

Life Strategies in Southeast Asia



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Introduction

Coming from the fertile plains of Mitchell, South Dakota, Home to the World's Only Corn Palace, the fact that over half of the world's population directly depends on rice for survival had never crossed my mind. That is, however, until Kate Kramer brought to my attention the daily struggle millions of people go through in the attempt to feed themselves, as well as their families. She then suggested I attend an institute in the fall of 2004 in hopes of better understanding the problems of global food security. As I prepared my research paper for the World Food Prize Youth Institute it did not take long for me to realize how important it is for my generation to actively fight to insure global food security. It was then I applied to be a Borlaug~Ruan Intern for the opportunity travel overseas to work on a research project directly dealing with global hunger.

After receiving my a letter which stated I was selected to be an Intern, I quickly learned I would be going to Los Baños, Philippines to work at the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI). As the topic for the 2004 Institute had been rice, it seemed fitting. It must be added that, although I was extraordinarily honored to be chosen and more than excited about the experience that awaited me, I have never been a fan of rice. Here I was going to a research institute that is devoted to the study of that food source. That was my narrow concern, before I headed out on the journey that has changed my life.

Upon my arrival in the Philippines, I was nearly blasted away with culture shock. The homelessness, the humidity, and the hunger were so extreme, it was hard to believe this all existed in the same planet in which I live so comfortably.

I arrived at IRRI, with a warm and heartfelt greeting from Dr. Hossain and Mirla Domingo. Then they described to me my research project, which would require some readings and five interviews complete with overnight stays. Dr. Hossain informed me that IRRI is a nonprofit agricultural research and training center. It was established to improve the well being of present and future generations of rice farmers and consumers, particularly those with low incomes. He said it is dedicated to helping farmers in developing countries produce more food on limited land using less water, less labor, and fewer chemical inputs, without harming the environment. Rice is strongly tied to IRRI's logo, "Rice is Life".

Case Study

In this study, a series of households will be surveyed to better comprehend the livelihood strategies of the more rural areas in the Philippines under the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), in Los Baños, Philippines. Research conducted was under the direct supervision of Dr. Mahabub Hossain, Division Head of the Social Sciences at IRRI and Esther Marciano, his researcher.

The village in this study, Tubuan, was chosen for several reasons. Its socioeconomic conditions are fairly typical or an irrigated rice farming area in the Philippines and it is location away from urban influence, yet not totally isolated. Tubuan is located in the Municipality of Pila in the

Province of Laguna. Tubuan is more specifically located in Eastern Laguna with a population of approximately 2600 people as determined by an August 2003 IRRI survey. A local council headed by an elected Barangay Captain and eight elected council members, governs the village. The Barangay Captain represents the village in Pila, the town proper.

A high degree of interaction is present in the village. It is the essential element for its inhabitants as mutual help and patron – client relationships ensure overall economic survival. The village contains an elementary school, Catholic Church, and several sari-saris or small multiple item stores. Catholicism in the village, like most of the country, proves to be the favored belief system the people live under.

This village is known as the test site of IRRI that introduces innovative materials such as miracle varieties (MV) of rice to the farmers of this area along with breakthroughs in agricultural technology such as the drumseeder, making transplanting rice a thing of the past. IRRI's role in Tubuan is to introduce these scientific breakthroughs with the common goal of improving the life ways of the peoples here.

The households in this study consist of five different types, each earning income from different revenue sources. The families represent the following: a family with Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW); a family whose income is derived from a non-land owning agricultural worker (landless worker) and heavily dependant on agricultural related sources of income; a migrant family; a family that was poor and now relatively wealthy; and a family that was relatively rich and now poor.

In this study, the first item discussed is the general asset base of the family. This includes the land, animals, vegetation, machinery, education, and children of each household. Next is the livelihood strategy of each family. This section analyzes how the households make capital from their assets. Livelihoods are the ways people make a living, including how they distribute their productive resources and the types of activities in which they are engaged. This all usually has much to do with a wide range of the people's goals and values considering the cultural aura of the Philippines. Third, the interaction with outside forces is noted, indicating if the family had some kind of hidden advantage helping them climb the social ladder. The outside forces consider different business relations, political connections, outside sources of income, and people they know who have helped them achieve success. Next, the use of the family income and savings is documented. In this section, what they do with their accumulated capital and investment strategies are noted along with the family's overall plan for the future. Last, the external shocks and disinvestments are noted. These are factors that caused the family economic failure and usually involve the loss of crop, loss of family member, exhaustion of land, or exhaustion of resources due to an overpopulated family. The overall goal of this study is to add understanding to the dynamics of poverty.

The research done in this village was made possible thanks to the aid of Alma, as well as the assistance of her entire family. They were my "adopted family" on my visits to the village, including overnight stays.

Overseas Worker

For this study's sake, the overseas worker (OFW) will be referred to as John. John and his wife, Joan, are a very young couple with a more than sufficient asset base. John owns two large pieces of property. One, 800 square meters in size was inherited from John's mother, while the 1,100 square meter property the family lives on was purchased.



