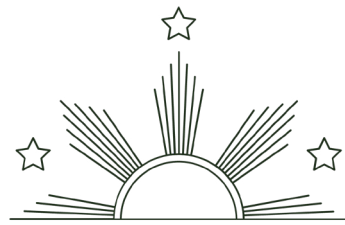




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SAADvocacy

OFFICIAL NEWS MAGAZINE OF THE SPECIAL AREA FOR AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Seeds of Hope:

Cultivating a
Brighter Future
for the Manobo
Dulangan Tribe



SAAD's way of farmer empowerment:

Multifaceted
approach for
a harmonious
community

Breaking Barriers:

Farmers' Group in
Palawan Thrives with
Fresh Eggs



San Isidro all-women farmers' association flourishes in Eastern Samar



Leading with purpose:

Laguna woman leads
group of vegetable
farmers toward
growth, unity

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SAAD NPMO Year-end Assessment

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE



Dear Readers,

As we conclude another year, I am filled with immense pride and gratitude for the remarkable achievements of the Special Area for Agricultural Development (SAAD) Program Phase 2.

It's been a year of growth, of challenges overcome, and most importantly, of witnessing the remarkable resilience and resourcefulness of our farmers and fisherfolk in the countryside. This magazine is a testament to their hard work and dedication.

Within these pages, you'll discover inspiring stories of individuals who have transformed their lives and their communities through the SAAD Program. From thriving livestock farms to bountiful harvests of high-value crops, you'll see firsthand how our targeted support has empowered them to build sustainable livelihoods. These aren't just numbers on a page; they are the faces of hope and progress.

This year, we've had the privilege of sharing SAAD's success at important events like the 61st Philippine Society of Animal Science Scientific Meeting and Annual Convention and the Collective Efforts in Poverty Alleviation Forum organized by the Office of the Presidential Adviser for Poverty Alleviation.

It's been incredibly rewarding to connect with fellow leaders and share our experiences, learning from each other and collaborating to build a stronger future for our nation's agriculture. The conversations and connections forged at these events will continue to fuel our work.

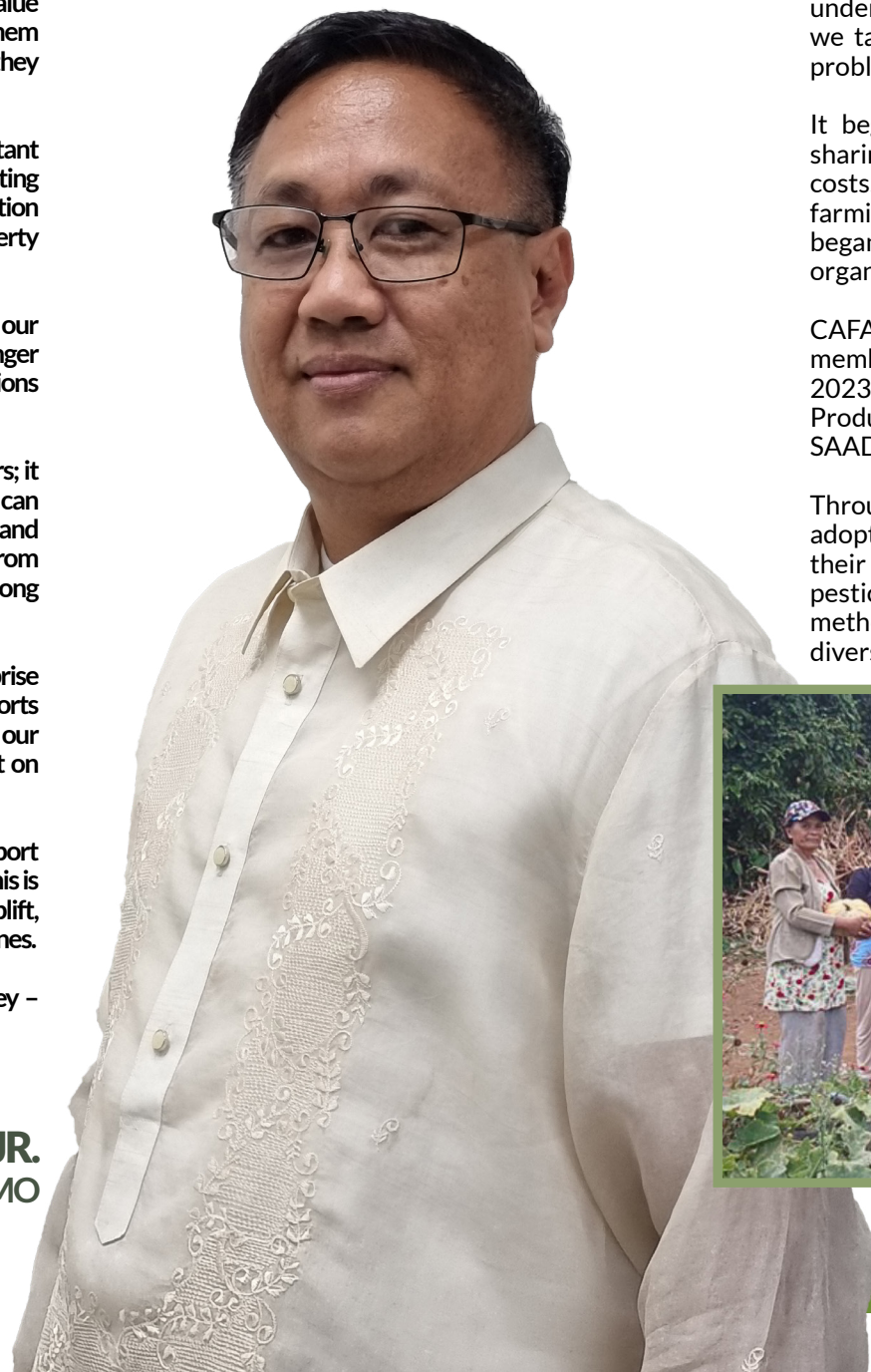
Our recent year-end assessment wasn't just about reviewing numbers; it was about learning and growing. We've identified key areas where we can refine our approach, ensuring that our support is even more effective and impactful. We're committed to providing comprehensive support, from planting the seed to bringing the harvest to market, and to fostering strong partnerships with local communities and other organizations.

Lastly, the successful rollout of the Marketing Assistance and Enterprise Development (MAED) initiative marks a pivotal moment in our efforts to harness technology for social good. MAED promises to streamline our processes, enhance our outreach, and ultimately, amplify our impact on the ground.

Looking ahead, we remain deeply committed to our mission: to support 173,480 farmers and 149,590 fisherfolk on their path to prosperity. This is more than just a program; it's a promise. A promise to empower, to uplift, and to build a brighter future for rural communities across the Philippines.

Thank you to everyone who has been a part of this incredible journey – your dedication and hard work make all the difference


ULYSSES J. LUSTRIA, JR.
Director, SAAD-NPMO



Strength in unity: Biliran farmers join forces for sustainable farming

"United we stand."

This was the resolute affirmation of Jose Ochea, President of the Cabucgayan Farmers' Association (CAFA), when asked about their pursuit of sustainability for the livelihood project granted by the Special Area for Agricultural Development (SAAD) Program Phase 2.

For many years, the members of CAFA managed their own plots of land. They faced significant challenges, such as unpredictable weather, rising costs of farm inputs, and limited access to markets. Over time, they realized that the solution lays not in working harder alone, but in collaborating with one another.

"And if there are misunderstandings, we choose to understand each other. If someone commits a mistake, we talk it over and forgive each other to solve the problem," Ochea added.

It began with small steps. A few farmers started sharing resources, such as seeds and tools to reduce costs. They exchanged knowledge about organic farming techniques and pest control strategies. What began as informal exchanges evolved into a more organized effort.

CAFA was established in 2014. With 21 active members, the group became a recipient of the FY 2023 Diversified Farming in Corn and Vegetable Production Project worth Php774,109 under the SAAD Program Phase 2.

Through collaboration, the farmers have successfully adopted organic farming practices, thereby reducing their dependence on chemical fertilizers and pesticides. They have also adopted a crop rotation method, which has enhanced soil health and diversified their income streams.



by Jessica R. Alvero | REGION 8



Currently, the group is growing cucumbers, squash, corn, and okra, and has already secured a savings worth Php30,000 deposited in a local bank.

Recognizing that sustainability is a long-term objective, they involved the youth in this endeavor. Through mentorship and hands-on training, the skills and practices for managing the livelihood project will be passed on to the young generation.

"We also inspire our children to love farming by involving them in our daily farm tasks," shared Clara Lipapao, CAFA Treasurer.

The story of CAFA is one of teamwork and collaboration. In an era when many rural communities encounter challenges, they have found strength in unity. Through their collective efforts, they have not only improved their own lives but have also laid a solid foundation for the future of farming in Biliran.

Breaking Barriers: Farmers' Group in Palawan Thrives with Fresh Eggs

by Melissa F. Lingco | MIMAROPA REGION



Growing Income, Expanding Markets

In the first half of 2023, AbBaCa FA sold over 41,000 eggs, earning nearly Php 393,000. After deducting costs such as feed, labor, and transportation, their net income was Php 347,571. From July to August, they sold another 14,540 eggs and recorded a net income of Php 59,190.

Overall, since the project began, the group has sold 58,730 eggs, generating a total income of Php 553,641. With expenses amounting to Php 124,197, they have accumulated net savings of Php 429,444. The project is not only boosting their livelihood but also ensuring fresh, locally produced eggs for the people of Agutaya.

