8.1
VOLUME

Agricultural Productivity

The Right Path to Philippine Development

ADRi
OCCASIONAL PAPER QUARTERLY

Agricultural Productivity

The Right Path to Philippine Development

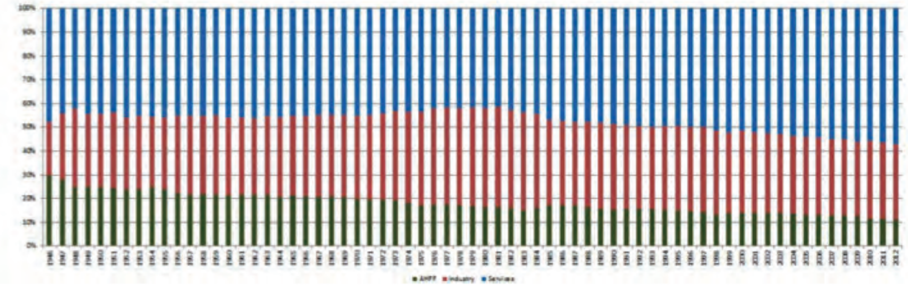
PHILIPPINE AGRICULTURE

The agricultural sector remains predominantly viewed as a poor man's sector. Despite being considered as an agricultural economy, the Philippines has has not fully explored, much less realized, the sector's potential.

Poverty and inequality are often inextricably rooted in the underdevelopment of a country's agricultural industry. This is evident in the Philippines, where poverty and skewed distribution is worst in rural and agricultural areas. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) writes that "agricultural development is critical to the structural transformation of a developing nation, from an economy that is fundamentally agricultural to one that is based on industry and services."[1] Thus the modernization of the agricultural sector has always been seen as a key factor in economic growth and poverty reduction.

Past publications of the Albert del Rosario (ADR) Institute, formerly the Stratbase Research Institute (SRi), have studied poverty and inequality and how

GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT: PERCENT DISTRIBUTION PER INDUSTRY
(1946 – 2012)



SOURCE: NATIONAL STASTICAL COORDINATION BOARD [5]

they remain pervasive in spite of rapid economic growth. This paper will explore how agricultural productivity and development were managed and why the agricultural industry continues to lag as a sector.

It will also focus on how the modernization of the agriculture sector can facilitate food sufficiency and inclusive and sustainable growth. As the Philippines is soon expected to reach a demorgaphic sweetspot in terms of population, the need for food sufficiency has never been more critical. This is especially crucial as an estimated 3.8 million families experience involuntary hunger at least once in the past three months."[2] This demand for food can only be sustained through agriculture.

However, the agricultural sector's performance has perenially lagged. In 2013, its growth decelerated to 1.1 percent, contributing a measly 0.1 percent to the total gross domestic product (GDP) growth[3]. The agricultural sector's share in the economy has also continuously declined over the past years. In 1946, about a third of the economy (29.7 percent) was agricultural, but in 2012, it contributed merely 11.1 percent to the economy[4].

It is also important to note that the total factor productivity (TFP) growth in agriculture has remained at a low level at 0.2 percent per year over the past two decades. This is low compared to 1.0 percent per year in Thailand, 1.5 percent per year in Indonesia, and 4.7 percent in China"[6]. TFP is determined by the efficiency of labor and capital brought about by the input of technology, a determinant of growth in a modern economy.

With the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) intergration already upon us, this makes modernization a more daunting undertaking. There seems to be a glint of hope, however. The agricultural sector has recently shown improving performance in terms of growth.

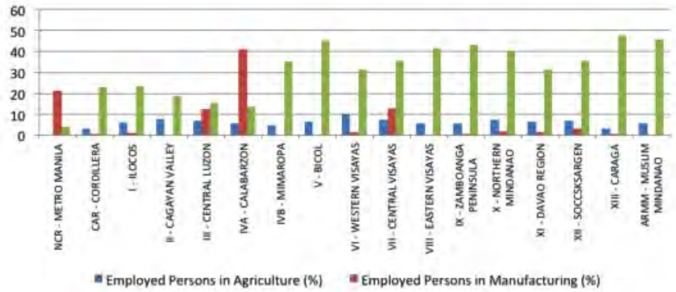
Even so, the agricultural sector remains predominantly viewed as a poor man's sector. Despite being considered as an agricultural economy, the Philippines has not fully explored, much less realized, the sector's potential. The result is high poverty incidence and wide economic inequality in the provinces.

