

WOMEN, WORK AND WAGES IN A PADDY ECONOMY*

Marieta Bañez-Sumagaysay**

Abstract

Female labor supply in the paddies in selected communities in the island of Leyte is significant though irregular, unstable, and often viewed as buffer labor. With the few farm work available to women, not all these work is paid work, no matter how vital work may be in the whole rice production system. Moreover, work hours available to women are fewer than men's due to reproductive-productive role conflicts. Hence, women bring home lesser cash incomes. Farm wage is generally low. Alternative off-farm and non-farm work cushions family cash shortages. It is not only the man who brings home the food. The woman does, too, and has to prepare, cook, and serve it as well to her family.

In predominantly agricultural communities, rice is the primary food crop. It is both a subsistence and trading commodity. When farm sizes are relatively small, rice production is barely enough for the farm households' own consumption. Rice becomes an exchange and cash crop for those who produce more than what they can actually consume. In this economy, the household is an important unit of production and consumption. At the core of the household production system is the family farm sector.

The family enterprise engages in economic activities which are classified into three types: first, the family produces goods

*Revised version of a paper presented during the 4th General Assembly and National Conference of the Women's Studies Association of the Philippines on April 14-16, 1999 at Miriam College, Katipunan Road, Quezon City.

**Marieta Bañez-Sumagaysay is an Associate Professor and current Chair of the Division of Social Sciences in UPV Tacloban College.

and services for their own consumption; second, it engages in household production for sale or exchange in the goods market; and third, it offers its available labor services for pay outside the confines of the home (Eviota 1993; Anderson et al., 1994).

In the past and at present, division and specialization of labor have dictated that husbands till the soil and engage in various income-generating activities. Wives contribute to household income by taking any lucrative activity open to her. This she does increasingly enough while attempting not to compromise homework and household tasks. In later phases of the household's life cycle, children take a bigger share of both domestic and economic activities. At times when the household is caught in deep cash shortages, the wife significantly contributes to family sustenance.

This paper tries to look into female labor and income contributions to the family farm sector. In 1995, four key rice-producing villages were chosen as research locale. These were Barangay Balocawehay in Abuyog, Leyte; Barangay Canipa in Baybay, Leyte; Barangay Tugop in Tanauan, Leyte; and Barangay Mercedes in Silago, Southern Leyte. A total of one hundred ten (110) married women respondents were randomly selected. An investigation was specifically made on the following aspects: the working wives' socio-demographic profile, the types of productive work engaged in, the extent of paid and unpaid farm work, and the wives' contribution to the family coffers.

Her Money or Her Time?

Will a woman work or will she stay at home? Will she sell her labor services for money or will she be a full-time household-system maintainer, child-rearer, and husband-carer? A rural wife consciously decides on the division of her home

and market time where home time is used in activities for the production of goods and services for the consumption of family members. Market time, on the other hand, is time used to engage in any productive activity for which there is material reward, pay, or profit. Using Becker's (1965) neo-classical economic model, and assuming that the goal of an individual is to maximize her utility or satisfaction, she decides on whether or not to participate in the labor market (Blau and Ferber 1992). A wife compares the value of her time in the market, w , to the value she places on her time at home, w^* . If w exceeds w^* she participates in the labor market. Otherwise, if w^* exceeds w , she stays out of the labor force.

When the rural wife decides to offer her labor services in the paddy economy, she expects a just remuneration. However, due to gender differentiation in culturally defined tasks and roles in the farm sector, women do not have equal access to productive economic resources as compared to her male counterparts. Her work is more properly seen in the context and in relation to men's work (Eviota 1993). Moreover, her reproductive functions often hinder her to offer as many work hours as she desires in the labor market. Women tend to work less in order to have current births rather than postpone or stop childbirth in order to work (Herrin 1980). With these considerations, the woman specializes in the allocation of her time according to comparative advantage (Blau and Ferber 1992). As long as there exists potentials for higher wage offers and alternative employment opportunities, she will surely specialize in market work.

Which Women Work?

Age. A married woman's age appears to influence the pattern of her participation in paid economic farm activities.

That is, labor input pattern is closely related to a woman's age. Similar to Japanese agriculture (Kada and Kada in IRRI 1985), younger women in the study areas tend to participate less in the labor market for reasons such as to bear and rear small children which is an immediate concern. Older women, because of poor physical strength and stamina, reduce their labor participation in the farm. It is the middle-aged women who are most visible in paddy agriculture. From 35 to 45 years old, the women are physically capable and can compete and/or complement men's farm work. At this age range, their children are relatively old enough to become mother substitutes as they take more and heavier domestic tasks to include taking care of younger siblings. This releases the mother to look for paid work farther away from the doorstep. The older children assist their mothers and swell the ranks of child laborers, grabbing any employment opportunity in the farm (Sumagaysay 1993). In both cases, they may drop out of school in favor of paid work.

