

In search for the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow: The causes of rural-urban migration of street vendors from Sarangani Province to General Santos City Public Market

Sheruel G. Matalandang

Mindanao State University

General Santos City, Philippines

Email: matalandangsheruel@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Rural-urban migration is a defining characteristic of developing countries like the Philippines, affecting political, demographic, and economic development in both rural and urban areas. This study examines the major causes of migration among street vendors from rural areas to General Santos City, focusing specifically on migrants from Sarangani Province. A qualitative approach was employed, selecting 14 migrant street vendors through snowball sampling. Data were collected using interviews with both open- and close-ended questions. The study revealed multiple factors driving migration. First, economic and livelihood challenges including unemployment, loss of income, landlessness, adverse land-to-population ratios, homelessness, and poverty serve as primary push factors. Second, political issues such as poor delivery of education, local political dynamics, and deteriorating peace and order in rural areas compel residents to migrate. Third, social factors, including marriage and access to health services, influence migration decisions. Fourth, environmental conditions, such as frequent and severe natural disasters and unproductive agricultural land, discourage rural livelihoods. Many prefer street vending, as it provides quicker income compared to the long gestation periods of agriculture. Migration to urban centers like General Santos City reflects a combination of economic, political, social, and environmental pressures. Understanding these drivers can help policymakers and development agencies address the push factors in rural areas, promote sustainable rural development, and improve urban management strategies. This study provides insights into the challenges faced by rural communities and the pathways through which migration affects both rural and urban development.

Keywords: Migration, rural-urban, push-factors, pull-factors, General Santos City

Date Submitted: December 21, 2025

Date Accepted: December 31, 2025

Date Published: January 17, 2026

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.69651/PIJHSS0501723>

Recommended citation:

Matalandang, S. G. (2026). In search for the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow: The causes of rural-urban migration of street vendors from Sarangani Province to General Santos City Public Market. *Pantao (The International Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences)* 5 (1), 7987-7993.
<http://doi.org/10.69651/PIJHSS0501723>

INTRODUCTION

General Santos City is close to Sarangani Province, it is considered as one of the poorest provinces in the Philippines with 61.7% poverty incidence and ranked number 18 based on National Economic and Development Authority and Philippine Statistics Authority's Annual Per Capita Poverty Thresholds, Poverty Incidence and Magnitude of Poor Families (2016).

Urban population has been increasing due to rural migration. The City's urbanization rate has been quoted at 3.53% over the period from 2000 to 2007 and 1.91% in 2015. This is one of the highest in the Philippines.

The Rural to Urban migration of street vendors from Sarangani Province is one of the most common trends of General Santos City. Lack of opportunity, unemployment coupled with poverty pushed people to migrate.

Statement of the problem

This study aims to explore the causes of rural urban migration of street vendors from Sarangani Province to the General Santos City Public Market. Specifically, it seeks to determine the underlying factors that influence the decision of street vendors to leave their places of origin and relocate to an urban commercial center in search of livelihood opportunities.

1. What are the causes of rural urban migration of street vendors from Sarangani Province to General Santos City in terms of landlessness, adverse person to land ratio, frequent severe natural disasters, homelessness, unemployment and poverty, loss of income sources, absence of industries, law and order situation, village politics, lack of social and cultural opportunities, and dissatisfaction with village life?

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative descriptive design to explore the motivations, experiences, and consequences of migration among street vendors. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, focusing on individuals originally from Sarangani Province who are currently vending within the General Santos City Public Market.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted in Cebuano, allowing participants to express themselves naturally. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were strictly observed.

Data were analyzed thematically following the steps of familiarization, coding, theme development, and interpretation. Themes were derived from recurring patterns in participants' narratives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the findings of the study based on data gathered from the participants who were street vendors originating from Sarangani Province and currently operating at the General Santos City Public Market. Using a qualitative research design, the study employed purposive sampling to select participants who met the criteria of having experienced rural-urban migration. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and narrative accounts,

and were analyzed using thematic analysis supported by cause-and-effect mapping and causal loop analysis. The results are grounded in the empirical data obtained from the participants and are interpreted in direct relation to the objectives of the study, particularly in identifying and explaining the multidimensional causes of rural-urban migration among street vendors.