Latest data from the National Statistical Coordination Board (NSCB) and the National Statistics Office (NSO)[8] show that poverty incidence is higher in

CONTRIBUTION OF THE AGRICULTURE, HUNTING, FORESTRY AND FISHING SECTOR IN THE GDP
(2008 – 2014)

SOURCE: NATIONAL STASTICAL COORDINATION BOARD [7]

EMPLOYMENT IN AGRICULTURE AND MANUFACTURING AND POVERTY INCIDENCE
(IN PERCENTAGE)



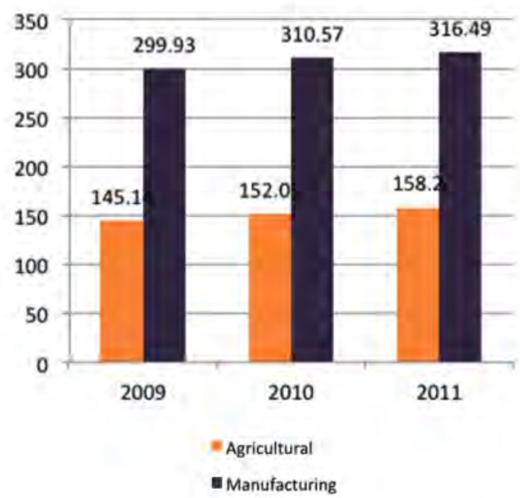
SOURCE: NSCB[9]

rural areas or in agriculturally based regions than in regions where there are many manufacturing establishments.

NSCB explains: "given the low labor productivity and wage rates, it is not surprising that across basic sectors, poverty incidence is highest among fishermen and farmers at 41.4 percent and 36.7 percent in 2009, way above the poverty incidence for the whole country at 26.5 percent in 2009."[10]

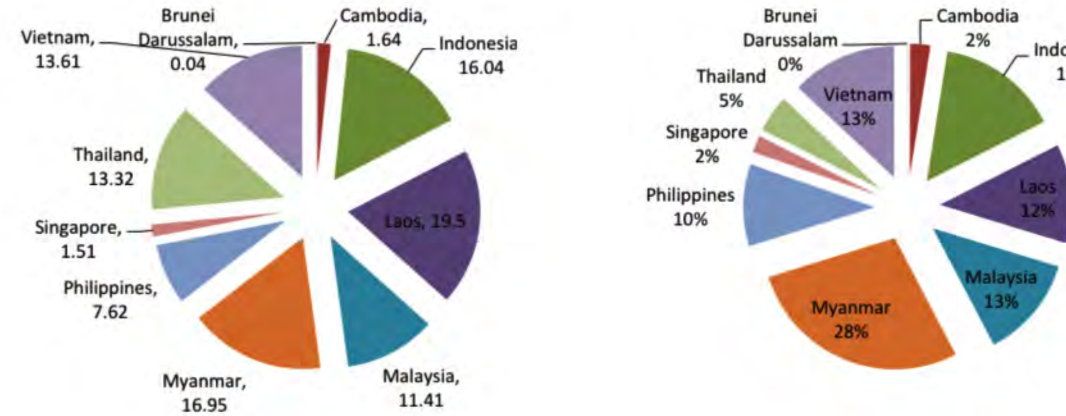
The agricultural sector's lackluster performance is also true in terms of exports. Despite improvements in the country's agricultural foreign trade performance from 2012 to 2013[12], agricultural productivity still pales in comparison to the rest of ASEAN. Based on official ASEAN data, the Philippines has one of the lowest share of the global export market for agriculture.

