



Outstanding Practice in
AGROECOLOGY 2019



FACTSHEET

Philippines – Building Resilient Farming Communities and Sustainable Economies in the poorest provinces of the Philippines through Agroecology (2004)

IN BRIEF

The farmer-owned NGO Agro-Eco Philippines addresses the gaps in rural development by training Provincial Consultative Teams for coordination, monitoring and consultation. Its focus is on conservation and production aspects, but also aims to create more sustainable local economies by transforming organic farmers into social entrepreneurs and establishing marketing hubs (farmer-managed stores) for organic products. Agro-Eco Philippines entails key features including but not limited to: seeds and plant genetic conservation, farmer-led and participatory plant breeding, community-based seed banks and learning farms, training of young farmers and students, and organic products processing. Agro-Eco currently works with 300 organisations across the Philippines. It has trained a total of 3,048 small-scale farmers on climate-resilient agriculture and claims to have transformed their lives. It also developed 22 farmer's organizations now engaging in social entrepreneurship and established 5 marketing hubs in Mindanao.

ABOUT THE PRACTICE AT A GLANCE

Organisation: Agro-Eco Philippines, Inc. (NGO)

Implemented in: 22 Provinces and 7 cities of Mindanao, 2 Provinces in Eastern Visayas and 1 Province in Eastern Luzon (Philippines)

Year: 2004

Beneficiaries: 300 farmers' organizations (2,000 women and 2,500 men); smallholder farmers, women and youth

Topic(s): Production, Processing, Distribution, Consumption

PROBLEMS TARGETED / CONTEXT

The NGO Agro-Eco Philippines addresses the problems of poverty, hunger and climate change. The island Mindanao is rich in natural resources and has long been considered as the breadbasket of the Philippines. However, half of the island's population lives in poverty and farmers are too often malnourished. Indeed 80% of agricultural production - mainly bananas, pineapples, palm oil - is destined for export. Consequently, the agro-business companies benefit from the profits generated by agriculture, adversely to farmers, who have no control over their production. Climate change is also strongly affecting the Philippines: rising temperatures, repeated typhoons, droughts, and floods are factors that have negative impacts on farming. In addition to that, most of small-scale farmers do not have access to seeds, to appropriate and sustainable farming technologies, to markets and are not taken into account by government policies or programmes.

Agro-Eco Philippines started its development work with the poor farmers in Mindanao as early as 1991. It is based on the actual situation of small-scale farmers and their needs. Its existence and sustainability up to this period is attributed to the active involvement of the Church people, civil society organizations, scientists, local government units, and more importantly the voluntarism of farmers. Agro-Eco Philippines is owned by the farmers and they played a role in its conceptualization and implementation. In 2004, the organization officially registered under the name MASIPAG Mindanao Inc. In 2016, it changed its name to Agro-Eco Philippines Inc.

KEY FEATURES OF THE SOLUTION

The goal of Agro-Eco Philippines is to address the gap between programmes implemented by the government or NGOs, and the problems that the farmers are facing. Its main objectives are to improve the quality of life and the resources of poor farmers by focusing on a holistic and sustainable development strategy. In order to support local initiatives of poor farmers and to support their political and social empowerment, the practice implements a bottom-up approach, farmer-scientist partnerships, farmer-led research and development, farmer-to-farmer mode of transfer, and advocacy for farmer's rights.

Indeed, since the NGO's beginning, it is owned by farmers: 80 % of the members of the Board of Trustees are peasants, who also oversee the implementation through their respective organization or committees (i.e. social enterprise committee or advocacy committee). In a participatory approach, Agro-Eco also formed Provincial Consultative Teams for regular coordination, monitoring and consultation, in addition to two annual project assessments and a yearly planning, where farmers take part. Every three years, the NGO organizes a General Assembly, where each farmer can state what kind of activities the organization should be engaging in. Whilst conservation and production were given priority in the first years of implementation, recently the NGO engaged in social entrepreneurship – transforming the organic farmers into social entrepreneurs and creating sustainable economies.

Overall, Agro-Eco Philippines carries out 10 projects:

The programme “Rescue and Conservation of Traditional Plant Genetic Resources” is focused on the right to seed sovereignty. It aims to combat the destruction of traditional seeds and the environment caused by modern agriculture (hybrid seeds, use of pesticides). Thus, it focuses on the collection of traditional plant genetic resources. The collected plants are evaluated in farmer learning farms and in the MASIPAG Mindanao Biodiversity Center for the purpose of production, improvement, conservation, and studying their capacity to adapt to climate change (“Data Banking and Information Dissemination”). The evaluation and plant breeding are realized by farmers and scientists at the community level through the “Research and Development of Farmer-Developed/-Adapted Technologies” programme.