Aside from their large estate, the only other assets the couple has are their educations and children. John went to private high school and attended college in Manila where he earned his Bachelor of Science degree in Civil Engineering. His parents, both from the village, wanted to ensure their three boys and two girls had college educations because they were unable to attend college themselves. John's father, a farmer, was also a landless worker who raised ducks as a side enterprise, while his

mother was a housewife. Joan originated in a similar back ground as her parents were tenant farmers. Joan has four brothers and four sisters, all college graduates. Joan also attended a private high school and went to college for music education majoring in the piano. Together, John and Joan have two children, a four-year-old boy attending nursery and a six-year-old girl in the first grade.

The livelihood strategy of John and Joan is very similar to the American strategy: use one's education to further one's self and one's family. John works overseas for various companies using his degree as a Quality Assurance and Control Personnel (QAC). His first four years of being an Engineer was spent here in the Philippines earning a meager PHP 10,000 per working month. John then decided to go overseas to earn PHP 60,000 per working month. However, John knew that with more experience he would earn substantially more in the Middle East and India. Currently, with over 10 years of experience, John brings home PHP 100,000 per working month. John is employed on a contract allowing him to come home for 30 days after 90 days of work. Still searching for the "perfect company", the one thing John dislikes about his career choice is the large amount of time spent away from the home. He once spent 15 consecutive months working overseas.

The main factor that is very similar between John's livelihood strategy and that of most Americans' is that he makes no money from his land. The lot 1,100 square meters in size is solely for the placement of the home (pictured above). The 800 square meters inherited from his mother is idle.

Joan used her education early in the marriage as a piano instructor. Although her contribution was meager, it definitely helped get the family settled. Now Joan stays at home as a housewife and mother, caring for their children and taking care of domestic matters.

Since their children are still very young, there is obviously no income derived from them. The only income the family receives is from John's employment overseas. John did disclose, however, that one outside source has helped the family considerably. In the early stages of his career, he would rely on outside sources to aid him in finding the company that would be most beneficial to him. He said today he does all of his business himself as he now has his own reputation to use.

Expenses in the Philippines are much less than in most countries in the world. John and his family only incur minimal expenses such as school, electricity, food costs, and cell phone usage along with property and income taxes. John estimates that he spends around PHP 15-20,000 per month sending his two children to Catholic elementary and nursery schools. He does not encounter a water bill due the quality of the well water on his property. The well was installed for PHP 5,000. The electricity is near PHP 700 per month and food consumption is around PHP 2,100 per month.

John uses portions of his income to lend to family and close friends. When asked what the terms and conditions of the loans, John replied, "None". Due to his strong Catholic beliefs, John refuses to charge interest on his lending capital and the same goes for his savings accounts. The family capital is placed in non-interest drawing accounts only. John stated, "If I earn PHP10, I should only be able to spend PHP 10". John maintains two savings accounts as well as one basic checking account. He stated to have two savings accounts is a necessity. In his line of work, employment is never guaranteed as world policy changes and legislation varies from country to country. When John is working abroad, he keeps only a modest amount for him to live with and the rest is sent home. Joan uses the money to put the children through school, pay expenses, and take care of the family marketing. A majority of the money goes directly into savings.

John and his wife still have many aspirations for the future. John is considering looking into different investment opportunities. When asked on current investments, John stated that his only ones as of now are his children's education and the improvement of his home, plus the purchase of some type of automobile to make the family more mobile. John said he hopes to one day open his own business, but his belief on starting a business is the larger the initial investment, the larger the return.

One of John's plans; however, could actually be more of a disinvestment rather than an investment. He stated that he and his wife are determined to have three more children. His exact words were, "Determination is key", and he is determined to have a family of five. With his employment being unstable, searching for a perfect job and no guarantee that there will be work tomorrow, enlarging a family may be a risky decision.

Landless Worker

Ron and Rhonda, in a landless household, live a very different lifestyle than John and Joan. The only property the couple owns is a meager 123 square meters. In addition to the land, they also own 17 chickens and 30 orchids. On my first visit to the family, they owned pigs also, but they were sold as hog prices were quite desirable during that week.

Since no farmland is owned, the couple owns no form of machinery or automobiles.

Ron and Rhonda come from similar educational backgrounds. Rhonda's family also depended on agricultural worker in the village but they did own a small amount of farming ground. Her father was the one who farmed while her mother was a dressmaker and housewife. They were able to send Rhonda and her three brothers to a private high school. Rhonda; however, only completed her second year of high school.

Ron, also born in the village, grew up in a very large family. His father only completed elementary school and was a carpenter by trade. His mom, a homemaker, also only went through elementary school as well. Ron has two brothers and five sisters. His parents managed to send two of the brothers to high school; Ron only went through two years of public high school. Due to their lack of a quality education leading to their current lifestyle, Ron and Rhonda understand the importance of an education. They are currently sending their 14-year-old girl to a private high school in Pila; their other child is two and one half years and is not yet attending school.



