

# Mobilizing Upland Farm Support Programs



*Local governments can enable upland farmers become partners in watershed protection by helping them improve farm productivity while adopting environmentally sound land management practices.*

## Delivering Services Where They Matter Most

Close to a quarter of the country's population live in the upland or hilly areas which include the upper portion of locally important watersheds. Upland farmers constitute the largest component of this upland population. They make decisions every day, which on the aggregate, eventually affect the overall situation of watersheds and those dependent on its resources. These include lowland farmers, water districts, coastal fishermen, and even upland farmers themselves. The effects of farmers' actions are visible in the degree of soil erosion, protection or extraction of forest cover, productivity of springs, and intensity of floods.

Decisions by upland farmers lead to practices such as kaingin, intensive cultivation, application of pesticides, or the incorporation of perennial crops in the farming system. For most farmers, the main consideration in making these decisions is the need to provide for the daily subsistence needs of their family.

Given limited resources, there is no doubt that local government units (LGU) need to build creative partnerships with their upland farmers as co-stewards of the watershed. These partnerships must enable farmers to apply better farming practices to increase their productivity and income while protecting watershed resources.

To build partnerships, LGUs need to know better the perceived needs and aspirations of upland farmers. On this basis, they can initiate small practical innovations that are within their means. With the help of local volunteer talent, they can also develop short and long-term local action programs supporting upland farmers. These active local programs can also attract incremental support from other sectors of the locality as well as national government programs and external donors.

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## Technology

### Developing an Upland Farm Support Services Program

Organize a Local Planning Team to develop a support program for upland farmers. Their task is to conduct an appraisal of the upland farming situation and develop LGU action programs. Ideally, the team may include interested and able staff from the LGU Agriculture and Social Welfare Offices, the Community-Based Forestry Management (CBFM) of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), local academe, nongovernmental organizations (NGO), external resource organizations, and farmers' organizations. Look out for persons who can volunteer time, expertise, and effort. Provide some support for their field trips and meetings. If the LGU budget is very limited request counterpart assistance from the organizations that are interested to help. Ask the team to perform the tasks described below.

- Know the upland farmers' situation. Ask the team to choose and apply existing rapid appraisal methods in order to accomplish this task. This process includes a review of secondary data, field observation, and interview of key informants. DENR community forestry or ISF technicians and NGOs usually have access to either information or skills on these methods. Use proven facilitation tools such as Problem Tree Analysis to help farming communities identify and prioritize upland farming concerns. Pay particular attention to productivity constraints of main farm products. Know what other small farm enterprises are potentially suitable and profitable.

- Know promising practices. Identify local farmer organizations or NGOs that may be active in the area as initial interventions could start with them. Support a study tour of the planning team to other areas where successful upland farming

support programs have been successfully organized.

- Know opportunities under national programs. Organize dialogues with national government agencies to determine the type and scope of national programs that can be potentially customized to meet farmers' priorities.

- Present the results of the appraisal to a multi-sectoral gathering such as the local Agriculture and Fishery Council (AFC). With the help of a facilitator, build consensus so that participants agree on key strategies, immediately doable action programs, and corresponding budget priorities. Read *Local Governance Technical Notes on Watershed Management (LGTN-WSM) Notes 4-1999 on Building Consensus for Watershed Management*.

- Where possible replicate the consensus building workshop at the barangay level. This will help barangay leaders make their share of the IRA more responsive to priorities articulated by their farmers.

- Activate and regularly convene multi-sectoral support bodies such as the Environment and Natural Resources Council (ENRC) or the Agriculture and Forestry Councils. Ensure that the upland farm support program is in their agenda so that they can help provide direction and serve as catalyst for assistance from national programs, external donors, and the private sector.

- To augment LGU funds, support studies and actions that help generate financing for farm-soil erosion control and activities that encourage local water districts to set aside funds for watershed protection.

- In collaboration with the Regional Office of Agriculture or the Provincial Environmental and Natural Resources Office (PENRO), determine the needs of local community forestry or agricultural technicians so they can provide more effective technical assistance. Identify short and long-term measures to improve their ability to extend services to upland farmers.



Photo courtesy of ICRWF.

*Upland farmers usually maintain indigenous self-help organizations that LGUs can assist to better address farming concerns. An example is the LGU support to "landcare" associations in Claveria, Misamis Oriental.*



## Policy and Practice

### Enabling Framework

Republic Act No. 7160, the Local Government Code, mandates LGUs to protect and promote the general welfare of its citizens, including resources such as forests, soil, and water resources which support their livelihood. It also requires that agricultural support services are put in place to support community livelihood.

The Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization Act (AFMA), RA No. 8435, and its implementing rules and regu-

lations DA Administrative Order (AO) 06-1998, promote entrepreneurship in focal areas established by the Strategic Agriculture and Fisheries Development Zone. The Act also reaffirms the responsibility of LGUs in delivering direct agriculture and fishery extension services. Specifically, provincial governments shall take responsibility in integrating the operations for the agriculture extension services and shall undertake an annual evaluation of municipal extension programs.

Executive Order (EO) 263, establishes Community-Based Forest Management (CBFM) as the forestry sector strategy for upland development. It seeks to provide preferential option to forest user groups such as upland farmers with vested rights and are actually occupying and using forestlands to be provided with tenure. The strategy argues that sustainable land use can only be achieved when linked with appropriate tenurial arrangements.

### Practices That Are Working

In Claveria, Misamis Oriental, the municipality promotes self help initiatives for different upland farmer groups and forest occupants who till open upland areas and benefit from the remaining forests. The support provides an enabling working environment and proactive technical assistance to these groups.

