

POLICY BRIEF

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DEVELOPING A SUSTAINABLE FOOD SECURITY PROGRAM FOR AN URBAN COASTAL CITY

POLICY SITUATION

Local urban coastal cities are most vulnerable to the impacts brought about by climate change. Very little attention, however, had been given to the role of coastal cities, including Navotas City, to the achievement of food security in urban centers like Metro Manila. A unified plan of action and a sustainable food security program are imperative given the unpredictability of climate change and the growing urban populations, which result to an increasing demand for a sustainable source of nutritious and affordable food. This study looked into developing a sustainable food security program designed to mitigate the impacts brought about by climate change on food availability, access, utilization, and stability; and how these affect Navotas City's food security. Data from literature reviews and agency reports were validated by key informant interviews and focus group discussions to achieve the aforementioned objective.

CURRENT CHALLENGES THAT AFFECT THE ABILITY OF NAVOTAS CITY LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN PROVIDING FOOD SECURITY FOR THEIR CONSTITUENTS

In separate interviews with the City Health Officer of Navotas City and the Navotas City District 2 Councilor, the study ascertained that Navotas City has yet to fully embrace and recognize the concept of food security. Hence, Navotas has no actual food security policy in place. Since 2011, the city's Annual Development Plan has started allocating funding for food security; but the actual activities under the said program remain undefined. The interviews also showed that the city government's main agenda continues to be poverty alleviation, provision of basic services, and the mitigation of

Navotas' perennial flooding problems.

Additional dialogues with barangay representatives from the communities of Navotas West, Bagumbayan North, and Bangkulasi revealed that their common concern revolves on how climate change creates significant food security concerns for their constituents. Owing to the changes in ocean temperature and weather patterns, fishermen are forced to go further into and stay longer on the open seas in order to haul a favorable catch; making the fishing activities more expensive for the boat owners to sustain and less profitable for the

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vendors to support. Consequently, local industries that rely on fishing - such as canning, food processing, ice storage, and warehousing - have also become affected. Without fish, these industries would cease to exist.

The over-dependence/specialization of local commerce on fish-related industries as sources of income has likewise limited the opportunities for local barangays to explore alternative occupations. The distinct demographic profile of the different barangays in Navotas also makes it difficult for the local government to unilaterally implement a food security policy. Given that some barangays are more progressive than others, the local government must first identify the most food vulnerable communities, particularly during disasters and calamities. Similarly, the interviews identified flooding as a perennial concern that could affect the Navotas residents' decisions to not only grow/harvest food; but to also sell and purchase them.

FOOD SECURITY BEST PRACTICES AT NAVOTAS CITY

Despite not having a concrete food security plan, Navotas City does have viable programs/plans/projects in place which can be considered as food security best practices. These activities have consistently improved the food security situation in Navotas even when their traditional purpose was to address other urban coastal problems. Among these programs are the revamped zoning regulations and urban housing projects that were intended to mitigate the effects of climate change on the living and

working conditions of Navotas residents. Recent anti-flooding projects have also been initiated, which include the addition of two more pumping stations by early 2015.

Moreover, the feeding programs continue to yield successful results in alleviating malnutrition for underage and primary school children. In January 2015, the city held its first ever food festival highlighting the local residents' love for food and support for homemade and local industry food production. This newfound appreciation for local food manufacturers generates commercial benefits for the producers; creates a sense of awareness and pride for the residents of Navotas; and provides an opportunity for the entire community to realize the important role that food security and self-sufficiency plays in their daily lives.

STAKEHOLDERS IN NAVOTAS CITY WHO ARE DIRECTLY AFFECTED BY FOOD SECURITY PROBLEMS

The City Health Office identifies the children 0-71 months and their parents as immediate stakeholders. In addition, the city government determined that the citizens/residents of Navotas and those who are involved in the food-supply chain of the city are food security vulnerable stakeholders as well. The buyers and sellers of agro-fish products, on the other hand, count on the health office to certify the nutritious value and compliance to the food sanitation measures of the food products available in the markets.

