Launch of twin Zero Hunger initiatives caps Philippines’ celebration of World Food Day 2020

FAO and Philippine partners renew pledge to work together to eradicate hunger in the country at culminating event.

To mark World Food Day as well as the 75th founding anniversary of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Philippine Government launched two initiatives envisioned to help the country attain Zero Hunger as part of its commitment to the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

The twin Zero Hunger initiatives: the National Food Policy (NFP) and the Food Security and Nutrition (FSN) Roadmap of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARM, were launched on World Food Day held on 16 October.

“We strongly endorse and commit to action the newly-launched NFP under the authorship and leadership of Cabinet Secretary Karlo Nograles,” Agriculture Secretary William Dar said during the event, held at the DA-Bureau of Soils and Water Management in Quezon City.

For his part, Nograles — Chair of the Inter-agency Task Force on Zero Hunger that crafted the NFP of President Duterte’s administration — said hunger is a multi-dimensional problem caused by a combination of inter-related factors, and thus collective action of everyone is crucial in addressing it effectively.
"To ensure not only a whole-of-government approach, but also a whole-of-nation approach in eradicating hunger, the NFP provides an outline of the national priorities based on a comprehensive understanding of hunger and related issues," he said.

The NFP outlines six key result areas, namely: 1) review and rationalize existing policies, rules, and regulations related to zero hunger; 2) ensure available and affordable food; 3) secure nutrition adequacy; 4) secure food accessibility and safety; 5) ensure sustainable food systems, food resiliency, and stability; and 6) ensure information, education, awareness, and people participation.

Department of Agriculture (DA) Secretary William Dar, who serves as Vice-Chair of the Zero Hunger Task Force, said the 2020 World Food Day celebration is made more relevant as it highlighted the need to attain food security with a greater sense of urgency, as the Philippines and other countries worldwide contend with the global COVID-19 pandemic.

"With this year’s theme, ‘Grow, Nourish, Sustain. Together,’ the I assure our countrymen that the DA will sustain our efforts to ensure food adequacy for the present and future generations of Filipinos," Dar said.

Ms Tamara Palis-Duran, Assistant FAO Representative for Programme, underscored the importance of the two initiatives and the partnerships needed to carry them out effectively for the Philippines to attain Zero Hunger by 2030. She said that while FAO supported the development of these two important initiatives, the agency will also support their implementation as deemed necessary by the Zero Hunger Task Force and BARMM.

"More than ever, this need for collective and collaborative action is brought front and center by the fact that the world is already five years into the 2030 Agenda, and a mere 10 years to realize the SDGs. Things are further compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, which is estimated to add another 83 to 132 million hungry people," Ms Duran said.

During her address, Ms Duran also presented the summary highlights of the Overview of Food Security and Nutrition in the Philippines 2019-2020, which FAO is developing in partnership with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), World Food Programme (WFP), and World Health Organization (WHO). The full report is expected to be out by the first half of 2021.

Mr Gustavo Gonzalez, the new UN Resident Coordinator in the Philippines who is attending his first WFD celebration in the country after assuming office mid this year, reiterated that World Food Day “is a reminder to the international community of its fundamental political commitment to humanity – the eradication of all forms of hunger and malnutrition – and that achieving a Zero Hunger world by 2030 is not only doable but also possible”.

Also on World Food Day, the BARMM regional government also launched its first-ever Food Security and Nutrition Roadmap that complements the NFP. The FSN Roadmap was launched at a formal event held at the Shariff Kabunsuan Cultural Complex (SKCC), Bangsamoro Government Center (BGC), Cotabato City and webcast live over the BARMM Facebook page.

Almost a year in development, the strategic document was turned over by Minister Dr Mohammad S. Yacob of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Agrarian Reform (MAFAR) and BPDA Director General Engr. Mohajirin T. Ali to BARMM Executive Secretary Abdulraof A. Macacua, representing Chief Minister Ahod Balawag Ebrahim, Al-Hadj.

Minister Yacob said the roadmap “stipulates both the emerging issues and gaps, and the strategies and actions that need to be looked into, carried out, and sustained by the different stakeholders especially the government of the BARMM.”