The LGU provides active support to a farmer-driven "landcare" movement to help the upland farming sector. This movement involves approximately 200 village-based land care groups with membership of several thousand households. Through these groups, farmers help one another in testing and applying effective land management methods particularly in soil conservation and integrating perennial crops into their

farming systems. The landcare groups have developed their own agenda and are based on neighborhoods.

The LGU provides technical and organizational assistance to the landcare groups. Technical assistance includes farmers' training and advice in the production of good quality planting materials. Organizational support includes facilitating the dialogue of farmer groups. The LGU has promulgated local ordinances that provide a range of incentives leading to the widespread adoption of soil and water conservation technologies. For instance, farmers who adopted soil and water conservation approaches are given priority in receiving other farmer assistance development services. The local government also taps

the support of external organizations such as research institutions to provide technical advice and help set up trials on improved farm practices based on farmer priorities.

The municipality also engages forest communities as partners in protecting the remaining forests. Together with the DENR, the LGU helps organize the communities and assists them secure forest management agreements with the government. This agreement guarantees their right and responsibility to manage and use forest resources in an environmentally sound manner. With these agreements, forest communities are better motivated to help protect remaining forests. The farming sector also benefits from better protection of forests.

The recently prepared Philippine Watershed Management Strategy has recommended the case of the Municipality of Claveria as a model for building a community-based and LGU-assisted approach to sustainable upland agriculture and natural resource management. Leaders in the agriculture sector are increasingly looking at Claveria as a source of insights for improving the farm research and extension system. Based on the Claveria experience, extension agents move from the role of teacher to that of facilitator of farmer group initiative.



*The Municipality of Claveria supports its farmer organizations with good quality planting materials and links them with helpful research and extension support institutions.*



## LGU Action Agenda

### Other Initiatives

In Lantapan, Bukidnon, the municipality's Natural Resources Management Council (NRMC) consulted its farmer organizations to develop and launch a farmer support program. The farmer support program helps farmers test and apply simplified soil erosion control measures such as natural vegetative strips (NVS) which is less labor intensive than the Sloping Agriculture Land Technology (SALT). A trained farmers' group earns income by producing good quality forest tree seeds for various reforestation projects nationwide.

In Arakan, Cotabato, the ENRC composed of very active LGU, NGO, and people's organization representatives marshaled local resources to take control of the local watershed and set up a small farmer agroforestry program. The ENRC catalyzed the formation of barangay level ENRCs to implement the program at the grassroots level.

### What You Can Do

Depending on the priority needs identified by farmers, LGUs can provide a range of practical support actions to upland farmers. Start in active farming communities and expand to others.

- Organize a cross visit by farmer leaders to nearby farming communities successfully applying good practices such as agroforestry. Assume some of the visit costs while farmers can bring food if needed. Assign a facilitator to ensure productive interaction.
- With the help of the Department of Agriculture (DA) and DENR, make good quality planting materials available especially for perennial crops desired by farmers. Support small private nurseries run by entrepreneurial community groups with members who have the proverbial "green thumb." This is more sustainable than large municipal central nurseries. Provide training in nursery management, identify good mother trees, provide small "in kind" loans for vital materials such as plastic bags, and buy their products for the LGU's tree parks or reforestation programs.
- With the help of cooperating farmers, the local DA office, or agricultural colleges, help set up key farm trials and demonstrations in farmers fields.
- With the help of the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) or DENR, facilitate the preparation of appropriate security of tenure agreements for communities or individuals. Initially, this will involve helping organize community meetings to prepare preliminary community maps.
- Identify existing off-farm enterprises that can be improved further such as indigenous mat making. Invite resource persons to help improve product design and marketing.

### Resources and References

Maps and other secondary information may be obtained from the DA, DENR, local colleges, and other private sources. *LGTN-WSM Notes 2-1999 on Delineating the Boundaries of the Watershed Important to the Community* and *LGTN-WSM Notes 3-1999 on Knowing the Characteristics of the Community Watershed* has additional information on this topic.

To conduct rapid appraisal, the LGU may check NGOs, DENR-CBFM, or DA offices for available practitioners. The LGU may also ask the Centers for Local Governance (CLG) to facilitate participatory barangay- or municipal-level planning and budgeting workshops to encourage the allocation of more budgetary resources. You may contact any of these CLGs:

- Ateneo de Davao University,

Jacinto St., Davao City, Tel. (082) 221-2411, loc. 602, c/o Ms. Lourdes Mamaed

- Ateneo de Naga University, Naga City, Tel. (054) 473-9253, c/o Dean Alfredo Fabay

Other CLGs are listed in *LGTN-WSM Notes 4-1999 on Building Consensus for Watershed Management*.

To know about successful approaches, initiatives, or interventions that have helped upland farmers, the following sources are recommended:

- The Upland NGO Assistance Committee (UNAC) chronicles successful experiences by NGOs and people's organizations promoting sound upland agriculture. You may contact them at 52-C, San Salvador St., Loyola Heights, Quezon City, tel. (02) 436-0706.
- The *Galing Pook Awards* describes innovative upland agriculture and fish-

ery programs by several LGUs. You may call the *Galing Pook* Secretariat, Asian Institute of Management, at (02) 867-2529.

Be alert to resource organizations within your province or region that generate information on better upland farming practices or better farmer extension methods. Examples include:

- Mindanao Baptist Rural Life Center, Bansalan, Davao del Sur
- International Center for Research in Agroforestry, Claveria, Misamis Occidental

The Philippine Watershed Management Coalition conducts regular information sharing sessions on promising government and farmers' groups partnerships that help protect watersheds. Contact Ms. Jessica Salas at (033) 320-0854.