

Gmelina Boom, Farmers' Doom: Tree growers' risks, coping strategies and options

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ABSTRACT

A strong belief by Clavaria farmers that there is 'gold in Gmelina growing' turned out to be a huge frustration among tree out growers in southern Philippines in the late 1990s. The lack of a market study and appropriate government support system to address farmers' tree growing risks resulted in a great loss, not only financially but also in terms of local people's confidence in tree growing in the area. A large number of tree growers returned to subsistence farming while others opted to have their land rented out to multi-nationals for high value crops production (including bananas and pineapples). However, the majority shifted to fruit bearing trees. Ten farmers were interviewed using Problem in Context analysis, and they made various recommendations for government to improve the financial performance and regulatory environment for tree farming. These recommendations included the removal of the cutting permit requirements for timber grown in private woodlots, setting the wood price regulatory system to safeguard the interest of small tree growers, providing wood market information and strategic networks for tree growers to find alternative markets or use for their timber produce, and encouraging the private sector to establish small wood processing plants in every municipality in order to provide ready markets for timber produce. It was also suggested that government initiate contract tree growing between the private sector and farmers' groups, provide more planting area for interested tree growers, and assist small tree farmers to form or strengthen local cooperatives.

Keywords: market uncertainties, tree growing risks, coping strategies, policy measures, institutional safeguards

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