In the remote town of Agutaya, Palawan, a small farmers' association is turning challenges into opportunities. The Abagat Bancal Cambian (AbBaCa) Farmers Association (FA), located in Barangay Poblacion, shows that distance is no obstacle to success.

Agutaya is one of Palawan's farthest municipalities, part of the Cuyo Archipelago, and a fifth-class municipality due to its limited resources. As a result, it qualified for the Special Area for Agricultural Development (SAAD) Program Phase 2. The program now supports four farmer groups in the area, including AbBaCa, an association made up of Agutaynen Indigenous People.

Boosting Local Livelihoods

In October 2022, the AbBaCa group received 290 ready-to-lay (RTL) chickens, 10 sets of cages, and essential medicines and vitamins valued at over Php 881,000. The goal was to start egg production and create a sustainable source of income for the community. This year, SAAD added Php 355,550 worth of support, including feeds, veterinary supplies, egg trays, plastic drums, and a poultry net to strengthen their production further.

Within two months, the chickens started laying eggs, and the association quickly began reaping benefits. By December, they had sold 3,066 eggs, earning Php 27,233. After covering basic expenses, the group had a net income of Php 22,683. Encouraged by this success, they aimed to produce more.



Fresh Supply for Agutaya

Before SAAD's intervention, stores in Agutaya had to source eggs from other islands like Cuyo, Iloilo, or even Mindoro, often resulting in high prices and damaged goods due to long travel times. Now, AbBaCa FA supplies fresh eggs at affordable prices to the entire town.

"Before SAAD's RTL project, our island relied on eggs from other provinces. But now, we are the ones supplying Agutaya with fresh eggs. Thank you to the Department of Agriculture for giving us this opportunity through SAAD," shared Mrs. Rosela Bacosa, president of the association.

"We are also happy to deliver fresh eggs to local stores at lower prices," she added. "SAAD's support has made a big difference in our lives," she added.

“Before SAAD’s RTL project, our island relied on eggs from other provinces. But now, we are the ones supplying Agutaya with fresh eggs. Thank you to the Department of Agriculture for giving us this opportunity through SAAD.”

Eyeing Sustainable Growth

With their egg business thriving, AbBaCa FA is planning for long-term sustainability. They aim to invest in new chickens next year to maintain production levels as their current flock ages.

Despite the distance and challenges, the group remains committed to maximizing the opportunity provided by DA-SAAD. Their goal is to keep growing, serve their community's needs, and inspire other farmers in similar situations.



Enhancing Human Capital: Empowering SAAD development workers as the main engine of empowering communities

by Cedie C. Bataga | REGION 6

Kung hindi ako, sino? Kung hindi ngayon, kailan? – This is a rhetorical question, yet remains a significant provocation that encompasses the whole community development work. More than making a positive impact, this anchorage serves as a reminder that it takes a community to realize a dream, and within these communities is the backbone of development efforts, a Community Development Worker.

With a multi-faceted work that requires understanding of the community's needs and aspirations, Community Development Workers need to carve a certain space within the community. With proper training, these workers can be equipped with the right skills in tailoring programs and initiatives of the same nature and engaging local people– a driving force towards achieving social mobilization.



Building SocMob skills to increase humanitarian results

Mobilization, as much as it requires active participation from the community being at the center of development efforts, also requires a good development worker who shall steer actions, initiate discussions, engage people, and guide them towards their own development.

This process works as a “platform” for local development, helping to bring together communities, knowledge, and resources. People with certain characteristics and experience in placing the values, priorities, and agency of citizens at the grassroots level are of paramount importance in creating an enabling environment towards increasing humanitarian results and instill among communities to embrace the concept of self-help.

Readings from TCI University which discussed the elements of social mobilization and implementing it effectively, have recognized the steps of mobilizing a community which put choosing and training social mobilizers as the fifth step, followed by implementation and monitoring of social mobilization activities.

As such, this training was initiated by the SAAD NPMO to ready its commdev workers in the field, enabling them in taking ideas forward and building an alliance with stakeholders. After all, it takes an increased level of awareness amongst the commdev workers before entering and situating themselves in a community.

In Western Visayas, ten (10) community development workers took part in the training which transpired from April 1-5, 2024 and gained a profound learning experience through an extensive training course. The weeklong activity allowed the participants to gain a perspective on community organizing with activities focusing on situational analysis from the field.

Foundations of the training approach: Lessons from the field

Since the program is anchored on poverty reduction, reaching and supporting the poor farming communities by giving them livelihood interventions, information, and training, requires specialized social mobilization skills. These skills can be developed from actual challenges in the field and drawing lessons from it will lay the groundwork for strategizing and planning.

This approach has deviated from the traditional development paradigm, focused on “being” and “doing” rather than just “having”. The training sessions have touched on a few principles of operation, with broad strokes on the real scenarios from the field. It provided insights and key takeaways that will help the officers to not only stay as passive listeners who work within their Terms of References but become active partners in community-building who work beyond the bounds of their contracts.

Kung hindi ako, sino?



Kung hindi ngayon, kailan?



As such, the Special Area for Agricultural Development (SAAD) Program, through its Social Preparation and Program Management (SPPM) Component, has mainstreamed community organizing efforts in a bid to increase the capacity and capability of its development workers being one of the keyplayers of social change and other related initiatives among its covered areas.

Led by the distinguished community development practitioner, SAAD Deputy Director Dr. Pedro S. Dumaraos along with the SAAD Social Preparation Team, the fifth course of Community Organizing towards Social Mobilization Training of Trainers (TOT) ran for a week and involved development officers from the Visayas Cluster. The activity aimed at building power within communities through the instrumental role of program actors.



The issues on community entry, right implementation strategies, addressing needs, and involved collaboration were at the core of the training. It placed emphasis on shared understanding of development and poverty and instilled the concepts of leadership, the sense of volunteerism, and resolute commitment among the participants. The objective is to instigate action, grounded in the needs and aspirations of the people for a strengthened local ownership, thereby empowering the local communities from within and motivating them to become self-sufficient.

The interactive role playing mixed with team discussion and activities explored opportunities to enhance social mobilizers’ skills especially in troubleshooting, identifying areas for improvement, expanding their understanding on engagement, and overcoming barriers in project management. It likewise fostered teamwork that is crucial in sustaining work dynamics.

In the lens of a Community Development Worker

For a week of training with passionate intensity, the participants have their fair share of impressions and opinions on the totality of the activity. With the theme, “Alab sa Puso, Alay sa Bayan: Tuloy ang Laban sa Kahirapan,” the activity has awakened leaders among the warm bodies that now, more than ever, have reaffirmed their roles to helping poor farming communities.

Miss Reah Garduce, SAAD Western Visayas Social Preparation Lead, shared the takeaways she will bring into the work, “The Social Mobilization TOT was a truly enlightening experience. The sessions were well-structured and provided a comprehensive understanding on how to effectively engage and inspire communities, especially those assisted by SAAD, for collective action. I particularly appreciated the emphasis on practical strategies for grassroots organizing and the role of inclusive communication in fostering community participation. The interactive components enriched my learning, allowing me to see the direct impact of those techniques. I feel more equipped and motivated to apply these principles in my work as a Social Preparation Lead and make a tangible difference in the SAAD communities I serve.”



Equally motivated Area Coordinator of Negros Occidental, Mr. Jezer John Chispa, also imparted his opinion on the activity, “Personally, naniniwala ako na malaki ang maitutulong [ng training] sa akin bilang isang Community Development worker. Kahit na matagal na ako sa larangan ng organizing, doon ko napagtanto na marami pa palang kulang sa akin at sa aking mga ideya at doon ko din napagtanto kung ano pa ang mga dapat kong gawin. Nagpapasalamat ako nang lubos sa oportunidad na makasali at makabahagi ng aking experiences mula sa aking area.”

[Personally, I believe the training will be of great help for me as a Community Development worker. Even though I have long-served in the field of organizing and have already gained an ample amount of experience, I realized that I still lack many things, still have many ideas to learn, and still have many things to do. I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to join and share my experiences from my area of assignment.]

With renewed commitment to being proactive partners, the SAAD development community practitioners are now ready to serve and implement projects that will significantly benefit the socially-excluded local communities towards rural development. In the words of James C. Humes, “The art of communication is the language of leadership,” connects us to the rhetorical question rooted on leadership values, If not me, who? If not now, when?

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For the people, by the farmers: Sorsogon FAs participate in local community service activities

by Nonie Lyn M. Nuñez | REGION 5

In a generous pursuit to serve the people in their local communities, members of farmers’ associations (FAs) under the Department of Agriculture – Special Area for Agricultural Development (DA-SAAD) Program Phase 2 participated and hosted local community services as part of their commitment to social development in the province of Sorsogon.

In addition to agricultural production, the FAs have actively participated in social development initiatives, demonstrating their commitment to serving their community which has supported their growth. These FAs are Bolo Rural Workers Association, Samahang Magsasaka ng Poropandan, and Sinang-atan Farmers Association.

For them, being involved in the community transcends their broader aspirations of a successful organization– an idea of a unified society where everyone’s welfare is at an appreciable state.

Forging healthier futures

“Sa mga aktibidad na ito, maipapakita (ng mga asosasyon) na bukod sa pagtatanim, makatutulong din kami sa ibang pangangailangan ng bawat mamamayan” said Junard Gargallo, president of Samahang Magsasaka ng Poropandan as he referred to their previously concluded children’s feeding activity in Barangay Poropandan, Matnog.

(Through activities like this, we prove that we can serve the people in our communities in charitable ways apart from our agricultural resources).

In the data released by the Sorsogon Provincial Nutrition Working Technical Committee in 2019, it was noted that the town of Matnog ranked first in recorded undernutrition among children aged 0-59 months in the entire province.