The livelihood strategy of Ron and Rhonda has many facets. They earn their income from many different sources. Their main source of income is from Ron. He is permanently employed by a local landowner as a hired hand. Each season working for the landowner, Ron earns 10 cavans of paddy and an additional PHP 2,000. Approximately seven of those cavans will be sold for PHP 3,100 and the other three are used for consumption. The landowner Ron is employed by is the first farmer of the village to plant

the fields using IRRI's new drum seeder. This invention will allow Ron more time to pursue other forms of income such as transplanting for other farmers. The couple estimated they make PHP 2,100 per season on transplanting. When not working on the land, Ron also has an additional job. He drives a tricycle 10 days per month adding PHP 1,000 per month to their income. In addition to that estimate Rhonda helps other farmers doing weeding and other various tasks earning the couple 11 more cavans of rice. Out of those 11 cavans, seven will be used to repay debts while the remaining four are for consumption. Rhonda also participates in an activity called "gleaning" in which she will sift through the rice husks to retrieve the grains missed in the initial practice; this activity contributes three cavans per season to their income used for daily expenses. Aside from directly farming, Rhonda also makes a substantial contribution to their income. She is the one who tends to the family hogs. She stated the purchase piglets and raises them for four months costs roughly PHP 3,000. She estimated they earn PHP 14,000 annually on the pigs. When at the home, in addition to caring for her daughter, Rhonda has another source of revenue. She does laundry for the people of the village earning her PHP 500 per month.

Meandering around the family property the 17 chickens can be found. The chickens are used for consumption only; Ron and Rhonda make no income off of the poultry. The 30 orchids the couple owns are hung in the backyard. Orchids take three months to grow, and the batch will be sold for PHP 500.

Rhonda estimated the annual salary of the family considering all avenues of income is PHP

65,000 plus the money saved by the consumption of their livestock.



The most important asset to this family seems to be their large amount of spare time to seek revenue through many enterprises. The land the couple lives on is near exhaustion due to the overuse of the land due to the practice of their many enterprises. Neither Ron, nor Rhonda's education is used in their daily routine.

Ron and Rhonda have no real connection outside of the village. Both of their families are from the village and a majority of their siblings still reside in the village.

Income generated by the family goes nearly from hand to mouth. They spend PHP 300 per month on electricity, PHP 375 per month and one half on fuel for cooking, PHP 800 per year on medications, and PHP 1,000 on their children. The PHP 1,000 spent on the children is a composite of the PHP 600 used for tuition, lunch, and transportation to school and the other PHP 400 for technology fees and materials for projects. Consumption costs the family PHP 900 per month as they eat strictly 3 meals per day consisting of mostly vegetables and occasionally meat. Water used by the family is free thanks to a land grant done by a local politician who installed a manual water well during an election year.

Ron and Rhonda have many hopes for the future. Their main plan/ investment is to ensure their children get a college education. Rhonda stated they plan to expand on hog raising to earn enough capital to send both of their children through college. As mentioned earlier, Ron knows how to drive a tricycle and hopes to one day purchase a tricycle for both transportation and as a source of revenue. When asked if they would ever consider leaving the village, both Ron and Rhonda said never. They would like to renovate their home, but never leave the village. Rhonda was also asked what is the most important factor to guarantee a prosperous future. She simply stated the rice fields ensure their survival; thus they are the most important entity to the family.



One major disinvestment the family encountered can also be seen as one of the best things that has happened to them. Rhonda was asked why the ages of her children were so far apart; she said it was because her oldest daughter had to be born via cesarean section. The hospital bills set them back financially and her ability to give birth was also affected. She then stated that event alone was the deciding factor that they only wanted to have one more child. Now that their second child is two and one half years old, they still stick to the decision that they will have no more children. Ron and Rhonda also partake in one habitual disinvestment. They continue to borrow money from family members. They borrow PHP 1,400 per season from family members under the condition that they will be repaid one cavan of paddy per PHP 200 lent to Ron and Rhonda. The family member lending them the money is making a considerable amount of income off of Ron and Rhonda considering that one cavan of paddy can be sold at a minimum of PHP 300. Lastly, the only other disinvestment is completely unavoidable. When a farmer needs transplanting done in a field, he will pay a certain amount of Pesos for an intended amount of workers. When Rhonda was interviewed; she had just gotten back from the fields. The landowner of that field requested 32 workers, 96 showed up. This means that the intended payment had to be further divided among the extra workers, taking away from the initial agreed amount.

Poor to Rich

The family in this segment was at one time very poor and now is relatively rich. Bill and Betty are their names, and since the near beginning of their history together, they have accumulated a quite large asset base.

The couple lives on a compound owned by the mother's family. They own 1 hectare of land, half of it was bought 30 years ago for PHP 16,000 and half was inherited from Betty's family. In addition to their homestead and farmland, they also own 1000 square meters in a village also in Pila. This strip of land was given to Bill due to his caretaking of the property. The couple also owns several fruit trees and some livestock.