AVERAGE DAILY BASIC PAY OF WAGE AND SALARY WORKERS BY AGRICULTURAL AND MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY GROUPS
(2009 – 2011)



SOURCE: NSCB[11]

AGRICULTURAL EXPORT SHARE OF ASEAN COUNTRIES
(2010 AND 2011)



SOURCE: BAS[13]

Dr. Rolando Dy, Executive Director of University of Asia and Pacific's Center for Food and Agri Business explains the competitiveness of Philippine agricultural products relative to ASEAN through the revealed comparative advantage (RCA) of export product groups between 2001 and 2012 levels. Export products with an RCA of 1 or more are competitive in the global market.[14]

REVEALED COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE OF AGRICULTURAL EXPORTS FOR ASEAN
(2001, 2006 AND 2012)

	2001 RCA	2006 RCA	2012 RCA
Indonesia	7	9	9
Malaysia	3	3	6
Philippines	5	8	9
Singapore	2	1	3
Thailand	12	11	12
Vietnam	16	13	8

SOURCE: BUSINESS WORLD[15]

Peculiarly, the Philippines, together with Indonesia and Malaysia, showed improvements in its RCAs. In 2012, the Philippines posted gains in: "fish, fresh fruits, vegetable extracts (carrageenan), vegetable oils (coconut oil), seafood preparations, sugar and confectioneries, cereal preparations, fruit preparations and tobacco products."[16] The country ranked number three in bananas and number two in pineapples.

However, what RCAs did not include is the size of exports, which is one of the problems of Philippine agriculture: low productivity. Dy compares: "Malaysia exports over $20B of vegetable oil while the Philippines exports just over $1B of coconut oil. Malaysia had about 5 million hectares planted to oil palm, and the Philippines, 3.5 million hectares of low-yield, subsistence coconut farms."[17]

Moreover, "limited diversification, difficult access for farm expansion, unorganized and fragmented small farms, poor extension services by municipal governments, weak research and development infrastructure, lack of financing for long gestating crops, and inadequate rural infrastructure"[18] also hampered productivity.

The National Economic Development Authority (NEDA) Philippine Development Plan cites a few other constraints that affected the industry's growth: "high cost of production inputs; inefficient supply chain and logistics systems; inadequate provision of irrigation infrastructure; low rate of adoption of technologies, including mechanization; and limited access to formal credit and financing."[19] The country's regulatory and policy framework are major challenges as well such as the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) and economic restrictions in the Constitution.

Various commentaries and studies suggest that not only has CARP prevented economies of scale in terms of agricultural production, it also contributed to the perceived policy instability and lack of private property protection in investing in the Philippines. This limited and hindered private capital and eventually resulted to a 'capital flight' from the sector.

According to Dr. Raul Fabella of the University of the Philippines School of Economics, "the structures on ownership and the additional uncertainty of property rights lead to the exodus of private capital from agriculture"[20] The five-hectare ownership limit in the law, while discouraging private investors, also discouraged farm efficiency. While this is not the sole determining factor for agricultural modernization, it is a necessary one. CARP failed because the necessary capital, technology, and expertise for agricultural productivity were not incorporated in the framework.

With the country falling behind in production, exports, and farmers' income, a great effort from the public and private sectors in revitalizing the sector is necessary. There is a need to diversify the rural economy and export products. Hence, the level and quality of investments in the agricultural sector need to be strengthened.

AGRICULTURAL INVESTMENTS

NEDA Sec. Arsenio Balisacan said that "more private-sector investments are needed to improve the country's agricultural competitiveness"[21]. This is especially relevant in the context of the ASEAN economic integration. According to the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), many business sectors are prepared for the integration, but some the agriculture sector is not yet competitive. The loss of tariff protection could hurt agriculture, particularly the sugar industry.

This is perhaps why the Sugarcane Industry Development Act of 2015 was signed into law. It aims to increase the competitiveness of the sugarcane industry during ASEAN integration by improving productivity of farms and farm workers.