While the province’s malnutrition state stooped down in succeeding years, the FA took it upon themselves to help aid the persisting adversity even in the simplest way. The group coordinated with the Barangay Health Workers to monitor children with malnourished cases and conducted a children’s feeding activity for 86 kids ages 1-5 years old.

On the neighboring shore, Sinang-atan FA also took the same initiative and committed to a bi-annual feeding program for their barangay’s children. Barangay Sinang-atan is a barangay in Matnog with a population of 414 people situated on an island a few nautical miles from the mainland. Given its difficult topographic features, transferring food and other staple products in the barangay is an arduous task.

Sa mga aktibidad na ito, maipapakita (ng mga asosasyon) na bukod sa pagtatanim, makatutulong din kami sa ibang pangangailangan ng bawat mamamayan



A clean school fosters a thriving learning environment

Further, with the FAs' commitment to the welfare of children in their respective barangays, Sinang-atan FA also participated in the barangay's elementary school's Brigada Eskwela in June 2024– a cleanup activity on school grounds conducted before and in between schools' academic years.

According to the FA members, the students and teachers—who are also the primary customers of their egg-based products—have developed a personal connection with their group, as their center house stands directly below it.

The group participated in the said activity with assistance from the 22nd IB Infantry Valor Battalion deployed in the barangay, establishing strong bonds not only with the community but with other units that secure the peace and prosperity of the place.

Intertwined with the same idea, Bolo Rural Workers Association members also participated in the same Brigada activity at Bolo Elementary School in June 2024, ensuring that their children and every student in the school have access to clean and convenient learning facilities. Their involvement demonstrated their commitment to education and fostered a sense of community, as parents worked alongside teachers and local volunteers to enhance the school facilities. Through collaborative efforts, they aimed to inspire pride in their surroundings and encourage a culture of responsibility among the students.

The Matnog-based FAs demonstrated sustainability not only in their accustomed farming practices. Through their dedication, they have contributed to the development of their local communities in a formidable fashion.

The SAAD program will continue to support beneficiaries' benevolence and empower them to showcase the program's influence on their association and the community.

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San Isidro all-women farmers' association flourishes in Eastern Samar

by Lester Mark A. Lora | REGION 8

The San Isidro Women's Association (SIWA) continues to exemplify the strength of sisterhood and the transformative power of dialogue and open communication in farming.

Formed in 2016 by women who understand the challenges and rewards of agriculture, the group relies on collaboration and shared responsibility to overcome obstacles. Through constant dialogue, these women have fostered a sense of unity that has made their association resilient.

Based in San Julian, Eastern Samar, SIWA began as a small association with a clear mission – to give women a voice in the community, gain access to livelihood opportunities, and provide additional financial support for their families.

The group has since evolved into a multi-faceted operation, managing ready-to-lay chicken projects, an agrivet store, and vegetable production, all while advocating for environmental preservation.

In July 2023, SIWA became a beneficiary of the Special Area for Agricultural Development (SAAD) Program Phase 2, a key turning point in their growth. The support from SAAD allowed the association to expand its operations, providing them with essential resources to boost their egg production and other agricultural ventures.

At the core of their operations is the egg production project. With the help of SAAD, the group received 408 ready-to-lay chickens, 140 bags of layer feeds, weighing scales, multivitamins, and egg trays. Their livelihood training in egg-layer production allowed them to fully utilize these resources, resulting in a total of 109,525 eggs harvested since August 2023, yielding a net income of Php 310,109.

SIWA's ventures did not stop there. The association also runs an agrivet store, where they sell fertilizers, medicines, and feeds for chickens and pigs. Additionally, they practice vegetable production, using organic fertilizer derived from chicken manure

To further diversify, SIWA uses some of their harvested eggs for baking cakes, which they sell for various occasions, providing another stream of income for the group.

While the association has experienced impressive growth, their journey has not been without challenges. Miscommunication and conflicts over task scheduling were common hurdles, but SIWA has mastered resolving these issues through open dialogue and mediation.

By listening to each other's stories and perspectives, the members have learned to approach conflicts constructively, strengthening their bond and improving their operations.

As SIWA President Maricar Alfonso shares, "Our best practice is to allow members to express their ideas and opinions." This inclusiveness has led to a more cohesive and efficient group, where everyone's voice is valued.



Beyond their economic pursuits, the women of SIWA are also committed to serving their community. They often participate in barangay clean-up drives, feeding programs, and even engage in health and wellness activities.

The Local Government Unit, Ecoweb, and the Bureau of Soils and Water Management (BSWM) have also lent their support, helping SIWA navigate the technical aspects of farming and marketing. This collaboration with various agencies has empowered the group to become responsible and knowledgeable farmers, proud of their work and committed to its success.

SIWA's success has inspired them to dream bigger. Moving forward, they plan to invite more members into their association to help more families and farmers. They also aim to expand their agrivet store and increase their egg layer production to meet the growing demand.

Their ultimate goal is to prove that, just like men, women can thrive in the field of agriculture. "Farmers are not only limited to farming, but they can also be good entrepreneurs," Maricar shared, reflecting on the association's journey.

By diversifying their skills and knowledge, the women of SIWA are set on learning more and earning more, continuing to build on the foundations of sisterhood, dialogue, and determination.

SIWA is a testament to the power of community and cooperation. With the continued support from SAAD and their own perseverance, they are determined to uplift not only their own lives but also the lives of other farmers.



Samar farmers builds camaraderie; finds success in SAAD agri projects

by Jessica R. Alvero | REGION 8



Kapit-bisig, a Filipino term meaning linking-arms, perfectly encapsulates a remarkable story of a group of 20 farmers and fisherfolk in the town of Talalora, Samar who transformed their passion into a sustainable foundation for the future of their families.

In 2023, the Kapit-Bisig Tungo sa Pag-unlad ng Mamamayan Farmers and Fisherfolks' Association was selected as a beneficiary of the Department of Agriculture - Special Area for Agricultural Development (DA-SAAD). The main sources of income in Talalora are agriculture and fishing. The fisherfolk in this community are also farmers passing down their skills from generation to generation.

Their dream was not just about the future of their children; it was about building a community with less poverty. However, with limited resources and the challenges of unpredictable weather and market access, this vision seemed daunting.

Recognizing their shared struggles, the group members decided to unite, believing that together they could achieve what seemed impossible. They organized themselves as a group, sharing their resources and knowledge.

"We want to uplift our lives; we want to succeed. But we cannot do it alone," shared Rhoda Bersales, the association secretary. "In order to do so, we work hard and support each other as family."

For years, the members of the Kapit-Bisig Tungo sa Pag-unlad ng Mamamayan Farmers and Fisherfolks Association toiled in the sea and in the fields, catching fish and planting various crops in hopes of providing a better life for their children. Their turning point came last year when they received the Vegetable Production Project worth PhP 738,686.00.

Through the SAAD Program, the members established a communal vegetable garden. Initially, the group planted okra, ampalaya, eggplant, patchay, and string beans on a 5,000-square-meter communal farm. Balancing their duties as parents, these farmers discovered hope and purpose in vegetable farming.

Using what they learned from the training provided, this group of united farmers and fisherfolk turned the livelihood program into a lucrative source of income. Every week, they would sell vegetables at the local market.

Earlier this year, the farmers began to venture into egg production with another set of livelihood interventions valued at PhP 1.2 million as they received the FY 2024 Support to Vegetable and Egg Production Project consisting of 470 ready-to-lay (RTL) chickens, 198 bags of layer feeds and biologics.

As the tide rises from low to high, so too does their financial status. In just five months, their collective efforts were able to harvest 39,456 pieces of eggs and generated PhP 80,250.00 savings fund. Yields improved significantly as they learned to use chicken manure to enhance their produce.

For them, the poultry farm is not merely a structure; it is a symbol of what they could achieve together with the support of the SAAD Program. "Our communal vegetable and poultry farm are proof that with hard work and cooperation, we can do more," said Febe Abarratigue, association member.

"Basta kay maniguro gud la kami ngan kapit-bisig gud la pirimi (We will always work hard together)," she added, her eyes glistening with tears of gratitude.



SAAD ZamPen officers complete Gender and Development training

by : Aimee Lou D. Madjus | REGION 9

Gender and Development (GAD) has emerged as a critical framework for addressing gender inequalities in the Philippine agricultural sector, particularly in rural areas. The Department of Agriculture - Special Area for Agricultural Development (SAAD) Program, with its focus on empowering farmers and improving rural livelihoods, aligns seamlessly with these GAD principles.

By integrating GAD into its initiatives, SAAD further enhances its impact and creates a more equitable and sustainable agricultural sector. Community Development Officers (CDOs) under the SAAD Program play a pivotal role in implementing agricultural development initiatives.

Recently, CDO Catherine Aranton and information officer Aimee Lou Madjus of SAAD Zamboanga Peninsula (ZamPen) completed a GAD Training initiated by the DA Regional Field Office 9 - Philippine Rural Development Project last October 2, 2024 in Ipil, Zamboanga Sibugay.

Dr. Rosalyn Romo-Echem, a GAD advocate and Associate Project Professor from Western Mindanao State University (WMSU), served as the training resource speaker.

Through GAD training, these SAAD officers were equipped with the knowledge and skills to identify and address gender-based disparities within farming communities. By recognizing the unique challenges faced by women farmers, such as limited access to land, credit, and technology, CDOs can tailor their assistance to meet the specific needs of women.

By recognizing the unique challenges faced by women farmers, such as limited access to land, credit, and technology, CDOs can tailor livelihood interventions to meet the specific needs of women.