Their livestock consists of the couple's many chickens along with one sow and six piglets. Found in the same vicinity as the livestock, the couple also owns mango, rambutan, and orange trees.

Along with their land and animals, Bill and Betty also have many pieces of machinery and automobiles. Connected to their home is a lean-to garage housing the couple's motorcycle, tricycle, bicycle, and an older model automobile. With respect to the machinery dealing with farming, the couple also owns an older model hand-tractor.

Bill and Betty have a very interesting education background. Atypical to their situation, neither Bill nor Betty has a college education. Bill was raised in a poor family and left school at grade

four. His mother was a simple housewife, selling coconut as a side enterprise while Bill's father was a leaseholder. Bill's father died when Bill was four years old, this was the key factor why Bill left school at such an early age.

Betty, also born to a leaseholder and housewife, ended her education upon completion of her first year of high school. She has three sisters and five brothers, one of whom completed college and four graduated high school. They all attended public elementary and private high schools.

Knowing the importance of a complete education, Bill and Betty sent all three of their children through college. They have two boys, ages 33 and 36 along with one girl age 25. The oldest son works in Alabang at an electrical appliance factory. He has two children, a two and one half-year-old girl and a one and one half-year-old boy. The middle child lives at home and is OFW as a Marine Engineer. Their only daughter is also an OFW cashiering at a department store.

Considering the large asset base of this particular family, the livelihood strategy of Bill and Betty is rather adequate. The compound the couple resides on is primarily for the dwelling of the family; no significant income is made off the homestead. They use their one-hectare of rice fields for farming earning them an estimated PHP 40,000 per year from the fields. Bill stated that he has been farming with IR14 variety rice that returns a higher yield allowing them additional capital. Bill and Betty also have 1,000 square meters in a nearby village. They use this land for the raising of their livestock and fruit trees. Bill stated it takes him an estimated 4 months to raise a piglet they can sell. He concluded that they make PHP 50,000 gross per year from the pigs in addition to using some of the hogs for consumption. The chickens found on the property are not used as an income supplement, they are solely for consumption purposes. The couple no longer uses the car as they find it to be unreliable. They prefer to use the tricycle or motorcycle for transportation outside of Tubuan and the bicycle for in village travels.

In addition to their directly earned income, they also have other venues that supplement their income. Their OFW son, a seaman, sends PHP 17,000 per month to Bill and Betty. Their daughter, also an OFW, has been away for four consecutive years and sends them PHP 50,000 per year. Betty added that they do not require that their children send them any sum of money; they do it out of homage of their parents' hard work and in gratitude of providing them with a great education. Bill and Betty have climbed the social ladder with support from Betty's family and no other outside forces. The couple claims they have no political or business connections. The only "help" they had climbing the ladder came from the owner of the 1,000 square meter lot they own, Bill was a caretaker of the land and in return the owner granted them ownership of a portion of the lot.

Much like the other families, Bill and Betty also experience expenses. The farmland requires little to no expense. Bill stated he spends an estimated PHP 10,000 per season on hired labor, pesticide, fertilizer, and fuel for running the one irrigation pump on half of the hectare. A considerable amount of capital is saved due to the hand-tractor replacing labor that they would have to hire. Half a hectare was inherited with a water pump on the land while the other half is within reach of a creek so irrigation is not needed. They also estimated they spend PHP 1,300 per month on electricity, PHP 400 every month-and-a-half on cooking fuel, PHP 700 per week on consumption. Their water is free due to the electric water pump installed on the property for

around PHP 5,000.

From the beginning of their life as a couple, life was not nearly as easy as it now is for them. They strived to provide their children with the best, and most complete education, pushing them to test their financial limits. Betty actually worked abroad in the Middle East, Malaysia, Singapore, and Hong Kong as a domestic servant to help send their children through high school and college along with helping to buy one half hectare. While Betty worked abroad, Bill raised the children and the rice. The couple reminisced on how hard life was, but both commented that the most important thing to them is the well-being of their children. Neither Bill or Betty received a complete education; this in turn made them aware of how important an education is. The sole purpose for them working as hard as they did was for the education of their children. Presently Bill and Betty are enjoying life, Betty said they would call their employment status as being retired. Although their children are grown, they still help the oldest son who lives in the compound with expenses he encounters in raising his children.

As mentioned earlier, they started out leading a rough life with one major disinvestment. Their situation was complicated further in 1972 when their son died at five years old. The boy was troubled with a persistent fever. Betty took him to the doctor many times and when medicated his symptoms would disappear but on completion of the medication the fever would always return. Bill's mom recommended they see a "Quack Doctor" which they did and he prescribed holistic medication. The doctor said herbal remedies take more time so they should let the fever run its course. Their son failed to get better and by the time they took him back to their family physician, he said it was too late. Throughout the course of his medications and frequent doctor visits, Bill and Betty borrowed PHP 20,000 from Bill's mother with no interest to be paid off over a 5-year period. The total funeral expenses and doctor bills cost the couple around PHP 50,000. They paid the remainder of the bill from the family owned store and rice field profits. The couple stated they were thankful for their family's support and, correspondingly, did not have to mortgage or sell any of their land.