The BARMM FSN Roadmap seeks to “achieve a sustainable, competitive, and accessible food supply chain for Bangsamoro; a balance intake of Halal food; and an adaptive capacity of its communities, which shall guide BARMM in paving the way for self-reliance, food security and resiliency”.

On hand to witness the launch of the FSN Roadmap in Cotabato were Mr. Cesar V. Galvan, Head of FAO Philippines’ Cotabato Office; Dr. Mishael Q. Argonza, Head of the WFP Cotabato Office; and other officials from BARMM ministries as well as national government and development partners.

High ranking officials from BARMM partner organizations and agencies, participating virtually and remotely, also expressed their support to the FSN Roadmap. These included Cabinet Secretary Karlo Nograles, DA Secretary Dar, WFP Deputy Country Director Mats Persson, and Ms Tamara Palis-Duran of FAO Philippines, among others.
FAO, Philippine partners celebrate World Soil Day 2020; underscore essence of soil to humanity

FAO is supporting multilateral actions to help strengthen the country’s food systems.

Delegates to the WSD 2020 celebration signing the declaration of support to the observance of World Soil Day every December and to the Philippines soil partnership.

FAO Philippines and the Department of Agriculture’s Bureau of Soils and Water Management (DA-BSWM) led this year’s celebration of World Soils Day (WSD) with the theme “Keep Soil Alive, Protect Soil Biodiversity” with a commemorative event held at the BSWM Compound in Quezon City on 4 December. BSWM is the country’s mandated agency and FAO’s main partner on sustainable management of soils and water resources for agriculture. The agency advocates good soil conservation technologies and practices to improve soil health in various regions of the country.

The event was highlighted by the signing of the declaration of support to the “Philippine Celebration of World Soil Day” every 5th of December by the delegates. This declaration shall be endorsed to the Office of the President to advocate for financial support to the Philippine Soil Partnership through DA-BSWM.

As part of local celebrations of WSD, DA-BSWM organized a nationwide photography contest to promote this year’s theme as well as to create awareness of the importance of soil to national food security and development. This year’s winners are Mr. Keirvy Jhon P. Lao (1st place); Mr. Mark Kevin Badayos (2nd place); Mr. Christian T. Galgao (3rd place); and Mr. Arwin O. Arribado for the “People’s Choice Award”.

 Guests of honor during the event included DA Undersecretary for Operations Engr. Ariel T. Cayanan and Ms. Jasmine Magtibay representing FAO Philippines. Video Messages were given by Ms. Tamara Polis-Duran, Assistant FAO Representative for Programmes; Hon. Lord Allan Jay Q. Velasco, Speaker of the House of Representatives; and the Hon. Senator Cynthia A. Villar, Senate Committee Chair on Agriculture and Food.

During the second part of the day-long WSD event, special technical discussions were held on Overview of the National Soil Conservation Roadmap presented by Engr. Samuel M. Contreras, Chief of the Soil Conservation and Management Division; Revised World Soil Charter and the Challenges in the Philippines, Dr. Edna D. Samar, Chief of the Soil and Water Resources Research Division; and Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Soil Management, Ms. Jacqueline S. Rojales, Section Chief, Soil Biological Resources Management Section.

During the event, delegates and participants observed the minimum health and safety requirements related to the prevention of the spread of COVID-19 as directed by the national government.

Building capacities, livelihoods in the Bangsamoro despite the pandemic

Amidst the challenges posed by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, FAO pushed through with its capacity building activities under the project “Agricultural Training for the Establishment of Peace in Mindanao” that benefited several families of farmers and fisherfolk, including former combatants (FCs) and their immediate family members, Indigenous People (IPs), women, and Out-of-School Youths (OSYs) in the Bangsamoro and post-conflict areas in Mindanao. The initiative is funded by the Government of Japan.

Over the past 10 months, along with different training programs on agriculture, fisheries and livestock production, FAO carried-out four batches of the training on “High Yield Production Technologies for Rice, Corn, and Vegetables” benefiting some 93 participants, with an almost equal distribution of men and women.

The training beneficiaries hail from the provinces of Basilan, Sulu and the municipalities of Tungawan and Payao in Zamboanga Sibugay and comprised of 33 farmers, 8 IPs, 26 FCs, 18 BIWAB (women), and 8 OSYs. The training was organized in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture-Regional Field Office IX (DA-RFO IX), Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice), the Office of the Provincial Agriculturist of Zamboanga Sibugay, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Agrarian Reform of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao (MAFAR-BARMM).

