

Small Leyte town to be national model for rural development

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INOPACAN, a Leyte town that's now being aided in planting jackfruit, dipterocarps and tilapia raising may become a national model for being small, but is "food secure", owing to a "ridge to reef" ecosystem-based rural development.

The socioeconomic development at Inopacan, Leyte, is being approached in a different light by the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (Searca). Inopacan is a third-class municipality with a mere 20,000 population.

Instead of identifying development sites based on political classification, a Searca project is developing Inopacan from farm areas to forests and water bodies.

The project will focus more on the agro-ecological systems of a potential project site. It will be delineated based on predetermined ecosystem using the ridge-to-reef approach or landscape continuum.

This ecosystem-based concept follows Searca's model, called Inclusive and Sustainable Agricultural and Rural Development (ISARD).

ISARD said projects in poverty-stricken areas should enable "the poorest of the poor" in rural areas to get out of poverty, Searca Director Dr. Gil C. Saguiguit Jr. said.

At the same time, these communities should contribute to conserving the environment.

The ISARD project in Leyte is in partnership with the Visayas State University, Visayas Consortium for Agriculture and Aquatic Resources Program and Inopacan's local government unit.

The ridge-to-reef model raises the success potential of a poverty-alleviation project, as communities may be easily tapped for partnerships.

Besides, use of all agricultural, rain forest and fishery resources will be maximized with the proximity of each factor of production (labor and raw materials, machines, land and management).

Demonstration farms have just been put up in the last quarter of 2016 at Inopacan. These are a vegetable farm, a tilapia fishpond and two jackfruit farms. The vegetable plot of 1,000 square meters was planted with okra, *alugbati* and eggplant.

A technology on low-cost protective cover was applied as developed in an Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research-funded project in order to protect the plants from continuous rain, which is prevalent in the areas.

The fishponds should regularly increase the income of Inopacan residents.

“The tilapia fishponds were built in sequence along a stream where crystal-clear water flowed from a nearby spring. Fingerlings were introduced from a hatchery project of the VSU supported by the district representative Rep. Jose Carlos Cari,” reported Prof. Rolando T. Bello, ISARD coordinator.

Since good drainage is needed for the excellent production of jackfruit, the jackfruit-demonstration farms were placed on sloping areas with increased elevation to allow for good drainage.

Also raised are livestock as hogs, native chicken, ducks and goats. Searca looks forward to helping expand the market of Inopacan for jackfruit since there is already an increased demand for processed jackfruit or *langka* from the nearby Leyte town Baybay.

VSU has earlier entered into agreements that would expand jackfruit markets. Its MOA with Technomart, Baybay City Vacuum Fried Jackfruit Processors (BCV-FJP) and the Green Meadows Dehydrated Jackfruit Processor (GM-DJP) will enable commercialization of jackfruit technology (vacuum fried and dehydrated jackfruit).

The MOA allows BCV-FJP and GM-DJP to use VSU’s technologies in processing vacuum fried and dehydrated jackfruit.

Searca’s project is similarly addressing problems that came out based on the Participatory and Rapid Rural Appraisal. These are inadequate irrigation system, lack of arable and fertile open farms as coconut are planted in fertile areas, youth’s disinterest in farming and low farm-gate price.

Banana products are also eyed as an additional income for the community. Banana is a staple in Leyte. Prospects to sell banana outside Leyte is also there as banana is an ingredient for breakfast cereals, which has a growing market.

Inopacan residents are being assisted on processing bananas into fried chips.

Since Leyte has seen destruction due to Super typhoon Yolanda, the Searca project is applying climate-change mitigation and adaptation strategies in Inopacan. Planting of rain-forest dipterocarp trees and other native tree species have started in order to arrest soil erosion and prevent natural disasters.

“This is part of Searca’s contribution to the post-Yolanda rehabilitation efforts in Leyte. A rain-forestation project will be implemented in the upland grassland areas. Targeted areas are the upland grassland of Barangay Linao for rain forestation, and Barangay Cabulisan for expanded vegetable production.” Several factors have been found to be key to making a development model successful. These must be found in the ISARD model—problem-solving orientation, community-based, presence of committed local institutions and leaders, and links to policy-making.

For one, the Inopacan project received assistance in various forms from different institutions. It got seedlings from the Department of Agriculture Abuyog Experiment Station in Abuyog, Leyte. It obtained a loan for these seedlings upon agreement by the growers and cooperators.

Under the ridge-to-reef concept, LGU partners are tapped when these are around a “watershed or micro watershed, lake ecosystem including its tributaries.” The concept also determines choice of beneficiaries based on landscape ecologies of upland, lowland, coastal and marine ecosystems, including ecozones.

SEARCA’s ISARD projects get small grants for technical assistance; institutional development and capacity building; knowledge management; and linkaging and networking support.

Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping and Experts Systems developed by ViCAARP will also be deployed to support the project and growers in their decision making processes.

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