In her discussion, Dr. Romo-Echem focused on correcting common myths and stereotypes surrounding gender in society, challenging traditional perceptions that limit the roles of both men and women. Her insights encouraged participants to rethink their views on gender roles, giving a deeper understanding of the importance of equality and inclusivity.

The resource person also discussed Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Expression (SOGIE), which is vital for promoting an inclusive environment where all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation and gender identity, feel respected and valued. This understanding not only helps build trust but also encourages collaboration and participation, ultimately leading to more successful agricultural initiatives.

Dr. Romo-Echem also taught the SAAD officers with gender-fair language, alongside more gender-inclusive terms, which were earnestly received by Ms. Madjus.

"As a writer, learning to use gender-fair language is essential for fostering inclusivity and respect in my work. It promotes equality by avoiding biases and stereotypes, allowing all individuals to feel represented and valued," said Madjus.

By the end of the training, the transformation of perceptions from participants was evident. Dr. Romo-Echem stated in her parting message, "I hope you go to the field and create a culture that allows men to understand the role of women, to put value in women's role in the family and recognize the importance of partnership that will lead to their success not just in farming but in life as a whole."

Through their efforts, SAAD GAD-trained officers plan to conduct a re-echoing of their learnings for the GAD training. As they return to their assigned communities, they are poised to make a significant impact by pursuing gender-responsive development strategies and advocating for women's rights.

New group, new beginnings: 3M Association flourishes in agriculture

by Lester Mark A. Lora | REGION 8

In the small community of Mapanas, Northern Samar, a new group of farmers is making notable progress in agriculture. The Magsasakang Masisipag ng Mapanas (3M) Association is a newly-formed organization consisting of 20 coconut and vegetable growers, banding together in July 2023 with hopes of securing better opportunities for their livelihoods.

What distinguishes this group is their fresh yet determined approach to the agricultural sector, demonstrating that with the right support, even newcomers can succeed. The 3M Association, located in Brgy. Del Norte was organized initially to access much-needed government aid. Most of its members had long relied on coconut farming as their primary source of income.

Since coconut production is seasonal, the farmers needed an alternative source of livelihood to sustain their families during off-peak periods.

Recognizing this challenge, the Special Area for Agricultural Development (SAAD) Program Phase 2 of the Department of Agriculture stepped in, providing their first intervention, the Diversified Farming in Corn and Vegetable Production Project, granted in July 2023. This was followed by another intervention, the Egg Layer Production project, awarded in November 2023 based on the Beneficiary Needs Assessment (BNA).

With SAAD's support, the association received provisions for egg layer production worth nearly Php 1 million, composed of 440 layer chickens, 180 bags of feeds, and vital farming equipment like egg trays and weighing scales. Additionally, the association was granted with materials and inputs for corn and vegetable production valued at over Php 800,000, which included corn seeds, eggplant and ampalaya seeds, organic fertilizers, garden tools, and more.

These interventions were essential in laying the foundation for 3M's agricultural venture, but the association's success was also fueled by social preparation activities, livelihood training, capacity-building sessions, and marketing assistance provided under SAAD.

The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) also pitched in by training members in entrepreneurship development and financial management - equipping them with crucial skills to handle their newfound responsibilities.

In just a short period, the association's efforts have begun to bear fruit. From their ampalaya (bitter melon) harvest alone, they generated Php 30,000 from 200 kg of produce, while their corn yield brought in Php 17,075 from 2,000 kg.

The highlight was their egg production, which generated a total cash asset of Php 320,806.32 from the sale of 78,334 eggs during the same period from January to September 2024.

Reflecting on the support of SAAD in their lives, Nancy Taringting, President of the 3M Association, expressed gratitude: "We are deeply grateful to SAAD for these projects. It gives us pride and relief knowing that we now have meaningful work that sustains us."

She underscored that, aside from the material benefits of the projects, there is also a more profound impact on the members of the association.

For many in the 3M Association, engaging in these projects was once a daunting prospect filled with uncertainty. However, with the assistance of SAAD, they have transitioned from being mere subsistence farmers to empowered entrepreneurs, capable of generating income. Looking ahead, the 3M Association has ambitious plans. With another round of support expected in 2024, the group is eager to expand their vegetable production and explore new ventures such as swine raising. They also plan to establish a mini store to further boost their income.



Hope for the future: Rural poultry raisers gearing towards excellent egg venture

by : Lester Mark A. Lora | REGION 8

The Sabang II Rural Improvement Club (RIC) is transforming the lives of the women in Brgy. Sabang II. This grassroots organization emerged from a vision to uplift its members by seeking access to vital government aid and resources.

Founded in July 2023, the Sabang II RIC set out on a mission to empower the women of their community. They have 18 registered female and two male members. Their journey began with the Php 895,475 worth of Chicken Layer Egg Production Project from the Department of Agriculture - Special Area for Agricultural Development (DA-SAAD) Program Phase 2.

After receiving technical training, Sabang farmers were granted 408 ready-to-lay (RTL) chickens, 140 bags of layer feed, egg weighing scales, multivitamins, and 600 egg trays. This support laid the foundation for a thriving egg production venture.

From July 2023 to September 2024, the group harvested 156,817 eggs, translating to a net income of Php 408,521. What started as a local endeavor soon expanded beyond the confines of Brgy. Sabang II. The newly established agri-mart has become a bustling hub for egg sales, with plans to reach even more towns in the future.

The success of the Sabang II RIC is attributed not only to the initial farm inputs but also to comprehensive training on social preparation, livelihood, and enterprise development. Members have learned to manage their production effectively, assigning tasks that rotate among them to ensure smooth operations.

Like any venture, the path has not been without its obstacles. The initial phase was particularly challenging as the group faced logistics issues while building their processing area, nestled a few meters from the road on a steep slope. To tackle this, they ingeniously constructed stairs for easier access.

Peddy Ramosa, the president of Sabang II RIC, expressed her gratitude: "I am thankful to SAAD and to the members. It will not always be easy and there will be difficulties, but we should continue doing our best."

A notable aspect of the Sabang II RIC is its commitment to inclusivity. Among the members is Gary Dadia, a proud LGBTQ+ advocate who stepped in to assist the group in place of her aging mother. "I thank this association for welcoming me wholeheartedly and for making sure that I'm included and belonged every step of the way," Gary asserts, highlighting the club's welcoming environment for all.

The vision for the future is ambitious. The Sabang II RIC plans to expand their egg production by acquiring additional RTL chickens, further tapping into nearby markets.

Additionally, they are exploring eco-friendly solutions by considering the purchase of a vermicompost machine to process chicken manure into organic fertilizer, transforming waste into valuable resources.

Currently, the group employs rice hulls to manage the moisture in chicken manure, effectively controlling odors and demonstrating their commitment to sustainable practices.

The story of the Sabang II RIC is one of resilience, community, and empowerment. As they cluck towards greater success, their journey serves as an inspiring testament to what can be achieved when a group of determined individuals comes together with a shared goal.

With the support of local programs like SAAD, and the strength of their diverse community, the women of Brgy. Sabang II are not just producing eggs—they are crafting a beaming future for themselves and their families.





Seeds of Hope: Cultivating a Brighter Future for the Manobo Dulangan Tribe

by Jericho Jhon Palawan | REGION 12

At the heart of Sultan Kudarat where the mountains embrace the hopes and dreams of the Manobo Dulangan Indigenous People of Sitio Mudti, Brgy. Chua, Bagumbayan, a new chapter is being written under the guidance of Michael Guinta Kasa.

"Leadership isn't just about guiding—it's about inspiring people so they can find their own way," said Mr. Kasa, a beacon of strength and vision for his tribe.

Returning from college to take up the mantle after his father's passing, Kasa chose a life dedicated to the progress of his people. As the President of the Sitio Mudti Salatan Manobo Dulangan Rural Workers Association, he now leads 60 members with a clear and zealous vision for the future. "It's not enough to hope for change; we must be the ones to create it," he reflects. His words resonate deeply within his community.

Through the Department of Agriculture - Special Area for Agricultural Development (SAAD) Program Soccsksargen, the association received 60 bags of corn seeds, 180 bags of fertilizers (comprising 60 bags of Complete fertilizer and 120 bags of Urea), 33 goats (including 3 bucks and 30 does), and corn sheller that contribute to the association's income, and the members no longer need to spend money to have their corn shelled at the center in Brgy. Chua. This assistance has already borne fruit, as the entire association has planted the corn seeds, and the goats have already started multiplying, with 20 kids born so far.

"We plan to become a supplier of goats not only in Sultan Kudarat but throughout Region 12," said the president, highlighting the vision of the association.

Further, Kasa also serves as the Indigenous People Mandatory Representative (IPMR) of Barangay Chua, Sultan Kudarat. His dual role allows him to bridge the gap between his community and local government, ensuring that their needs and aspirations are heard and addressed.

"We must stand together, help each other, and think about how we can progress. The first thing we need to do is form associations in tribes that have not yet received assistance so they too can benefit from government programs for the betterment of the tribe. We must have initiatives to develop our tribe. Here in our community, we may be few, but we work together, especially now that SAAD has projects for us, and we find ways to grow the resources provided by SAAD," said Kasa, as he addressed his fellow tribe people encouraging them to unite and take proactive action within the association.

The story of the Manobo Dulangan Indigenous People in Sitio Mudti is a testament to the power of leadership, unity, and government support. With their determination and the resources provided, they are on a path to uplift not only their community but also serve as an inspiration to other indigenous communities across the region.