Despite the travel and other restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the FAO Project Management Office in Zamboanga
Ms Josefa Gregorio, one of the training participants and a member of the Balian Farmers Association from Payao, said, “I learned a lot from the technology and would definitely share it to other members of my community. I also thank FAO for giving us incidental allowance of PhP 160.00/night, which we can use as pocket money when we go home.”

Another training participant, Ms Nema Tito, a member of BIWAB’s Social Welfare Committee Association from Tungawan, expressed her gratitude to FAO for the knowledge and skills gained which “could help my family have potential business in the future”.

Mr. Hisam Basso, a member of Datu Tumanggong Farmers Association of Tungawan, also thanked FAO for the ZamPen technology – one of the innovations introduced during the training – which he considers as “the best fit for the environmental condition in our area”. He added that he will definitely be producing ZamPen in his family’s backyard, buying two ZamPen chickens that he brought back home after the training.

Another project beneficiary from the Upper Sumilong Community Multipurpose Cooperative said that “this training is very beneficial for our cooperative and we wish to venture into this kind of business eventually”. Another BIWAB member also expressed her excitement to share the technology with the community. After the training, many of the participants took home forages, such as azolla and duck week, along with the ZamPen chicken they bought. All of them indicated that they will apply what they’ve learned from the training once they are back in their respective communities. They also said that they will share the knowledge and skills they picked up with other families in their villages.

The FAO Project Management Office in Zamboanga City says that succeeding training batches on this topic will be conducted following a modified modality in line with the COVID-19 health and safety protocols. These will commence as soon as the related operational safety procedures are in place and FAO finalizes associated agreements with MAFAR-BARMM.

Apart from training, the project will also be distributing Livelihoods Starter Kits to one selected CBO per municipality.
with trained beneficiary-members, as soon as all CBOs have been validated. FAO aims to complete all its planned training batches on the same topic in BASULTA by early 2021.

The project aims to boost agricultural productivity and increase household incomes and overall economic productivity towards peace and prosperity in the Bangsamoro and post-conflict areas in Mindanao. However, as most LGUs in Basilan, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi (BASULTA) and Zamboanga Sibugay region – the project’s target areas – also lack the financial and technical capacities to provide agricultural, fishery and livestock extension services to these sectors, the project also serves as a platform for government and non-government entities to come together and pool their resources to benefit marginalized farmers and fisherfolk in these areas.

Rapid assessment study by FAO determines impact of COVID-19 on food supply in the Philippines

Results intended to inform government policies and interventions to improve food supply systems during pandemic.

As part of its efforts to support the national government in developing appropriate response and recovery measures to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in ensuring food supply and food security, FAO conducted and has completed a rapid assessment study that evaluated the impact of COVID-19 on the country’s food supply chains. The results of the study has been published in a report entitled “Rapid Assessment of the Impact of COVID-19 on Food Supply Chains in the Philippines”, which could be accessed at http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cb2622en (see also “Latest resources” section of this newsletter).

The report was produced with technical support from the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Department of Agriculture (DA). The study was also supported by the Mindanao Development Authority (MinDA) and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Agrarian Reform of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (MAFAR-BARMM)

The study looked at rural livelihood and agricultural market chains as a critical component of the country’s food security capacity, and the related effects to it of the community restrictions imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Likewise, it assessed the impact of COVID-19 on the access of the most vulnerable population that may result in a high rate of malnutrition.

The results are expected to contribute to the information base to aid in local and national decision-making to alleviate the impact of this pandemic and facilitate the production, movement, and distribution of goods essential to food security without compromising public health and safety. The study’s findings are also envisioned to inform key government agencies in identifying the appropriate measures and programmes that will ultimately help ensure food security for all, at all times.

Given the focus on food security, the team consisting of FAO, IFAD and the DA, concentrated first on the main population centers of the country, which had the largest concentration of households. These included Metro Manila, Metro Cebu, and Metro Davao. Sites in BARM, Marawi City and Basilan were also covered to represent internally displaced population (IDP) and geographically isolated islands, respectively.