Development and dissemination of climate-resilient crops is achieved through the “Development of a Sustainable Agro-ecosystem” programme; whereas crop diversification and integration of livestock in the farms is promoted through the “Crop and Livestock Production and Improvement” programme.

In order to create added value to agricultural products, farmers join forces as social enterprises and establish marketing hubs through farmer-managed stores (“Organizational strengthening and consolidation” programme) for organic products and transformed products (“On-Farm Product Processing and Social Enterprising” programme). In the “Women for Agriculture” programme, women farmers are encouraged to form inter-finance groups.

Furthermore, the programme “Education and Training” provides training for young farmers and students. Finally, the programme “Advocacy and Linkage” tries to establish national, regional and international partnerships and solidarity actions to assert farmers’ rights to food and sustainable development.

Furthermore, Agro-Eco Philippines provides 6 programmes and services: The first one, “Advocacy, capacity-building, training, information dissemination and international solidarity, and defense on the violations of the right to food towards social equality (ACTIVE)” focuses on training on right to food; policy advocacy and lobbying, partnership with Local Government Units (LGUs) and government agencies; partnership with schools and churches; fora, symposia and mobilizations; linking and building of alliances; international solidarity and exposures.

The second, “Formation, Conscientization and Community Empowerment (FORCE)” is centered around community-based education on agroecology, training on soil quality management, community organizing, formation of Farmer’s Organizations, and capacity-building of farmer trainers.

The third one, “Agroecological development enabling farmers and communities to become resilient to climate change (Agroeco-Dev)” encompasses three sub-projects: “Rescue and conservation of traditional plant genetic resources (PGR conservation)” establishing community-based Farmer Learning Farms and seed banks, propagating and disseminating resilient crops, developing agroecological farms; “Crops and livestock Improvement and Production (CLIP)” breeding and developing resilient crops and livestock, livestock production and feeds formulation, and organic vegetables production; “Research, development and dissemination of resilient farming practices” develo-

ping on-farm researches on climate-resilient crops, technologies and farming practices, documentation, validation and dissemination of Farmer's Developed and Adopted Technologies (FDATs). The fourth one, "Generating Resources through Applied Community Enterprise (GRACE)" focuses on social entrepreneurship, organic product processing and marketing, Participatory Guarantee System (PGS), consumers' education and organic product outlets. The fifth, "Gender Empowerment by Nurturing Equality and Respect (GENDER) Women in agriculture", is centered around development of women farmer trainers, institutional partnerships, and advocacy and mobilizations. The last one, "Organizational Development, Expansions and Strengthening (ODES)" undertakes provincial, regional and national trainings; disaster preparedness and emergency response; and networking.

The activities are directly implemented by Agro-Eco Philippines under the direct supervision of the Executive Director. At a community level, the project is implemented by farmer's organizations. The 5 cluster coordinators (staff of Agro-Eco Philippines) and the 50 farmer trainers (advanced farmers who are imparting their skills to other farmers under the principle of farmer-to-farmer sharing of knowledge) ensure proper monitoring.

INNOVATIVE ASPECTS

- Addressing problems of rural poverty and hunger in a multi-dimensional and holistic way, transforming the lives of smallholders through a set of appropriate solutions that they themselves formulated and improved.
- Implementing a bottom-up approach that focuses on farmer-to-famer learning and scientist-farmer collaboration at a community level.
- Changed mind-sets of stakeholders in government, academia and Church.
- Promotes in particular circular economy through the processing of agricultural products by farmers-led social enterprises.

FACTS & FIGURES

- The national network-organisation works with 305 People's Organisations, 18 Partner Local Government Units, 28 Partner NGOs, 14 Partner Universities & Colleges and 158 young agriculturalists.
- Organized 15 big World Food Day activities (every October 16) in Mindanao highlighting Agroecology and Sustainable Development Goals and reached 1,542 females and 1,407 males. Produced and disseminated 14,000 copies of campaign materials on Right to Food, Farmers' Rights, and Agroecology (1,700). Established social enterprise programme named "Healthy Choice", providing small-scale farmers with opportunities to sell directly to consumers and educating 232 females and 207 males.
- Strengthened the institutional capacities on agroecology of 15 local government units, 12 universities, and 4 Dioceses.
- Trained a total of 3,048 small-scale farmers on climate-resilient agriculture and has transformed their lives through a set of appropriate solutions that they themselves formulated, improved and shared.