Although Bill and Betty are well into their 60's, they still have many plans for their future. It has always been Betty's dream to open a bakery. With the money they have been saving she feels it will happen someday soon. Together with the bakery, they would like to open a grocery store. They also have plans for the son to use the family tricycle to earn some additional income.

Migrant Family

Tom and Tona, the migrant couple in this study, moved to Tubuan in 2002 from Mindanao. Tona went to private high school and went to college graduating with a Bachelor of Science degree in Commerce. She has two brothers and one sister, one of her brothers finished college while the other two quit after two years of college and married. Tona's father was a large land overseer who died in 1967 at 82 years old when she was only five years old. Tona stated that her father

had many illegitimate children and was unable to state his education level. Her mom was a simple housewife who completed her second year of high school. Tom also attended private high school and graduated college with a Bachelor of Science degree in Civil Engineering. Tom has one sister and three brothers. The sister finished college, as did two of the brothers, while the youngest brother died in an automobile accident at an early age. The father of Tom was a landowner with a high school diploma. Tom's mother also graduated high school and at first was a simple housewife, but went abroad as a domestic servant to put Tom through college.

The couple lives on 140 square meters in a new sub-division in Tubuan. They reside there with their three children, a girl age eight with two boys, ages 12 and 13. The eight-year-old is in the third grade studying in the village while the boys are in their first and second year of private high school.



In addition to their home lot of 140 square meters, Tom and Tona own another lot 66 square meters in size. They bought the two lots for a down payment of PHP 20,000 under the agreement that they would pay PHP 600 per month for the next 25 years. Tona said they refuse to pay the monthly payments due to problems with the land. The home they built cost PHP 300,000 and is fully paid for.

Next to their home, Tona and Tom grow fruits and vegetables. They have avocado and mango trees along with their horseradish, cassava, and pepper plants. Tona added they did have tomatoes, okra, and squash but worms killed them all.

Tom uses his degree in Civil Engineering as a QAC in Qatar. He currently is serving a two-year contract earning the family PHP 50,000 per month. For OFW's, there is usually a placement fee to get the Filipino abroad. To make the payment, Tom traded the family motorcycle. Of that PHP 50,000 per month 60% is sent home to Tona to take care of the family expenses. His current salary is a great increase from his previous work experience in Mindanao (Southern Philippines), Bay (in Laguna), and Alabang (in Metro Manila), as these places paid only PHP 20,000 per month.

Now that all three children began school, Tona has discovered she has an abundance of spare time. This prompted her to contribute to the family income. Tona is a Ready to Wear (RTW) Clothing and Cosmetics Sales person and also sells Globe and Smart prepaid calling cards. In Mindanao, she said her profit from sales was around PHP 15,000 per month; however, in Tubuan she is lucky to do PHP 10,000 per month.

The land the family home resides on is dually used for the growing of the fruits and vegetables. As mentioned earlier, the couple grows mangos, avocado, horseradish, cassava, and pepper that they use for the own consumption as well as for gifts to neighbors, not for profit.

One key outside factor that helped the family achieve their recent "success" is a co-worker that aided Tom in landing his position overseas. Other than this outside connection, the family claims to have no ties with any influential people helping them with their employment/income related

opportunities. Besides Tona's contribution to Tom's income by selling RTW, there is no additional source of income to this family.

Taking away from their income, the family also has obvious monthly expenses. Just as the previous families, they invested in a manual pump water well for PHP 3,000 and have no water bill other than the PHP 400 Tona spends on mineral water for drinking. Their electricity costs them around PHP 900 monthly. Their children's tuition costs them PHP 1,500 per month, and their allowance to get to school is about PHP 34 per day.



The only real investment the family is struggling towards is the purchasing of a computer. Tona said she would not only be able to do more business with a computer, but she would also be able to process papers so that she would be able to go abroad with their children to make life easier.

One source consuming a portion of the family's income is their disinvestments. They take out loans for an average of PHP 14,000 that they pay off over a six-month period at 3% interest per week. The average payment on this type of loan is approximately PHP 662 weekly. This type of loan seems to be a habit as Tona stated they usually take one out every six months. In addition to their frequent loans, they seem to have exhausted some of their resources. When being interviewed, Tona was asked about livestock, chickens specifically, and she said they did have some, but they have all been consumed. This was the same response to a variety of vegetable crops that were "over harvested".

Atypical when compared with the other families, Tona has a negative outlook on life in Tubuan. She perpetually complained on their overall lifestyle and economic situation. She stated many times, "All I want is for us to have a good life". Tona stated she wants to go abroad for both work and pleasure, she said she will do whatever it takes to ensure her children will complete college. Their main reason, Tona claims, why she wants to go abroad is because she studied to be a medical transcriptionist and she doesn't want her education to go to waste.