SAAD National Director listens to IP beneficiaries; monitors livelihood projects in Davao Region

In his monitoring activities last October 21, 2024 in Davao across the Department of Agriculture - Special Area for Agricultural Development (DA-SAAD) Program's regions of scope, National Program Management Office (NPMO) Director Ulysses Lustria, Jr. encouraged Banoog CAA Farmers Association and Dagohoy Abaca Farmer Association in Talaingod to "talk about their stories" and strive for their groups to create community-based enterprises (CBEs).

Lustria listened in on the groups' stories of origin and organization, what the groups had to say about the projects delivered by SAAD, and what is there for the program to do from the perspectives of the FAs.

"Sa buong Pilipinas, pinupuntahan ko po yung pwede kung puntahan. Gusto ko yung field visit, doon ako nakakakuha ng inspirasyon. Dito, makakakuha ako, mukhang maganda ang samahan ninyo. Pag pumupunta ako sa mga asosasyon, hindi ako nagtuturo...kung ano ang tama at mali, ang ginagawa ko, ako ang nakikinig. Pakikingan ko kayo. Gusto kung malaman ang istorya ninyo," said Lustria.

(I go where I can in the entire Philippines. I like field visits as I get inspiration from it. Here, I will, as I've seen your association is tight-knit. When I go to the FAs, I don't teach...what is right or wrong, what I do is listen. I will listen to you. I want to know your stories.)

Banoog CAA Farmers Association (FA) is an IP-led and IP-centric FA in Talaingod, Davao del Norte. Led by Alex M. Diabo, the group has 25 members, all descendants of the Ata-Manobo tribe. The association previously received corn and layer chicken production projects from SAAD Davao Region in 2023. The program augmented the same livelihood projects this year.

Meanwhile, Dagohoy Abaca FA is a new addition to the farmers groups benefited by the program this year. The FA will receive abaca and native chicken production projects. The association is also IP-led and -membered, of the Ata-Manobo tribe and has 25 members.

Previously, Lustria checked in with Regional Executive Director and SAAD Davao Region Focal Macario Gonzaga and Regional Technical Director for Operations and SAAD Davao Region Assistant Focal Marie Ann Constantino to discuss the intricacies of implementation in the region, especially in far-flung areas inhabited by mostly Indigenous Peoples (IP).

SAAD is a locally-funded program geared towards poverty incidence reduction in far-flung communities of the country and is implemented in 15 regions, except National Capital Region (NCR) and Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

by James Brian Flaga | REGION 11

"Pasalamat mi sa DA ug SAAD nga naabot diri ang tabang sa gobyerno. Among ginahimo sa among asosasyon karon, ginapalambo kay naa na man ang mga proyekto," Alex Diabo, chairperson for Banoog CAA FA in Talaingod, said.

(We are grateful for DA and SAAD in their work to make the government's help be felt here. What we do now with our association is that we want it to flourish and develop.)

In the forum with Dagohoy Abaca Farmers Association, Talaingod Municipal Agriculturist Dexter May-as announced that the FA has been chosen as the lead association for abaca production in the municipality under the agency's regional Farm and Fishers Clustering and Consolidation (F2C2) program.

"Natutuwa ako na magiging pilot ng F2C2 itong abaca nila. Sana mas madami pang mga programa ng ahensiya ang makatulong dito," Lustria added.

(I'm delighted that this FA will be an F2C2 pilot for abaca. We hope that more of the agency's programs will extend their help here.)

Previously, the municipality of Talaingod experienced a critical scare on their abaca production due to the proliferation of abaca-daratex fibers, to which Lustria coincidentally helped troubleshoot in his short stint as Deputy Director for the Philippine Fiber Industry Development Authority (PhilFIDA).

"Gitagaan mi ug abaca, kanding, ug manokan, pero makaingon gihapon ko nga tungod sa kawadon sa kinabuhi diri, kulang gihapon nga para among mga kabataan makapadayon ug pangeskwela," Lito Bog-ot, chairperson for Dagohoy Abaca Farmers Association, emphasized.

(We've been given abaca, goats, and chickens, but I can honestly and truly say that because of how extreme the state of poverty here, it's still not enough for our children to go to tertiary schools.)

In its Phase 2 of implementation, the Program is designed to create community-based enterprises (CBEs) from the far-flung communities and FAs it benefits. CBEs answer the question of how these doled-out livelihood projects attain longevity and sustainability after the program eventually terminates.



Betterment of lives: ZamSur beneficiaries reflect on SAAD Program’s impact for 2024

by Aimee Lou D. Madjus | REGION 9

To truly measure the success of a government program or initiative, it is imperative to consider its impact on the lives of its beneficiaries. While program design and execution are crucial, the ultimate measure of success lies in the program's resonance with the people it aims to serve.

A recent example of this approach is the year-end assessment conducted by the Department of Agriculture - Special Area for Agricultural Development (DA-SAAD) Program Phase 2 Region 9 from October 22 to 31, 2024.

Two hundred forty farmers from 16 recipient groups across Zamboanga del Sur shared their insights on the SAAD projects they received, their associations, and the program as a whole.

By actively listening to the feedback of these beneficiaries, SAAD implementers gained valuable insights into the program's impact and identified areas for improvement. This human-centered approach ensures that the program remains relevant, effective, and aligned with the evolving needs of the farming community.

One success story is the Kapamanok Rootcrops Farmers' Association (KRFA) from the municipality of San Pablo. As a beneficiary of the FY 2023 Corn Production Project, KRFA has already experienced increased yields and income.

KRFA member Ms. Nelcilsa Aya-ay shared the profound impact of the program on her life as a farmer. After earning a gross income of Php 41,840 from selling 4,148 kilograms of yellow corn at Php 10 per kilo last August this year. "Sauna sa bata pa lang ko, mag-uuma na gyud mi pero sa pagkatinuod, naundang ko ug uma mga pila ka tuig tungod sa kamahal sa palaliton, wala na koy i-kapital. Pero katong naapil ko sa SAAD, gihatagan ko ug dakong grasya sa Ginoo nga ipa-balik ko sa pag-uma ug maka income ug dako-dako."

(Since I was a child, farming is the only means of living I know, but I had to stop farming for a few years because the cost of supplies was too high and I didn't have enough capital. However when I joined the SAAD program, it was a huge blessing from God that allowed me to return to farming and earn a better income.)

Ms. Nelcilsa is now eagerly anticipating another bountiful harvest of yellow corn this December. The KRFA has also accumulated Php 91,924 in savings, the result of a rollover scheme in which each bag of fertilizer provided by the program is paid Php 500 after each harvest. This system allows the association to build its financial stability, even though the project is managed individually.

Meanwhile, the Kilusang Pagbabago Kabatan FA (KPKFA) from the municipality of V. Sagun has just begun to reap the rewards of their banana production project.



After diligently cleaning the area and wrapping the fruit to protect it from pests and damage, the farmers have seen the positive results. KPKFA Treasurer Mr. Charlito Lanutan shared his experience in managing the bananas.

"Dako namong kalipay kay karon ra mi kasinati nga sinaw kaayo ang saging kay pinutos, ug gailogan gyud ang saging sa mamalitay. Ang SAAD ra gyud ang nakahatag og kaayohan kay sa history, wala pa gyud mi kadawat og programa sa gobyerno nga amumahon gyud mi sugod sa pagporma sa asosasyon, di pa gyud mi byaan hangtod ma-siguro nga molungtad amoang proyekto," he said.

(We are very happy because now we get to experience how smooth our bananas are because they're properly protected, and they are in high demand from buyers. It's only the SAAD program that has brought us this livelihood because, in the past, we've never received any government support that truly cared for us. From the formation of our association, SAAD will never leave us until the project's success is secured.)

On the other hand, the Poblacion Tigbao Farmers Association (PTFA) President Mr. Dante Miral shared the harsh reality of being a farmer with no capital.

"Sa wala pa ang SAAD, makautang gyud mi una ayha maka tanom, unya controlled ang presyo sa supplier ang among produkto kay sila ra man pud ang gapalit. Karon nahatagan mi og libre nga binhi ug abono, igo na lang gyud mi mag kugi, unya tabangan pa gyud mi ug baligya sa among abot, maong dako gyud kaayo og kabag-ohan para namo'ng uyamot nga mag-uuma," he stated.

(Before SAAD, we had to borrow money before we could plant, and the price of our products was controlled by the supplier since they were the only ones buying from us. Now, we are given free seeds and fertilizers from SAAD, all we need to do is work hard, and they even help us sell what we harvest. This has brought a huge change for us poor farmers.)

It's also worth noting that PTFA has Php 55,000 in savings in its association's bank account, which has been accumulated from corn production and the income generated from their corn sheller.

Aside from the farmers, local government units (LGUs), through the municipal agriculture offices, expressed their appreciation for the program's contributions to the agricultural sector. Ms. Nasaria Gavin, the Sominot Municipal Agriculturist, spoke highly of the program.

"Special gyud kaayo ang programa kay gihatagan mo sa tanan inputs except inyong effort. Sa napulo ka tuig nga nagtrabaho ko sa munisipyo sa agrikultura, karon pa mi kasinati aning programa nga ingani ka daghan ang gihatag," he expressed.

(This program is really special because it provides all the inputs, except for our effort. In the ten years I've worked in the municipal agriculture office, this is the first time we've experienced a program that gives so much support.)

The Municipal Agriculturist of Tabina, Mr. Joy Pati-an, also highlighted the program's significant role in improving the livelihoods of farmers.

"Diri gyud nato makita unsa ka seryoso ang national government agency pinaagi sa SAAD program, nga nagtinguha og kalambuan sa mga mag-uuma sa nasud." (Through the SAAD program, we can truly see how serious the national government agency is in aiming for economic prosperity for the farmers in the country.)

