



PPSA
Philippines Partnership for Sustainable Agriculture

FARMERS DIALOGUE SERIES



**farmside chat.
real stories.
farmers' solutions.**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Context	3
Design and Methodology	5
Objectives	6
Sampling Criteria / Participants	7
Findings	9
Local Solutions	10
Suggestions / Aspirations	11
Observations	12
Considerations for Improvement on various interventions for farmers	17
Scalable Local Solutions / Recommendations	18
Report Use	21

The Farmers Dialogue Series

CONTEXT

The poverty incidence among small farmers in the Philippines is very high. In 2018, the Philippine Statistics Authority reported that farmers and fisherfolks posted the highest poverty incidences among the basic sectors at 31.6% and 26.2% respectively. Moreover, the agriculture, forestry, and fishing sector account for only 10.2 percent of the country's Gross Domestic Product and 24.5 percent of the 46.59 million employed Filipinos despite the country being an agricultural nation.

Although the causes of poverty in rural areas vary, the challenges faced by smallholder farmers include vulnerability to climate change and natural calamities; unsustainable farming practices such as *kaingin* leading to deforestation, soil erosion, and depletion of soil nutrients; lack of access to farming inputs; lack of access to financing; decline in agricultural productivity; limited access to markets; and limited access to basic services in health and education.

Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the impact on both smallholder farmers and food supply chains in the country. During the height of the pandemic, the national government put in place restrictions on the movement of people and goods to minimize the transmission of the



virus. This was reported to disrupt the supply of vegetables, devastating the livelihood of many farmers in the Philippines.

While the country is already on its way to recovery, there is a need to revitalize the agriculture sector to help increase productivity, income, and sustainability. The Department of Agriculture recognized farmers' significant role in ensuring enough food supply for the country and adopted the [National Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization and Industrialization Plan \(NAFMIP\)](#) to [help cushion the impact of the global food crisis and increase the income](#) of farmers and fishers in the country.

To operationalize this, the government continues to call for the support of the public and private sectors towards increasing investments in the agriculture sector. But to help, these sectors are looking for more concrete solutions.

Thus, to aid the private and public sectors in identifying appropriate interventions, the PPSA conducted a series of strategic planning sessions with the members of its commodity and thematic Working Groups (WG), which are composed of representatives from different stakeholder groups such as the agribusinesses, government agencies, research and academic institutions, civil society organizations, and a few farmer groups. These planning sessions brought out project partnership opportunities and helped the participants agree on specific collaboration goals.

This Farmers Dialogue Series supports the outputs of the said planning sessions as it aims to help determine which development interventions should be prioritized. The sessions validated the concerns of the farmers and sought their recommendations on projects that could respond to their needs.

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY OF DATA COLLECTION

The series of farmers' dialogues was conducted virtually last October 14, 2022, and November 7, 2022. Tagalog was used as the language of interaction with occasional translation to vernacular by other participants. A careful relay of information was observed to ensure as much democracy in the session considering that there might be conflicting views.

The dialogues tackled the following areas of concern as expressed by the farmers in previous discussions. Additional discussion topics related to PPSA's planned interventions were also added to gather necessary inputs from the farmer-participants.

The sessions were thus organized based on the following thematic areas:



Agri-Tech Innovation and
Digital Agriculture



Role and
Participation
of Women in
Value Chains



Climate
Resilience and
Adaptation



Agricultural and
Value Chain
Financing



Partnerships
for Farmers'
Growth

The information gathered during the dialogues are handled with confidentiality. If names are specified, consent from the farmer-participants will be sought in case any portion of the findings will be published outside of this report.

Objectives

The goals of the FGD, as clarified during the sessions, were to provide an opportunity for the farmers to share their experiences, challenges, and suggestions; and gather insights that will help draw out action plans, enhance existing interventions, or share relevant information for research and policy enhancement purposes.

During the discussions, the facilitators observed the interaction between participants in terms of potential areas for collaboration and support systems.

Overall, the outputs of the FGDs will support the buildup of well-coordinated, effective, and productive streams of support provided to farmers to avoid duplication and promote the complementation of efforts.

