



POLICY BRIEF **STRENGTHENING THE LOCAL SUPPORT AND REPRESENTATION OF FARMERS AND FISHERFOLKS**

Filipino farmers and fisherfolks are crucial in the country's development and sustainability; the agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing (AHFF) industry contribute largely to the gross domestic product (GDP), according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA). However, they remain to be the poorest sectors in the Philippines. This Policy Brief looks into the issues confronting these sectors, e.g. inadequate farm input support and lack of sustainable and alternative livelihoods, as well as identifies several recommendations particularly on policy implementation to help alleviate poverty and ensure inclusive economic growth.

ISSUES ON LIVELIHOOD

Farmers from 16 municipalities raised several gaps on the State-provided farm input support

Some of the gaps that have been identified by the farmers were: 1) mismatch between land size and the provision of seeds and fertilizers; 2) untimely delivery of farm input support during the planting season; 3) low quality of livestock given to farmers for dispersal purposes; and 4) ineffective information dissemination and targeting of beneficiaries. The insufficiency of farm input support supplies are attributed to the limited budget provided by the government. For farmers of Maydolong, Eastern Samar, this led to a decrease in their production.

On the other hand, farmers from Calbayog City, Samar reported that only those who submit project proposals were provided with local support. Since many farmers and fisherfolks are not equipped with the necessary technical skills, they were unable to craft and submit proposals.

In terms of farm equipment utilization, some farmers have inadequate knowledge about properly operating and maintaining their machines. Those who live in far-flung areas also continue to use outdated machineries because farm technicians cannot reach them. Additionally, not all fisherfolks receive fishing equipment, either. They are not aware of the criteria used in selecting the recipients of fishing support.

With these gaps in mind, the CBAMGs made the following recommendations:

- Conduct regular consultations with the farmers to come up with programs and services that will cater to their needs. The Barangay Agricultural Worker (BAW) should be active in relaying the concerns of the farmers to the Municipal Agricultural Office (MAO). The implementation should be localized to ensure better quality of the support vis-a-vis profitability and sustainability of the program;
- The LGU should allocate funds for the procurement of additional farm and fishing inputs;
- The LGU should train farmers and fisherfolks about crafting project proposals; and

- The LGU should also administer a comprehensive survey among farmers to ensure that the program is well-targeted. At the same time, the Department of Agriculture (DA) should re-evaluate and validate all indigent farmers to make sure that they benefit from the program.

9 municipalities emphasized the need for irrigation systems

Effective irrigation systems should be installed to address the farmers' needs. Irrigation equipment such as water pump, suction hose and flexible hose should be requested by submitting a project proposal.

During the national consultation, a representative from National Irrigation Authority (NIA) clarified that while the DA builds irrigation systems to help out poor municipalities, its installation will still depend on the type of soil and the availability of water sources in the area. In this regard, they are encouraging farmers to engage in other farming activities such as vegetable production.

Need for alternative and sustainable livelihood

The Sustainable Livelihood Program (SLP) is a capability-building program that provides access to opportunities that will increase the productivity of the livelihood assets of the poor, vulnerable and marginalized communities, in order to improve their socio-economic well-being.

However, not all farmers and fisherfolks in the city/municipalities covered by the monitoring activity are SLP beneficiaries. Again, the sectors pointed out that this gap is due to the insufficiency of funds allotted by the national and local government. If programs were made available, members of the sectors still assert that these do not match their skills and interests, and do not improve their income.

The LGU should provide additional livelihood programs and skills training to fisherfolks to augment their income. Moreover, a survey should also be conducted to identify those in the community that should benefit from the programs. The list should be accurate and validated. Livelihood programs should also be monitored.

Meanwhile, farmers should also be given alternative livelihood that will allow them to cope with the effects of climate change on their productivity. The DA should conduct a study on the effects of climate change and come up a climate change adoption plan with LGUs that will include the provision of alternative livelihood programs for farmers. During the national consultation, a representative from the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) added that the issue should be viewed at the macro/provincial level because planting is being done depending on the climate of different provinces and areas.

