the youth, minimal participation of young professionals in dialogues concerning agriculture, and young people's lack of access to resources. In 2018, YPARD Global restructured its main objectives into the following strategic aims:

- To ensure the long-term sustainability of YPARD
- To be a key influencer in the strategic direction of youth engagement in sustainable food systems
- To enable young people in agriculture shape sustainable food systems
- To be an innovative and supportive global team



Country representative Jim Leandro Cano (farthest right) with fellow founding core members at the launch of YPARD Philippines in March 2015. (Photo from <https://ypard.net/es/2015-may-13/ypard-philippines-vision-casting-%E2%80%93-building-team>)

The goal to involve young people in agriculture is motivated by a combination of concerns and possibilities. The aging of Filipino farmers has been a foremost concern. Young people can be a great resource, but to get them involved, there is a need to raise their awareness about the importance of agriculture through education. Jim stressed that the understanding of agriculture must go beyond farming, beyond production. YPARD Philippines aims to pursue actions in five key areas of agriculture: 1) research and development; extension and advisory services; 3) academe; 4) agribusiness (private sector); and, 5) agri-policy (public sector).

In its launch and first meeting on 4 March 2015, YPARD Philippines kicked off with a vision-casting of the organization's aims and programs. Following the initial meeting, the group then put up the YPARD Philippines Facebook Group (see fb.com/groups/ypardphilippines/; see also <https://ypard.net/country/philippines>) to facilitate exchange among members and to open membership to young people in the ages 18-39. As of January 2019, the Facebook group had 315 members while the website had 234 members. Like YPARD Global, the online platform is the primary means of communication and exchange among the members. Fortunately, the core members of YPARD Philippines are based in the University of the Philippines in Los Baños, hence it is easier to organize face-to-face

meetings if needed. New developments and other announcements are shared through the Facebook group.

In November 2015, the organization reached out to the Coalition for Agricultural Modernization in the Philippines, Inc. (CAMP), a coalition of scientists, advocates and agri-entrepreneurs in agriculture, forestry and aquaculture. Jim joined the board and became the youth voice in this group.

The YPARD participation in CAMP promises to be an interesting one as it will promote exchange and dialogue across generations. This cooperation also inspires one of YPARD Philippines' programs—mentoring—which, members “envisioned an avenue where the older generation or senior experts in their respective fields would be able to guide and work together with young professionals who are eager to develop themselves in their respective sub-aspects of agriculture (e.g. academe, research, extension, policy, agribusiness).”

Since its launch, the organization has conducted various activities and has collaborated with other organizations on agriculture-related initiatives. It has participated in forums on agriculture, career talks in agriculture, and promoted awareness of agriculture to young people. YPARD Philippines has been invited to key national and international conferences on agriculture including the 66th Farm Youth 4-H National Convention held in Iloilo City in 2018, the Asia-Pacific Islands Rural Advisory Services (APIRAS) Learning Event, the Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS) Annual Meeting 2018, the 45th Annual Session of the UN Committee on World Food Security (UN-CFS), and the 42nd Governing Council Meeting of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) of the United Nations.

Linking and Mentoring



Coalition for Agriculture Modernization in the Phils. (CAMP)

Photos courtesy of Jim Leandro Cano

One of YPARD Philippines' unique approach to promoting agriculture is through its Agri-Arts Initiatives. One of the highlights was the group's musical production, AGRA, in partnership with UP Broadway Company. In March 2017, YPARD Philippines received funding from the Office for Initiatives in Culture and the Arts, University of the Philippines in Los Baños to stage the two-hour musical

which featured 16 original songs about agriculture. It was co-created with a musical director from the Bureau of Plant Industry; the script was written by a geneticist from the International Rice Research Institute; and a colleague from the Animal Science Department took care of make-up and costume design.

YPARD Philippines with 4H Club Philippines



Photos courtesy of Jim Leandro Cano

In their meeting on 12 January 2019, the members discussed future plans which include the following: developing working groups among members to engage in focused discussions around the five-fold arenas of engagement—academe, research, extension, policy and agribusiness—and develop policy briefs; exploring possible areas of cooperation with the Philippine Agriculturist Association; and looking into an ASEAN-wide event targeting young people (to be discussed with a state university).