Sampling Criteria

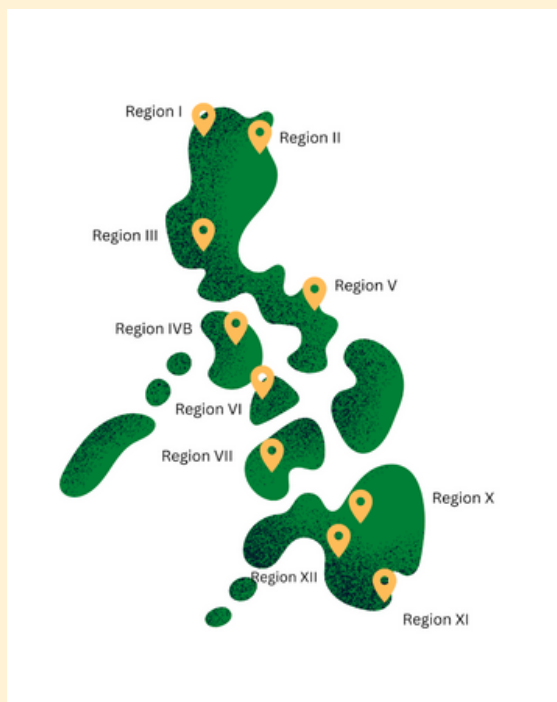
- ✓ **Men and/or women farmers, preferably women/women farmer leaders;**
- ✓ **Those who are engaged in various value chain activities (production, processing, consolidation/distribution, marketing, etc.), preferably, either working with institutional market or supplying to an entity or even local markets;**
- ✓ **Farmers who are involved in different crops/commodities;**
- ✓ **Farmers with experience accessing agri-tech, digital farming solutions or climate-smart agriculture practice; and**
- ✓ **A mix of last-mile farmers, budding farmer leaders, and entrepreneurial farmers.**

For the second leg of the FGD, the participants were grouped into three (3) to better maximize the participation of the farmers and allowed more interaction and cross-learning. The groupings for the FGD were: 1) Women in the Value Chain; 2) Agricultural Finance; and 3) Partnerships for Farmers' Growth.

Grouping Mechanics

- ✓ One (1) male per group;
- ✓ Regions with more than 1 representatives are distributed across all topics;
- ✓ Each group is composed of representatives from various regions, coming from different host organizations; and
- ✓ Other Considerations:
 - Entrepreneurial farmers were assigned to Partnerships for Farmers Growth
 - Farmers involved in value chain interventions were assigned to Women in Value Chain
 - Processors, farmers in the North (Luzon), and those sent by the DA regional offices were assigned to Financing

Participants



For the two series of dialogues, there were a total of **150 participants** from Regions I, II, III, IVB, V, VI, VII, X, XI, and XII.

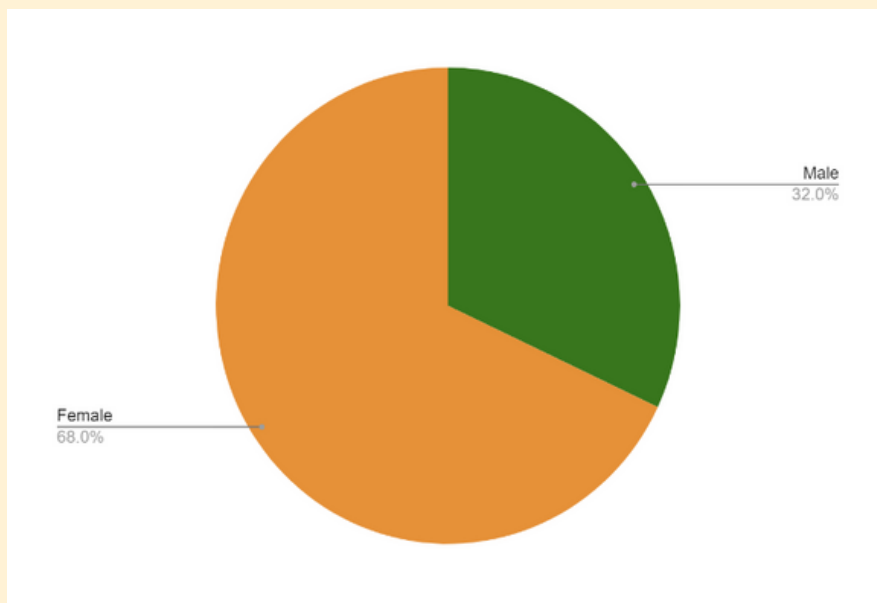
Crops grown by the participating farmers:

- rice
- vegetables
- corn
- cacao
- poultry
- hogs
- tilapia
- soybean

Fig. 1 Geographical Distribution of FGD Participants

Most of the participants were women (68%). Apart from the farmers, agronomists from PPSA partner-companies, and Gender and Development (GAD) Focal Point members from the Department of Agriculture - Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) network in the regions also joined the dialogues.