The future, Tona thinks, will be much easier than their current life. They are both in their early 40's allowing them decades of life yet to live. Once their children are out of school, the couple would like to move back to Dumaguete, in the province of Visayas. There the husband would like to open a bakery with delivery service available. The main thing the couple is hoping for is for their children to be able to work in the United States or Canada so that they will be able to send remittance checks in dollars rather than in pesos.

Rich to Poor

This family originated in a considerable amount of wealth and now has very little. Glen and Gerri are their names, and their life story is almost completely opposite that of Bill and Betty.

Glen and Gerri live on a parcel of the 340 square meters they own. The land stretches along one

side of a paved road. On the land, the couple installed a manual water pump for an estimated PHP 3,000. In addition to the land, the couple owns one pig.



Certainly the most valuable asset Glen and Gerri have is their children. The couple has 11 children. In numeric order, their children’s names, ages, number of the grandchildren, and highest level of education are illustrated on the table below.

Name	Age	# of Children	Years of Study
Leodigario	49	3	13
Yolanda	47	6	10
Estelita	45	2	10
Josephine	43	4	10
Rosie	deceased at 39	unmarried	12
Bartolome	39	2	10
Napoleon	37	unmarried	10
Noel	35	3	10
Isagani	33	2	10
Marnie	30	2	10
Roderick	27	1	10

*It should be noted that in the Filipino education system, the core education goes until grade 10, any years after 10 on the chart above indicates some under graduate study. All of the children’s elementary education was public, while the high school they went to was private.

Typical to most people of their generation, neither Glen nor Gerri have a college education. Glen was born to a share tenant who only went through grade five while his mother, a housewife, went through the sixth grade. Glen has two brothers and two sisters; none of them even graduated elementary school, Glen himself made it through grade three. Gerri’s father was also a share tenant who didn’t finish elementary school. Her mom was a housewife whose education also ended in elementary school. Gerri has two brothers, both ended school at the third grade. Unlike her brothers, Gerri did graduate third grade.

The livelihood strategy of Glen and Gerri is very much unlike that of the other families in this study. Glen and Gerri use their 340 square meters for their home as well as the homes of two of their children who live next door. The manual water pump is the family’s prime source of water, both drinking and cooking. The family pig was originally intended for breeding, but due to the couple’s age, they have decided to sell the pig once the requested price is met. They bought the hog for PHP 1,300 and want to sell it for PHP 4,200 after raising it for four months. Glen added that they did have two head of cattle but needed to sell them because one of them went wild on Glen, dragging him through the fields injuring his hip. The cows were sold for PHP 25,000.

By far the primary source of their existence is by assistance from their children. All of the children except for two, Leodigario and Roderick, live in the village. The land the children live on was provided for by Glen and Gerri as the children's inheritance. Leodigario, who is currently working overseas in Saudi Arabia, and is sending remittances of PHP 20,000 annually. Their second child, Yolanda, is a simple housewife in the village and contributes PHP 2,000 yearly to her parents. Estelita sends PHP 2,000, Josephine gives PHP 5,000 per year, Bartolome contributes PHP 500 per year, Noel gives PHP 500, Isagani sends PHP 1,000 per year, Marnie gives PHP 500, Roderick gives PHP 500 per annually, and their son Napoleon who is still living in the home, contributes the most to the family. Napoleon, an elected councilman, receives an honorarium of PHP 2,300 per month. That income as well as the money he makes as a tailor is a large part of the household income. Gerri estimated he contributes PHP 5,000 per month on average as well as being the overall provider for other needs the family encounters.

The obvious connection with outside forces that could prove to be beneficial for the family would be Napoleon's position as a local politician. If used to the full advantage, his position could potentially help the family.

Taking from the family income would be the necessary expenses. As mentioned earlier, the water bill is nonexistent due to the investment of PHP 3,000 to install a manual water pump. The electric bill is around PHP 700 to PHP 1000 per month and the only other expense the family regularly encounters is for consumption. To feed all 3 members of the household costs PHP 1,000 per month.

Prior to having 11 children, Glen and Gerri were quite wealthy. Glen was a tenant of four and one half hectares until the early 1980's. Glen said he had to mortgage his land off piece by piece starting in 1977. He mortgaged his land for PHP 10,000 per hectare; today one hectare is worth PHP 100,000. The reason for this transaction is due to a variety of factors. Although the fact that he had to provide an education for 11 children had a large role in the dissipating of the land, Glen thinks the major disinvestment that plagued the family was the droughts and pests. He explained he would borrow money to prepare and plant the land, then, when a large drought or pests would ruin the fields, he would not have enough capital to pay the mortgages off so he had to let go of a portion of his land. After all of his land was gone, he had no use for his hand tractor so that also was sold for PHP 4,000.

The death of their fifth child, Rosie, also added to the financial struggle. Gerri said she (Rosie) had a large amount of capital so when she died, a majority of it was taken care of but Gerri and Glen still had some financial obligations. They were unable to estimate what the cost of her death entailed.