As mentioned earlier, YPARD Philippines has forged a partnership with CAMP. It has started engaging with the 4-H Philippines, serving as resource persons in various trainings of 4H Regional and National Officers. The two organizations may wish to consider developing potential areas for more substantive cooperation and synergy.

On the global stage, Jim will be representing YPARD Global in the establishment of a Youth Council with fellow international youth-in-agriculture organizations (e.g., 4H International, Climate Smart Agri Youth Network) to be based in Rome. The council aims to influence and advocate for youth-oriented policies with the three UN Food Agencies – IFAD, FAO, and World Food Programme.

Insights

YPARD Philippines is a notable development in the agriculture landscape in the Philippines. It has the potential to involve young people and develop leaders to promote the development of agriculture in various fields. If developed fully, it can be a platform for youth involvement in policy-making, an arena which sorely needs to involve young people

not just as beneficiaries but as key actors. The organization has thrived as a voluntary organization and is largely driven by the vision and motivation of Jim and his core team. The openness of the Department of Agriculture in engaging young Filipinos, not just as producers, but also as actors in academia, research, policy, extension, and agribusiness, would be part of durable solutions to attract, retain and invigorate agriculture in this country.

Written by M. Asis*Sources:*

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GOOD FOOD COMMUNITY: LINKING SMALLHOLDER FARMERS TO MARKETS

Filipino farmers are confronted by many challenges in the production stages such as accessing land, agricultural inputs and capital. Once they have harvested their crops, the next challenge is to find buyers, a gap that middlemen fill, but often, to the disadvantage of farmers. Linking farmers to markets is a gap in the agricultural sector which Good Food Community, Inc. (GFC) addresses in its initiative.

Growing up, Charlene Tan was painfully aware of the sad reality that food consumers eat three times a day while farmers are hungry and poor. When she started GFC, she felt compelled to not only do something but to do it effectively to stop injustice and hunger among farmers. As she put it, it was like a “calling,” a mission to create an alternative food system that benefits everyone—the farmers, the consumers, the soil—and a harmonious relationship which transforms people’s relationship with the food system. It is important that a community of all stakeholders in food production is built around it, thus, the company’s motto is “let’s change the world with food” (Interview, Charlene Tan, 18 September 2018).

Starting up and starting over again

Charlene Tan initially learned about the concept of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) from volunteers visiting from the United Kingdom while working as a systems engineer and volunteer manager at Sibol ng Agham at Teknolohiya, Inc. [Spring of Science and Technology] (SIBAT) in 2008. She loved the idea of an alternative model, whereby, consumers are connected directly with the farmers who grow their food. Customers commit to support farmers, subscribing to purchase farmers’ produce for a certain period of time, and receiving vegetables based on whatever is available. She considered this arrangement beneficial for both groups because farmers are assured of a steady demand and consumers have access to fresh, organic vegetables. SIBAT helped in starting the



GFC *gulay* (vegetable) shares in *bayong* (small sack). Photo from GFC’s Facebook account

initiative and later on Charlene ended up spearheading the implementation of CSA (Interview, Charlene Tan, 18 September 2018).

A year later, Charlene pitched the idea of starting a program to support farmers to her prayer group at Christian Life Community of the Philippines (CLCP). Along with 12 members, all in their mid-20s, they formed the GFC. They submitted a proposal to the British Council's "I am a Changemaker Social Enterprise Programme."²⁵ In 2010, GFC was the NCR winner in the said competition and received seed funding of PHP 100,000. The price money and the contributions from the members were used as capital to trial run their social enterprise until its formal launch in 2011. They started partnering with 11 identified organic farmers in Capas, Tarlac, who were part of SIBAT's community.



Charlene at the British Council's "I am a Changemaker Social Enterprise Programme." Photo from GFC's Facebook account

The middle of 2012 was a trying period. The group ran out of funds. Many members got tired because they had full-time jobs. Most of them were just establishing their careers. Some were concerned that the business was taking the place of prayer. Eventually, the members of the team quit because they cannot devote their time to the project. It was heartbreaking for Charlene to tell the farmers that they had to stop because they had no money.

Looking back, Charlene has this to say about this episode:

I thought about my life. I got depressed and asked if this is still something I really want to do. I thought the idea hasn't left me yet and we can still continue somehow. I was trying to tweak it [concept of CSA], trying to get other people to get involved. So, I prayed a lot.