The participants were largely drawn from extended family backgrounds, with most coming from large households where resources were shared among numerous family members. This demographic context is significant in understanding migration decisions, as large family size was associated with increased strain on access to health services, educational opportunities, and stable employment. Participants reported that the combination of limited family resources and insufficient institutional support in their communities of origin contributed to compromised education and health outcomes, which in turn reduced employability and increased vulnerability to unemployment. These conditions created a context in which migration became a rational survival strategy rather than a voluntary choice, aligning with earlier studies that emphasize household pressure as a key driver of migration in rural settings.

The analysis of the data through a cause-and-effect framework revealed five major categories of factors influencing rural-urban migration, namely political factors, personal reasons, social factors, economic factors, and natural factors. Among these categories, economic factors emerged as the most dominant, as reflected by the number and depth of codes associated with this theme. Participants consistently emphasized income difference, price difference, lack of livelihood projects, unemployment, loss of income, homelessness, and absence of industries as the primary reasons for leaving Sarangani Province. These findings indicate that economic insecurity in rural areas serves as a strong push factor, while the perceived availability of income-generating opportunities in the urban informal sector functions as a pull factor.

Political factors were identified as a significant contributor to migration, particularly issues related to education, peace and order, and local political dynamics. Participants reported that while basic education such as kindergarten, elementary, and secondary schooling was available in their municipalities, the absence of tertiary education institutions compelled families to send their children to urban centers. This relocation often required parents to migrate as well in order to financially support their children's education. Informants expressed concern over the high cost of living in the city but considered migration necessary to secure better educational prospects. These accounts reflect the role of uneven educational infrastructure in shaping migration patterns, consistent with development literature that links educational access to population mobility.

Concerns regarding peace and order further intensified migration decisions. Participants described their communities as increasingly unsafe due to gambling, alcohol abuse, domestic conflicts, vehicle-related betting incidents, and criminal activities. Reports of attacks attributed to leftist groups, including the burning of supply trucks, heightened fear and insecurity among residents. Informants expressed declining trust in local government units to effectively address these issues, leading to a perception that urban areas offered greater safety. This perceived insecurity aligns with existing studies that identify weak governance and internal security challenges as catalysts for rural displacement and migration.

Social factors, particularly health and marriage, also played a role in shaping migration experiences. Participants reported that although health centers were present in their municipalities, these facilities were insufficient to meet the growing health needs of the population. The lack of modern medical equipment and limited capacity to address emerging illnesses prompted families to seek better health services in urban areas. Migration, therefore, functioned as a strategy to

improve access to healthcare, a pattern that reflects broader public health research identifying migration as both a response to and a determinant of health inequality.

Marriage emerged as another social factor influencing migration, especially among younger and unmarried individuals. Participants noted that romantic relationships formed in General Santos City often motivated permanent relocation. This observation is consistent with demographic research indicating that unmarried individuals are generally more mobile and responsive to labor and social opportunities. In some cases, marriage reinforced migration decisions already initiated by economic or educational considerations, demonstrating the interrelated nature of social and economic drivers.

Economic factors were consistently described as the most compelling reasons for migration. Participants emphasized that rural livelihoods were largely dependent on subsistence farming and seasonal labor, both of which were highly vulnerable to environmental and market conditions. The lack of industrial development and limited employment opportunities beyond agriculture resulted in widespread unemployment. When farming failed due to drought or unpredictable weather, households were left without food or income, pushing individuals to seek alternative livelihoods in the city. These findings align with migration theories that frame poverty and unemployment as central push factors in rural-urban migration.

Natural factors, particularly frequent and severe natural disasters, further exacerbated economic vulnerability. Participants described prolonged droughts that destroyed crops and reduced agricultural productivity. The uncertainty associated with farming, including long gestation periods, fluctuating market prices, and high production costs, made agriculture an increasingly unattractive livelihood option. Informants reported that even when harvests were successful, produce was often purchased at unfairly low prices, resulting in financial losses rather than gains. These experiences highlight the role of environmental stressors in reinforcing economic hardship and accelerating migration decisions.

