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POLICY SUPPORT AND PROCESSES FOR INSTITUTIONALIZING ORGANIC AGRICULTURE (OA) IN THE PHILIPPINES, SOME EVIDENCES AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

In the Philippines, government's policy support complemented the efforts of non-government entities for the promotion and development of organic agriculture. Republic Act (R.A.) 10068 or the Organic Agriculture Act of 2010 mandated the development and promotion of organic agriculture in the Philippines. The promotion, propagation and development and implementation of organic agriculture is part of State policies. Policy instruments issued by several LGUs institutionalized their support for organic agriculture which paved the way for allocation of resources, creation of effective implementing structures thereby providing conducive environment for organic agriculture. National policy interventions implemented should further encourage private sector participation, improve awareness on the organic agriculture program and develop more practitioners.

INTRODUCTION

Organic Agriculture is considered as an important strategy for sustainable development and rural sector empowerment. In the Philippines, the initial efforts of the non-government organizations and private sector were later complemented by the government through policy support and expanded engagement for the promotion and development of organic agriculture.

NATIONAL POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

The following policies, programs and regulations were identified by Maghirang *et al.* in their review/inquiry on the sustainability of organic agriculture in the Philippines.

Philippine Agenda (PA) 21 or the National Agenda for Sustainable Development based on the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) Global Agenda 21. It envisioned a better quality of life for all Filipinos through programs that increase productivity, participation and democratic processes, and promote harmony within the limits of nature's carrying capacity and the integrity of creation.

Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization Act (AFMA) approved in 1997, this act defined the Philippine government's policy to ensure the development of the agriculture and fisheries sectors in accordance with the principles of poverty alleviation and social security; food security; rational use of resources; global competitiveness; sustainable development; people empowerment; and protection from unfair competition. The same act called for the formulation of medium and long term plans aimed at reducing the use of agro-chemicals that are harmful to health and the environment.

Executive Order (EO) 481 by President Arroyo in 2005 promoted organic agriculture as a farming scheme especially in rural communities. It called for effective networking and collaboration with the

stakeholders involved in the production, handling, processing and marketing of organic agriculture products; guarantee food and environmental safety by means of an ecological approach to farming; and ensuring the integrity of organic products through the approved organic certification procedures and organic production, handling and processing standards.

Philippine National Standards for Organic Agriculture (PNSOA) - In order to have uniformity in production and processing of organic products, the Philippine National Standards Specification for Organic Agriculture was prepared by the Organic Certification Center of the Philippines (OCCP) and adopted by the Department of Agriculture through the Bureau of Agriculture and Fisheries Product Standards (BAFPS). The standards are bases for the conversion period, production of organic crops and livestock, processing, and labeling and consumer information of organic produce and products.

Certification is the procedure by which the recognized certification bodies attest that the food or food control systems conform to requirements. The three (3) types of certification are: a. First Party Certification where the criteria and rules are set, implemented and monitored by the company itself, b. Second Party Certification where criteria and rules are set by buyers or industry organizations, and c. Third Party Certification or Independent Certification where an independent body certifies that the subject product is organic, after inspection.

In 2004, the Philippine National Organic Board was created to support among others, the implementation of the Philippine National Organic Standards and Certification system; and the establishment of a Five-year Organic Industry Development Program for adoption by the respective units of DA in partnership with the private sector.

DA Administrative Order No. 25 Series of 2005 – Guidelines on the Certification of Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) for Fruits and Farming. This Administrative Order provided the rules for granting, maintaining and withdrawing Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) Certificate to individual fruit and vegetable growers/farmers or to their Produce Marketing Organizations (PMOs).

Republic Act (R.A.) 10068 or the Organic Agriculture Act of 2010 mandated the development and promotion of organic agriculture in the Philippines. It was declared as the policy of the State to promote, propagate, develop further and implement the practice of organic agriculture in the Philippines that will cumulatively condition and enrich the fertility of the soil, increase farm productivity; reduce pollution and destruction of the environment, prevent the depletion of natural resources, further protect the health of farmers, consumers and the general public, and save the program for the promotion of community-based organic agricultural systems which include, among others, farmers produced purely organic fertilizers such as compost, pesticides and other farm inputs.

