

Coping with Extreme Climatic Events: Stories of Resiliency in the Philippines

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The Philippines has recently been experiencing the adverse effects of climate change, and its most common manifestation is the increasing frequency of extreme events like El Nino, La Nina, and strong typhoons.

In 2009, the country greatly suffered when it was successively hit by super typhoons Ondoy (Ketsana), Pepeng (Parma), and Quedan (Melor).

According to the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA), the country's climate monitoring body, an average of 20 typhoons enter the Philippine Area of Responsibility (PAR) annually, of which, about nine to ten have combined strong winds and rainfall which can disrupt agricultural production and cause damage to infrastructure.

Mainstreaming Climate Change: The EU-FPAVAS Experience

Recognizing that climate change is one of the most compelling issues faced by the country, one component of the European Union - Focused-Food Production Assistance to the Vulnerable Sectors (EU-FPAVAS)² project

is mainstreaming climate change adaptation (CCA) in local development plans, specifically for the agriculture sector.

Mainstreaming refers to "the integration of policies and measures that addresses climate change into development planning and sectoral decision-making." It encompasses linking and networking with institutions in order to better address the adverse impacts of climate change.

Prior to mainstreaming, establishing an area's vulnerability to climate-related risks and hazards is equally important. The dangers posed by climate change vary depending on location. As such, there is a need to localize the process of vulnerability assessment by drawing out actual experiences of farmers and fisherfolk as well as their observed climatic changes and existing adaptation options.

Documentation of best practices should also be complemented by scientific tools such as geographic information system (GIS) to provide a platform for local government units (LGU) in coming up with science-based decisions for land use planning, particularly in the agriculture sector.

EU-FPAVAS employed these methods to determine the vulnerability to climate-related risks and hazards in its project areas. The entire vulnerability process is deemed participatory as various stakeholders representing different levels of LGU (provincial, municipal, and barangay) were involved in every step. This allowed for easier cascading of information down to the community level.

Stories from the Ground

In the province of Camarines Sur, farmers shared that they can no longer predict the shift in dry and wet seasons. There are also abrupt changes in weather patterns -- from very hot weather to short episodes of heavy rain showers in a day. Farmers take a big risk



in planting because their traditional cropping calendar is no longer applicable. There were very few farmers who signified that they adjusted their planting calendars.

2010 was a very hot year and the wet season arrived only in June. Due to this shift, harvesting time extended until the rainy season. As a result, harvest coincided with the arrival of strong typhoons which caused flooding, thereby, destroying more crops.

Difficulty in predicting the onset of the dry and wet seasons is also a problem in Misamis Oriental, located in the southern part of the Philippines. The farmers said that in the early 1990s, typhoons usually occur around October to December. During June to July, the southwest monsoon (habagat) may bring heavy rains but are not damaging to crops. From 2006 to 2009, typhoons arrived earlier than usual, becoming more frequent and of greater intensity. However, the province barely experienced a typhoon in 2010. These unpredictable patterns increase the probability of decrease in earnings or profit for farmers.

On the other hand, stories of drought are abundant among those residing near Tabtaban Lake in Occidental Mindoro. In early 2010, there was very little rainfall in the area causing Tabtaban Lake to dry up. Locals observed that rainfall has been declining in the last five years with March and April considered as the hottest months. During this time, locals suffer from lack of freshwater supply, high water temperature, and decrease in lake water, translating to decrease in fish catch and eventually adversely affecting livelihoods.

In order to adapt, locals diversified their farming by branching out into poultry and livestock. Others planted drought-tolerant crops such as cassava. However, there were others who merely waited for the rain to come and as a consequence, suffered from hunger.

The Current Milieu

These narratives are but few of the many stories of resiliency in the Philippines waiting to be heard. Climate change is happening and people at the grassroots level have already felt its adverse impacts. As such, they were also among the first

to respond to such threats. Some of the more common adaptation options being practiced and/or suggested by farmers include:

- use of drought-, submergence-, and saline-tolerant varieties (as applicable)
- review and adjustment of cropping calendar
- provision of irrigation facilities especially in drought-prone areas
- practicing contour farming and other soil conservation measures
- farm diversification
- promotion of organic farming
- reforestation

In 2009, with the passage of Republic Act 9729 or the Philippine Climate Change Act, the institutionalization of CCA in development plans became imperative for all LGUs.

The following Priority National Adaptation Actions were identified: (1) reducing vulnerability in key climate-sensitive sectors, (2) enhancing cooperation and partnership to mobilize new and additional financing and investments for CCA, (3) promoting capacity building at all levels, especially in vulnerable communities and areas, and (4) mainstreaming CCA in government policies and development plans.

By mentoring the six province-beneficiaries in developing their local climate change action plans, the EU-FPAVAS project served as a catalyst in realizing a climate-proof agriculture sector. In the long run, it is hoped that agricultural production is sustained and local governance is prepared in the face of a fast-changing climate.

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