

Economic geography of upstream seaweed value chains and poverty reduction efforts

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The Philippines is a good example in the Asia and the Pacific of a country in which rural-urban migration has led to massive informal urban sectors and persistent urban poverty. Therefore, it also makes sense to continue exploring rural employment opportunities and inclusive insertion in global agribusiness value chains. This presentation focuses on the impact of collective action dynamics on the seaweed value chain and on livelihood resilience of Philippine coastal communities. The Philippine government has perceived seaweed as a suitable alternative income generating activity for fisher folk. Here we explain the successes and failures of collective action efforts among coastal communities in four Philippine provinces where cultivating seaweeds is or used to be one of the prime income generators. The empirical insights are based on 41 semi-structured interviews (conducted in the Provinces of Guimaras, Palawan, Sorsogon, and Iloilo between 2016 and 2019) and 2x48 surveys in Iloilo (fieldwork in 2015 and the same seaweed farmers late 2018 and 2019). This contribution reveals the complexities of utilising community support structures as a means of compensating for market and government failures. A gap continues to exist between collective action initiatives and household level capabilities. Our empirical study offers implications related to path dependency and divergence, differentiated developmental-geographical settings, and the possibility of local failure when implementing nationwide programmes.