

## Book Review

*Gelia T. Castillo\**

---

**Land and Schooling: Transferring Wealth Across Generations.** Agnes R. Quisumbing, Jonna P. Estudillo, and Keijiro Otsuka. 2004. Hard Cover. ISBN 0-8018-7842-X. London and Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press. In association with the International Food Policy Research Institute.

---

Although this book is not easy reading, if one is able to proceed patiently, the rewards to one's understanding of social change are ample even for a non-economist, non-gender specialist but agriculturally-oriented social scientist. The authors' comment that "although topics such as inheritance and family structure have long been studied by anthropologists, ethnographers and sociologists, past research has been primarily descriptive, which has made generalization and replication difficult" is well taken. Perhaps the value of such descriptive studies is that they have long been done and have provided the impetus for hypothesis formulation and testing. Nevertheless, even with their descriptive nature, patterns of similarities and differences across cultures and sites are already identifiable. Admittedly, though, quantification defines magnitudes of trends more "precisely". *Land and Schooling*, therefore, takes us much, much further into the specificities of how agriculture and rural society are evolving in the Philippines, Indonesia, and Ghana.

This book is as much about changing inheritance rules, land tenure institutions, patterns of land and labor use, the increasing importance of schooling and non-farm income, as it is about gender equity. It is, in fact, a very useful account of what is happening in traditional agricultural rural societies as they shift crops and/or farming systems in response to market forces, increasing population pressure and urbanization. What is worth noting about the gender equity aspect is the counter-intuitive finding that there is an increasing gender egalitarian trend in handing down land and schooling to male and female children, and indeed, in certain instances, females are more than equal in these bequests. This is contrary to the repeated observation that females are disadvantaged, whether in land or schooling.

---

\*The author is a consultant at the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI).

There are three major findings which appear to be common to the three countries:

- (1) Levels of schooling have increased from parents, to respondents, to respondents' children, and the gender gap in schooling has narrowed with each succeeding generation.
- (2) Regardless of customary land tenure and land inheritance system, whether bilateral, communal, matrilineal or uterine matrilineal, changes are taking place in the direction of individualized ownership. Bought property, earned property or land received as gifts provide strong land rights to those who acquire them, and the nuclear family has gained importance in relation to the extended family. In the case of land transfers, evidence does not support the persistence and universal presence of gender discrimination. Although there is weak parental discrimination in the respondents' generation, this is less in the present generation.
- (3) Land inheritance and schooling are alternative forms of intergenerational wealth transfers.

This review voices concern about the following issues:

- (1) When Filipino daughters receive schooling bequests from their parents, what obligations do they have to support younger siblings in school? Do they discriminate in favor of sisters rather than brothers?

Although this study is a partial answer to why there are more females than males particularly in tertiary schools, perhaps we should explore other hypotheses. For example, since Filipino women usually manage the household purse, are parents more likely to invest in daughters because in their old age, it would be easier to receive assistance from their own daughters than from their married sons whose household finances are handled by daughters-in-law? In the Philippines there is also no marked preference for baby boys than for baby girls.

- (2) Both the Foreword and the book jacket emphasize policies to encourage adoption of labor-intensive agricultural technologies for women. If we want to right gender imbalances, why should we promote labor-intensive and not productivity-enhancing technologies? It is precisely labor intensity which makes women suffer drudgery without rewards to income or to productivity. As a matter of fact, the operative words in agriculture now are: labor-saving, input-efficient but knowledge-intensive agricultural technologies. The latter is to be enhanced by schooling (whether formal or informal). Experience has also shown that labor-intensive technologies are slow to be adopted, if at all.

- (3) The authors state that “the regions that have most successfully promoted equal education in East Asia, Southeast Asia, and Latin America have also experienced the most economic and social progress in recent decades”. If this were indeed the case, the Philippines should have been near the top of developing countries in terms of economic and social progress and our fertility should have lowered like these countries. As it is, the Philippines still has one of the highest population growth rates in the world.

The study has established that in the Philippines, there has been minimal gender disparity in school enrollment since the 1970s and the gender gap has been eliminated since 1980. Indeed, female enrollment rate has surpassed male rate for several decades and the most remarkable finding is the clear gender gap in schooling in favor of women in the children's generation. Why has this gender advantage not been translated into lower fertility and higher level of economic development for the Philippines, the way it has ostensibly happened in other developing countries?

- (4) Quite intriguing is the observation that “returns to schooling are higher in non-farm jobs than in farming”. Does this mean that increased schooling is also schooling that leaves farming behind and not schooling which increases farm incomes?

On a final note, the research which went into this book is creative in its approach, meticulous in its design, and very substantive in its findings on institutional change beyond gender issues; furthermore, the authors' collaboration is collective rather than unitary and the output comes out greater than the sum of its parts.

To reach a wider audience of development professionals, including agricultural scientists, a simpler, shorter and more straightforward research brief or research newsletter version would be useful to get their attention. This is an important and timely contribution to the literature on institutional change in agriculture and in rural society.