These private sector investments can be directed towards "increasing productivity and production, expanding markets, improving participation and value-adding activities, and building disaster resilience"[22]. Although investments in the sector have increased in the past few years, they still do not compare to what other ASEAN countries invest. The Philippines has

lagged behind attracting foreign direct investments overall despite a 20 percent improvement posted in 2013.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) argues that agricultural development highly "depends on the simultaneous growth of agricultural production and the value chains to which it is linked. These value chains include a wide range of small and large scale activities that involve supplying farm inputs, processing, storing, distributing, wholesaling, retailing and exporting farm products"[23]. Increased investments are crucial particularly in science and technology, transportation, and farm-to-market infrastructure. Investing in agricultural research and development, for instance, would be beneficial in developing technologies that enable higher yields, reduced costs, and less damage to the environment. In the Philippines, institutions such as the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) and Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) have been established to this purpose. However, aside from these areas, more private capital should be infused in farm production.

ASEAN member-countries such as Thailand and Vietnam have accelerated their economic growth by prioritizing the agricultural sector. Their experiences in agricultural development highlight encouraging land tenure, "effective property rights over land and assets"[24] and investing in agricultural research and development. Market and trade liberalization, above all, also improved the investment climate and at the same time incentivized production and competitiveness of the sector.

Renowned economist Dr. Cielito Habito in "Braving it and Making it" discussed in detail successful investments in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and the significant experiences of some top agribusiness players in the country. Three of these investors are Unifrutti Philippines Inc. (UPI), Agumil, and BJ Coconut Oil Mill.

UPI, one of the country's biggest banana exporters, invested in a banana plantation and packing house in the province of Maguindanao and is considered as Unifrutti's most successful investment in Mindanao. Agumil, with its palm oil investments, began its oil palm out-grower program in 1998. The company eventually expanded into the provinces of Sultan Kudarat and Maguindanao to feed its oil mill, because these areas already had independent oil palm growers selling their produce to Kenram and Pilipinas Palm Oil. Lastly, BJ Coconut Oil Mill is the only large industrial enterprise in the island province of Sulu and the only coconut oil mill in all of the ARMM.

In this case study, Dr. Habito cites various good practices embodied in the experiences of these investors.

- "Provide appropriate incentive systems to foster higher productivity and loyalty.
- Take deliberate measures to promote workforce motivation, discipline and harmony.
- Harness complementary businesses for reducing costs and optimizing company resources.
- Consider providing for own source of power, especially via renewable energy facilities that tap local resources."[25]

These examples show the role that big businesses play in pouring investments in other "inclusive growth drivers"[26] such as the agricultural industry. They were instrumental in uplifting the quality of life in the communities by contributing to their productivity. The case study, however, notes some difficulties, such as those "associated with land access and tenure; poor or inadequate infrastructure; weaknesses in local governance including graft and corruption; and relatively unskilled labor."[27]

However, as the challenge of reforms still persist, this does not mean that the agricultural sector cannot thrive with our existing regulatory and structural frameworks. In fact, contract farming[28] schemes can be explored as a means to improve the country's economies of scale in agricultural production and competitiveness. "Larger farms are often easier and less costly to service than small farms, hence some types of agroindustrial investment can be expected to increase as the farm size distribution becomes more concentrated in large holdings,"[29] according to FAO. In fact, this has been utilized by a number of corporations that are in the food business in the Philippines.

Aside from the benefit of economies of scale, other advantages of contract farming include "assured market of farm produce or assured sale of the crop, technical assistance, financial support and credit, services, or inputs from the purchaser to the farmers."[30] Contract farming can even encourage the planting of non-traditional and high-value crops, which will contribute to agricultural diversification.

Ensuring agricultural competitiveness will also contribute to the country's bid to food sustainability. This, however, should be complemented with investments in agricultural research and infrastructure support.

CAPITAL FLIGHT NO MORE

The Philippines has always been an ideal location for agricultural investments, with the availability of land, and relatively low labor costs. The country's economy has fared well in spite of external shocks. This opportunity, however, has been offset by governance and institutional factors such as corruption, policy inconsistency, and laws such as the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP).