The supply of 16 site-specific fresh produce: rice, hogs, chicken, chicken eggs, bangus (milkfish), galunggong (round scad), tilapia, eggplant, squash, tomato, cabbage, carrot, potato, and banana (Lakatan variety) for all regions; and ampalaya (bitter gourd) and cassava for BARM were traced back from the demand areas to their respective major trading hubs and supply areas. Secondary government data and key informant interviews from a wide-array of respondents from the government, and the private sector were used to establish the baseline conditions, and acquire information on the impact of the restrictions, feedback on policies, and outlooks for the next months. Gender and halal dimensions were also incorporated in the assessment design.

A sidestreet vendor selling fruits and vegetables at the height of the community quarantine related to the COVID-19 pandemic.
The current situation the country finds itself in is proof that \textquoteleft old normal\textquoteright and \textquoteleft business as usual\textquoteright just won\textquotesingle t cut it anymore. We need to consider new investments, tap digital technology, and build more supportive infrastructure to help the country\textquotesingle s most vulnerable sectors mitigate further impacts of the pandemic, boost resilience, and accelerate the rebuilding, adaptation, and sustainable transformation of the Philippines\textquotesingle agri-food systems post-pandemic.

This is the advice offered by Ms Tamara Palis-Duran, Assistant FAO Representative for Programme, at one of the sessions of the Virtual Economic Forum organized by Business World – the Philippines\textquotesingle leading business newspaper – held on 26 November when asked how the country\textquotesingle s agri-food sector is to survive and rebound better from the socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. She was one of the resource speakers at the session on \textquoteleft What we need: Ensuring food security and boosting the agriculture\textquoteright.

"Specifically, we need to take a long hard look at shifting to e-commerce solutions for the marketing of food producers, and using drone-based technologies and digital- or mobile-based applications in smallholder farmers\textapos; and fisherfolk\textapos; production systems such as in fertilizer use and cropping calendars, among others," she added.

"The good news is that the Department of Agriculture (DA), FAO\textapos; main government partner, is either already implementing or is seriously considering these options, which bodes well for the agri-food sector."

However, Ms Palis-Duran also reiterated that innovations encompass more than just the use of modern technologies but also developing new approaches and methodologies or adapting tried and tested ones to enable the country to bounce back better after this pandemic passes. She cited, among others, promoting the optimal use of biodiversity for food security, nutrition, and incomes; nutrition-sensitive programming; introducing conflict-sensitive livelihoods approaches; leveraging legislation and partnerships; information-based and quality data planning; and anticipating risks and future threats through Early Warning Early Action systems to prevent agri-food supply disruptions.

The Economic Forum is Business World\textapos;s flagship annual event that serves as a platform for industry leaders and key figures in society to come together and deliberate on key issues and challenges affecting the country. This year\textapos; two-day forum, which was held virtually for the first time ever, focused on the theme \textquoteleft Forecast 2021: ReBoot. ReThink. ReShape.\textquoteright

The two other distinguished speakers in the same session as Ms Palis-Duran were Dr Shahidur Rashid, Director for South Asia of the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), and Dr Paul S. Teng, Senior Fellow and Adviser in Food Security of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies.
FAO continues support to stakeholders in fight against the fall armyworm

Initiatives against the pest continue amidst the COVID-19 pandemic

To further support and complement the government’s initiatives against the fall armyworm (FAW), FAO is implementing a Regional Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) project entitled “Support for developing and implementing management strategies in response to Fall Armyworm incursion in Asian countries”.

“This especially holds true in the specific context of BARMM, which is still in transition. The region’s youth will definitely play a key role in ensuring its long-term stability,” he added.

“On my part, through legislation, I will continue to support and advocate for the development of the Filipino youth to help them achieve their full potential. They are, after all, this country’s future,” he concluded.
Philippines highlights rising role of digital agriculture at FAO Regional Conference

As DA, FAO reiterate continued partnership at post-conference meet

Specifically, the FAO-led FAW initiative is expected to result in the fine-tuning of appropriate and affordable integrated pest management (IPM) options to reduce FAW incidence through the conduct of pilot season-long farmer field schools (FFS).

Despite the challenges presented by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, FAO has been able to carry out several activities under this Regional FAW TCP.