The woman's age reflects the family life cycle and structure, and the income needs of the family at various stages of family development (Blau and Ferber 1992). At middle age, family cash requirements pick up, thus, pushing mothers to the labor market.

Family Size. A larger family tends to push wives to look for paid work. This is specially true in cases when husbands do not have regular and stable jobs due to poor health, old age, the season, or simply because of less access to economic resources in the paddies. The wives take in whatever job is available—may it be on-farm or off-farm work, in order to augment the family income. At an average family size of six in the study areas, which is similar to research findings among urban poor households (Torres 1993–94), financial needs are high, hence, the mother musters strength and drive to

work in order to help satisfy the family's needs, and how well she manages her children (and her husband).

A wife's decision to work is also influenced by the presence of other household members who are working for pay. Usually, female wage-earning households have fewer adult workers per household. In all, except in five cases in the study, the husband worked. In 62% of the cases there were children and extended family members who have jobs. Jobs ranged from farming, carpentry, fishing, tailoring, jeepney driving, and tending *sari-sari* stores. As long as the cash receipts fall short of the household requirements, the wife surely seeks paid work.

Marital Age. Similar to findings among working wives in Leyte fishing villages (Sumagaysay 1996), women in the paddies have a modal age of eighteen at first marriage. About fifty-nine percent have teenage marriages with fourteen as the youngest age at first marriage. By the time the woman reaches middle age, she already has a large family and has teenage children — two factors that positively influence her decision to work for pay. Moreover, data reveal that the longer the woman's married life, the longer her work hours become but do decline after a threshold when she grows older and become less physically able and less preferred in a male-dominated paddy economy.

Educational Attainment. Sixty-nine percent of the women in the study areas had at least an elementary schooling. Eight percent have no schooling at all. The remaining twenty-three percent, except for four wives who either finished a degree in BS Elementary Education or a two-year Secretarial Course, reached secondary level. The women's educational attainment is relatively low and that it had no significant relationship with the number of hours that a woman worked in rice production. This can be explained by the fact that education

does not serve as a screening device in the farm labor market, nor does it significantly affect the working woman's value of her market time in the paddy economy. Education after all does not decide on the wage a woman gets for transplanting, for harvesting, or for seedbed preparation in traditionally operated farms.

It should be noted, however, that related studies (Paqueo 1979; Canlas and Razak 1976) found that there is a threshold education among women below which the marginal effect is negative and above which additional years of schooling raises the probability of a woman to be employed more hours and at a higher pay.

A Mother's Place Is at Work

In the recent past, working mothers were criticized for leaving their children with mother-substitutes at home, just so they can get paid work in the fields and farms. At present, it seems that mothers who stay at home all the time are the ones who have to explain themselves. Children today accept working mothers (Duran 1991). With a husband who has an irregular and low income from farm yields and with the increasing cost of living, wives cannot take life in stride.

Female labor supply in rice production in the study areas is significant. Female labor inputs are fairly substitutable with male labor supply (Rola and Elazegui 1997). Young girls and older married women alike participate in various activities in the paddies. Results of the study reveal that the earliest age a wife entered into paid farm labor was when she was only six years old. Sixty two percent of the married women started as child laborers. Just as many have continued work in the farm even after marriage though currently at an intermittent

pace. Rice production activities have become synonymous to life.

During the peak seasons of planting and harvesting, they engage in rice production-related activities from 8 to 10 hours a day for at least 6 days a week. Others, however, do not have Sundays to talk about. On the average, women start working as early as 6:00 a.m., stopping shortly before noon. Work resumes at 2:00 p.m., and continues until dark. During off-season other odd jobs are resorted to.

Married women get paid for some of the activities they do in the rice farms. In Silago, Southern Leyte, with the help of men, they are paid PhP50.00 per day excluding meals for seedbed and land preparation including the repair of dikes. In the other study areas, males do the job alone, or unpaid family labor (women and children) is preferred. Seed selection and germination is paid work for women in only one study area of Baybay, Leyte. Married women get paid for this work PhP40.00 per day with breakfast and lunch. This includes sowing of quality seeds over the seedbed. In Abuyog, Leyte women are tasked with uprooting seedlings to be transplanted and tying them into bundles of 100 stalks each. For this work, they are paid PhP20.00 per bundle or PhP60.00 per day without meals.