When money is not readily available, the family turns to petty borrowing. Since borrowing of small amounts is done both ways in the family, there are no terms or conditions for the favor. Money is not the only thing borrowed in the family; their daughter Josephine owns a small grocery store in the village and gives her parents credit within the store.



Napoleon is very much looking forward to the future. He feels the number one investment for the family as of now is to get himself, along with a couple of his siblings, overseas. The only roadblock this goal has is the very large placement fee and the paperwork required to get everything ready. If going abroad becomes too distant of a dream, Napoleon stated he would like to open a tailor shop in the municipality and have other tailors work for him.

Despite the depressing story of Glen and Gerri, they are still very proud. Glen said it took strength and determination to raise his family. He was very proud when he stated that all of his children received at least a high school education. They added they have no regrets for having a large family; food was always on the table and that is all that mattered. Currently the couple is praying for more life, they want to make sure that all of their grandchildren go through college; this is the couple's number one goal. Napoleon stated his long-term dream to very similar of his parents'. He too wants to ensure the children get a college education.

Final Thoughts

Taken as a whole, the peasant economy is a very fragile system. The overall capital gain of the people here goes almost directly from hand to mouth. Each villager's wage ensures the survival of the other families within the village. The people exhibit patron-client relationships and they are held with up most importance. One observation about the village is that it seems the more family members who live in the village, the more patronage takes place, thus ensuring many avenues of enterprise to confirm the families' means of survival. In contrast to that comment, families who lack outside resources often do not have the resources necessary for survival. Without the means to appropriately intensify agriculture, the peasants of the village are forced to overuse and misuse the natural resources in an effort to survive. As the poor are forced to exploit the natural resources for their survival, the wealthy appear to indirectly exploit resources through the poor.



Studies such as mine are conducted to assess the needs of the people and then make their lives more comfortable by guaranteeing sufficient nutrition. One key factor helping the village prosper is recent technology introduced by IRRI to the village during my internship. Following in the same tradition as miracle varieties of rice (MV's) producing greater yields under less than favorable conditions, and color charts helping to indicate proper usage of nitrogen, is the Cadillac of rice technology, the drum seeder. This piece of machinery makes the

transplanting of rice, an extremely laborious task, a thing of the past as it directly sows the rice seed into rows on the moist soil. When I arrived at IRRI, the drum seeder was the newest invention. No rice farmer in the Philippines had even used this piece of machinery; the picture on

the previous page is the first run of the drumseeder. IRRI introduced this technology at a grass roots approach, as they understand the poor farmers must be key actors in identifying and addressing their livelihood priorities. This method is by far the most successful approach. They gave the drumseeder to my host family in Tubuan, as they actively correspond with IRRI on their many research projects within the village. The day the farmer decided to implement this device was compelling, attending this trial run was members from the Agricultural Department of the Philippines, IRRI officials, as well as other farmers of the village. The landless worker planted four paddies in under an hour. Without the drumseeder, this task would have required many more laborers and many hours of transplanting. Even if this machinery proves to result in lower yields, the costs it saves in labor alone makes it good technology. By going with my “Tita” Esther to the village doing follow-ups on the newly planted field, technology corruption was observed. Like all new inventions, there are bound to be “bugs” that need to be worked out. Rats attacked the first and only plot in the village planted with the drum seeder, massacring the yield. This can mostly be linked to the fact that this field was standing alone, exposed to all elements without the surrounding plots being planted, filtering the devastation.

Nonetheless, the drum seeder will allow for a reduction in necessary man-hours by eliminating the previously laborious transplanting procedure. The poor laborer, therefore, will have time in which to peruse other enterprises. It also enhances the overall picture of the future of agriculture in rice production. The drum seeder can be compared to how the McCormick Reaper transformed commercial agriculture in the Midwestern region of the United States in the second half of the 1800s, or the role the Cotton Gin played boosting cotton production in the American South in the early 1800’s. All three inventions reduce the labor intensity in farming, thus allowing reductions in costs, and man-hours required. At first this could be a dangerous thing, creating a surplus of laborers, but eventually the work force can then focus on other sources of income just as Americans did in the decades of the 1800s when they then opened different manufacturing concerns sparking the innovations and inventions of our Industrial Revolution. Conclusively, the introduction of innovations in technology has the potential to improve the livelihood of those who need improvement the most.

Even if this machinery proves to generate lower yields, the costs it saves in labor alone will offset that difference.

The drum seeder, color charts, and “MV” are not panaceas. They do, however, hold more hope than other technologies of recent decades. Some of the obstacles facing Southeast Asia are manmade, other forces of nature. Upon study, however, each presents golden opportunities if approached correctly and solved. It is the “peasant who is most affected by current constraints. It is the “peasant” who stands to benefit most from improvements. It is through working with this sector of the population that change will come over time. They must be the ones to accept and implement.

