POLICY BRIEF

Transitioning from Conventional Extension to a Resilient, Multisectoral Organic Agriculture Framework Towards Future-Proofing Smallholder Agriculture

Executive Summary

Smallholder farmers are vulnerable to climate and non-climate stresses. Over the last five years, smallholder farmers have faced challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Workie et al. (2020) highlighted that the COVID-19-induced pandemic disrupts the entire food system from primary production to final demand. Landicho et al (2022) reported that access to farm inputs and markets, as well as the transport and marketing of agricultural produce, were among the primary effects of the pandemic on the vegetable-based agroforestry farmers in upland farming communities in the Philippines. This suggests the need to build the capability of the smallholder farmers to produce their own farm inputs, particularly organic soil amendments and organic plant supplements.



Future-proofing from the ground up: *Farmer-partners establishing the community demonstration farm*

Recent project implementations in Atok, Benguet; Sariaya, Quezon; and Bayombong, Nueva Vizcaya demonstrate that smallholder farmers are highly vulnerable to global energy crises and climate uncertainties. However, by adopting need- based capacity development, multisectoral governance, and organic production systems, farmers can significantly reduce input costs and increase climate resilience. This brief recommends institutionalizing these practices through local policy to ensure long-term food security and environmental sustainability.

The Problem

HIGH DEPENDENCY

Smallholders are overly reliant on expensive, imported synthetic inputs.

KNOWLEDGE GAPS

Traditional top-down extension services often fail to reach the most remote or marginalized farmers.

LACK OF CONTINUITY

Project-based interventions often collapse once external funding ends due to a lack of local institutional "ownership."



Policy Recommendations

Based on recent project implementation findings and best practices, the following policy recommendations are proposed to institutionalize a multisectoral organic agriculture framework and sustainably future-proof smallholder farmers:

1 Institutionalization of Multisectoral Governance

- The success of the Multisectoral Facilitating Team (MFT) implies that local agricultural policy should not sit solely with the Office of the Municipal Agriculturist. Local Government Units (LGUs) should pass ordinances that formally recognize and fund multisectoral committees.
- This ensures that even when local leadership changes, the partnership between academia (SCUs), NGOs, and farmer groups remains legally mandated and budget-protected. This requires moving toward "Convergence Budgeting," where environment, agriculture, and education departments co-fund projects like demonstration farms and OA Festivals.

2 Re-evaluating Extension Service Models

- The Farmer-to-Farmer (F2F) and practitioner-led approach suggests that the traditional model of a government technician simply "delivering" info is outdated. Hence, the need for the following mechanisms:

1. Certification of Farmer-Trainers:

   Policies could be developed to officially certify "Master Farmers" as accredited extension service providers. This would allow them to receive government honorariums or incentives for training others, decentralizing the workload of overworked government technicians.

2. Support for Demonstration Hubs:

   Instead of centralized research stations, policy should incentivize the establishment of "Community-Based Demo Farms" on private or communal lands, providing tax breaks or utility subsidies to farmers who host these learning sites

3 Economic Incentives for "Nature-Positive" Inputs

- Since organic farming is a hedge against the energy crisis and high input costs, policy should reflect this economic reality. This can be done through a shift in the subsidy focus, like transitioning government procurement from synthetic fertilizers to supporting the local production of organic soil amendments.
- In terms of marketing, policies can mandate that a certain percentage of food for local government programs (e.g. school feeding programs or relief goods) be sourced from certified local organic smallholders.

4 Academic-Community Integration

- The involvement of State Colleges and Universities (SCUs) suggests a need to bridge the gap between "ivory tower" research and field application.
- Funding for state-funded research should be prioritized for projects that start with a "community needs analysis" rather than purely theoretical pursuits.

5 Mainstreaming Climate and Disaster Resilience

- The lesson on "future-proofing" against climate and non-climate uncertainties (like COVID-19) implies that organic agriculture is a tool for risk management, not just food production. Thus, there should be policy advocacy for insurance providers to offer lower premiums or specialized coverage for diversified organic farms, which are more resilient to pests and climate shocks.
- In addition, integration of organic seed banking and on-farm input production into municipal Disaster Risk Reduction and Management plans to ensure food sovereignty during supply chain disruptions.

Expected Outcomes

ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

Reduction in farm production costs by an estimated 30–50% through on-farm input production.

SOCIAL CAPITAL

Stronger communal ties through the MFT and farmer-to-farmer sharing networks.

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

Improved soil fertility and reduced chemical runoff into local water systems.

Conclusion

The lessons learned from our recent capacity development project prove that organic agriculture is not just an environmental choice but an economic necessity. By adopting these policies, the LGU can transition from being a provider of "subsidies" to a facilitator of "self-sufficiency."

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