From 28 July to 06 August, FAO conducted a training workshop on the Biology and Ecology of FAW and Sustainable Management Strategies and Options in two batches. Its objectives, among others, included the identification of sustainable FAW management strategies, covering: (1) awareness campaigns; (2) surveillance and monitoring activities at farmers’ field and community levels; (3) farmer training through season-long FFS; and (4) developing regional and provincial action plans for the sustainable management of FAW. The 50 workshop participants comprised municipal, city and provincial IPM coordinators in Region 12 (Mindanao).

Additionally, FAO organized a five-day Refresher Training Workshop for FAW-IPM FFS Facilitators on the topic of Sustainable Management of FAW from 10 to 15 August. As the FFS facilitators already have the basic technical, facilitation and organizational skills to set up and implement FFS in corn-based IPM, the workshop provided additional knowledge and skills specifically on the sustainable management of FAW. Twenty-five (25) IPM FFS facilitators participated in the refresher training course.

FAO also facilitated the conduct of a training workshop for “Bantay Peste” (Pest Watch) and local farmer-technicians on FAW Monitoring and Surveillance Systems throughout the month of October. A total of 63 farmer-technicians were trained, in four batches, on carrying out regular field surveillance and monitoring of FAW at farmers’ fields, focusing on scouting protocols, pheromone trapping, and damage assessment and reporting.

All the training workshops were conducted following the minimum COVID-19-related safety and health standards as mandated by the national government.

FAO has also been continuously providing technical advice and support to national and regional government agricultural officers to upscale and mainstream the project’s interventions to cover more FAW-infested areas across the country.

Additionally, the Philippines is being tapped as a model country in the implementation of armyworm control initiatives that could be introduced and adopted in other FAW-affected countries in the Southeast Asian region.

The Department of Agriculture (DA), FAO’s main government partner in the Philippines, said it would push for the digitization of the country’s agriculture sector under the “new normal” to achieve its goals of reducing poverty and attaining food security in the country.

Agriculture Secretary William D. Dar told delegates during the high-level Ministerial Session at the 35th FAO Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific (#APRC35) virtual meeting held on that it is important to teach farm families to capitalize digital agriculture to increase their productivity and incomes.

“It is important that we continuously empower vulnerable groups—smallholder farmers, fisherfolk, rural women, the youth, indigenous communities and farm families, in general—by providing them the needed technical, marketing and financial support, especially in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic,” Dar said.

“Now, more than ever, we should reinforce this by teaching farm families to take advantage of data-driven or digital agriculture to further increase their productivity and incomes,” Dar, who was also elected APRC35 Vice Chairman, added.

FAO and DA, through its various line agencies, are working together to promote digital agriculture in the country.
through initiatives that include the use of drones and digital tools and platforms to monitor production, assess damage from natural disasters, and implement early warning early action protocols, among others.

Dar told delegates at the high-level meeting that the DA is “fast-tracking” the development of a digital road map for the agriculture sector to promote and integrate precision agriculture and digital technology in local farming practices.

“We aim to integrate digital technologies in the food value chain and logistics, benefiting both producers and consumers,” Dar said.

Dar added that, in the short-term, he is looking to put in place “real-time access to ICT-driven crop production and risk and damage assessment information with the use of drones and dynamic cropping calendar.”

“In all these,” he emphasized, “the DA looks to FAO’s support in pushing this vision forward”. Dar added that the DA is also pursuing partnerships with the private sector, civil society, and international research institutions to digitize Philippine agriculture.

**FAO Philippines, DA assure each other of continued and enhanced partnership at post-APRC meeting**

At a post-APRC virtual meeting held on 17 September, FAO Assistant Director-General and Asia-Pacific Regional Representative Kim Jongjin and then-FAO Representative ad interim in the Philippines Ms Xiangjun Yao thanked Secretary Dar for his participation and support to the 35th FAO APRC as well as to discuss continued partnership between the two agencies in the Philippines.

Also in the virtual meeting were Ms Tamara Palis-Duran, Assistant FAO Representative for Programme, and Ms Jasmine Magtibay, FAO Philippines Programme Assistant.

Apart from thanking the Secretary for his role and support of the conference, Ms Yao also apprised Secretary Dar of FAO’s ongoing and pipeline projects in the Philippines, in all of which the DA is a key partner. She especially cited FAO’s Rapid Remote Assessment on the Impact of COVID-19 on Food Systems, conducted with IFAD, that helped provide baseline information to inform DA’s COVID-19-related response, recovery, and rebound plans and programmes for agriculture in the country.