Even so, the country is once again given another opportunity. International credit rating agency Standard & Poor's (S&P) recently announced a fresh rating upgrade for the Philippines, its highest credit rating in history and "the best grade the Philippines has ever received from any of the three major credit rating agencies."[31] Together with S&P, Moody's and Fitch Ratings have also positively rated the country. This is attributed to reforms that have been successfully implemented to improve the Philippine business environment.

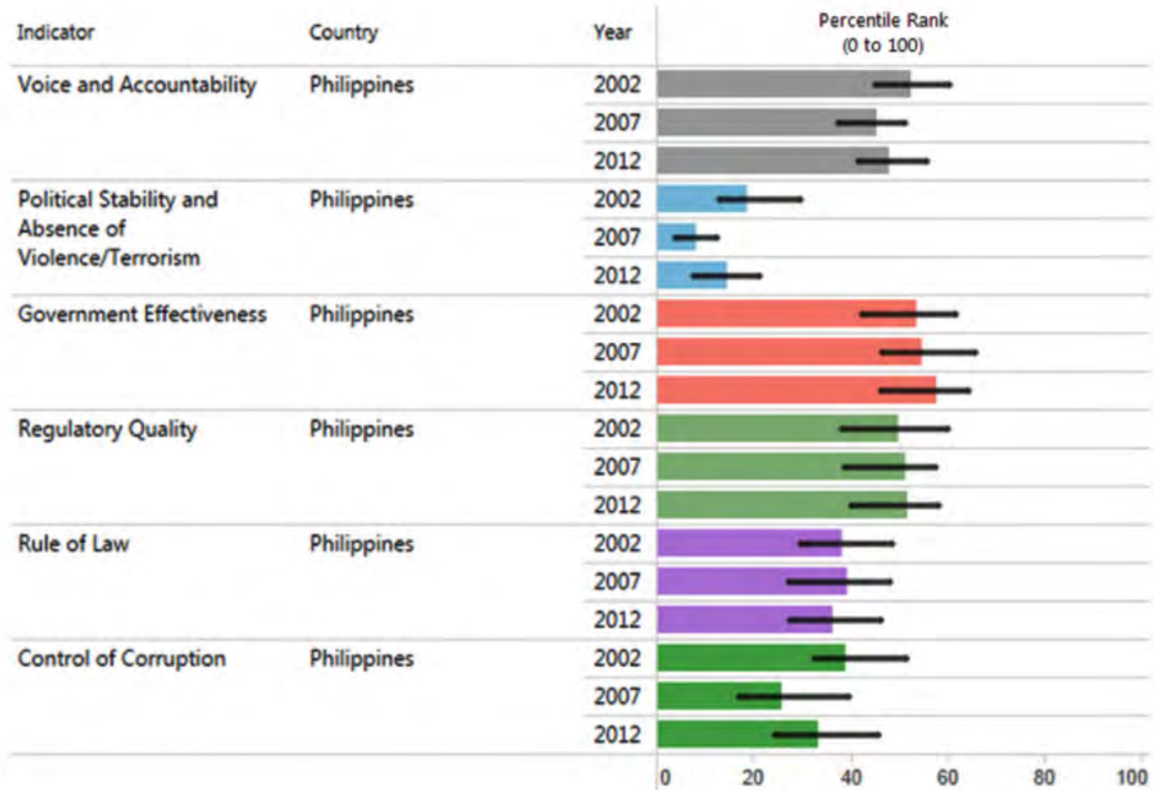
ATTRACTIVE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

A primary task for government is to ensure a sound and workable business environment. That entails transparency, policy stability, consistency and proper implementation of rules and regulations, among others. The Philippines, notably under the Aquino administration, has in fact been acknowledged to have improved on this aspect.

As a matter of fact, the current business environment has consistently been commended by several economic surveys particularly in terms of governance and institutional reforms. In the latest World Economic Forum's (WEF) Global Competitiveness Report, the country landed on the 59th spot out of 148 countries, a six-notch leap. The Aquino administration's current fight against corruption, a factor seen as affecting the country's competitiveness – is effectively being addressed.