A year after the signing in 2010, the National Organic Agriculture Board (NOAB) led the formulation of the Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR), which was approved by the Congressional and Oversight Committee on Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization (COCAFAM) on January 31, 2011. The National Organic Agriculture Program (NOAP) was then launched in 2012 to implement and promote organic agriculture nationwide.

Recent legislations have been filed at the House of Representatives to further support organic agriculture. The following are among the several proposed bills:

1. H.B. No. 1043: An Act Strengthening Organic Agriculture and Enhancing Support for Small Organic Farmers, Amending for the Purpose Certain Sections of RA 10068 of the Organic Agriculture Act of 2010;
2. H.B. No. 5412: Strengthening the Implementation of the National Organic Agriculture Program by enhancing Regulatory Capacity;
3. H.B. No. 6042: Strengthening Sustainable Agriculture and Enhancing Support for Small Organic Farmers Amending R.A. 10068; and

4. H.B. No. 6566: Recognizing the Participatory Guarantee System as a Form for Certification for Labeling Organic Products.

IMPLEMENTATION OF ORGANIC AGRICULTURE

The National Organic Agriculture Program (NOAP)

The NOAP has the following major components (NOAB-TWG, 2016):

1. Institutional development and strengthening for the localization of the Organic Agriculture Act;
2. Research and Development (R and D) for technology improvement ;
3. Production and technology support for production and processing;
4. Extension and capability building of key stakeholders such as Local Government Units (LGUs), People's Organizations (PO's), Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) and other interested groups and individuals;
5. Promotion, advocacy and education of producers and consumers;
6. Market development and commercialization of organic farming practices; and
7. Results-based monitoring and evaluation.

Based on the IRR of the NOAP, the LGU has the primary role of implementing the program at the local level utilizing available personnel and facilities. The municipal, city and provincial governments through their agriculture offices and staff undertake the following:

1. Formation of local technical committees (provincial/municipal/city) for organic agriculture to implement activities in line with the NOAP;
2. Passing of ordinances through the local technical committee and their provincial municipal, city councils relating for the approval of the local agriculture plan. The plan should specify the steps on how to actualize the NOAP as a strategy to address local issues and problems concerning on food security, environment, health and wellness, and poverty alleviation. Appropriation of funds for organic agriculture is also part of the plan;
3. Provision of incentives for organic input production either through reduction of amount of local taxes or extension of the period of payment as determined by the LGU councils;
4. Designation of organic agriculture focal person in each town or province will champion OA and act as overall coordinator for implementing OA programs and projects;
5. Ensuring development and deployment of extension workers, service providers or farm technicians on organic agriculture in each town or province;
6. Ensuring cooperation and mutual assistance with POs and NGOs and as effective coordination and networking among relevant national government agencies in order to ensure widespread participation during program formulation, implementation and monitoring; and
7. Coordination with the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) and other agencies for the alignment and development of standardized instructional materials and conduct of technology training on OA for focal persons, extension workers/service providers and farm technicians

Policy Instruments at the Local Government Units (LGUs)

Experiences of several LGUs in the Visayas were documented by the Department of Agriculture (DA) and the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) as part of the guidelines for LGUs in developing local

organic agriculture plan. Strong policy support was cited as a key factor in sustaining OA programs initiated by the local government and private sector.

Policy instruments issued by several LGUs institutionalized their support for OA. These were done through provincial ordinances and memorandum of agreement. Through the said policy instruments, resources were allocated and implementing structures were created, thus providing conducive environment for OA.