The stories shared by the participants during the year-end assessment reflect the deep and lasting impact of the program on their livelihoods. The program's holistic approach, which includes facilitating savings schemes, offering technical assistance, and ensuring market access, is pivotal in creating sustainable agricultural enterprises. It also emphasizes the importance of community-driven solutions, where farmers are not only beneficiaries but active participants in shaping the future of their associations.

As the program continues to evolve, it is clear that its success is measured not just in the numbers of projects implemented but in the tangible improvements in the lives of farmers. By listening to the beneficiaries, understanding their needs, and adapting to their feedback, the DA-SAAD Program remains a critical component in the government's efforts to achieve agricultural sustainability and poverty alleviation in rural communities.

Leading with purpose: Laguna woman leads group of vegetable farmers toward growth, unity

by Pamela Faith Garcia | CALABARZON REGION

In the rural fields of Rizal, Laguna, Jonna Royo, 39, has taken the helm of a group of vegetable farmers. As the president of the San Miguel Arkanghel Pook Vegetable Farmers' Association, Jonna has transformed a group of 52 local farmers into a cohesive and forward-thinking collective.

Established in March 2021, the association is one of the beneficiaries of the Department of Agriculture - Special Area for Agricultural Development (SAAD) Program in CALABARZON and is currently under the Social Preparation Component.

Jonna Royo's journey into farming leadership wasn't a conventional one. Previously, she worked in merchandising, but her life took a new direction when she married Mario Royo Jr., a local in Rizal, Laguna.

As a mother of four, she quickly immersed herself in the community, building connections with local farmers and also ventured into agriculture through planting bitter melon (ampalaya). She learned through observing, online resources and participating in various training programs available near her. Her experience in farming led her to champion agricultural development.

As she pursues agricultural livelihood, Jonna recognized that traditional farming practices, though valuable, needed innovation and a more strategic approach.



“Nakita ko na paulit-ulit lang ang nangyayari sa amin – magtatanim, aani, tapos ulit na naman. Nais ko sana makita na mas mapaunlad ang buhay naming magsasaka. Nagsimula kami sa pagbuo muna ng samahan,” she explained.

(I noticed that the same cycle kept repeating—plant, harvest, and then repeat. I wanted to see real progress in the lives of the farmers in our area. As a first step, we formed an association.)

Leveraging her background in merchandising, Jonna understood that individual efforts alone wouldn't yield lasting change. She advocated for unity and community collaboration, encouraging farmers to form a formal association to enhance their collective bargaining power.

“Mas malakas kasi ang boses naming kung sama-sama kaming lalapit sa mga institusyon para suportahan ang aming kabuhayan,” said Jonna.

Her leadership was instrumental in establishing the San Miguel Arkanghel Pook Vegetable Farmers' Association, which has since become a vital platform for local farmers seeking to improve their livelihoods.

When asked on how she manages the association, she emphasized transparency, community involvement, and capacity building. Additionally, the concept of bayanihan remains as the center of their efforts as they regularly conduct community service to ensure the cleanliness and unity of their community. She values the opinion of the members and consults the barangay government unit and the municipal agriculture office to improve the status of their association.

Under Jonna's leadership, the San Miguel Arkanghel Pook Vegetable Farmers Association is poised to make a significant impact on the community. Through empowerment, collaboration, and sustainable practices, they are paving the way for a brighter future for local farmers.

And with community organizing training and profiling completed, SAAD-CALABARZON targets to provide interventions to boost vegetable production and draft animals. A budget proposal of Php 811,000 is being prepared for 2025 to support food production and livelihood components.

SAAD's way of farmer empowerment: Multifaceted approach for a harmonious community

by Nicole C. Zarsuelo | CALABARZON REGION

In a small community in the religious town of Pakil, Laguna, a group of coconut farmers, the Banilan Farmers Association (BFA), have been facing numerous challenges on their livelihoods and stability. Relying primarily on coconut farming, most members are landless laborers struggling with low coconut prices and lack of alternative income sources.

One of their members, John Dhelmar Lagurin, a 34-year-old farm worker, has been experiencing the same obstacles head on while fulfilling his roles as a father, husband, and a community leader. As the primary provider for his family, his days are filled with the physical demands of harvesting coconuts. Additionally, he shoulders the responsibilities of being both mother and father, raising his two siblings while his wife works in a factory in Batangas City.

Despite these challenges, Dhelmar perseveres, backed by the Department of Agriculture (DA) - Special Area for Agricultural Development (SAAD) Program's commitment to empowering small-scale farmers like him. His dedication to his family, community, and the association's growth reflects the multifaceted approach of the SAAD Program to agricultural development.

Recognizing the unique challenges faced by the farmers in marginalized areas, the program strategizes and implements livelihood projects tailored to their specific needs.

Designed to foster sustainable and maximized beneficiary development, the SAAD Program operates through four key components: Program Management, Social Preparation, Food Production and Livelihood, and Marketing Assistance and Enterprise Development. These components work together to assist beneficiaries in food sustenance, creating livelihood opportunities, and improving socio-economic conditions.

The Program Management component ensures efficient and effective program implementation, while the Social Preparation component empowers beneficiaries through needs assessments, training, and collaboration with partner agencies. Food Production and Livelihood provide tailored projects, ranging from animals and crops to post-production inputs, to enhance agricultural productivity. Finally, the Marketing Assistance and Enterprise Development component helps communities create enterprises by establishing market linkages and providing technical and logistical support.



BFA is currently in the Social Preparation phase, having completed Participatory Rural Appraisal, Community Organizing, and Database Profiling. These activities helped identify needs, strengthen the association, and assess the eligibility of farmers for the program. Based on these assessments, the farmers have expressed a desire to diversify their income by incorporating vegetable production into their coconut farming activities. Vegetables have shorter growing cycles, offering more frequent harvests and a steadier income flow. Additionally, growing vegetables for home consumption will reduce their dependence on purchased produce, improving food security and saving money.

In 2025, the farmers will receive specialized training on vegetable production prior to the distribution of targeted interventions under the Food Production and Livelihood component. They will also be introduced to community-based enterprises under the Marketing Assistance and Enterprise Development component.

“Dahil sa SAAD, nabuo ang aming samahan at nagbigay ito ng daan upang magkaroon kami ng iba pang alternatibong hanapbuhay bukod sa pagniniyog na makakatulong para sa aming mga pamilya at lalo't higit sa aming komunidad.”

(We were able to form our group because of SAAD and this paved the way for us to have an alternative source of livelihood apart from coconut farming.)

By providing a multifaceted approach to development, the SAAD Program is enabling small-scale farmers to thrive and contribute to the growth and prosperity of their communities.

SAAD NPMO-LED ACTIVITIES

October – December 2024



Lustria underscores impact of SAAD's livelihood projects at 61st PSAS annual convention

by Joash David L. Ricanor

The 61st Philippine Society of Animal Science (PSAS) Scientific Meeting and Annual Convention opened last Wednesday, October 23 and welcomed esteemed speakers including Special Area for Agricultural Development (SAAD) Program National Director Ulysses J. Lustria Jr. of the Department of Agriculture (DA).

Held at the Acacia Hotel in Davao City, the convention served as a platform for exchange on advancements in animal science, agriculture, and their implications on national development.

Director Lustria graced the event as one of the plenary speakers and delivered a presentation on "SAAD: Creating Livelihood and Poultry Enterprises for the Marginalized Filipino Communities." He underscored SAAD's role in transforming vulnerable communities into empowered contributors to the country's agricultural landscape through sustainable enterprises.

In his address, the SAAD chief shared the success stories of farmers who have benefited from SAAD's livelihood projects from Phase 1 and Phase 2, particularly focusing on livestock and poultry production. "Livestock and poultry farming helped in increasing their incomes, decreasing hunger incidence and poverty," emphasized Lustria.

SAAD's efforts in providing inputs, marketing assistance, and capacity-building initiatives in livestock and poultry production have significantly improved income generation for smallholder farmers since its inception in 2016.

He further discussed the ongoing initiatives under SAAD Phase 2, now centered on expanding farmer associations into community-based enterprises, enabling more marginalized communities to participate in local food systems and value chains.

In closing, Director Lustria reiterated the Program's continuous commitment to uplifting marginalized Filipino communities through strategic agricultural projects that enhance food security and foster economic independence. He expressed the hope that the SAAD will be continued as a regular program in order to reach more partner-beneficiaries.

Lustria's talk was well-received, particularly his focus on building enterprises that utilizes science and technology as well as sustainable agricultural practices that directly benefit those most in need.

The Department of Agriculture's (DA) Assistant Secretary for Livestock Constante J. Palabrica (represented by Bureau of Animal Industry Director Diosamia M. Sevilla), gave the keynote message.

The convention also gathered leading professionals in animal science, researchers, and policymakers, providing a valuable forum for collaboration. The PSAS was led by President Dr. Claro N. Mingala and Vice-President and President-elect Dr. Elpidio M. Agbisit Jr. University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) professor Dr. Rommel C. Sulabo, UPLB researcher Dr. Yusuf A. Sucol, and Philippine Carabao Center Executive Director Dr. Liza G. Battad also joined in the plenary session.

Send-off to a Social Development Leader: SAAD NPMO celebrates the legacy of Deputy Director Dr. Pedro S. Dumaraos Jr.

by Joash David L. Ricanor

The National Program Management Office (NPMO) of the Special Area for Agricultural Development (SAAD) Program recently gathered to honor the career and contributions of Deputy Director Dr. Pedro S. Dumaraos Jr., who retired from the Department of Agriculture (DA) last October 24, 2024.

