



Growing Organic Native Rice:

Breaking the Cycle of Informal Money-lending, Low Bargaining Power and Degradation of the Environment



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In the Philippines, rice farming households are among the poorest in the society. Numerous efforts have been undertaken to addressing yield gaps and low incomes. Often this meant introducing new high-yielding seed varieties, improve the application of fertilizer and strengthen pest fighting capacities, as it happened in the Agusan Marsh Wildlife Sanctuary.



Native rice varieties

Here, farmers – including members of the Manobo tribe – have been exposed by agricultural development partners to hybrid rice varieties that promise immense yield increases. In order to deliver upon that promise, farming becomes highly capital-intensive relying on external inputs pushing farmers towards local moneylenders. Being obliged to repay their loans by selling their harvest to them, farmers are left with only little bargaining power. In addition, chemical input-intensive farming threatens the local flora and fauna while being less adapted to the local environment.

Planting native rice varieties minimizes the pollution in the rivers and lakes improving their water quality. In the long term, wildlife and other endemic organism will be coming back to the area.

Emmilie Ibonia, PASu

The re-introduction of native rice varieties coupled with natural farming methods has helped local farmers to break the cycle brought about by conventional agricultural development practices. Where before, farmers had to borrow money to buy inputs locking them into an imbalanced trading relationship, growing native rice enables them to produce their own inputs and market directly to retailers. Native rice varieties cater to a niche market of socially and health conscious urban middle-class consumers, thus receiving a premium over conventional varieties. Hence, it provides not only safe and healthy food for the farm households, it is also a profitable business and beneficial to the local flora and fauna.



Emmilie Ibonia, Agusan Marsh Wildlife Sanctuary Protected Area Superintendent

Successfully marketing and showcasing the economic potential of native rice varieties to overcome the reliance on capital-intensive agricultural inputs, was made possible by operation of demo farms, farmer field schools and participatory market research.

The Indigenous Practices for Conservation of Biodiversity (IP4Biodiv) Module of the GIZ-implemented Conflict-Sensitive Resource and Asset Management Programme (COSERAM) began its intervention by supporting the “Promoting Native Rice to Strengthen the Agro-biodiversity and Livelihoods in Agusan Marsh”-project implemented by a local NGO (PhilDHRRA). Together, they set up several demo farms and conducted trainings to pilot the reintroduction of native rice varieties in the Agusan Marsh buffer zone. This included field suitability testing, validation of tested varieties and eventually mass production for seed banking, food and marketing. The farming practices employ natural methods such as the use of bio-sprays for pesticides and other forms of organic fertilizers.

“ During the market research, we were educated about the quality of native rice that the buyers would want from us, we learned that they always prefer whole grain rice and not broken rice. We will make sure that the next batch of native rice that we sell to them will not be broken rice. ”

Merly Albina, Farmer Cluster Leader



Farmer-Cooperator Manuel Limos from Barangay Poblacion, La Paz, Agusan del Sur, interviews a staff from Don Bosco Multi-Purpose Cooperative during the Market Study Tour.

A unique component of the project was the conduct of a market research by the 35 farmers. They were able to analyze the potential of selling organically produced native rice, personally interact with businesses and understand the market requirements (i.e. quality, quantity, pricing, etc.).

The joint intervention helped the rice farming communities living in the buffer zone of the Agusan Marsh Wildlife Sanctuary to break the cycle of environmental degradation, capital constraints and low market bargaining power. According to farmers, the project helped them to become independent from external suppliers for rice seeds, fertilizer and financing.

Growing Organic Native Rice

Their food security has improved, even in times of calamities. One farmer's testimony was that he was able to produce 100 sacks of native rice using natural farming methods from one hectare. However, most importantly, they became price setters rather than price takers when selling their produce.

With 157 farm households already planting native rice, interest has risen immensely in the communities. Others are enticed by the prospect of dealing directly with niche retailers in Butuan, Davao and San Francisco who pay higher prices than the local traders.



Participants of the Workshop on Enterprise Plan Formulation in Butuan City

“ The project enabled farmers to have initial agreements with the business establishment. They are very keen on getting products from the area. Such opportunities would not have been easily accessible for the farmers, if not for the project. ”

Ruel Maitem, PhilDHRRA

This successful case of reintroducing endemic varieties for market production, shows that it is possible to break out of the conventional cycle of capital-intensive agriculture that locks farming households into dependency and puts pressure on the environment. Participatory market research, facilitating information sharing and trust-building were keys to create value for everyone.



Ruel Maitem, PhilDHRRA Project Coordinator

COSERAM is a joint undertaking of the Philippine and German Governments, implemented by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) for the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) together with five Philippine government agencies: the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), National Economic Development Authority (NEDA), Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), and the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP).



Robert Platon and Datu Ezequil Miel at their trial farm of various native rice varieties.

SUMMARY

Katloa'g lima ka mag-uuma—kadaghanan mga Manobo na gikan sa Agusan Marsh Wildlife Sanctuary—naghimo ug pagpanaliksik bahin sa produksyon ug pagbaligya sa organic native rice. Kining maong kalihukan parte sa proyekto nga ginganlan ug, "Promoting Native Rice to Strengthen the Agrobiodiversity and Livelihoods in Agusan Marsh." Suportado kini sa IP4BIODIV module na gihimo sa GIZ Conflict Sensitive Resource and Asset Management (COSERAM) na programa ug gi-implementar sa Philippine Partnership for the Development of Human Resources in the Rural Areas (PhilDHRRRA). Nagadasig ang programa sa mga mag-uuma nga magtanom ug organic native rice para makonserbar ang biodiversity sa mga umahan palibot sa Agusan Marsh. Gihatagan pud niining programa ang mga mag-uuma ug training, uban ang pag giya sa ila sa paghimo sa market research ug pagbuhat sa marketing plans para molambo ang ilang kinitaan ug panginabuhi.