A friend called me one night informing me about his friend who does not want to work in corporate anymore. So, I said, "have him send me an email and tell me what his gifts are and tell me what he is interested in and let's see, we'll take it from there." This person turned out to be Ernest,²⁶ my teammate. I interviewed him but this time . . . I realized I don't need an employee. I need a partner in this. I needed a

²⁵ Since 2009, the British Council has been implementing a six-day program training and mentoring young people on social enterprise (British Council, 2018).

²⁶ Ernest Barreiro, an Economics graduate from Ateneo de Manila University, was 22 years old when he joined GFC.

partner. If there's profit, we share. If there's poverty, we will share it also. So those are my terms.

By November 2012, GFC resumed its operations with Ernest Barreiro and Tricia Velez on board and with the help and hope of an approved Starbucks grant. Restarting the social enterprise was not an easy task: it was difficult to regain the farmers' trust and to bring their subscribers back. The group did not stop and returned to the community every week. Charlene felt that God sent her new people and Ernest was one of them. Ernest fell in love with the farmers and the farmers fell in love with him, a relationship which Charlene considers key to sustaining the partnership (Interview, Charlene Tan, 18 September 2018).

Currently, GFC has a very simple structure, with Charlene as CEO, Ernest as Operations Manager, Katreen Andrea Castillo as Agritech/Farmer Support Manager, and Cecilia Haro as Salesperson. Presently, Ernest and Cecilia handle the day-to-day operations of the store in Cubao while Katreen Andrea takes care of farmer engagement and handles concerns on production, deliveries and community engagement.

Community-shared agriculture: GFC's business model

Initially, GFC had an agriculturist who lived in the community to liaise with the farmers and to provide capacity-building; they eventually ended up dealing with the farmers directly. The team conducted a lot of community organizing with the help of SIBAT. Focusing on smallholder farmers, they sought to maintain the cohesiveness of the community, to encourage farmers have a unified voice to promote their interests and concerns, and to further cooperation among farmers to achieve common ends.

Who are the food producers?

At the core of the business model are the farmers whom they call "partners"— they provide the produce offered to consumer subscribers in Metro Manila. As of 2018, they were working with approximately 75-80 farmers from Capas Organic Farmer Producers Cooperative (COFPC) in Capas, Tarlac; La Organica in La Trinidad, Benguet; Chico River Organic Producers Cooperative (CROP-C) in Barangay Labney, Mayantoc, Tarlac; the Dumagat Remontados of Barangay Daraitan, Tanay, Rizal; and Coromina Forest Cottage in Tublay, Benguet. Majority (80 percent) of the farmer-partners are women because the men are working as farm workers, construction workers and tricycle drivers in areas far from their farms. (Interview, Charlene Tan, 18 September 2018; Interview, Ernest Barreiro, 25 January 2019).

Who are the food consumers?

GFC's subscribers include individuals/families and "B2B" or business to business, that is, restaurants and retailers. The profile of individual subscribers is diverse and it changes

from time to time. Currently, young single-person households and recently married couples with no children make up the majority of subscribers. There are more women subscribers than men mainly because women are the ones who usually place orders for their families (Interview, Ernest Barreiro, 25 January 2019).

How does GFC connect farmers and consumers?

GFC puts emphasis on the connection they want to create with and for farmers. Hopefully, if all people who have a stake in food production know each other and have a direct relationship, they could find solutions together and could heal their relationships with each other and with the land. The central idea of CSA is that they are in harmony in sharing the fruits of their labor, the difficulties and the rewards.

Milestones, challenges and future plans

Just like any other organization, GFC had its share of birth pains. Most notable of these challenges were introducing the concept of CSA among farmers and convincing them to go organic. By creating a steady market for their produce, GFC was able to persuade the farmers that their business model can work. Together, GFC and its partner farmers plan logistics, do price-setting and carry out costing every year (Interview, Charlene Tan, 18 September 2018; GFC website, 2018).