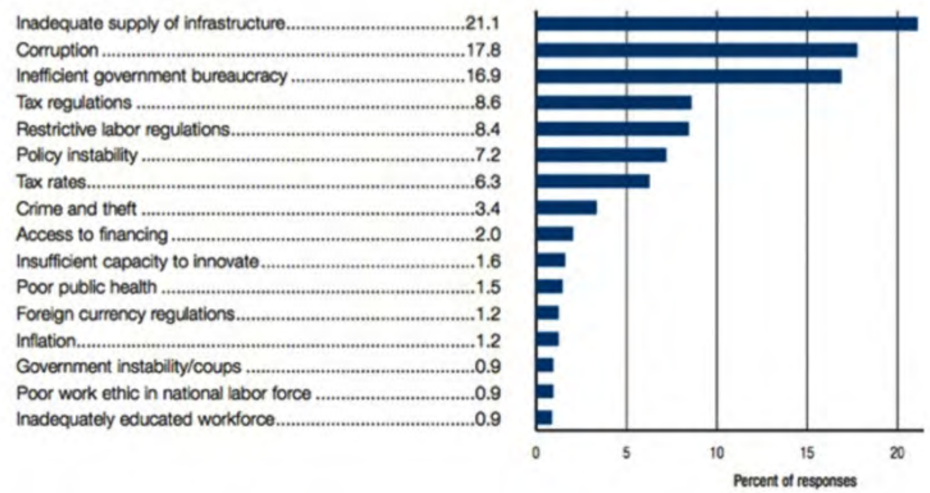
This anti-corruption drive has produced noticeable results. The Philippines jumped to 87th from 135th in the Ethics and Corruption Category. The same trend was observed in the Government Efficiency Category (75th)[32]. Even in World Bank's monitoring of Worldwide Governance Indicators, the country has notably improved in most of the indicators.

WORLDWIDE GOVERNANCE INDICATORS FOR THE PHILIPPINES
(2002, 2007 AND 2012)



SOURCE: WORLD BANK[33]

MOST PROBLEMATIC FACTORS FOR DOING BUSINESS



SOURCE: WEF[34]

Despite these gains, there are numerous factors that the country still needs to work on. WEF stressed that transport infrastructure has improved but remains in a dire state (84th), especially when it comes to airport (113th) and seaport facilities (116th).

Further, the report highlighted problematic factors in doing business in the Philippines. The top three include: inadequate supply of infrastructure, corruption, and inefficient government bureaucracy. WB also notes the need to improve on the control of corruption and political stability.

Aside from these reforms is the need for a policy framework that will not discourage investments. The Board of Investments (BoI) in the deliberation of government's Investments Priorities Plan (IPP) highlights the "importance of incentives to enterprises for investors in choosing the site for investments"[35]. Income tax holidays and lower corporate income taxes aim to encourage the inflows of investments in the sector, as we compete with our neighbors. However, the possibility of another Congressional extension of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) is seen to be a disincentive to investors and a major roadblock to the full potential of the country's agricultural industry.

ADR Instittue encourages government to prioritize the implementation of contract farming schemes, which will guarantee economic efficiency and food security. With the impending expiration of CARPer, corporate farming is seen to lead to much-needed agricultural modernization. Government should encourage the development of large-scale farms that will reduce cost for private investors in going into agriculture business.

Dr. Raul Fabella of the University of the Philippines School of Economics, in his recent presentation to the Management Association of the Philippines on how to move forward with land reform, cited case studies of China and Taiwan and how they implemented their land reform programs. According to Dr. Fabella, the Liuzhuan Program in China and "Small Landlord, Big Tenant" 2009 Program in Taiwan both encourage large-scale farming and long-term leasing of farmlands.

So far, only one corporate farming-related bill has been filed under the 16th Congress. Senate Bill No. 2089, entitled, An Act Promoting Corporate Farming And Providing Incentives For Its Effective Implementation was filed by Sen. Grace Poe and has been pending since with the Committees on Agriculture and Food, Agrarian Reform and Ways and Means.