Homelessness and landlessness were also cited as contributing factors, although participants clarified that land scarcity was not always due to the absence of land but rather its unproductive nature. Available land was often prone to natural disasters or unsuitable for sustainable agriculture, limiting its value as a livelihood asset. Participants who lacked secure housing described feelings of instability and discomfort, particularly when living with extended relatives without a sense of ownership. Migration to the city was perceived as a means of attaining greater autonomy and stability through informal economic activities such as street vending.

The causal loop analysis further illustrated how these factors interact dynamically. Large family size contributed to increased pressure on limited resources, leading to compromised education and health outcomes. These limitations reduced employability and reinforced unemployment, which, when combined with environmental shocks such as drought, resulted in loss of income and deepened poverty. Poverty, in turn, acted as a reinforcing loop that sustained migration as a survival response. The findings underscore that rural-urban migration among street vendors is not driven by a single factor but by the cumulative and reinforcing effects of economic, social, political, and environmental conditions.

In synthesis, the results demonstrate that rural-urban migration of street vendors from Sarangani Province to General Santos City is a multidimensional process shaped by intersecting structural and personal factors. Economic insecurity, environmental vulnerability, limited access to education and health services, governance challenges, and social dynamics collectively push individuals toward urban informal livelihoods. These findings contribute to the broader understanding of migration by highlighting the complexity of push factors in rural contexts and

the role of informal urban economies as absorbers of displaced rural labor. The results directly address the objectives of the study and provide a foundation for policy interventions aimed at rural development, disaster resilience, employment generation, and social service provision, thereby preparing the reader for the subsequent discussion on conclusions and recommendations.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the migration of street vendors from Sarangani Province to General Santos City is a complex and multidimensional process primarily driven by economic necessity and reinforced by social conditions, environmental vulnerabilities, and structural limitations in rural areas. Economic factors emerged as the most dominant drivers of migration, particularly unemployment, poverty, loss of income, absence of industries, homelessness, and unequal price and income structures between rural and urban areas. These conditions significantly constrained livelihood opportunities in the province, making migration a survival strategy rather than a voluntary pursuit of improved living standards. The results further revealed that environmental pressures such as frequent droughts and severe natural disasters weakened agricultural productivity, intensified food insecurity, and increased household vulnerability, thereby accelerating decisions to migrate. Subsistence farming, which served as the main source of food and income for many participants, was rendered unreliable due to climate variability, long crop gestation periods, and unfair market pricing, ultimately reinforcing economic instability.

Social and political factors further compounded these economic pressures. Limited access to adequate health services and the absence of tertiary education institutions in Sarangani Province compelled families to relocate in order to secure better healthcare and educational opportunities. Concerns regarding peace and order, local political dynamics, and perceived inefficiencies in governance reduced trust in local institutions and heightened feelings of insecurity among residents. These conditions strengthened the perception of General Santos City as a safer and more opportunity rich environment, despite the risks associated with informal urban employment. Personal factors such as marriage and dissatisfaction with village life also influenced migration decisions, often interacting with economic and social pressures rather than operating independently. Collectively, these findings confirm that rural urban migration among street vendors is shaped by interrelated push factors that operate simultaneously and reinforce one another.

While migration was often associated with aspirations for improved livelihoods and social mobility, the study also revealed that the realities of urban life frequently fell short of expectations. Migrants encountered financial insecurity, unstable income, poor working conditions, and social marginalization within the informal economy. These challenges highlight the vulnerability of street vendors in urban spaces and underscore the need for inclusive development policies that address both the causes and consequences of migration. The findings suggest that without adequate institutional support, migration may merely shift poverty from rural to urban settings rather than resolve underlying structural inequalities.

In light of these conclusions, the study underscores the importance of comprehensive policy interventions that address migration at both the rural and urban levels. Strengthening rural livelihoods through job creation, territorial development, and sustainable food systems is essential to reduce the push factors that compel migration. Investments in agricultural value chains,

agribusiness development, and research driven innovation can enhance productivity and income stability, while measures that increase the resilience of agricultural livelihoods to environmental threats can mitigate the impact of climate related shocks. Establishing sustained dialogue among local governments, market actors, cooperatives, youth groups, and rural communities is also critical in ensuring that development initiatives are inclusive and responsive to local needs.