1. Memorandum of Agreement between Negros Occidental and Negros Oriental signed by the two governors for a Negros Island-wide program with a vision of transforming the island the Organic Food Bowl of Asia. This paved the way for the creation of the Negros Island Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development (NISARD) Foundation the leads the implementation of OA programs in Negros.
2. Provincial ordinances approved by the governors of Negros Occidental and Bohol as well as the Executive Order issued by the Mayor of Dumingag have indicated the local government's commitment to mainstream OA and defined the LGUs' programs, strategies, implementation structures and funding support.
3. Negros Occidental further demonstrated its commitment by banning the entry of living Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) through a provincial ordinance while a parallel city ordinance was made by Bacolod City. This policy ensured that the biodiversity of the province is protected and that the organic farms and products of the province will not be contaminated by GMO.

The creation of the Negros Island Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development Foundation or NISARD, supported by the Provincial Legislative Council facilitated the passing and approval of ordinances discouraging the entry of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO) in 2007 for the province of Negros Occidental and Bacolod City government in 2009. This was sustained despite the strong lobbying of multinational chemical companies.

4. The provincial government of Bohol through the provincial council, passed and approved through a provincial ordinance the BOHOL GREENLIFE which stands for BOHOL Growing in Rhythm with Ecologically Vibrant Economy, Nourished by Life-Centered, Integral Farmlands and Ecosystems. It aimed to transform ten (10) percent of prime agricultural lands of the province into organic farms.
5. In the case of Dumingag, Zamboanga del Sur, the OA program was institutionalized through local laws, ordinances and resolutions that support and promote OA. The Dumingag Organic Farming System Practitioners Association (DOFSPA) and the Dumingag Organic Farmers Credit and Savings Cooperative (DOFCSC) were organized to consolidate the farmers and support the adoption of OA. In addition, the Dumingag Institute of Sustainable Organic Agriculture (DISOA) was established to provide practical trainings and community organizing activities for farmers, LGU agriculture technicians and civil-society organizations.
6. Provincial Organic Certification System
 - a. The Negros Island Certification Services (NICERT), is a certifying body accredited by the BAFPS to provide certification within the Visayas regions. The certification allowed the labelling of products into "organic" and "organic certified" Separate staff and inspectors work hand in hand with NISARD and other organic producers in the Philippines.
 - b. The Bohol Internal Guarantee System (BIGS) was activated to set standards for organic product certification and fair pricing. The approved standards were based on the Green Net Cooperative in Thailand and accredited by the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM),

and the Organic Certification Center of the Philippines (OCCP). Certification involves different steps from the farmers level, inspectors at the municipal level, certifiers at the provincial level and third party certifiers.

Based on the on the documentation of the experiences of three (3) LGUs, it was revealed that strong policy support is a key factor in sustaining OA programs initiated by both local government and the private sector. They recognized efforts and decades of experience of civil-society organizations (CSOs), and community-based organizations in OA program implementation, drawing lessons from the gains of earlier initiatives and integrated them in the provincial socio-economic political agenda and development plans.

To further sustain and enhance the growth of the organic agriculture industry, policy instruments like council resolutions and ordinances, executive orders, memoranda of agreement, were put in place. These facilitated the allocation of resources, creation of implementing structures, and provided a favourable environment for adoption of OA.

CHALLENGES AND AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

1. Institutionalizing cost-sharing schemes. There are costs involved for compliance to standards, inspection and registration which should be shared among the stakeholders. There were reports that producers often bear the bulk of the costs. There are group certification schemes where the group of farmers shares the certificate and certification fee among themselves. The challenge is on unburdening the producers and promoting cost-sharing schemes for certification. This can be addressed through further local and national policy initiatives.
2. From the literature reviewed, it was suggested that policy interventions implemented should further encourage and increase participation of the private sector, with the provision of incentives and institutionalization of reward systems (institutional, technical and financial resources) that will attract organic farmer entrepreneurs and encourage more OA practitioners.
3. While there were successes achieved in the LGUs studied, the adoption of OA is considered to be on a marginal level if viewed on a national scale. There remains a large scope for information dissemination, training of technicians, farmer-adoptors and practitioners.
4. Further policy and institutional support in the form of public investment, guidelines, standards, information, arbitration and other factors that will enable OA stakeholders to sustainably increase outputs and benefits from the program need to be pushed.

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