THE ROLE OF PHILIPPINE STATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES IN ENHANCING FOOD SECURITY

Atty. Benjamin P. Sapitula
Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University, Bacnotan, La Union, Philippines

ABSTRACT

Aside from their prime mandate of providing Instruction, Research, and Extension to the publics, state colleges and universities (SUCs) in the Philippines are also an indispensable instrumentality in helping address local and global issues such as food security. It is the intent of this paper to share what SUCs in the Philippines are doing towards enhancing food security. It specifically ventilates some of the significant experiences and best practices of Philippine SUCs, which are seen to bring about a significant dent in helping realize the World Food Summit Plan of Action. In coming up with this paper, documentary analyses, interview with key informants, review of related literature, and personal accounts on relevant University experiences were employed.

INTRODUCTION

Food security is a global issue. In the Philippines, it has been reported that for more than 800 million people who do not get enough regular, healthy food, ill health and a shorter life expectancy are real risks. Children, and especially very young children, who suffer from food insecurity will be less developed than children of the same age who have had sufficient food. They will most likely be shorter and weigh less, and be less able physically and intellectually, because of poor nutrition.

Putting food on the table is a daily struggle for most Filipino families. Results of a national food consumption survey showed the difficulty of obtaining a nutritionally-adequate diet. Even households with incomes in the highest quartile failed to have diets adequate in energy, vitamins and minerals. Are Filipino households eating enough? In answer to its own question, the Food and Nutrition Research Institute concluded that in 2003, “the typical one-day dietary pattern of Filipino households remained to be a combination cereals-vegetable-fish, as they contributed the largest share in the total intake,” as was the case also in 1978, 1982, 1987 and 1993.

The above scenarios illustrate the extent of food security problem in the Philippines. The country’s food and nutrition problem has become more complex, and the resources needed to address it effectively have increased enormously, making broad networking a necessity. There is now a large cast of characters. In addition to the people themselves and national and local governments, other players are the food business and industry, mass media, agencies of the United Nations, transnational food corporations, non-governmental organizations, international funding agency, etc. (Gopalan, 2005).

The academic institutions, such as state universities and colleges (SUCs), also form part of this large cast of characters. They, therefore, play a crucial role towards enhancing food security.

Modalities/Strategies Employed by SUCs in Addressing Food Security

How do SUCs respond to the challenge of enhancing food security?

Following are some of the modalities/strategies employed by SUCs in helping address the issue of food security:
The role of Philippine state colleges and universities in enhancing food security

A. Production as a Mandate of SUCs

State Universities and Colleges in the Philippines are mandated to perform a trilogy of functions: instruction, research and extension. However, considering that majority of SUCs control vast resources such as land, manpower, technology, infrastructure and other facilities that could be utilized for economic activities, the Philippine government added production or income generation as a fourth function.

As one of the legal bases in establishing income-generating projects, Republic Act No. 8292, otherwise known as the Higher Education Modernization Act of 1997, legitimizes efforts of state universities and colleges in agribusiness program implementation. A provision allows SUCs to enter joint venture with business and industry for the profitable development and management of the economic assets of the institutions, the proceeds to be used for the development and strengthening of the college or university.

All SUCs in the Philippines engage in income generating projects (IGPs) with the initial intention of enriching their main trilogy functions. They are one in the philosophy that the ultimate measure of the effectiveness of any institution is its contribution to and impact on the educational, economic, social, cultural and political well-being of the students, faculty and employees and the community they serve. These are all geared toward development of quality human resources and technologies supportive to people empowerment, global competitiveness and sustainable development. Through its production function, SUCs embark on various activities that aim to help address food production and security. These include special projects related to the massive conduct or implementation of agricultural, agroforestry, fishery and other related commodities. The Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University (DMMMSU), for instance, which is one of the leading agricultural universities in northern Philippines, has initiated a good number of food production projects both in the University and in its various Extension service areas. One of its flagship commodities, apiculture or beekeeping, has penetrated to various provinces in the country, and had consequently triggered massive adoption by a good number of rural clientele.

B. Research & Development Symposia: A Marketplace for Generated Technologies

A very good repository and marketplace for generated technologies, which could be a springboard for triggering technology adoption and eventual massive food production/entrepreneurship, is the yearly conduct of Regional Symposium on R&D Highlights throughout the country. Each region in the country has an agricultural resources research and development consortium, whose membership includes institutions that implement R&D projects, that mounts the yearly gathering of topnotch researchers to present the highlights of their respective generated technologies. SUCs have been the forefront players in this R&D endeavor.

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<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
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<td>209</td>
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This year, in Region 1, the Ilocos Agriculture Resources Research and Development Consortium (ILARRDEC) had come up with very good technologies as can be gleaned in the last staging of its R&D symposium. Most of the commodities usually presented in the ILARRDEC symposia are along high-value fruit crops and vegetables, cereals, commercial and plantation crops, livestock, poultry, forestry, apiculture, sericulture, among others. Table 1 shows the prolificacy of generated technologies by ILARRDEC.

C. Education Economic Zones for State Universities

Recently, the Commission on Higher Education launched the Education Economic Zones for State Universities in the country. Here, series of national fora on SUCs-private partnership on economic zones are held to discuss projects which are of help to SUCs in generating financial resources so they can continuously deliver quality higher education to meet the standard of the industry that their graduates hope to serve.

The series of national fora also provide an avenue for sharing existing best practices on SUC-Private partnership relative to the following sub-themes: enterprise development; intellectual property management/technology business incubation/technology commercialization; asset, management and development; business process-outsourcing; among others. They also aim to explore the future potential SUCs-private partnership.

D. SUC Alliance for Income Generating Projects

In response to the call of Philippine President Benigno C. Aquino, III in modernizing agriculture, the Commission on Higher Education is set to launch the formation of a SUC Alliance where research results of selected higher education institutions will be subjected to technology business incubation.

SUCs which are strong in a particular R&D commodity shall take the lead role in fast tracking the dissemination, diffusion, adoption and commercialization of that particular commodity, in partnership with other SUCs. The DMMMSU, for instance, whose commodity strength is beekeeping, shall be the lead institution of a national network for apiculture.

E. Partnership with R&D Institutions

Forging linkages and networks with R&D institutions is also an effective modality by which SUCs can help address food security.

The DMMMSU, for instance, had recently inked a memorandum of agreement with the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), India regarding the implementation of the “Strengthening Rainfed Agriculture Research Development and Extension in the Philippines.” ICRISAT is a non-profit, non-political, international organization for science-based agricultural development that helps developing countries mobilize science to increase dryland agricultural crop productivity and food security, reduce poverty, and protect the environment.

DMMMSU and ICRISAT shall engage in collaborative rainfed agriculture RD&E projects. Being a SUC, DMMMSU stands to benefit much from this partnership as it shall be adopting and commercializing cutting edge rainfed agriculture technologies provided by ICRISAT through the Philippine agricultural R&D network.
CONCLUDING STATEMENT

The World Food Summit Plan of Action said that food security exists “when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.”

Academic institutions, such as SUCs, can do no less in doing its part in helping enhance food security in the country. Aside from their primordial role of empowering and educating the people, they are an effective instrumentality in coming up with practical, feasible and viable options and modalities towards realizing the World Food Summit Plan of Action.

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