Fig. 2 Sex Disaggregation of FGD Participants



“Hindi rin basta basta nakakapasok sa mga services ng gobyerno kung walang cooperative kaya ako naging member ng multi-purpose cooperative.”

"It's not easy for farmers to access government services, especially if you are not a member of a cooperative. That's why I decided to join a multi-purpose cooperative."

FINDINGS

Most of the farmers who participated in the FGDs are those who already have access to some support services or at least found opportunities to create indigenous solutions to their challenges. Some of these solutions are already under strengthened, while some are potent for scaleup.

Access to information has been observed to be an effective lever that enabled farmers to find opportunities to participate in, benefit from, and extend solutions to their fellow farmers.

A summary of [actual responses can be found here](#).

Challenges

The challenges experienced by the farmers depended on various factors which can be categorized by either gap in capacity or other externalities such as geography, local governance, connectivity, and crops. Key challenges are summarized as follows:

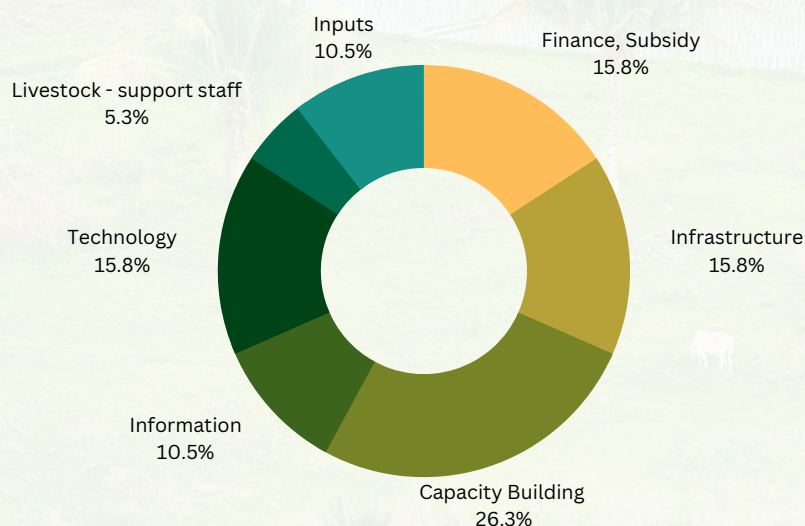


Fig. 3 Key Challenges identified by the farmers

More than these, some farmers related that they are still landless or have relatively lesser lands to till. To maximize production, they are partnering with other landowners who don't have the capacity to till their lands for either lack of agricultural knowledge or lack of facilities to do so. Hence, they are the ones planting and maintaining fields for them on a benefit-sharing basis.

Local Solutions

A summary of local solutions being implemented by the farmers are as follows:

