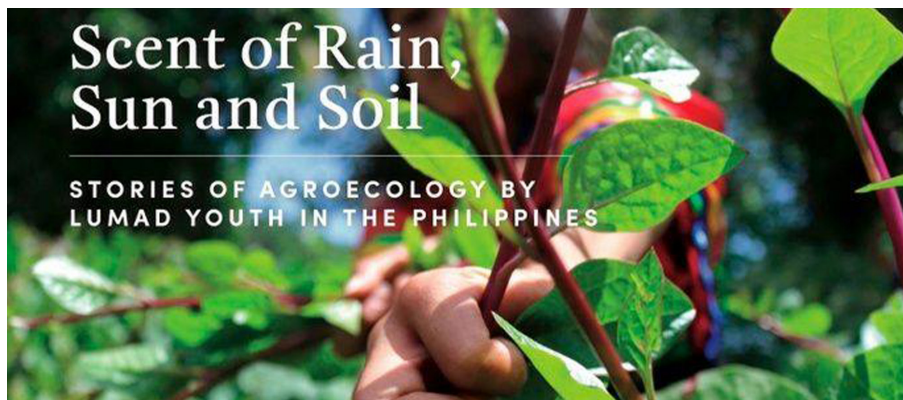


# Book Review

Jose Monfred C. Sy



Wright, Sarah. 2020. *Scent of Rain, Sun and Soil: Stories of Agroecology by Lumad Youth in the Philippines*. Community Technical College of Southeastern Mindanao. 52 pp.

After five years of serving youth from Lumad and peasant communities, the operations of the Community Technical College of Southeastern Mindanao (CTCSM) have been suspended indefinitely by the Department of Education upon being declared unfit for educational service. CTCSM, as an indigenous Lumad school, has provided culturally sensitive education primarily through agroecology, which also becomes a site for securing food for the school and nearby communities. CTCSM's letter of appeal for DepEd to revoke its decision ends by reaffirming the school's commitment to "uphold education and holistic rights of disadvantaged children." The book *Scent of Rain,*

*Sun and Soil* (hereafter *Scent of Rain*), published by CTCSM in response to their forcible closure, bears witness to this braided commitment to education and environment.

Compiled by geographer and development scholar Sarah Wright, *Scent of Rain* knits together narratives, poems, testimonies, and photographs to limn the experiences of the CTCSM community in cultivating and protecting the Lumad ancestral domain. By amplifying the voices of indigenous youth and advocate-volunteers, *Scent of Rain* is an invaluable contribution to research about and *with* indigenous peoples and social movements in the Philippines. Participatory action is underscored here as the book foregrounds the practitioners of school-based organic farming as valid producers of knowledge in the discipline of agroecology. With its decidedly interdisciplinary thrust and multimodal expression, *Scent of Rain* could be read through different lenses to render visible certain intersections among the Lumad youth, their land, and liberation.

As an institutional history of CTCSM, *Scent of Rain* could be read as a counterpoint to decades-long state-backed efforts to displace Lumad communities from their domains. This clears the way for the construction of foreign-owned mining, logging, and industrial agriculture operations that exhaust the natural resources stewarded by the communities. *Scent of Rain, Sun and Soil* emphasizes such stewardship by opening a window to the school itself. Chapter 1, aptly titled “Save Our School,” offers a backgrounder on the Lumad lifeworld in Mindanao and the forces that threaten it. Faculty, students, and staff introduce themselves and what their school stands for in Chapter 2, “Who We Are.” In Chapters 3 and 4, vignettes about day-to-day school life and work on the organic farm accentuate a discussion on agroecology and its centrality in an indigenous Lumad school’s curriculum. Chapter 5, “Harvest and Hunger,” deepens the relation between the school community and agroecology as a pillar of their curriculum (along with academics and health) on the basis of necessity. *Scent of Rain* ends with the chapter “Hopes for the Future,” a final clarion call for social and environmental justice through the voices of the students themselves. *Scent of Rain* unravels how Lumad students and advocate-volunteers take up the challenges of living sustainably and simply, offering models of alternative learning and emancipatory pedagogy. Released during the pandemic, the book also answers questions of how an indigenous school could function amid political and health crises.

Curating stories of labor on the land, *Scent of Rain* could also be read as a sourcebook or even manual for agroecology and sustainable

organic farming. The book quotes Carmelita Haictin, Head of the Sustainable Agriculture Program, in rationalizing the practice of agroecology as both a subject and a community activity in CTCSM: “Agroecology is very appropriate to Lumad ancestral domains because, to this day, there are still large portions of their land where forest hard wood is protected.” Defined, agroecology covers strategies that seek to rehabilitate soil quality for continued farming, enrich on-farm diversity (challenging industrial monocultures that exhaust soils for profit), and preserve local biodiversity. The book is rich in accounts that testify to the potential of agroecology as an alternative to the highly extractive and antiquated agricultural industry in the Philippines.

Beyond merely informing readers of such strategies, *Scent of Rain* champions the students and teachers as the cultivators of this citizen science. At one point in the book, a Subanen student shares, “in organic farming, our soil will not be damaged because we don’t have to use chemicals and at the same time our crops will be healthy.” A Manobo student later encourages on-farm diversity: “Our garden is nice to look at if we plant a variety of plants, flowers and vegetables.” Photographs complement such commentary to help readers understand not the procedure sustainable farming, but also how such an alternative practice shapes the lives of children and communities. The book’s aims are not dissimilar to that of *Bungkalan: Manwal ng Organikong Pagsasaka (Tillage: Manual for Organic Farming)*, published by the Union of Agricultural Workers (UMA). In both “manuals” for agroecology, real-life experiences nourish the science behind sustainable farming. The testimonies and poems written by members of the CTCSM community add texture to the practice of agroecology – rendered necessary by ecological and social crises – transforming citizen science into a realm of possibility for both the indigenous school and the book’s readers.

A third way of reading *Scent of Rain* highlights this politics of hope. In juxtaposing image and text, the book reads as a radical model for children’s literature and what the genre could be. That poems punctuate the book suggests the capacity of the literary text to convey, with a sense of clarity, experiences that escape procedural exposition. A poem by the student Rossana could even encapsulate the very spirit of the book. A stanza reads: “The answer to feed the hungry. / The answer to expose the greedy. / The solution to hunger. / The solution to food security.” Such lines reveal the intersecting concerns for the environment, food security, and the welfare of Lumad communities. This emphasizes the agency of Lumad children to communicate their lives, beliefs, and struggles to other children who happen to read *Scent of Rain*. Hope is best heard in this register: solidarity between a child and another, imagining a better future for themselves.

These ways of reading *Scent of Rain* are made possible by interdisciplinarity (agroecology, life history, children's literature) and multimodality (testimonies, photographs, procedures, poems). The book is not only a contribution to the study of indigenous peoples' alternatives to mainstream models of development. *Scent of Rain* is in itself a contribution to the campaign of CTCSM to continue its operations and to empower Lumad children in protecting and cultivating their ancestral lands. The book is a testament and a blueprint for a sustainable and just future.

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