



Implications of Conflict to Sustainable Agribusiness in Mindanao, Southern Philippines

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Abstract

Mindanao has had a long history on agribusiness given that the establishment of plantation agriculture and agricultural colonies served as the cornerstone of American colonial government's development policy. Hence, rubber, pineapple, abaca, and cassava plantations began operations in the early twentieth century. Despite conflict in some areas of Mindanao, particularly in the Bangsamoro region, I will show that there are successful agribusiness firms currently operating in the area. Key elements that allowed these firms to be successful are the following: partnership with an "enlightened" local strongman, knowledge and respect of the local culture and traditional leadership structure, provision of greater benefits to their farmer-partners compared to what the prevailing job opportunities in the area can offer, and self-reliance and flexibility in addressing unpredictable challenges that will arise from time to time due to the relative instability in the community. While violent conflict presents a difficult environment in which agribusiness firms can operate, the challenges it poses are not insurmountable as shown by highly profitable agribusiness companies operating in conflict areas. At present, there are strong interest indicated by other agribusiness firms to locate their operations in the Bangsamoro region, no doubt triggered by the optimism generated by the positive results on the on-going peace talks between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). I argue that there is a need for the passage of the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) or any future arrangement acceptable to both parties that will allow greater self-rule among the Bangsamoro. If this happens, agribusiness can be a significant force that can contribute to uplifting the dismal socio-economic situation in Muslim Mindanao.