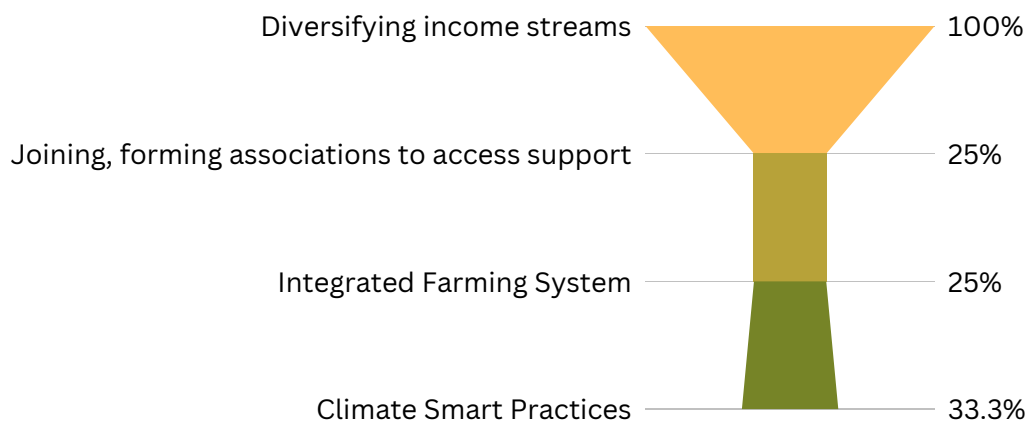


Fig. 4 Local Solutions identified during the FGD

On climate adaptation, one respondent shared about a technology shared by DOST, called '[Windy App](#)', which provides a 15-day forecast of any weather disturbance and can be used as a reference in safeguarding harvest or scheduling the planting activities.



“Ang mga assistance to small farmers programs at pagpapalago ng katutubong kaalaman - nakakalungkot na pinagbabangga - ngayon nga ay may climate change, kailangan tingnan ang katutubong kaalaman.”

"It is saddening that the current (modernization) programs for smallholder farmers and the promotion of indigenous knowledge are being projected as if one is better than the other. Now with climate change, we also need to incorporate indigenous knowledge (with science)."

Farmers' Suggested Support Interventions

On Infrastructure and facilities:

- farm-to-market roads
- machineries
- vermicomposting facilities for vegetable production
- greenhouses
- tillers

On technology and capacity development:

- financial literacy
- business management
- pricing, bookkeeping, and accounting
- farm management
- forming associations
- values formation
- social media/digital marketing
- agripreneurship
- business registration
- registration processes with the Department of Trade and Industry and Food and Drug Administration
- [KADIWA entrepreneurship](#)

“Gusto ko makakita ng paraan para masugpo ang destructive farming. Ang organic farming sa gulay at rice na napatunayan na kaya. Viable ang farming pero kailangan ang masinsin na extension work at technical assistance.”

"I hope there are ways to prevent destructive farming. Organic farming in vegetables and rice works. However, we need intensive extension work and technical assistance."

Aspirations

Some lessons derived from many farmer-oriented projects we know point to a gap between the development objectives and the aspirations and motivations of the farmers. To find some answers, this FGD attempted to ask about how farmers treat and dream about their farming life.

Here are their responses:

- They look at farming for subsistence to make ends meet.
- Some related how they managed to sustain their children's education beyond providing for their subsistence needs.
- Ironically, no one mentioned that they are being succeeded by any child in farming.
- A number of women respondents shared that they find farming as a means to contribute and live by their social obligations to help others. Farming gives them joy and health, and the opportunity to teach and be an inspiration to others.
- The women farmers signified their intention to be recognized and associated with groups to access support.



**“Marami pa rin
umaasang mga
women’s association
at farmers association
na ma-register.”**

*“There are many women’s
association and farmers
association hoping to be
registered.”*

While positive on the surface, this could indicate that the perspective of farming in the country may still be far from entrepreneurship or farming as a business, or from stabilizing food security which is the crux of most developmental investments.

However, this finding could just be one side of a prism and may require an in-depth data collection. In some experiences, this type of investigation could be managed through methodologies such as community immersion (*pakikipamuhay*) using locally practical language and social relations as it needs trust building to assimilate the farmers’ lives more than comprehending what they actually say.

OBSERVATIONS

*“It is sad to realize that farming is still not sustainable
and cannot depend on the production cycle alone.” -
Farmer-respondent*



*Income diversification is only an immediate solution
to sustaining agricultural production*

Most of the innovations shared reflect that in order to sustain, one needs to use or create different sources of income.

The participants diversified their incomes through:

- combination of household savings from other livelihoods;
- creation of new products; and
- development of innovations such as integrated farming.



Imbalance in the resources being provided by the government

- Some high-value crop farmers indicate that they are not receiving support from the government, compared to rice farmers.
- Some farmers claim that they receive facilities and tools which are not responsive to the local setting, either due to topographical/crop being cultivated or lack of extension support and know-how.
- Farmers from the north (Regions 1 and 2) are relatively more aware of how to access loan facilities and have access to support groups.
- Some farmers from the south related that opportunities for support services coming their way are piling up - some they can no longer afford to take due to absorptive capacity concerns.