In spite of the many challenges, Ernest saw the value of their work. He finds meaning in their activities: waking up early to go to Capas every Monday, carrying the cumbersome Hong Kong bags/ laundry bags and styrofoam coolers under the heat of the sun, meeting with the farmers to discuss available vegetables and place their orders, picking-up the vegetables, and



GFC founder Charlene Tan and Chrysalyn Gocatek of SMC at GFC's workplace. Behind the two are *bayong* (sacks) and *tampipi* (chest-like containers made of palm leaves) used for delivering vegetables to subscribers in Metro Manila. Photo courtesy of Chrysalyn Gocatek

delivering to subscribers until 11:00 PM. He is grateful that he is doing something which is not routine, unlike corporate work. Ernest appreciates the social values of GFC. Working with smallholders entails a lot of groundwork; finding ways to ensure that the CSA model is viable and sustainable is both challenging and fulfilling.

In the past eight years, GFC has endeavored to pay the farmers fairly and to raise awareness of their significant role in society. Charlene considers the establishment of a committed team as one of GFC's main achievements. The GFC has opened opportunities for people to participate in conversations with farmers and to build friendships with them to better understand our food system.

Through CSA, the farmers have learned to become resilient to risks brought about by economic shocks and climate change. Farmers do not feel the lean months as much because they have a minimum purchase guarantee for their produce. Another significant milestone is how GFC has boosted farmers' sense of self, self-confidence and self-respect. Many of them did not take pride in their labor or expertise and they could not advise their children to continue farming. Through farm trips, they are able to share organic agriculture to city-dwellers and this changed their perceptions about themselves and their contributions to society.

Likewise, the imagination of consumers was challenged beyond thinking about prices and availability of the vegetables they want to purchase. They became mindful of how these vegetables were grown, when these are growing, or how the farmers cook their produce. Recently, GFC's women partners have won prestigious awards like *Gawad Saka* (Lady Yalung from Capas, Tarlac) and *Magsasaka Syentista* [Farmer Scientist] (Mary Culay-an from La Trinidad, Benguet). Overall, GFC has been successful in fulfilling its vision of building a community for all stakeholders in food production- uniting the farmers/producers, eaters/consumers, and ecosystem (Interview, Charlene Tan, 18 September 2018; EAT, 2017).

To promote a sense of community, GFC runs community kitchens, Good Food Sundays Market, Food for Peace dialogues, and farm trips to orient young children to farming and life in rural areas and for farmers to share their way of life. Their Learning and Accreditation Program empowers smallholder farmers through the conduct of farmer support activities, training on entrepreneurial development, and advocacy workshops.

The Good Food Sundays Market is currently held at Mandala Park in Mandaluyong City. Launched in 2014, it was created primarily as a co-producers' market, where people can learn about their food source, meet the farmers and establish a community. Today, it has evolved into a plant-based local community market where activities such as demo cooking, composting workshops, and dialogues are held. A related activity, Food for Peace events, also provides avenues to discuss the burgeoning issues in the agricultural sector.

GFC is looking at a prospective partnership with a major food chain company which is interested in sourcing from smallholder farmers. GFC's farmers cannot meet the volume demand at the moment. Charlene remains hopeful that they will be able to work with the company in the future because this would connect communities to deliver directly to the stores and the demand will encourage more farming activities (Interview, Charlene Tan, 18 September 2018).

Insights

GFC demonstrates that young people are also active movers in the agricultural sector. By adopting the CSA business model, GFC was able to provide a steady market for smallholder farmers by connecting them directly with farm share subscribers in Metro Manila. GFC has shown that doing away with middlemen/ traders helps farmers. While the GFC model may be replicable, scaling up remains to be seen.

GFC has shown that an agriculture background is useful but is not a necessary ingredient for creating a youth-led social enterprise which supports sustainable farming and rural development. Their advocacy to promote organic agriculture, to help the farmers, to engage everyone who has a stake in the food system, and to protect the environment, opened spaces for them to collaborate with other youth who also share the same passion. GFC has hired Cherrys Abrigo (see *Sierreza* in this series) and Jabez Joshua Flores (Project Leader of Permaculture Research Philippines) in a previous project and has invited Ruel Amparo (see *Cropital* in this series) in a discussion about microfinance in agriculture.

