

Food Security and Farmer Empowerment

A study of the impacts
of farmer-led
sustainable agriculture
in the Philippines

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MISEREOR**



MASIPAG is a network of farmers' groups, scientists and non-government organisations in the Philippines seeking to improve farmers' quality of life through their control over genetic resources, agricultural technology and associated knowledge.

MISEREOR was founded in 1958 as an agency "against hunger and disease in the world". In its capacity as the overseas development agency of the Catholic Church in Germany, it offers to cooperate in the spirit of partnership with all people of goodwill to promote development, fight worldwide poverty, liberate people from injustice, exercise solidarity with the poor and the persecuted, and help create "One World". MISEREOR is mandated by the German Catholic Bishop's Conference to fight causes of hardship and misery chiefly in countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America and to promote justice, freedom reconciliation and peace in the world.

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Foreword

After years of neglect, agriculture and food security are back on the international agenda. It now seems certain that the international community will fail to meet the Millennium Development Goals designed to reduce hunger and poverty worldwide. The world food crisis, that peaked in April 2008, saw high food prices contribute to a major increase in the number of people going hungry. This figure now stands at close to one billion people.

The crisis has uncovered what many farmers, NGOs and others have been saying for decades: that today's agriculture, and especially food production, is in a deep crisis. The world agrarian report¹ has highlighted that a shift in agriculture is urgently needed. The steadily growing global agro-industry with its focus on global markets has not been able to ensure food security for all. Countries which were food secure some years ago, like the Philippines, have become net food importers, simply because they prioritised large-scale, export-oriented agriculture and neglected local food production. The world agrarian report clearly states that small scale, sustainable agriculture is the key for combining an increased productivity in agriculture with reduced social and economic inequities and environmental stewardship.

As a development organisation that accompanies and supports poor farmers on their way out of poverty in many countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America for more than 50 years, MISEREOR has come across many successful initiatives of small farmers who have developed – against the mainstream – alternative agriculture systems that clearly show ways out of the agricultural crisis. These farmers have first-hand experience of the problems of so-called 'modern agriculture'. Knowing that modern agriculture can lead to poverty, they have chosen sustainable agriculture as survival strategy – to overcome high input costs and indebtedness, to reduce risks in production and to ensure food security.

¹ Report of the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development IAASTD, www.agassessment.org

One outstanding example of the innovativeness and capacity of small farmers is provided in this book by MASIPAG, a farmers' organisation from the Philippines. MASIPAG and MISEREOR have been partners in development for more than 20 years. MISEREOR has learned a lot from these farmers and has facilitated the sharing of their experiences with other small farmers' organisations in many Asian countries.

During a visit to MASIPAG in November 2006, the idea was born to conduct a study which assesses the impacts of MASIPAG's work in order to use the data for further up-scaling and lobbying for the MASIPAG approach to development. To fully convince those decision makers and researchers who are already open to alternative ways in agriculture, the study had to provide statistically reliable data which could challenge the common prejudices on sustainable agriculture and small scale farmers. While conventional agriculture, with its powerful supporters among politicians, researchers and the agro-industry, is promoted with an incredible amount of money, only a few studies have been published on the successes of small-scale, sustainable agriculture. Small farmer pioneers often stand alone against the mainstream and have to prove that they can and do provide better solutions.

And in fact they can provide the proof. The impacts of MASIPAG's work clearly show that farmers can take the lead in developing an agriculture which is highly productive and improves the food security, income, and, importantly, the sovereignty of farmers. MASIPAG farmers breed their own varieties of rice which compete with the high yielding varieties of international research institutions in yield, and at lower cost, lower risk and in a shorter time. MASIPAG farmers, most of them belonging to the poorest sector of society, have better food security, better incomes, better health, and a positive view on their future. MASIPAG farmers take their responsibility for God's creation seriously and hold their solidarity and spirituality against the global consumerism which is still gaining ground even if the financial crisis and climate change indicate the unsustainability of the current development path.

Seeds are at the centre of MASIPAG's work. For these farmers, seeds are respected as a common good and heritage, not as commodity. With the help of innovative farmer breeders,

the MASIPAG network has developed an impressive number of rice varieties well adapted to local conditions which have the potential to adapt to future challenges. The promotion of diversity on farm helps farmers to reduce production risks. Furthermore, the sustainable agriculture promoted by MASIPAG avoids CO₂ emissions since it relies on local resources, avoids the use of fossil energy and prioritises local markets. With such strategies, farmers prepare themselves to challenge the impacts of climate change and give a convincing example of what agriculture should look like in times of climate change.

The biggest share of the hungry people worldwide live in rural areas and belong to farming families or landless farm labour. Most do not get support from their governments. They do not have an equitable access to resources like land and water. Nor do they have easy access to education and health services. In most cases, insurances or credit facilities are not accessible. They are the ones suffering most from volatile world market prices for commodities, and they are the ones who already suffer from climate change impacts while the powerful governments of this world half-heartedly discuss the topic of CO₂ emissions. Small farmers produce the larger part of food for local markets while going hungry themselves.

Yet, as this book shows, small farmers using sustainable agriculture also have the solutions. It is time to draw all the attention to their work and support the farmer-led sustainable agriculture as it is presented in this book!

Dr. Martin Bröckelmann-Simon
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From the Publisher

More than twenty years ago, a small group of scientists and farmers dared to unmask the myths of IRRI's miracle seeds and its green revolution package of technologies. This group, led by the late Drs. Burton Onate and Aurelio Briones and scientists belonging to the UPLB Multisectoral Forum (MSF), farmers from AMGL and DIWA, and development workers from ACES and FRC, dreamt of reversing the trend of "genetic imperialism" which had big business in control over the germplasm and agricultural production in developing countries such as the Philippines.

MASIPAG was created out of the need of small farmers for an alternative to the debt trap of the green revolution, and to develop self-determination in their agricultural practice. Initially, MASIPAG's goal was "to revive and improve indigenous rice varieties that would not require imported inputs and generate appropriate technologies attuned to farmers' problems and needs". Now, farmers groups and communities all over the country have control over seeds and technologies and are talking about and practicing the "MASIPAG way of life." As this book will show, a MASIPAG way of life includes reviving traditional labor-sharing practices, as well as regenerating farms and communities.

The growth of MASIPAG could not have happened without the painstaking dedication of the founders, the farmer-leaders, scientists and NGOs, and not least, the partners, especially Misereor which has provided constant financial support from the start. Misereor has accompanied MASIPAG's development and helped nurture it from its birth as a project and program on rice genetic improvement and development of technologies, through its spread as a network and now a growing movement of farmers advocating for self-reliant rural development through sustainable agriculture.

This book, the result of an impact evaluation funded and commissioned by Misereor, is one such product of the

partnership – initiated to allow MASIPAG to reflect on its work methodically and provide the organization with a detailed impact monitoring system at the household level.

We dedicate this book as well as our efforts in MASIPAG, to our founders, our international partners MISEREOR, Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC), Catholic Lenten Fund (SCLF) and Trocaire, and to all the farmers we work with and serve. We hope that this book would inspire more farmers in the Philippines and outside to work for solutions in creating a better Earth.

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