Gaps in the implementation schemes of current programs

Some farmers hinted the need to 'ensure that subsidies and other government support services really go to the farmers'.

This can be linked to the expressed concern on the manner of distribution of the assistance implemented by various government agencies.



Award-giving mechanisms as effective drivers of women's leadership

Farmers find value in receiving awards and recognitions.

Insights from some of the awardees of the Search for Outstanding Rural Women (SOWR) by the Department of Agriculture (DA) present during the FGD:

- These awards helped them debunk their perceived capability limitations.
- These also opened opportunities for them to be more engaged and become entrepreneurial.

¹ Visayas and Mindanao

- These served as mechanism to strengthen their community engagement, and foster trust building with the farmers, especially the women farmers who need more support in terms of molding their agency.



Build initiatives from strength to strength – maximize bottom-up coordination to improve and innovate programs

- Effective programs started by various government agencies such as DA, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), and Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) should be sustained.
- Consider institutionalizing linking and learning among regional offices and between regional offices to national offices.

Possible gaps in this action area may best be filled by a strong collaboration with civil society organizations.

For example, some farmers related that there is a need for farm-to-market roads, which, as they explained, can be addressed by strong oversight and coordination between local functionaries and the national government, either for direct investment or by linking with other flagship programs of the national government or local governments.





Strengthen implementation of existing policies that cascades information at the local level including price watch

Generally, the findings suggest that:

- Those better-performing farmers have better access to information on market opportunities and training programs either directly from their local governments or from other informal groups.
- Giving access to information empowers farmers and enables them to have a point of reference for negotiations.



Scale up initiatives that address local self-sufficiency

The agricultural sector saw a light in the midst of the pandemic.

- The pandemic pushed the farmers to run innovations and create adaptive solutions² to survive.
- Consumers pushed themselves to learn to farm and grow their own food.
- A new market was also created for new sources of consumption beyond the traditional staple food in households, e.g., rabbit, mushroom, soybean, etc.
- New livelihood opportunities rose not only to find new streams of income but most importantly, to meet local food demand.
 - This has proven to be beneficial not just for the producers but also for stronger local economies.

²See the 'Local Solutions'.



- This also contributed to mitigating costs of distribution, making food more accessible and relatively affordable, and helping people shift to healthier food choices, sometimes organically produced goods.



Strategic targeting of beneficiaries in the design of the government programs

It was observed that strategic targeting of certain social sectors such as Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), women, and youth in the design and implementation of some government programs such as the Agrinegosyo Loan Program ([ANYO](#))³ of the Agricultural Credit and Policy Council (ACPC) was an effective driver and produced a proof of concept for budding agripreneurs. This finding can be used as a leverage in reaching out to many other farmers and help proliferate innovations in the sector.



Emerging shifts to farming

The FGD found some experiences from an emerging breed of farmers who started farming as a secondary source of income but eventually shifted fully into farming. They used to do other employment-based jobs such as OFWs, as well as, from the BPO industries shifting to farming.

³ Targeting women as beneficiaries; loaning up to PhP100,000, payable in five years with zero interest

Considerations for Improvement on various interventions for farmers

01 Integrated Farming

Proven effective in terms of developing a healthy ecosystem for vegetation, conserving water use, and maximizing waste management. However, in the livestock industry, a mix of poultry and piggery was seen as a driver in the spread of the virus.

02 Search for the Outstanding Rural Women

The awardees who participated are mostly of an older age which is reflective of the aging profile of food producers in the country. In the future, it may be good to consider adding certain criteria that reach out to younger exemplars of rural women.

03 Diversifying income source

Due to high input costs, some farmers are veering away from rice production and shifting to other crops.

Diversifying income sources by venturing into other products is still rather, a retail solution if food security is the ultimate goal of investments in the agricultural sector. To be more sustainable, it might be rather wise to support farmers in coping with their challenges, and mastering the creation of solutions to sustain the production of their crops, however, this can be done on a case-by-case basis.



Scalable Local Solutions

01 Rural Improvement Clubs in Region II

DA-Agricultural Training Institute's support to rural improvement clubs in this region reflects good outcomes based on the sharing of one farmer who established a poultry business that benefits its members by also supporting demand for poultry products locally.