Although GFC has worked with municipal/city agricultural offices in the different communities, to date, they have very limited engagements with the DA. A dialogue between the DA and GFC can be fruitful, particularly in realizing the goals of the 1992 Magna Carta for Small Farmers to empower this specific sector.²⁷

Written by C. Gocatek

Sources:

Interview with Charlene Tan (18 September 2018); participant observation (packing the vegetables in GFC's office, 16 October 2018); interviews with Cherrys Abrigo and Dumagat Remontado farmers, Barangay Daraitan, Tanay, Rizal (24-25 October 2018); visit to the Good Food Sundays Market (11 November 2018 and 13 January 2019); and interview with Ernest Barreiro (25 January 2019).

²⁷ The Magna Carta for Small Farmers is aimed at empowering small farmers which includes the provision of market infrastructure (http://policy.denr.gov.ph/1992/RA_1992_7607.pdf).

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SIERREZA: EMPOWERING INDIGENOUS FARMERS



Ms. Cherrys “Che” Abrigo, the person behind Sierreza’s many advocacies Photo courtesy of courtesy of Teds Kitchen, Laguna

Sierreza- Los Baños Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA)/Sierreza Zero-Waste Store & Artisan Café (Sierreza) is an initiative founded by Ms. Cherrys “Che” Abrigo in 2018. The café is distinctive because it serves organic food sourced from the harvests of indigenous peoples (IPs) living in the mountain range of Sierra Madre. Another distinctive feature of the café is its zero-waste philosophy and practice. The café and store also promote and sell the art works of IP families. Sierreza sums up Che’s passion and commitment to help the community, enable consumers to access healthy organic food at a reasonable price, and raise awareness about caring for the environment to farmers and consumers alike.

Apart from the café and CSA, Che participates in the Saturday Bazaar organized by the University of the Philippines Los Baños Business Affairs Office, organizes farm trips and field outreach in the Dumagat communities, organizes tours and market exposure trips for the Dumagat families (e.g., Good Food Community, Inc. [GFC], Healthy Options in Shangri-La Mall, UPLB, and Sierreza in Laguna), and conducts various training programs for farmers.

From chemical engineering to community organizing

Che's agriculture journey is an interesting story. She is a licensed chemical engineer who graduated from the University of the Philippines Los Baños and a holder of M.S. Environmental Science from the University of Auckland in New Zealand. She started volunteering in her undergraduate years when she joined the Pahinungod Program, the University of the Philippines' volunteer initiative.

After finishing college, Che worked as a project manager for a multinational company. She was leading the so-called good life, with a nice income, a car and living in a condominium in Manila – but she longed to do something for underserved communities. After two years and seven months, she quit her job and decided to study again with hopes that her next course would be something that she can connect with community work.

She returned from New Zealand in 2013. She did not apply for a full-time job. Instead, she accepted short-term projects just to earn enough money to cover her living expenses and devoted the rest of her time to volunteering in various outreach programs. She observed, however, that over the years, there were no significant improvements in the communities they visited in Sierra Madre. She realized that instead of helping, they were crippling the communities because they made them dependent on relief goods from the feeding and gift-giving projects.

Looking back, Che appreciates her many experiences which are useful in her projects now. For instance, her experience in the corporate world helps her in project management and budgeting of resources. These skills and her background as a chemical engineer and graduate studies in environmental science are put to good use in her current work. She is happy with what she is doing. Likewise, she also makes her father happy because she is fulfilling his dream of helping others.

From dole-outs to capacitating the Dumagat Remontados

Determined to make a positive change in the communities she has visited, Che joined different volunteer groups and met a missionary, Rochelle Mosura, whose idea of outreach programs is akin to hers: doing outreach which makes the IPs self-sufficient. Together, they taught organic agriculture in Benguet (Atok and Buguias) and in Nueva Vizcaya.

In 2015, she studied organic agriculture to realize her plans to promote sustainable livelihood in IP communities and communities which care for people and the environment. She submitted a project proposal to the Small Grants Program 5 (SGP5) team of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) which incorporates teaching marketing, quality control and pricing. The proposal included training in marketing, quality control and



Dumagat farmers from Barangay Daraitan, Tanay, Rizal during their UPLB Tour and market exposure in 2017. Photo courtesy of Cherrys Abrigo

pricing, components, which Che noted, were often missing in most livelihood programs. She received funding in December 2016. She chose Barangay Daraitan in Tanay, Rizal as a project site because of its accessibility, the presence of sources of water, and most of the community members are farmers. She allotted a portion of the UNDP funds to build a structure called Bahay Tipunan at Libreng Paaralan (Meeting Place and Free School), which the farmers can use for various purposes: as a place where they can sort their harvests, as a meeting place, and as accommodation for tourists for a minimal fee. The latter provides additional income to the farmers.