The send-off celebration yesterday, marked by heartfelt tributes and gratitude, was a fitting conclusion to Dr. Dumaraos' distinguished tenure as a key advocate for the SAAD Program and his transformative impact on marginalized agricultural communities.

SAAD National Director Ulysses J. Lustria Jr. led the event, lauding Dr. Dumaraos for his dedicated service and the deep-rooted legacy he leaves within the Program. "I wasn't wrong in letting him join the SAAD: he delivered in all his assignments; he was generous with his wisdom, his expertise on social development. I am grateful and honored to have worked with him," shared Lustria in his message.

Dr. Dumaraos joined SAAD as a Program Officer on December 1, 2022, overseeing program coordination and support services, and soon after advanced to the role of Deputy Director on January 24, 2023. Over nearly two years in leadership, he championed SAAD's social preparation component — a crucial element of the Program that strengthens the resilience, knowledge, and organizational skills of beneficiaries. His initiatives prioritized capacity-building, organizational development and organizational strengthening particularly in engaging with the farmers and fisherfolks, which have empowered farmer associations (FA) to develop sustainable agricultural enterprises and become active participants in the country's food security efforts.

Known for his inclusive leadership style, Dr. Dumaraos emphasized the importance of trust and community collaboration, empowering SAAD officers to pursue people-centered approaches and participatory strategies that make a tangible impact in addressing poverty among SAAD-covered regions.

"SAAD is more than an organization; it's a lifeline for our farmers and fisherfolk," said Dr. Dumaraos. "We have strived to give them the resources and support they need to prosper, and I am grateful to have been a part of this journey."

During the event, members of the SAAD-NPMO expressed their admiration for Dr. Dumaraos' unwavering dedication and his ability to inspire others. SAAD officers from the BFAR - Special Area for Agricultural Development Program National Program Management Support Office (NPMO) and DA-Regional Field Office (RFO) SAAD MiMaRoPa, who were also in attendance, recounted their fond memories of a leader who led with empathy and integrity.

• "For SAAD Phase 2, the social preparation will always be synonymous with the name of Doc Pete. Through him, all of SAAD Phase 2 from the NPMO, NPMO, down to the 15 RPMSOs of DA and BFAR know the importance and relevance of social preparation component in achieving success of its project implementation." (Mr. Darwin A. Pamatmat, NPMO Operational Planning, Budget Monitoring and Evaluation Unit Head)

• "Doc Pete, congratulations for graduating with flying colors. Surely, you will be missed, but rest assured your legacy, especially on social preparation, will continue. We declare good health and happiness as you enjoy this next chapter of your life." (Ms. Elymi-Ar-J S. Tuñacao, BFAR-SAAD National Focal Person, delivered by Mr. Arnel R. Valenzuela, BFAR-SAAD Alternate Focal Person)

• "We are blessed na mapabilang sa mga naturuan ni Doc Pete sa community organizing. We're thankful for everything our team has learned from him in uplifting the lives of our farmers and the communities we serve in the MIMAROPA region. To serve with all your heart, ito po ang ipinakita sa amin ni Doc Pete. Maraming salamat, Doc Pete!" (Ms. Marissa D. Vargas, SAAD MIMAROPA Regional Lead)

• "Si Doc Pete ay isang ehemplo ng isang tunay na public servant. Marami akong natutunan sa kanya during our cascading of Community Organizing Training of Trainers na kung tutulong ka sa mga magsasaka at mangingisda tulungan mona hanggang dulo. Maraming salamat din po sa mga payo, aral, at sa pagiging pangalawang tatay. Happy retirement, Doc!" (Mr. Meljun A. Florece, Executive Assistant to the Office of the SAAD Program Deputy Director)

• "My love for the farmers grew every time we visited them during our monitoring, and I enjoyed my job even more as a result of the knowledge you shared. Doc, thank you. This is not the end; rather, it is the beginning of your new journey." (Mr. Saturnino R. Palahang Jr., Executive Assistant to the Office of the SAAD Program Director)

• "Kami po sa IDD Unit ay nagpapasalamat sa lahat ng mga naituro at gabay na binigay ni Doc Pete. Isa siya sa mga itinuturing namin na tatay sa SAAD. Sana ay maipasa din namin sa iba pang magiging IDD staff ang mga bagay na ibinahagi nya sa amin. Hangad namin ang mabuti mong kalagayan sa iyong pagreretiro, Doc!" (Mr. Randy C. Ocampo, NPMO IT and Database Development Unit Head, delivered by Mr. Jerech D. Flauta, NPMO Information Technologist)

• "It has been both an honor and a privilege to have worked with a leader like Doc Pete. As for me and the whole PRDC Unit of SAAD, the best response we can give Doc Pete is to continue what he has started, most especially in the development communication aspect of our Program." (Mr. Joash David L. Ricanor, NPMO Public Relations and Development Communication Unit Head)

• "Si Doc Pete ang isa sa mga leaders na aking ina-admire sa SAAD. Lahat ng kanyang mga advice, suggestions and recommendations regarding sa aming trabaho ay hindi namin malilimutan." (Ms. Juliet F. Cruz, NPMO Admin & Procurement Unit Head)

• "Lubos ang aking pasasalamat sa pagkakataon na makilala ang isang Doc Pete sa SAAD. Habang buhay kong tatanawin na utang na loob ang bawat tulong na kanyang ibinahagi, maliit man o malaki." (Mr. Allen A. Sioson, NPMO Admin & Procurement Support Officer)

In his retirement, Dr. Dumaraos leaves behind a robust foundation in the social preparation component, one that will continue to benefit the communities SAAD serves. His legacy, imbued with resilience and dedication, remains an inspiring example of the difference that visionary leadership can make in public service.

Dr. Dumaraos concluded his address with a message of optimism, encouraging his colleagues to continue building on SAAD's mission. "The road ahead is challenging, but I have every confidence that you will carry this program forward with the same dedication and heart," he concluded. "Ipagpatuloy ninyo ang alab sa puso, at ang laban sa kahirapan."

As SAAD moves forward, the impact of Dr. Dumaraos' work will continue to be felt across the nation's most vulnerable agricultural communities, a testament to his unwavering commitment to uplifting Filipino farmers and fisherfolk. His retirement marks the end of a significant chapter for SAAD, but his legacy will be a guiding light for years to come.





SAAD IDD Assessment concludes in Tuguegarao amid Typhoon Marce

by Jennifer A. Valcobero

Despite Typhoon Marce approaching the province of Cagayan, the Department of Agriculture's Special Area for Agricultural Development (SAAD) Program pushed forward and successfully concluded its annual Information Technology and Database Development (IDD) Assessment from November 4 to 8 in Tuguegarao City.

The event centered on evaluating and enhancing data systems that support marginalized farming and fishing communities, with over 87 participants from DA-SAAD's 15 regional offices and the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) Central Office in attendance. This assessment, essential for improving SAAD's data-driven outreach, underscored the program's resilience and commitment to underserved farmers and fishers.

In his closing message, Program Director Ulysses J. Lustria Jr. highlighted the central role of reliable data in tracking SAAD's contributions, impact, and the need for improvements.

He shared how many poor farmers and fishers identified by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) have received support from SAAD. This shows that SAAD is focused on helping the most vulnerable communities by using national poverty data to reach those who need it most. The percentage he presented highlights SAAD's progress in improving the lives of these farmers and fishers and staying true to its mission of supporting underserved agricultural communities.

This support provides SAAD with renewed motivation to expand its efforts and achieve even greater progress in reducing poverty in the country's farming and fishing sector.

"To everyone who participated in this year's IDD Assessment, especially our host region, Region 2, I extend my heartfelt gratitude and congratulations. Your dedication and hard work, especially under the added pressure of Typhoon Marce, have shown how committed each of you is to the mission of SAAD. The progress you've made in data profiling, database management, and digitalization is invaluable and truly inspiring," said the SAAD chief.

As we move forward, let's keep focusing on improving data quality – ensuring accuracy, consistency, and security so we can better serve our farmers and fishers," concluded Lustria.

The assessment closed with a renewed commitment from SAAD to refine its data systems for more accurate resource distribution. With panelists' feedback and actionable insights, SAAD's regional teams are equipped to address data security, maintain communication with other departments, and standardize data handling processes. The event underscored SAAD's dedication to its mission, demonstrating that even amidst adverse weather, the program remains unwavering in its focus on data-driven solutions for the benefit of underserved farming and fishing communities.



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENTIAL ADVISER FOR POVERTY ALLEVIATION



Director Lustria highlights SAAD Program's impact at Poverty Alleviation Forum

by Christ John B. Gamarcha

In his address at the recent Collective Efforts in Poverty Alleviation Forum last November 8, 2024, organized by the Office of the Presidential Adviser for Poverty Alleviation (OPAPA), SAAD Program National Director Ulysses J. Lustria Jr. highlighted the transformative role of the Special Area for Agricultural Development (SAAD) Program in improving the lives of marginalized Filipino farmers and fisherfolk through community-based enterprises.

The forum, led by Presidential Adviser Lorenzo "Larry" G. Gadon, brought together key government officials to engage in constructive dialogue, share best practices, and explore innovative solutions to address poverty in the country.

At the heart of Director Lustria's message was SAAD's commitment to empowering rural communities, since its inception as a locally-funded program of the Department of Agriculture (DA) in 2016. He shared how SAAD has made strides toward sustainable development by addressing specific needs of farmers and fisherfolk through social preparation, technical assistance, and marketing and enterprise development. Adding that through SAAD's targeted initiatives, beneficiaries are better positioned to overcome the cycle of poverty, leading not only to personal growth but also to enhanced agricultural productivity and food security for their communities.