Legislation is the first step. the latest Arangkada Assessment Report released by the Joint Foreign Chambers (JFC) says: “a subsequent law should allow large corporate farms based on acquisition of smaller farms.”[36] What this entails, however, is amending some of the Constitution’s economic provisions that render constitutional restrictions on foreign ownership of land.

Along with other business groups in the Philippines, the Foundation for Economic Freedom (FEF) deems that amending the economic provisions in the Constitution limiting foreign ownership in certain sectors will promote inclusive growth. FEF argues that this “will provide the “key” to opening up areas of the economy to more foreign investments, thereby providing more competition, facilitating technology transfer, generating jobs, and improving consumer choice.”[37] Instead of extending CARP, FEF says that government should allow “farmer-beneficiaries to mortgage their Comprehensive Land Ownership Awards (CLOAs) for production loans”[38] and allow farmers to lease their land.

ASEAN INTEGRATION AS A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY

The ASEAN integration, though posing a challenge to the agricultural industry because of the perceived intense competition in the region, also presents opportunities because of the potential of a bigger market share. According to JFC, Philippine agriculture “needs to fully explore the immense new market opportunities that ASEAN Free Trade Agreements (AFTA) and other new FTAs present for both traditional and new agricultural exports.” In “An Assessment of Philippine Competitiveness, Trade and Foreign Direct Investment Regimes,” it referred to FTAs as a “means to promote trade and investment flows. FTAs also ensure continued and enhanced market access for ASEAN’s exports. They can draw greater and sustained inflows of foreign direct investment (FDI). They can also offer mutual support on issues of common interest in international fora and help maintain competitiveness. They aid in portfolio diversification and cross border industrial complementation. FTAs also take advantage of geographic proximity and offer leverage opportunities.”[39]

And with the integration, the country must build on its competitive advantage and discover other areas of opportunity, such as the development of new export crops, primarily high-value crops. These include “abaca, ampalaya asparagus, banana, cabbage, carrot, cassava, coconut, coffee, commercial trees, cotton, garlic, ginger, mango, monggo, onion, papaya, peanut, pineapple, sugarcane, sweet potato, tobacco, tomato, water melon, white potato, etc.”[40]

In agricultural development, it is also important to engage more agricultural labor in the rural areas as much as possible. Inclusive businesses, according to Dr. Habito, “create or expand access to goods services and livelihood opportunities for the poor and vulnerable, in commercially viable and scalable ways.” It is including rural labor in these economic activities and so returns are shared equitably. In the same column, Dr. Habito cites the practice of Jollibee in sourcing onions and other raw ingredients “from organized small Nueva Ecija farmers, and now reportedly does so from over 400 farmers in six communities nationwide”[41], a more inclusive value chain. This is consistent with what ADB writes that agricultural and rural development will only be as good as the promotion and implementation of “value chain development and improved logistics, application of agricultural research, rural infrastructure and green rural development, and financial development in rural areas.”[42]

It is important for government to address land productivity and farmers’ productivity by encouraging the infusion of private capital to Philippine farms. This is only possible if governance and institutional reforms are in place and properly implemented.

The country’s top economists such as former NEDA Director-General Gerardo Sicat and Dr. Cielito Habito argue that the strength and competitiveness of the agricultural industry are necessary for a more sustainable economic development. Agriculture also supports other sectors in the economy such as manufacturing, trade, and even services sector.

With the Philippines in a political and investment sweet spot, it is only but strategic that government prioritizes the agricultural sector to make it more productive. With ASEAN integration already upon us, the government needs to bolster its agricultural sector to ensure its resilience and safeguard its competitiveness. Increasing the share of agriculture to the country’s GDP ensures that rural communities are not left behind in economic development.

ENDNOTES:

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8.1
VOLUME

ABOUT

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ADRi's Occasional Papers are concise analyses of the contemporary issues involving Philippine society.

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