- Developed 73 farmer breeders and 420 farmer-bred lines (varieties) for rice and corn.
- Developed 22 farmer's organizations now engaging into social entrepreneurship and established 5 marketing hubs for organic products in Mindanao.

OUTCOME, IMPACT & EFFECTIVENESS

- Has made 3,048 small-scale farmers seeds and food secured and helped them to practice climate-resilient agriculture, especially in the Eastern region, which is most vulnerable to climate change.
- Has resulted in the significant increase in the regular income of the farmers.
- According to a 2007-2008 impact study on MASIPAG (from which Agro-Eco originates), the livelihoods (defined as net income plus subsistence) of the poorest quarter of organic farmers is one and a half times higher than the income of the poorest conventional farmers. Further, net income plus subsistence value of crops calculated on a per hectare basis also shows a clear, highly statistically significant advantage for the organic farmers revealing higher productivity in organic farms. Food security is significantly higher in the households of organic farmers, who eat a more diverse, healthy diet, have better health, and whose farms have a considerably higher on-farm diversity, growing on an average 50% more crops than conventional farmers, better soil fertility, less soil erosion, increased tolerance of crops to pests and diseases and better farm management skills.
- Has influenced the policy and programmes of the local governments to adopt agroecology and to establish relevant programmes on organic agriculture.

OUTLOOK, TRANSFERABILITY, SCALABILITY & COST-EFFICIENCY

The cost of implementation of the practice is EUR 115,000 per year. The NGO receives financial support from DKA Austria and Fastenopfer (Swiss Catholic Lenten Fund). Agro-Eco Philippines generates some income from its Agroecological Centre and from donations of its member organizations.

The practice reaches 22 provinces and 7 cities of Mindanao. It is replicated by several farmers, NGOs and Church-based groups in the Visayas and Luzon. Furthermore, it builds up a network with Southern Asian countries, which will likely replicate the practice. It is seen as a best practice by the Philippine Organic Agriculture Programme. It has improved and became more contextualized and the number of farmers adopting its practices have significantly increased also, especially in the last 3 years. Now it focuses on strengthening its Social Enterprise programme and on building the capabilities of the member farmers' organizations to generate income and reduce expenses from their agroecological practices, making them more sustainable and economically independent.

In order to scale up the practice, three major issues need to be addressed: post-harvest facilities (rice mill, drier, processing, 6-wheeled trucks); physical outlet and equipment for organic produce of farmers; as well as partnerships with national and international organizations supportive to social enterprise and agroecology.

INTERVIEWEE FEEDBACK

Number of points: 22.5 out of 23

Summary: The interviewee provided us with an ample understanding of the development, operations and impact of Agro-Eco Philippines. All questions were answered thoroughly and to a very good level. Excellent points were scored, only losing 0.5 points in economic sustainability.

1 (Sustainable use of resources) – 5.5/6 – Sustainable use of resources is central to operations. No use of chemical inputs, instead training farmers to produce their own. Recycling bones and animal manure for fertiliser. Urine is used to repel insects, all of which increases soil fertility. Diversity of plants central, no monoculture allowed. Relies partially on external funding (0.5), as well as some income from services.

2 (Equity and eradication of poverty) - 4/4 – Aims to liberate farmers from the harmful cycle of agri-business seed companies. Focus on indigenous people and marginalised Muslims communities. Women are integrated into every aspect of the NGO and celebrated. Youth taught in separate programme, 240 finished so far. Promotes local markets, no export. Exchange between farmers.

3 (Precautionary approach to human health, natural resources and ecosystems) - 2 / 2 – No GMO allowed. Buffer zones established so as not to be contaminated by neighbours. Strong organic certification system established and protected. Distributes papers to inform the population about the products and about the risks of GMOs.

4 (Public participation and access to information) - 3/3 – Ensures the practice reaches the public. World Food Day/Earth Day used to spread information. Farmer-to-farmer approach, listening to farmers and encouraging them to present their innovations. Disseminate and celebrate local knowledge.

5 (Governance and human security) 3/3 – Organising farmers to ensure accountability at every level. Ensures flow of information, regular meetings. Different organisational bodies to eliminate corruption risks. Farmers are in control of their own resources.

6 (Integration, interrelationship- human rights, social, economic and environmental objectives) - 3/3 – seeks to address poverty and deliver social justice alongside environmental protection with every action. Diversified diet promoted. Teaches children that eating rice is as cool as eating a hamburger.

7 (Common but differentiated obligations) - 2/2 – Adaptation of technology for local context. Organisation remains same but implementation is different. Focus on vulnerable and climate fragile region, most marginalised and vulnerable people.

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LINKS AND FURTHER READING

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