The ADG also extended an invitation to Secretary Dar for the Philippines to join FAO’s Hand-in-Hand Initiative as a supporting country. He said that with the country’s booming economy and successful agriculture sector, the Philippines is well-placed to offer technical expertise and successful experiences to other countries in the region through HIHI and South-South Cooperation.

Ms Yao reiterated FAO’s continued commitment to supporting the government in advancing the country’s agriculture sector, through the DA, especially with respect to achieving food security and climate resilience.

Secretary Dar responded by also thanking FAO for the opportunity to contribute to the success of the APRC and assured FAO of his department’s continued strong partnership in implementing collaborative initiatives in the country.

“Rest assured that the DA, at various levels, will be partnering with and calling upon the expertise of FAO to ensure a high level of food security for the country and rebounding from this pandemic,” Dar said.

**FAO, UNICEF, BARMM launch joint program to help build resilience of the Bangsamoro people**

Joint social protection programme to empower Bangsamoro people to bounce back better and quicker from natural and human-induced disasters

The top leaderships of the United Nations in the Philippines and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) jointly launched on 13 August a programme that aims to build the resilience of households in BARMM, with special attention to poor and vulnerable households, through timely and effective responses to risks and shocks.

In the Bangsamoro, 74.3 percent or 108,600 of families were poor in 2018, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA). Conflict, natural disasters and the COVID-19
In 2018, the pandemic has the potential to push them deeper into poverty. For example, child poverty in the region is the highest in the country at 68 percent. Almost 1.3 million children in BARMM live in poverty, or around 7 out of every 10 Bangsamoro children (2018 PSA Poverty Report). During the COVID-19 pandemic, some families were not able to avail of the national government’s Social Amelioration Program (SAP).

This Joint Programme, funded by the Joint Sustainable Development Goals (JSDG) Fund of the UN and implemented by FAO and UNICEF in partnership with the BARMM regional government, aims to strengthen the social protection system of BARMM to make it inclusive, able to forecast risks, and quickly address needs in times of crises.

“The COVID-19 crisis is not only a health and humanitarian crisis, but also a human crisis, an economic crisis, and a development crisis, threatening the gains that the Philippines has made towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. To ensure that no one is left behind— a key guiding principle of the SDGs—governments should be able to establish a social protection system that is able to quickly and effectively aid people most-at-risk of the impact of disasters and emergencies,” Gustavo Gonzalez, UN Resident Coordinator in the Philippines says.

Social protection covers the range of policies and programmes needed to reduce the lifelong consequences of poverty and exclusion. Social protection programmes include cash transfers such as child grants, school meals, unemployment benefits, skills development and more. They help connect families to essential health services and increase labour productivity, employability and income, no matter what circumstances they are in, to give them a fair chance in life.

In BARMM, social protection programmes lack data, coverage, capacity, cultural context and coherence with Social Protection, Disaster Risk Reduction and humanitarian policy at the national and regional levels. The current poverty registry also does not include risk and hazard vulnerability assessments for inclusive targeting and effective monitoring.

To address this, FAO and UNICEF will work with BARMM through its Ministries, including the Bangsamoro Development Planning Authority (BDPA), Ministry of Social Services and Development (MSSD), Ministry of Interior and Local Government (MILG), Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Agrarian Reform (MAFAR), and Ministry of Indigenous Peoples’ Affairs (MIPA).

The programme will focus on three key interventions, including mainstreaming risk informed shock responsive social protection in the Bangsamoro Development Plan (BRDP); building capacity of BARMm Institutions to analyze and monitor both natural and human-induced risks and improve synergy and; improving the poverty registry system to include risk and hazard vulnerability assessments, predictive analytics, inclusive targeting and effective monitoring.

“With the partnership that we have right now, I am immensely excited for the eventual outcomes and hopefully, its lasting impact to Bangsamoro communities who desire nothing more but a more peaceful life with opportunities that lie ahead for them,” says Ahod B. Ebrahim, Chief Minister of the BARMM Government.

