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Headline: Toward climate resiliency for the agri sector

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Anxiety and uncertainty brought about by the increase in the prices of fuel and food heralded the administration of President Marcos Jr. Along with the lingering threat of the COVID-19 virus, these circumstances will further undermine the already precarious condition of the marginalized sectors of farmers and fishers.

The question is: Will the President's assumption of the agriculture portfolio signal a better vision for rural growth, more budget that upholds local agriculture and fisheries production, and a more competent, science-based planning and implementation of ways to slow down climate change for vulnerable sectors?

Livelihood and survival have become the battle cry of families battered by the economic lockdown due to the pandemic, and with the vicious cycle of debt and losses each year due to extreme weather events that hit them, this administration must listen hard.

Climate resilience. It is time to sternly mandate local government units (LGUs) to craft strategic and comprehensive agriculture and fisheries plan, together with their constituents and in consultation with experts, to address poverty as well as manage climate risks while promoting employment.

Climate change is a major consideration in both the comprehensive agriculture and fisheries plan (CAFP) and the local climate change action plan (LCCAP). The LCCAP addresses climate change vulnerabilities among the local population, while the CAFP is specific to the local agriculture and fisheries sectors. More importantly, the CAFP stands on the understanding that meeting the challenges of climate change is urgent and critical to the survival and development of these sectors.

In the last 12 years, Rice Watch Action Network Inc. (R1) has been assisting LGUs in LCCAP formulation and has recently rolled out assistance to develop a CAFP in LGUs.

Mandate and resources. Executive Order No. 138 was issued in 2021 directing local governments to be autonomous in delivering basic services to their constituents by the end of 2024. In the CAFP, devolution facilitates improved support for agriculture and fisheries development, as local governments provide services specific to these sectors within their jurisdiction.

Resources are guaranteed with the implementation of the 2018 Mandanas ruling, which directs the national government to increase internal revenue allocation to LGUs to finance the devolution of basic services. This presents a funding opportunity for climate resiliency and the supply chain sustainability initiatives of local governments and of farmers and fisher folk.

Sustainable supply chains for small farmers. In developing the CAFP, the analysis of supply chains is geared toward the fair distribution of income and benefits among stakeholders, particularly producers. A review of the supply chain allows communities to plan how they can restructure and influence the chain to boost the income of farmers and fisherfolk.

Food supply chains are largely affected by climate change. In creating sustainable and more beneficial supply chains for small farmers and fishers, other factors that affect them as producers

are identified. It is not only income but also processes that ensure the continuity of production and the protection of people's health and that of the environment.

A supply chain analysis should show how climate and nonclimate factors affect actors at different stages. Rice, for example, has suffered because of extreme changes in temperature, drought conditions, and excess amounts of rainfall from strong tropical cyclones. Additionally, the rice tariffication law has lowered farmgate prices, swelled incomes for wholesalers and international traders, and only marginally decreased rice prices for consumers. The Ukraine-Russia war also increased the cost of production inputs, such as fertilizers and fuel. This analysis brings in factors and problems that must be addressed, and solutions that would urgently identify, improve, and institutionalize the benefits for farmers.

For R1, this avenue for participatory and science-based CAFPP process at the LGU level is an important step to save the agriculture and fisheries sectors, which have long been neglected but are critical to the nation's survival.

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Hazel Tanchuling is executive director of R1, an institution supporting farmers, fishers, and related stakeholders working toward an economically and environmentally sustainable agriculture in the Philippines and other Asian countries.

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