Weak implementation of laws and regulations on illegal fishing affected the fisherfolks' catch and income

The LGU and the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) should ensure strict implementation of laws and regulations on illegal fishing. Additionally, fisherfolks association should have an active participation on the implementation of the law by reporting illegal activities of fishermen from other municipalities.

ORGANIZING AND CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

10 municipalities said farmers associations in their barangays are not functional

Some farmers organizations have difficulty getting registered and accredited because of limited understanding on the process and the documents required. Because of this, the members do not receive important updates concerning the sector. While each barangay has a designated BAW, it still lacks the capacity to transmit information from the municipality to the farmers in the barangay.

Calbayog City farmers also said the support provided by the government is only limited to registered groups. However, only few farmers (and fisherfolks) are members of associations and there is weak government support in organizing the farmers and fisherfolks sectors.

The inability of the fisherfolks sector to organize also caused their lack of participation during planning and other governance processes.

Barangay farmers' organizations need to be restructured. Inactive members should be evaluated as well. These groups should be registered and accredited, while concrete plans should be installed to strengthen them. A CSO Desk should be created to respond to the needs and issues of CSOs.

The feedback mechanism should be revived within each organization. Federation presidents should also visit the farmers' associations in the barangay to provide updates on the status of the LGU's plans and programs for them.

During the national consultation, BFAR encouraged fisherfolks to form groups for better management of sectoral concerns. This will also result to inclusion in BFAR's targeting for equipment distribution. The accreditation process of sectoral groups in the Local Special Bodies should also be streamlined and made easier.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Agricultural production is a main source of livelihood for Filipino farmers. However, it is also an industry that is prone to risks and natural disasters such as typhoons, floods and droughts. Given this, the Filipino government instituted a crop insurance system to provide protection and make the losses arising from natural calamities, plant diseases and pest infestations more bearable to farmers. Considering that a major sector of the country's farming economy are marginalized subsistence farmers—those who depend mainly on farming for their subsidies and till their own land with the help of the members of their household—Republic Act 8175 also makes it a state policy

to extend subsidies to them as may be called for to make the benefits of the program more accessible.

9 municipalities reported that the LGU did not conduct orientations and information dissemination campaigns about the program. Others held orientations; however, these were perceived to be inadequate

Farmers are not aware of the significance of the program as well as the application process and the guidelines that should be followed. Thus, they have not availed of crop insurance to cover their valued crops and livestock.

The DA and Philippine Crop Insurance Corporation (PCIC) should orient all farmers on the importance of crop insurance and encourage them to avail. The agencies should also ensure the proper implementation of the program and include all indigent farmers. Monitoring should be conducted to check on its implementation.

Local farmers and fisherfolks have limited and/or inaccurate knowledge on the programs and services available for them

A regular orientation should be conducted to inform farmers and fisherfolks of the government's programs and services. The LGU should also invite members of the sectors during program and budget planning to gauge their issues and concerns, and allocate funds to appropriate programs and services.

HEALTH

Local farmers and fisherfolks are not PhilHealth members

This is attributed to two factors: 1) the insufficient funds allocated by the national and local government; and 2) inadequate information given to the sector.

The LGU and Municipal Health Office should conduct orientations, and assist and enroll farmers and fisherfolks to be members of the program. There should be a revalidation of all program beneficiaries as well as profiling of all indigent members of the sectors to be included.

During the national consultation, government representatives from NIA, BFAR, DILG and the Department of Health (DOH) added the following clarifications to the gaps and recommendations raised by the sectors:

- Review the Local Government Code. They pointed out that most of the gaps were a result of the devolution of power from national to the local government. Thus, the allocation of funds for agricultural support, for instance, will depend on the LGU's agricultural performance. There are already a lot of standards and policies instituted at the national level; what's needed is to capacitate local governments to improve implementation;
- The devolution can also be held accountable for instances of political patronage at the LGU level, when preference is given to individuals who have close ties with local officials during the distribution of inputs;
- Make the position of Cooperative Development Officer—coordinator of the members of the sectors in the communities—mandatory to help organize farmers and fisherfolks; and
- Issues concerning farmers and fisherfolks should be viewed in a more holistic and sustainable approach, from property/tenurial rights to support services to productivity/livelihood.



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