Payment for transplanting ranges from PhP50.00 to PhP60.00 per day without meals. Should breakfast and lunch be served, wages range from PhP40.00 per day in Abuyog and Baybay, Leyte to PhP60.00 per day in Tanauan, Leyte. The same terms apply to weeding and planting activities. For harvesting, the woman laborer gets 1/7 share of the harvested *palay* except in the case of Tanauan, Leyte where she gets 1/5 share. Threshing is done immediately after harvesting, but before the distribution of harvested shares between woman laborer and the tenant is made.

Other paid activities include fertilizing and insect control. In Silago, Southern Leyte women are paid PhP60.00 per day without meals for fertilizing activities. This activity is not open for women in other study areas. In Baybay, Leyte women spray insecticides and are paid PhP6.00 per tank of spray used. Similarly, this activity is not open for women in the other research locale. In Abuyog, Leyte women are paid to gather *kuhol* at PhP5.00 per *ganta* of *kuhol*. This is an unpaid activity in other areas.

Labor Pains: Women's Unpaid Farm Work

The invisibility of women's productive contribution to the farm economic sector becomes more emphasized because of more unpaid work that they do. They are engaged in unpaid rice production-related activities, yet these activities are vital links in the whole farm production system. Except in Silago, Southern Leyte, women get no pay for the repair of dikes and seedbed and land preparation. They perform the work, as primary labor but as assistants to their husbands who are the ones hired by the farm managers for pay. She is an appendage to man's work. If there are no hired labor, the woman works as part of family labor together with her children who are old enough to work. Moreover, aside from providing family farm labor, women seek employment by others, though less preferred in the most physically straining farm work.

In most cases women also get no pay for seed selection and seed germination, the sowing of seeds on the seedbed, and for gathering *kuhol*. These are activities where women compete with child farm laborers. Women seem not to object to these terms because of the security of a future job during peak seasons. Under circumstances when there is an oversup

Wages of Women Farm Workers (Leyte, 1995)

<i>Municipality Province Activity</i>	<i>Abuyog, Leyte</i>	<i>Baybay, Leyte</i>	<i>Tanauan, Leyte</i>	<i>Silago, Southern Leyte</i>
Seedbed and land preparation to include repair of dikes	Unpaid	Unpaid	Unpaid	PhP50.00/day without meals
Seed selection & Germination	Unpaid	PhP40.00/day w/ breakfast and lunch	Unpaid	Unpaid
Sowing of seeds	Unpaid	Unpaid	Unpaid	Unpaid
Transplanting	PhP50.00/day without lunch	PhP60.00/day without lunch	PhP50.00/day without lunch	PhP60.00/day without lunch
Planting	PhP50.00/day w/out lunch or PhP40.00/day with lunch	PhP60.00/day w/out lunch or PhP40.00/day with lunch	PhP60.00/day w/out lunch or PhP50.00/day with lunch	PhP60.00/day without lunch
Weeding	PhP50.00/day w/out lunch or PhP40.00/day with lunch	PhP60.00/day w/out lunch or PhP40.00/day with lunch	PhP60.00/day with lunch	PhP60.00/day without lunch
Fertilizing				PhP60.00/day without meals
Insect Control: * Application of Insecticides * Gathering Golden Kuhol	PhP5.00/ganta	PhP6.00/tank Unpaid	Unpaid	Unpaid
Harvesting and Threshing	PhP50.00/day w/out lunch or 1/7 of harvest	1/7 of harvest	1/5 of harvest	1/7 of harvest
Winnowing	Unpaid	Unpaid	Unpaid	Unpaid
Drying	Unpaid	Unpaid	Unpaid	Unpaid
Milling and Storing harvest	Unpaid	Unpaid	Unpaid	Unpaid
Marketing of Palay or Rice	Unpaid	Unpaid	Unpaid	Unpaid

ply of farm labor and married women compete with male labor, getting no pay for the aforementioned activities ensures them of a paid work when harvesting or the next planting season comes around. They then become priority labor.

Married women likewise consider that getting no pay is part of the *bayanihan* spirit. They are willing to be unpaid in other farms with the implicit understanding that the latter will help them in their own farms when the need for extra labor arises. This arrangement serves as a cost-cutting measure in the rice production process among the farm households who usually operate small farm lands that do not guarantee economies of scale.

Married women as well get no pay for most post-harvest activities. They are not paid for bringing the *palay* to the rice mill; for drying, husking, and winnowing the *palay*; for storing the harvest; and for marketing the farm output. They are not paid because the work is perceived to be light, or the work is an appendage to men's bigger work, and does not merit a pay. Ironically, it seems that the most concentrated and busiest work for the woman in rice production occurs during post-harvest. Since these are mostly unpaid work, her actual contribution to rice production is underestimated.