Anyone can volunteer or can organize communities but not everyone will go out of his/her way to conduct financial literacy among farmers. This is one of the many features which makes Che's advocacy exceptional. She taught the Dumagats how to save money by challenging them that for every PHP 100 they save every month from the sales of their produce, she will give PHP 20 interest which she sources from Sierreza's profit. Che started the savings project in December 2017. The farmers saw the value of saving and this convinced others to join the savings project.

The CSA promoted by Sierreza is not identical to the CSA of Good Food Community, Inc. (GFC) (see GFC in this series). Che tweaked the CSA in Los Baños: (1) the payment in Los Baños is postpaid, a scheme preferred by the community after doing a trial run of prepaid subscriptions; 2) subscribers get to choose what they want to buy from the available produce posted in the Sierreza Facebook page; 3) most of the produce sold by Sierreza are not upland produce (rice is from Antipolo and fruits are from Barangay Daraitan); and (5) subscribers pick-up the produce from the store and delivery is for special circumstances only.



Dumagat farmers from Rodriguez, Rizal during their market exposure and visit to Good Food Community, Inc. in Cubao, Quezon City in 2019. Photos courtesy of Cherrys Abrigo

The Dumagat farmers' perspectives: The benefits of CSA



Katutubo (IP) in General Nakar, Quezon. Photo courtesy of Cherrys Abrigo

As of January 2019, Sierreza has 20 partner farmers in Barangay Daraitan, up from 12 in December 2016 when Che started her project.

Four (2 males, 2 females) are aged 40 and below. These farmers come from three areas and were chosen by three chieftains of the Dumagat tribe. According to the farmers, their partnership with Che has provided them with a steady market for their produce. If they have extra produce, these are bought by tourists who pass by their community (Interview, Cherrys Abrigo, 25 January 2019; participant observation of the agricultural activities of Dumagat Remontado farmers, 25 October 2018).

A visit to Barangay Daraitan in October 2018 showed that most of the Dumagat farmers are old, like 63-year-old Leonilo “Tay Yuni” Catameo, who was a former soldier. None of his five children wants to farm because they see it as difficult work and the exposure to the sun causes skin darkening. Tay Yuni, however, maintains a positive view about farming:

Farming has good prospects because the benefits for me, my children and grandchildren can last for a lifetime. In addition, the income in farming is constant compared to working in construction where your salary for a month will not last.

Tay Yuni and the other Dumagat farmers are thankful that they are part of Sierreza’s CSA. GFC also orders some fruits and vegetable from them. He revealed that CSA has allowed them to get a fair price for their produce. In the past, the middlemen offered very low prices for their fruits, that he would rather let their fruits rot and be eaten by birds. He added that the changing climate has also posed a major challenge for farmers: they had to deal with excessive rain during the rainy season and extreme heat during the summer. He was hoping that the government, through the Department of Agriculture, will provide more useful support to the farmers, not just training.

Insights

Sierreza's engagement with IP communities highlights some critical issues in the agricultural sector which call for effective government response: 1) acknowledgement of and support for social enterprises by the Department of Agriculture; 2) providing support to improve the marketing and distribution of agricultural products; 3) developing more tailor-made training programs that take into account the resources and constraints of different communities rather than a one-size-fits-all approach; 4) cultural sensitivity in developing training programs involving IP communities; and 5) providing training in financial literacy which considers the seasonal nature of farming.

Another concern worth looking into is the sustainability and scaling up of a social enterprise which requires a strong commitment from its proponents.

Written by C. Gocatek

Sources:

Interviews with three women Dumagat Remontado farmers (24 October 2018); interviews with two young farmers, 25 October 2018; participant observation of the agricultural activities of Dumagat Remontado farmers, 25 October 2018; and interviews with Cherrys Abrigo, (24-25 October 2018 and 25 January 2019).

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