GOVERNMENT AGENCIES AND NGO'S IN NAVOTAS CITY CONCERNED WITH FOOD SECURITY ISSUES

The City Health Office is responsible for food safety and nutrition. Its main task is to formulate and implement policies, plans, programs, and projects to safeguard the health conditions of the people. The other functions of the office are to: advise the Mayor and the Sanggunian on matters pertaining to health; execute and enforce all laws, ordinances, and regulations relating to public health; recommend to the Sanggunian, through the local board, the passage of such ordinances or regulations; direct the sanitary inspection of all business establishments, selling food, and providing accommodations; conduct health information campaigns and render health intelligence services; and coordinate with other government agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) involved in the frontline of health services delivery, specifically during and in the aftermath of man-made and natural disasters and calamities.

Another agency tasked to address food security issues, including food production in urban agriculture in Navotas, is the City Agriculture Office. Its main purpose is to formulate strategic action plans on agricultural programs and projects as well as to establish linkages with concerned national government agencies, non-government organizations (NGOs), and fisher folk for agricultural development purposes. The office

also conducts trainings, demos, and lectures on agricultural and aquaculture technologies and matters related to the agro-fishery sector, chiefly on capacity building and community involvement of the stakeholders towards economic growth. Similarly, the office participates in nutrition education and helps in promoting: 1) backyard gardening and fish culturing; 2) fish production in marine water, 3) fruit tree planting, 4) food processing, 5) livestock; and 6) poultry raising among less-fortunate fishermen-households.

Lastly, the Navotas City Agriculture Office is directly responsible for the implementation of RA 8550, otherwise known as the “Fisheries Code of 1998.”

Supporting these two main agencies in carrying out their food security-related tasks, Navotas also has a City Health Board; Price Monitoring Committee; City Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office; City Nutrition Council; and City Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Management Council. They handle issues on food availability and affordability.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

As the report by Goldstein, Bellis, Morse, Myers, and Ura (2001) indicated, urban agriculture tend to revolve around existing agriculture provisions and zoning ordinances within specific municipalities. Best practices for urban agriculture are likewise specific to the local context. Thus, cities undertaking a review of codes and city ordinances that may inhibit the development of urban agriculture or working with

stakeholders in food policy councils or food system assessments are taking important steps that would help them understand and engage in urban agriculture as it is practiced in their respective municipalities.

Another useful strategy for cities to support and encourage urban agriculture is direct engagement with residents and stakeholders in urban agriculture. Since a number of cities are overhauling or rethinking zoning and ordinances that constrain urban agriculture, now is the time to embark on education and outreach efforts to ensure that city officials and urban agricultural practitioners and advocates understand what is and isn’t working in their communities.

Engaging with stakeholders and community residents can help cities take a “how to do” urban agriculture approach - one that promotes the overall objectives of a particular municipality as oppose to merely voting “Yay or Nay”, in absolute terms, to urban agriculture. It may also help for cities to have a designated point of contact for residents and stakeholders who want to “do” urban agriculture. This point of contact could bridge the knowledge and communication gaps between city administrations and city dwellers.

Local government units (LGUs) must realize that local food security initiatives are important as they represent actual programmatic responses that are tailor-made to address sectoral or communal food security concerns be it on a policy, program, or process level (Cabanilla, 2006). Lessons and insights from the local food security perspective should then be echoed at the national level in order to help strengthen and/ or develop the needed food security

related policies, mechanisms, and institutions. Sustainable livelihoods and a healthy landscape likewise depend on the integrated management of natural resources (Gutierrez-Montes, Emery, & Fernandez-Baca, 2012; Valdivia, 2001); an understanding of the existing social conditions of a community; and the consideration of how the use of natural resources impacts the environment. Coastal cities should benefit from these insights as they are vulnerable to climatological and geographical considerations. Therefore, food security for Navotas and other urban coastal cities should also be viewed through the programmatic responses of the LGU representatives. What should, then, be promoted by the city government is a holistic perspective, grounded in stakeholder consultation and participation as shown by the Conceptual Framework for Food Security in Urban Coastal Areas developed by Carandang, Cruz-Flores, and Carandang (2014).

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