As the story goes,

IN ANCIENT TIMES, A KING HAD A BOULDER PLACED ON A ROADWAY. THEN HE HID HIMSELF AND WATCHED TO SEE IF ANYONE WOULD REMOVE THE HUGE ROCK. SOME OF THE KING'S WEALTHIEST MERCHANTS AND COURTIER'S CAME BY AND SIMPLY

WALKED AROUND IT. MANY LOUDLY BLAMED THE KING FOR NOT KEEPING THE ROADS CLEAR, BUT NONE DID ANYTHING ABOUT GETTING THE STONE OUT OF THE WAY.

THEN A PEASANT CAME ALONG CARRYING A LOAD OF VEGETABLES. UPON APPROACHING THE BOULDER, THE PEASANT LAID DOWN HIS BURDEN AND TRIED TO MOVE THE STONE TO THE SIDE OF THE ROAD. AFTER MUCH PUSHING AND STRAINING, HE FINALLY SUCCEEDED. AFTER THE PEASANT PICKED UP HIS LOAD OF VEGETABLES, HE NOTICED A PURSE LYING IN THE ROAD WHERE THE BOULDER HAD BEEN. THE PURSE CONTAINED MANY GOLD COINS AND A NOTE FROM THE KING INDICATING THAT THE GOLD WAS FOR THE PERSON WHO REMOVED THE BOULDER FROM THE ROADWAY. The peasant learned what many of us never understand! Every obstacle presents an opportunity to improve our condition.

The efforts of IRRI over the past decade have focused on just such an approach.

The Philippines Experience

“Nothing is predestined; The obstacles of your past can become the gateways that lead to new beginnings.” This Ralph Blum quote illustrates the attitude and determination of the Filipino people. I arrived in the Philippines excited to explore my new surroundings, and eager to get started on my project. At first, I felt as though I were at a nonexistent research facility as no one was in sight. I then learned, after much confusion and frustration, I arrived on their Independence Day and President Arroyo granted the weekend as well as the following Monday as holidays.

Once the people started to come back, and work continued as usual, I started to meet my fellow researchers. I found it quite odd that “Tita” Mirla (all of the women I worked with encouraged me to call them Tita as it means auntie and is a custom in the Philippines) took me around the entire building, introducing me to all of the members of the Social Sciences Division (SSD). In retrospect, that was my first taste of the remarkably kind Filipino people.



It was truly a phenomenal experience to get to know all of these people, as their life ways, goals, and aspirations were totally foreign to me. All that seemed to matter to them was that their families were happy, which meant they too were happy. To them, money is nothing but an object, not a pathway for happiness.

I remember being in the office one day talking with one of my office mates, she was telling me she wanted to go back to school in pursuit of obtaining a Ph.D. I then asked her how much of an impact that would make on her salary, she replied, I will take no more money for the job I love, I am content with the person I am and wish not to change myself. She wanted to go to school to advance herself as a person, not her income. In absolute astonishment, I told her that was probably the most amazing thing I have ever heard.

Although living well below the poverty line, the people of the Philippines have more contentment with their lives than many, if not most all Americans. Being in the presence of these people has helped me to put my life goals into perspective. They taught me that life is not about having money, but rather about laughter, happiness, and the will to make a difference. I am so moved by these people, and the lives they live, I recently purchased a plane ticket to return to the Philippines over Christmas break and have come into contact with the University of the Philippines as I am considering studying abroad, especially now that I have changed my major to economics.

This internship has proved to me the single most rewarding experience I have ever fulfilled. The people I met while at IRRI have changed my values and priorities, giving me an entirely different worldview. The kindness, generosity, and hopeful outlook each family I interviewed touched me in an amazing way. Most of the families I interviewed had trouble feeding themselves, but upon my arrival (and especially when I would do follow-up visits) I was greeted with a plate full of food. There is some unwritten importance of eating with the Filipino people; I could identify the people who cared the most about me, as they would frequently ask if I were hungry. Amazingly, the average family I met consumed at least five small meals per day. Although I was rarely hungry, it would have been considered rude for me not to except their generous offers.

Tita Esther once commented on a trip to the village, “You know David, the people here really seem to appreciate what you are doing, they seem to really enjoy your presence”. This kind of relationship is not common among people of the village and foreigners. She told me that they usually felt intimidated, but for some reason, they felt at ease with me. This was the moment when I decided that my work at IRRI could quite possibly be something I would like to be doing for the rest of my life. It saddened me, however, to see so many determined, talented people, living lives of uncertainty. With a single severe storm or accident, their entire livelihoods would be devastated.



These people had taken me in as one of their own, upon my departure, my Titas and Filipino Mother (Tita Esther) threw a despedida, or departure party. At my despedida, everyone took turns saying their goodbyes as well as the occasional first memory of me arriving to the compound as a lost little boy. But one final comment I will remember for the rest of my life, one of my coworkers in the SSD stated. “Many scholars have come to here to IRRI, all of them bright, talented individuals who most definitely have the potential to change the world with their minds; however, they lack what you have,

the ability to change the world with your heart, because that is the only way an effective transformation will take place.” I can still hear this quote in my head today, as it inspires me to do well, knowing that someday, somewhere, I will make a difference in the world as I will fight to ensure global food security.

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