

ICOPED's Community Gardening: An Approach to Food Security and Welfare

Agriculture remains as the primary source of livelihood in the Philippines of about 11.29 million individuals, which is 29% of the national employment (PSA 2016). As of 2014, 4.23 million hectares out of 9.67 million hectares of agricultural land area are suitable for the country's major crops and other agricultural products. The said land portion is vital in agricultural production and generating sufficient food to meet the requirements of the population. For 2010-2015, the average increase in population is 1.72% annually, and with the total population exceeding 105 million, the Philippines ranks 12th among the most populous countries in the world. Thus, it can be expected that 50 million more individuals will be added by 2045. Is our country ready to generate sufficient food for this rapidly growing population?

As a strategy for food security, home or community garden has been an effective practice of individuals and community members. Galhena (2012) mentioned that home garden has been an integral part of local food systems. It was emphasized that a small garden near a house is an oldest and most enduring form of cultivation and food production systems (Niñez 1984 as cited by Galhena 2012). Community gardens are found in both urban and rural communities, which primarily enhance food production for household consumption. These gardens can supply the daily recommended requirement of vitamins, energy, and protein of a household (Nair 1993). They also replace chemical intensive fruits and vegetables into organically produced food. They provide social interaction for children and adults. Children also assist adults in gardening which can also be an effective method in encouraging them to consume more fruits and vegetables.

Citing the study of Flachs (2010) on the Social Impacts of Community Gardens in Greater Cleveland Area, gardening provides communal space for the family members to discuss farming and gardening techniques, food recipes, and cooking methods, as well as learn more about decreasing food insecurity and addressing environmental issues. It is also a learning space to other community members where they share food production manuals, literature, and experiences on gardening. It also fosters a great sense of community relationship by encouraging cooperation among household and community members.

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Last 2017, the Institute of Cooperatives and Bio-Enterprise Development piloted its community garden utilizing its available small space and materials.

Mr. Banalo and Mr. Vargas initiated the development of the said garden located beside the ICOPED Auditorium. Mr. Vargas and Mr. Rafols gathered the used bamboo from the Christmas Village to create a trellis. Mr. Banalo bought good soil from a trusted plant store while the faculty, REPS and other ICOPED staff donated and planted vegetable seeds such as iceberg lettuce, *patola*, *upo*, and cherry tomatoes.



By April onwards, they harvested the fruit of their hard work and cooperation. Through this activity, the ICOPED staff were able to develop teamwork through the development of community garden, appreciate organically grown vegetables which made them more cautious about the fruits and vegetables they buy and consume, share and gain more knowledge on farming and planting techniques, combine their vegetable and food scraps to their compost for fertilizers, and be creative and innovative in developing the community garden and utilizing the resources available in the Institute.

Mr. Banalo reflected, "*Mainam sa atin na nakakakin tayo ng mga gulay na tayo-tayo mismo ang nagtatanim kasi alam natin na safe yun. Tapos masaya na kapag tumubo, sama-sama ding matitikman yung tinanim.*" For this year, ICOPED staff target to plant more variety of fruits and vegetables such as strawberry, grape, chili, eggplant, and *okra*. They aim to sustain the initiative to eventually encourage and inspire their clientele in developing community garden in their respective cooperatives and localities.



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