02 Proliferation of Extension Work

Some local civil society organizations and key women leaders in the localities have been investing resources to extend information, teaching, and training based on various topics such as value-adding activities, regenerative agriculture practices, organic farming, biofertilizers, and Good Agricultural Practices (GAP).

03 Farm Tourism

Some farmers, both laid back and entrepreneurial ones related that local tourism helped in terms of filling up gaps in income targets in times of low market offtake, while others' experiences related that local tourism demand actually brought in higher profit margins.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, a holistic package of support is wanting to be demonstrated to benefit farmers and strengthen efforts to boost production towards food security.

Farmers' suggestions above include support needs on finance, technology and innovation, capacity building, and infrastructure. Mentioned as well is the need to invest in climate-smart agriculture practices which have been becoming profitable for some, e.g. in the vegetable value chain but need more careful testing to ensure that it will be a sustainable business move for productions at scale.



Most importantly, to make this work, it is also proper and practical to mainstream the existence of a platform such as the institutionalization of consultation sessions as part of the project design and monitoring to ensure that these recommendations are actualized and remain relevant to beneficiaries or community partners.

As a possible next step, a survey may be conducted to gather more details related to some of the concerns, requests, and queries brought up during the discussions there were not addressed given the limitations of the FGD.

Action tracks identified from the analysis of the responses are listed below:

Governance

- Strengthen cooperative development at the local level
- Stricter oversight of local budget utilization
- Strengthen monitoring and evaluation by regional development councils and prescribe as much as a practicable special menu of development programs based on regional needs, taking into account unique ecological profiles, trade, and economic potentials
- Stronger engagement between local civil society organizations and local governments
- Maximize the national ID system. The national ID system could help facilitate a more efficient registry, especially of the *basic sectors* that will be useful for more coherent, non-duplicative, and more responsive programming, benefit sharing, and budget utilization, especially at the local level
- Rethink existing mechanisms in the agricultural sector to which current resources are being funneled, i.e., the imbalance between the support being received between rice farmers and farmers of other crops

Sectoral Actions

- Connect and collaborate for data sharing for purposes of complementation, deduplication, and stronger resource mobilization potential
- Value chain actors must examine areas of concern and address food loss occurrences where needed
- Find scalable solutions on the ground which are bankable, not necessarily to realize immediate returns on investment (ROI) but rather be leverage to expand reach and catalyze multi-sectoral collaboration to address intersectional needs, i.e., addressing various aspects of farmers' needs
- Fund innovations, especially those that are much needed but with relatively more costly investment such as weather protect insurance, regenerative practices, etc.

Individual Actions

- Campaigns for food choice diversification
- Register and reach out to local governments or civil society help groups (rural area)
- Initiate household conservation initiative (urban areas)
- Initiate urban agriculture
- Make adjustments to prevent food wastage
- For emerging leaders and agripreneurs, walk the talk

Training Topics

If possible, we can organize a learning topic/quick training for the farmers after the open forum so that they can have something to take away. Sample topics could be around:

- Digital Marketing
- Effective Communication
- Partnership Building
- Women Empowerment or Proposal Development and Leadership (Enabling them to be involved in Local Development Councils)



REPORT USE

The outputs of these sessions will be shared with the PPSA Working Groups and the concerned agencies of the Department of Agriculture to help better prioritize the support for smallholder farmers.

This series of focus group discussions could also support the PPSA and the DA-GESI in assessing the need to set up a Working Group with the farmers.

Limitations of the Report

Most of the participants of the FGD are the farmers associated with PPSA's partner organizations - the strong ones in terms of farmer engagement. Hence, it can be gleaned that most of them are relatively entrepreneurial and have access to resources, to some extent, that address their practical needs.

Other limitations are:

- virtual setup
- time limitation
- sufficient representation

***The Philippines Partnership for Sustainable Agriculture
pays gratitude to the following partners who helped mobilize the
participation of farmers and achieve the desired sampling targets for
this Farmers Dialogue Series.***





PPSA
Philippines Partnership for Sustainable Agriculture

Philippines Partnership for Sustainable Agriculture

www.ppsa-ph.org

secretariat@ppsa-ph.org