Women are not paid because these work are considered extensions of homework along maternalism, nurturance, and care-giving domestic services. She cleans the farm tools used by her husband who get paid for plowing the fields. She cooks/prepares food and feeds the farm laborers who get paid for various farm work that men do. She is unpaid for keeping birds away from the ripening *palay* in the fields while her husband gets a paid off-farm work. She pastures the *carabao* and she is not paid because that is not really work. Moreover, if she does not do it, the *carabao* cannot work productively and her husband will not earn more for

the family. She prepares and cleans the bamboo sledge which her husband will use for paid work. Women engage in unpaid work because she is socially trained and expected to do the work, and her husband cannot do it any better.

Just Any Job

The woman's economic contribution to rice production is underestimated and, consequently, is not integrated into the pricing of the final farm output. The woman is marginalized in the paddy economy with some field work not open to her, with a wide range of unpaid work, and with relatively lesser work time available to her due to her domestic functions which cannot be compromised. She learns to get by amid gender differentiation in economic worth. Getting by is coping on a day-to-day basis as if it were possible given the circumstances (Anderson et al. 1994). It implies a short-term perspective when women have none or have minimal access to economic resources which they have to compete with and achieve in a male-dominated workplace. When the family stock of *palay*/rice taken from the latest harvest will not last until the next harvest season, she is driven to look for off-farm paid work to help the family subsist, survive, and maintain a certain standard of living.

Dressmaking is a common secondary source of income. A woman gets paid from PhP60.00 to PhP80.00 per dress that she sews. Others offer their laundry services, engage in livestock raising, tend a *sari-sari* store, or vend/peddle processed foods. Some gather firewood for sale. Still others engage in mat weaving, *burj* hat making, pottery and *nipa* shingle and midrib broom production. Many of these activities are done while she cooks the family's meals, or while watching over her small kids, or while doing other domestic work. Her

house is her workshop. She perfects the art of harmoniously combining work time and home time. Her self-employment activities are characteristically extensions of her homework of self-provisioning and self-servicing activities.

Paid Work Makes a Difference

Lengthening the work period and engaging in multiple economic activities not exclusively of rice farm work mean higher returns to female labor. Wives attempt to work more hours as circumstances allow in order to help secure the family's present economic gains and move forward to higher family welfare states. The study showed that women from poorer and larger families tend to affect family earnings more significantly than women from less poor and smaller families. At the lowest income level, any additional cash income surely enables the family to purchase additional goods and services to meet its minimum nutritional requirements.

Planting and harvest seasons provide higher earnings per day worked by a woman than any other economic activities. Working for six days a week, wives are assured of a labor wage of at least PhP300.00. During off-season and post-harvest periods when female labor services go unpaid, wages from off-farm activities cushion the financial difficulties of the family.

Farm households have incomes which fall short of the poverty threshold. Sixty-six percent reported having average monthly incomes of less than one thousand and one hundred pesos. However, the farm family survives. It does not have to buy all its food requirements, nor does it need to purchase expensive non-food items too often. Requirements for health and education is low as well.

Working wives on the average contributed 39.44% to total family income. About 37% of the wives contributed more,

that is, at least 53% to family income. This implies that woman's earnings are not just pin money. They are essential and can make a difference between the family just getting by and living a certain expected or desired standard of living. Women's earnings are most vital in farm households where the husband is sickly, old, or disabled; or in farm households where children are not yet physically able to join farm work; or in farm households which are extended and have fewer or no other adult workers. In households where other family members work, then the greater is the additional income gained by the family both from rice production-related and non-rice farming sources. Off-farm work is seen to be predominantly related with sales work in the informal market. A sizable portion work in the service sector. A gender differentiation in the workplace appears where saleswork (such as peddling and vending) is associated with female work and service occupations (such as construction and transport-related work) belong to men.

More Time, Please!

Combining work and family/domestic functions spell hectic lives and multiple burdens for the women. Working women's biggest dilemma is their lack of time. Fifty-six percent claimed they have lesser time to take care of their children. Thirty-two percent claimed they have no more time to attend to their personal needs. Another five percent claimed they have no more time to engage in leisure activities. Because of reduced home time, some domestic activities are relegated to the background which oftentimes result in quarrels/conflicts with husband and/or children.