Protecting family farmers and their farm animals from the impact of volcanic eruptions in the Philippines

FAO, USAID, Philippine partners lay out plan for implementation in the country of the Asia-Pacific regional initiative “Livestock emergency preparedness and response for areas at high risk of volcanic eruptions”

Volcanic eruptions are one of nature’s most violent disaster events. Particularly in Asia and the Pacific where countries are still predominantly agricultural and where numerous active volcanoes dot the landscape, volcanic eruptions usually cause massive hardships for farmers and their animals.

During the last two centuries, volcanic eruptions in the rural areas of Indonesia and Philippines have resulted in the loss of tens of thousands of human lives, and untold numbers of farm animals. One eruption in the early 1800’s, that initially was reported to have killed 10 000 people, also resulted in the deaths of 80 000 others who perished due to starvation.

Recognizing the risk presented by volcanic eruptions especially to smallholder farmers and their farm animals, FAO and the United States Agency for International Development’s Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) launched
Crisis to cash: how an indigenous women’s group turned their livelihoods – and their lives – around amidst the pandemic

The agrobiodiversity-based livelihoods project implemented by FAO and funded by GEF enabled the women of the T’Boli tribe in the southern Philippines to keep on earning a living despite the challenges brought by the COVID-19 crisis.

Lake Sebu, with its beautiful landscape, rich culture, and cool weather, is the tourism hub of South Cotabato in Mindanao, drawing local and international tourists all year round. Approximately 40 percent of the town’s income comes from tourism, which meant a huge drop in the profits of the residents, many of whom come from the T’boli tribe, at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The other source of income of Lake Sebu, agriculture, was also beset with serious issues even before the pandemic. The municipality has experienced the adverse effects of climate change, with farmers contending with crop losses and failure in the past years.

While some have opted to grow vegetables besides rice and corn to supplement their incomes, these additional earnings are seasonal. Furthermore, transportation of their agricultural products to the market was already a challenge for the farmers even before the pandemic. Many of the villages in Lake Sebu are hard to access because of their geographical location and the underdeveloped roads. The pandemic added to the difficulty of earning through farming, as road closures and
limited transportation options prevented them from bringing their products to the market.

Producing t’nalak, the signature fabric of the T’boli tribe, has also been affected by climate change. Hotter temperatures due to climate change have made it more difficult to grow abaca, the main material used to make the fabric. It becomes brittle and easily breakable when exposed to heat, resulting in low-quality t’nalak that fetches low prices. Bungolan, a banana variety indigenous to Lake Sebu, has also been affected by climate change, considering these grow optimally when the temperature is cool and have sufficient forest cover. Prior to the pandemic, farmers were able to export these bananas to Japan. However, the movement restrictions that came with the community quarantine imposed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic prevented the exporter from picking up the bongulan bananas.

Instead of letting the Bungolan bananas go to waste, the T’boli women turned to food processing, a school they learned through the Dynamic Conservation and Sustainable Use of Agro-Biodiversity in Traditional Agro-Ecosystems of the Philippines (ABD Project), a project implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Philippine government through the Department of Agriculture–Bureau of Agricultural Research (DA-BAR), and funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

One of the first initiatives of the project in Lake Sebu when it began implementation in 2017 was to facilitate the formation of the Lake Sebu Indigenous Women and Farmers Association (LASIWFA), with membership coming from the five pilot villages of the ABD project. Because of their negative experiences in the past, not many of the T’bolis opted to engage in the project. However, more women, including youths, have since expressed their interest in joining after seeing the initial gains that the original members began to get from the project. One member was able to upgrade her house using more durable materials, while another has been able to put up her own mini-store. The support of the Provincial Local Government Unit of South Cotabato, including providing funding for the construction of food processing centers, also contributed to motivating more people to join the organization, as these complemented the trainings and product development skills that LASIWFA got through the ABD project. In Barangay Klubi, one of the pilot sites, membership has grown from five to 25, with 10 of the new members being 30 years old and younger.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Luhib, another village in Lake Sebu, already benefited from the project when they processed their tomatoes, which previously were just left on the sidewalks and left to rot if these were not sold in the market, into candies.