The SAAD chief also outlined the Program's holistic framework and components, which extends beyond mere financial assistance. He emphasized that SAAD's work goes beyond temporary assistance, creating pathways for beneficiaries to thrive independently. "The goal is not just survival but sustainability, enabling farmers and fisherfolk to scale their operations and achieve financial stability," he shared.



The goal is not just survival but sustainability, enabling farmers and fisherfolk to scale their operations and achieve financial stability



Citing studies by experts from the Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University and Central Luzon State University, he bared that farmer and fisherfolk beneficiaries experienced a substantial increase in income after participating in Phase 1.

And as SAAD moves forward with Phase 2, which runs from 2023 to 2028, the importance of effective project management, strong partnerships, and sustainable livelihood strategies continue to be vital for the Program's success.

"There is still much work to be done. Based on 2021 PSA data, 2.37 million farmers and 348,280 fisherfolk remain below the poverty line. Through SAAD, we aim to assist 7.31% of poor farmers and 42.94% of poor fisherfolk by 2028," added Lustria.

Concluding his address, the Director recalled what DA Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said on the Program's pioneering role in reaching remote communities. "During Phase 1, DA-SAAD was the first state agency to reach these areas. Imagine what we can achieve with continued implementation."

Also present at the forum to share their insights and best practices were representatives from the Asian Development Bank (ADB), National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), Department of Health (DOH), Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth), and Department of Trade and Industry (DTI). DA's Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Program Director Annray V. Rivera was also present to share about the Department's other initiatives.

These figures demonstrate SAAD's focused efforts to address rural poverty and promote inclusive development through targeted livelihood interventions.

The SAAD chief also highlighted in his report the key learnings from 2024, focusing on strategic areas to strengthen the SAAD Program. He emphasized the importance of, 1) applying a poverty lens to precisely target areas and beneficiaries, ensuring interventions are relevant and impactful, 2) a comprehensive package of interventions, encompassing end-to-end support from production to marketing, supported by specialized training, 3) social preparation in promoting ownership, conducting needs assessments, and building capacity among beneficiaries, 4) an on-the-ground presence, with area coordinators providing regular monitoring and technical assistance, 5) effective project management, including robust monitoring, evaluation, and database systems, 6) development communication for fostering transparency and awareness, 7) and partnerships with Local Government Units (LGUs), government agencies, academe, donors, and private sector. These are all crucial for collaborative success, while sustainability plans were highlighted as pivotal to ensuring long-term program impact.

The five-day activity focused on improving program implementation and enhancing teamwork. It also served as an opportunity to introduce the incoming Deputy Director, Mr. Elmer R. Esplana who joins the program in its mission to support marginalized farmers and fisherfolk across the country.

Following this, the NPMO Units including the National Program Management Support Office (NPMO) of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) presented this year's accomplishments and plans and proposals for next year.

Operations, Planning, Budget, Monitoring, and Evaluation (OPBME) Head Darwin Pamatmat reported on the farming sector's financial performance under the FY 2024 General Appropriations Act (GAA). As of November, the central office and its 15 regional operating units have obligated Php 874.23 million, representing 79.86% of the Php 1.09 billion total budget. Of this obligated amount, Php 546.88 million (or 62.56%) has been disbursed.

For the fishery sector, as of October 31, 2024, Php 446.295 million (or 91.69%) of its Php 486.75 million FY 2024 GAA has been obligated. From this, Php 357.81 million (or 80.17%) has been disbursed. These funds supported various activities and projects, including 503 social preparation activities benefiting 481 groups, the implementation of 471 livelihood projects for 496 groups, and 80 market-related trainings for 80 fisherfolk groups.

In 2025, the PRDC Unit will begin implementing its approved communication guidelines, as outlined in DA Administrative Order No. 15 series of 2024, which was signed by Secretary Tiu Laurel Jr. This initiative aims to streamline communication efforts across the program, ensuring consistency and alignment with the overarching goals and objectives. The guidelines will serve as a key tool in enhancing internal and external communication strategies, promoting transparency, and improving overall program effectiveness as the Unit moves forward in its operations.

As of December 2 this year, the Unit already published 525 press releases from its 720 target. The remaining 27% will be accomplished by the end of the month. It has printed 3 quarterly issues of its news magazine, conducted three clusters of DevComm Training (Part 1), National Information Officers' (IO) Conference, produced special features for the vulnerable sectors, bulletins, and photo releases.

For next year and onwards, the PRDC will continue its IO Conference, continuous capacitation of the officers through Development Communication (Part 2) training, while also proposing to add more awareness campaign materials such as pull-up banners, comics, flyers, brochures, pull-up banners, and tarpaulins, on top of the Unit's staple production.

SAAD NPMO reflects on 2024 milestones, preps for 2025 goals in Year-end Assessment

by Jennifer A. Valcobero

The National Program Management Office (NPMO) of the Department of Agriculture - Special Area for Agricultural Development (DA-SAAD) conducted its Physical and Financial Year-End Assessment from December 2 to 6, 2024, bringing together its units and sub-units to review the year's accomplishments, address challenges, and plan strategies for the coming year.

In his opening message, Director Ulysses J. Lustria Jr. underscored the Program's commitment to uplifting the livelihoods of the marginalized farmers and fisherfolk. As outlined in the SAAD's 2023 to 2028 roadmap, it could provide assistance to 173,480 farmers, representing 7.31% of the 2.37 million poor farmers nationwide (PSA 2021 data). For fisherfolk, the program could support 149,590 individuals, which accounts for 42.94% of the 348,280 identified as poor (PSA 2021 data).



IDD Head Randy Ocampo presented an update on the status of the SAAD Phase 2 server, detailing recent changes and ongoing improvements. He emphasized that the Unit will continue to carry out regular updates and maintenance to ensure the server’s optimal performance. Additionally, the team is working on the Market Mapping for Marketing Assistance and Enterprise Development, which is crucial for enhancing market access for SAAD beneficiaries. Ocampo also recommended transitioning to a cloud server as part of the strategy to improve scalability, data management, and overall efficiency, aligning with the program's long-term technological goals.

The Administrative and Procurement Unit will continue fast-tracking document processing for purchase requests - ensuring compliance with procurement guidelines, streamlining internal processes, and maintaining a smooth workflow, ultimately speeding up the approval and processing to ensure timely procurement and avoid disruptions in operations.

The SPPM Sub-unit continuously conducted a series of activities that helped identify the basic and complex needs of its target beneficiaries - serving as the baseline for the beneficiaries social and economic improvement relative to agriculture and fisheries. These activities encompass various needs assessment, training of trainers (TOTs) on community organizing and organizational development, and rollouts. These events will be carried out for 2025 while also proposing to add more activities such as social preparation monitoring and evaluation, and SAAD PMO evaluation to cater the 15 regional operating units of the program.

One of the major contributors in financial utilization is the physical accomplishment data in terms of the delivery of goods and service to the beneficiaries of the program. As of November 30, 97.4% was accomplished which means that 611 livelihood projects were initiated - 83 for corn, 258 for high-value crops, 94 for livestock, and 176 for poultry, benefiting 682 group beneficiaries with 17,064 members. In terms of fully implemented projects, 166 were completed. This included 13 projects for corn, 84 for high-value crops, and 69 for livestock and poultry benefited by 166 groups with 3,652 members.

Additionally, out of the 10,498 targeted farmers to be trained, 14,356 farmers received various commodity-based training.

In terms of conducting market related activities to assist and support the provided livelihood projects to help covered beneficiaries develop into enterprises to sustain source of income and improve their socio-economic status, the MAED Sub-unit already accomplished 429 market-related training to 409 groups with 9,219 members.

For FY 2025, the program targeted 209 community-based enterprises (CBEs) to be established by 209 groups with 5,686 members. Further activities on entrepreneurship and human resource management, accounting and finance, marketing training, capacitation of regional IDD staff on the tool used for market mapping, and the conduct of the monitoring and evaluation and audit on the established partial CBEs of the regions, are being proposed for next year.

For the fishery sector, a total of 503 social preparation activities were conducted, 471 livelihood projects implemented, and 82 market-related trainings were done as of October 31. This data accounted for the 91.69% or Php 446.295 million obligation and 80.17% or Php 357.809 disbursement status from the Php 486.75 FY GAA for BFAR-SAAD.

Moreover, several activities will also be conducted and proposed for the NPMO PRDC, IDD, and OPBME Units for next year.

Strengthening collaboration among NPMO Units and Sub-units, and BFAR-NPMO was among the main highlights of the assessment. This is deemed important to ensure smooth and effective program implementation.

By working together, sharing ideas, and solving problems as a team, each unit can contribute to the success of the program. This teamwork helps provide better support for farmers and fishers, making sure their needs are met and challenges are addressed on time. Through unified efforts, the program can create a bigger and more positive impact on rural communities.



Meet our Team

Let's get to know our SAADvocacy members.

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about SAADvocacy

SAADvocacy is previously a monthly newsletter produced by the SAAD Program to provide an overview and information on the program’s important activities and events toward realizing its goal of contributing to poverty reduction of farmers and fisherfolk groups in the 56 provinces (619 municipalities with 5th-6th income classification, and top third with highest poverty incidence rates) covered by SAAD.

This 2024, the Program is transitioning from a newsletter to a magazine format, all while retaining the same name but instead of monthly, changing it to quarterly. The motivation behind this potential shift is to enhance the overall reader experience, providing a more comprehensive and visually engaging content while maintaining the familiarity associated with SAADvocacy.

The Editorial Board reserves the right to edit and finalize all stories prior to publication.

For comments and suggestions, reach us at (02) 8929-7349 or via email address at saad@da.gov.ph.





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