Work hazards such as exposure to the heat of the sun, long working hours, wounds/cuts; and occupational health problems including fatigue, headache, dry skin and broken/

deformed toe nails are other related complaints of working women in the paddies. Gender discrimination as to the type of and number of farm-related work open to women; the number of working hours available for them; and the wages offered concern married working women as well. A working woman desires more home time for herself and her family. Yet, she, too, desires more work time in order to be able to engage in more paid work. A compromise emerges such that whatever she loses in home time, she gains in spending and bargaining power within the household. Her position in the political economy of the farm household improves.

Conclusion

Women in farm households are married to their work, not just to their husbands. Low family incomes push women to the fields just as employers are willing to pull them especially as buffer labor supply when there is a shortage of male farm labor. During off-season, when they are the first to be fired, they are driven into the underground and informal economies.

Men still dominate the heavy manual and managerial farm tasks while women are concentrated mainly in caring and nurturing work and support roles. Women's work are not always paid. On the average, they put in fewer hours in paid jobs than men, hence, their cash incomes fall behind than the men's. However, this does not mean that they are remiss in holding half of the sky. If their work were not subjected to what makes it underestimated, if not rendered invisible, they will be seen correctly as holding more than half of the sky.

The paddy economy cannot function without women workers, and married women would no longer want to function without work. If farm labor will be exclusively men's, then the paddy economy is limiting and narrowing its choice

to only half of the best and brightest people on earth. Women have been toiling under a system which is unfavorable for them. To make it better, there is a need to re-create the household and the paddy economy and re-allocate the domestic power based on gender as men and women re-define their experiences. First, the expansion of basic social services in farm communities may open to married women a variety of opportunities towards better access to economic resources. Second, the recognition of women's farm work as vital, measurable and quantifiable components of the entire farm production system without which producing the final output is impossible. This implies the monetization of women's gainful farm work. Third, the availability of home technology which will make homework light and labor-saving that can release wives in favor of more paid work. Fourth, the use of women-friendly farm technology that will not unduly displace and marginalize women farm workers.

Women workers will be here to stay and here to expand. It is then a challenge for policy-makers to dove-tail programs that will make women's choices wider, their economic worth appreciated/recognized, their full economic potentials tapped and developed, their lives more civilized while simultaneously uplifting their family to higher welfare states.

References

- Adalla, C. & Hoque, M. 1980. "Gender Issues in Rice and Vegetable Production: The Case of IPM Project in Calamba, Laguna, Philippines." In REVIEW OF WOMEN'S STUDIES, 1(1), 100-113
- Anderson, M., Bechhofer, F., & Gershuny, J. (eds). (1994). THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE HOUSEHOLD. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Blau, F. & Ferber, M. (1992). *THE ECONOMICS OF WOMEN, MEN AND WORK*. (2ND ed.) New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- Canlas, D. & Razak, M. (1976). Education and Labor Force Participation of Married Women: East Malaysia. UPSE DISCUSSION PAPER.
- Duran, M. P. (1991, June 1). Children Accept Working Mothers. *PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER*.
- Eviota, E. (1993). *THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF GENDER*. Philippines: Raintree Publishing.
- Freeman, J. (ed). (1979). *WOMEN: A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE*. (2ND ed.). USA: Mayfield Publishing Company.
- Herrin, A. (1980). Female Work Participation and Fertility in a Philippine Setting: A Test of Alternative Models. UPSE DISCUSSION PAPER No. 5.
- Jayme-Ho, T. (1976). Time Allocation, Home Production and Labor Force Participation of Married Women: An Exploratory Survey. UPSE DISCUSSION PAPER No. 8.
- Paqueo, V. (1979). An Analysis of Wife's Labor Force Participation in the Philippines and the Threshold Hypothesis. UPSE DISCUSSION PAPER No. 13.
- Paunlagui, M. (1997, May). The Invisibility of Women's Work. *POLICY FORUM*. Laguna: UPLB-CPDS. 12(5).
- Pineda-Ofreneo, R. (1990). Women and Work: Focus on Homework in the Philippines. *REVIEW OF WOMEN'S STUDIES*, 1(1), 42-55.
- Rola, A. & Elazegui, D. (1997, May). "What a difference Gender Makes." *POLICY FORUM*. Laguna: UPLB-CPDS. 12(5).
- Sumagaysay, M. (1993, December). CHILD LABOR IN EASTERN VISAYAS. *DOLE Region 8*.
- Sumagaysay, M. (1996, June). Work Participation of Women in Fishing Villages Along Carigara Bay. *DANYAG, UPV JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES*, 1(1), 72-87.
- Tapales, P. (1993-94). Women and Sustainable Development; The Case of the Philippines. *REVIEW OF WOMEN'S STUDIES*, 1(1).