Prior to their engagement in the ABD Project, the T’boli women did not believe in the value of enterprise, believing that selling products is akin to begging. The limited opportunities available to them, coupled with their shyness, made them even more averse to pursuing other entrepreneurial opportunities outside their village besides making t’nalak. “Di bale nang maghirap [Never mind that we are poor],” Chita Sulan, the president of LASIWFA, said, recalling their mindset. Eating one meal once a day was the norm for many of the families in the tribe because of their limited resources. Through the ABD Project, they learned how to utilize their crops, which they previously just allowed to go to waste, to earn so they can better support their families.

Chita secured a quarantine pass, which allowed her to transport a small volume of processed banana chips from Klubi to the rolling store an initiative of the provincial local government to provide goods to all municipalities in South Cotabato while the community quarantine was strictly imposed. This allowed the women to earn income even during the COVID-19 community quarantine. They were able to generate PHP 6 000 (about USD 1 20) from two batches of deliveries from April to May to the rolling store.

Naida Rose credits LASIWFA for allowing her to dream again. “Sa pagbuhat at pagbenta ng mga produkton gawa ng LASIWFA ay makakatulong ito para maabot ko ang aking pangarap sa buhay [Cooking and selling products made by LASIWFA will help reach my dreams in life].”

“Hindi na ako nahihiya magbenta [I am no longer shy about selling],” said Edwina Malindang, 21, one of the new members of LASIWFA. “Hindi dapat maihiya magbenta, matuto dumiskarte para may pambili ng pagkain ng aking pamilya sa panahon ng lockdown [You should not be ashamed about selling. You need to learn to find ways so you can provide food for your family during the lockdown].”

In Barangay Klubi to the rolling store an initiative of the provincial local government to provide goods to all municipalities in South Cotabato while the community quarantine was strictly imposed. This allowed the women to earn income even during the COVID-19 community quarantine. They were able to generate PHP 6 000 (about USD 1 20) from two batches of deliveries from April to May to the rolling store.

“Ang hindi na napapakinabangan na mga produkto ng mga magasasa namin at naibenta sa nasabaran ng COVID-19 [We converted the products that the farmers were not able to use into products that we could sell and have our families benefit from at the time of COVID-19],” says Naida Rose Sulan, 23, a LASIWFA member and one of the banana chips food processors. A single parent, she was able to use her earnings to provide food for her children. “Kahit may pandemya, may pag-asa palang kumita sa paraang ‘di namin nasubukan dati [Even with the pandemic, there’s still the possibility of earning through previously unexplored ways].”

Naida Rose credits LASIWFA for allowing her to dream again. “Sa pagbuhat at pagbenta ng mga produkton gawa ng LASIWFA ay makakatulong ito para maabot ko ang aking pangarap sa buhay [Cooking and selling products made by LASIWFA will help reach my dreams in life].”
Latest resources

Rapid assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on food supply chains in the Philippines

The FAO report looks at rural livelihood and agricultural market chains as a critical component of the country’s food security capacity, and the related effects to it of the community restrictions imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Likewise, the report assesses the impact of COVID-19 on the access of the most vulnerable population that may result in a high rate of malnutrition. The report is a publication prepared by FAO with technical support from the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Department of Agriculture (DA). The study was also supported by the Mindanao Development Authority (MinDA) and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Agrarian Reform of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (MAFAR-BARMM).


The Philippines: Urgent call for assistance - Super Typhoon Goni and Typhoon Vamco 2020

Super Typhoon Goni (local name Rolly) and Typhoon Vamco (local name Ulysses) made landfall in November 2020 in the Philippines, roughly following the same path as Typhoon Molave that hit just days earlier. Super Typhoon Goni severely affected Albay and Catanduanes provinces and Typhoon Vamco affected Cagayan and Isabela provinces, negatively impacting their economies, which were already reeling as a result of the coronavirus 2019 pandemic. The typhoons damaged rice, corn, abaca, and other high-value crops. They also destroyed boats, fishing gear, agricultural equipment, and other livelihood resources, significantly affecting those who are dependent on farming and fishing as their primary or secondary source of livelihood.

As part of a general United Nations appeal, and working closely with the government, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations aims to support affected farmers and fishers by helping them re-establish their livelihoods and improving their food security and nutrition.


This document highlights FAO’s response actions and anticipatory interventions to the COVID-19 crisis based on its analysis of the pandemic’s current and projected impacts on agriculture and food security on vulnerable populations and sectors of the country. It also provides information on the intervention gaps and FAO’s resource requirements to further address these impacts.