The findings further indicate that stimulating rural development requires harnessing the potential of diaspora remittances and migrant investments for both agricultural and non-agricultural activities in areas of origin. Encouraging return migration and maximizing the skills and resources of resettled migrants can contribute to local economic revitalization when supported by access to basic services and livelihood opportunities. Information dissemination initiatives that raise awareness about realistic living conditions and opportunities in both rural and urban areas are equally important, particularly through the promotion of rural success stories and the engagement of young farmers as ambassadors of rural development. Integrating migration considerations into rural planning processes and recognizing the diverse categories of migrants can enhance the effectiveness of local development strategies.

Finally, the study highlights the need for local government units to promote the development of regional urban centers in a sustainable, inclusive, and rights-based manner, ensuring access to basic services for informal workers and involving civil society organizations in planning and implementation. Strengthening rural urban linkages through inter municipal, inter provincial, and inter regional collaboration can further support balanced development and mitigate the negative consequences of unregulated migration. By integrating rural, urban, and regional policies, migration can be managed more effectively as a development process rooted in opportunity and choice rather than necessity and deprivation. Overall, the conclusions of this study contribute to a deeper understanding of rural urban migration dynamics and provide empirically grounded insights that can inform policy, planning, and future research on migration and informal livelihoods.

REFERENCES

- Bhowmik, S. K. (2005, May 28). Street vendors in Asia: A review. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 40(21), 2256–2264. <https://www.wiego.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Bhowmik-Street-Vendors-Asia.pdf>
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (2017). The future of food and agriculture: Trends and challenges. FAO. <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/2e90c833-8e84-46f2-a675-ea2d7afa4e24/content>
- Gonzales, E. T. (n.d.). Rural urban migration: Urban unemployment and rural urban disparities in the Philippines. *Philippine Review of Economics*. <https://pre.econ.upd.edu.ph/index.php/pre/article/view/271>
- Hossain, M. Z. (2001, August). Rural urban migration in Bangladesh: A micro-level study. Paper presented at the IUSSP XXIV General Population Conference, Salvador, Brazil. https://iussp.org/sites/default/files/Brazil2001/s20/S28_P02_Hossain.pdf

Lee, E. S. (1966). A theory of migration. *Demography*, 3(1), 47–57.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/2060063>

Todaro, M. P. (1969). A model for labor migration and urban unemployment in less developed countries. *American Economic Review*, 59(1), 138–148.

Morales, G. J., Villaronte, R. K., Yap, M. C., & Rosete, M. A. (n.d.). The relationship between rural urban migration and the agricultural output of the Philippines. *International Journal of Social and Management Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.5555/ijosmas.v3i1.88>

Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism. (2018, July 12). Stats on the state of the regions: Hubs of wealth, ponds of poverty. <https://pcij.org/2018/07/12/stats-on-the-state-of-the-regions-hubs-of-wealth-ponds-of-poverty/>

Philippine Institute for Development Studies. (n.d.). Migration and the rural urban continuum: Evidence from Bukidnon, Philippines. *Philippine Journal of Development*. <https://www.pids.gov.ph/details/back-to-the-countryside>

Philippine Statistics Authority. (2020). 2018 National Migration Survey: Migration experiences of Filipinos. <https://rssocar.psa.gov.ph/content/2018-national-migration-survey-migration-experiences-filipinos>

Ram, M., Nizamani, B., & Muhammad, A. F. (n.d.). Context of rural to urban migration and socio-economic empowerment of women in Pakistan and the Philippines: A systematic literature review. *Asas Wa Tandhim: Jurnal Hukum, Pendidikan Dan Sosial Keagamaan*. <https://jurnal.uce.ac.id/index.php/awtjhpsa/article/view/2568>

Regional Statistical Services Office XII, & Philippine Statistics Authority. (n.d.). Poverty incidence among families, SOCCSKSARGEN Region: 2015 and 2018. https://rsso12.psa.gov.ph/system/files/attachment-dir/SR_017_POVERTY_Final.pdf