Le Corps professoral de
Gembloux Agro-Bio Tech - Université de Liège vous prie
de lui faire l'honneur d'assister à la défense publique de la dissertation originale que

Madame NGUYEN Thi Minh Khue,

Titulaire d'un diplôme de master of arts in development studies,
specialisation rural livelihood and global change,

présentera en vue de l'obtention du grade et du diplôme de

DOCTEUR EN SCIENCES AGRONOMIQUES ET INGENIERIE BIOLOGIQUE,
le 18 novembre 2019, à 15h30 précises (personne ne sera admis après cette heure),
en l'auditorium ER1 (Economie Rurale, Bât. 18),
Passage des Déportés, 2, à 5030 GEMBLOUX.

Cette dissertation originale a pour titre :
« Impact of migration on agricultural development in the Red River Delta, Vietnam ».

Le jury est composé comme suit :
Président : Prof. B. BODSON, Professeur ordinaire,
Membres : Prof. P. LEBAILLY (Promoteur), Prof. T. D. NGUYEN (Copromoteur - Vietnam National University of Agriculture), Prof. P. BURNY, Prof. T. DOGOT, Prof. J. P. PEEMANS (UCLouvain), Prof. B. WHITE (Institut des Sciences Sociales, La Haye, Pays-Bas).
Summary

This thesis explores the impact of rural migration on agricultural production in the context of 30 years after the Đổ Mới (renovation) reform based on a systematic survey of a Vietnamese village, key informant interviews and participatory observation. All data was collected in Mai Thon Village, Bac Ninh province, a typical Red River Delta village. It features the comparative perspective, comparing the situations of household groups participating in different types of migration and non-migrant households and the impact thereof on their agricultural production. This thesis shows that the increasing rural out-migration flows have become more circular with the development of infrastructure. Normally, migrants send remittances back home and bring food from their homes back to the city. Moving back and forth, the migrants themselves are the key factors of rural-urban continuum. Migration has, therefore, become an important generator of change in farming in Mai Thon village.

Remittance plays a central role in local household income and shows a positive case of remittance spending in farming activities. The groups involved in diversified migration types made more remittances to overcome farming constraints than other groups. The remittance used for agricultural production is four times higher than for non-farm. Agricultural production and non-agricultural production are complementary to each other in household earning activities. The majority of migrant households keep their paddy fields and manage to maintain agricultural production on their land in the context of labour lost due to migration in multiple ways including partial abandon, partial leasing, partial lending and partial producing. Agricultural land and farm work, however, are retained as a stable resource, a guarantee of subsistence or a safety net for rural people while boosting their autonomy. In terms of an agricultural production choice, most of Mai Thon households keep rice production as the fundamental agricultural activity, while cash-crop cultivation and livestock raising are vastly reduced. The thesis also explores the expansion of multifunctional households and multi-spatial households to maintain agriculture under the influence of migration. Moreover, households with a migrant labourer continue agricultural production, giving priority to home consumption, which encourages Mai Thon households to keep farming on a small-scale, using local varieties or breeds with a higher nutritional value, enabling better local resource usage and hence more environmentally friendly for their own family and friends. This reaction shows the interesting resistance of peasant farmers in a context of global food crisis, not only in terms of food security but also food safety and food sovereignty. Most migrants prefer declaring their status as “peasants” and “village members” to keep their sense of social security, meanwhile integrating the outside world as “flexible peasants”. As a result, rural households become multi-site households with multiple job holdings and the village becomes a hybrid village where the traditional institutions have mixed with modern ones. This implies that although migration would be considered as a supplemental strategy for agriculture production to increase household security and autonomy, decentralised rural industries provide rural people with close-by extra job opportunities beyond farming, which could prompt people to continue farming.

Even though family farming has an important role in rural household livelihoods, the contribution of agriculture to farmer incomes and rural development depends on the active participation of youth who are the potential labour force. In Mai Thon, a wide range of constraints discourage the youth active participation in agricultural production activities includes: Inadequate credit facilities, low and unstable returns from agricultural investment, the drudgery of agriculture work and availability of employment alternatives. Indeed, those constraints have complex interlinks with each other. The prospects for success in the future lie in the fact that despite farming low return, most rural youths still engage in agriculture and consider it as their way of life.