

**Statement of the CAMP Chairman Emil Q. Javier
on the occasion of CAMP's 5th Anniversary**

19 March 2019 SEARCA

Welcome

It is my honor and pleasure to welcome you to our Annual General Assembly. In case you do not notice, this is our fifth year as an organization. Today is our Wood Anniversary.

I could not find the origin of the use of materials as symbols of commemoration. The best I could gather was a reference to Emily Post, the famous American author/columnist on etiquette and good graces who in 1922 proposed paper, wood, tin, crystal, china, silver, gold and diamond as symbols for the 1st, 5th, 10th, 15th, 20th, 25th, 50th and 75th anniversaries.

As anniversaries go, it is an opportune time for us to pause and reflect how far we have gone with regard to our advocacy of modernizing Philippine agriculture. It is time to take a good look at our initiatives, our approaches and assess how effective they have been and in so doing plan on what we do moving forward.

There had many email exchanges among many of us on how better to deploy our limited time, expertise and resources. It was for this reason that we prevailed upon Mariano Cordero to put his thoughts together to provide the background to our discussion this morning. The annual progress report of our President Ben Pecson should likewise provide additional info and fresh perspectives on how to bring these about.

But for now, allow me to share with you briefly my take on where we are now as far as agriculture is concerned, and in so doing suggest, alternative pathways we can explore in the pursuit of our advocacy.

Not so much more policy reform and enabling legislation but proper program planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, program continuity and embarrassingly, more transparency and a accountability.

Truly not all is well with Philippine agriculture. Except for the tiny city state of Singapore, we are the only net food importer among the major ASEAN countries. The gross value added from agriculture is in relative decline and our rural folks remain mired in poverty. Except for the modern banana, pineapple and papaya crop subsectors, our productivity coefficients in the other crops are consistently below that our ASEAN neighbors.

Much have been written on what ail our agriculture by own economic experts and those of the World Bank, FAO, the Asian Development Bank and the CGIAR research system. And invariably their prescriptions are for more policy reform and enabling legislation.

But is this what we really need? We had been heeding these prescriptions for so long but obviously with little to show for it.

I have come around the conclusion that what we need is not so much more policy reform and enabling legislation but more intelligent program planning and smart execution, more program continuity, and embarrassingly, more transparency and accountability in the use of public funds.

We have a surfeit of policies and enabling legislation covering agriculture, natural resources, local governance, agricultural credit, crop insurance, irrigation, promotion and regulation of major commodities and many others. The AFMA, Fisheries Code, Forestry Code,

the Local Government Code, the Agriculture Competitiveness and Enhancement Fund just to mention a few, are encompassing and inclusive in their purposes, strategies and directions. We can accomplish already so much with these policies and laws in place. The constraint all along is our inability to plan and execute.

Mess in Boracay

The perfect illustration of this dilemma is the mess in Boracay. The problems are obvious — encroachment of illegal structures on the beach front and uncontrolled disposal of solid wastes and untreated waste water into the sea. There was no need for policy reform and new legislation because the environmental laws are clear on these points. Clear as well was the responsibility and accountability of DENR and the local governments for their implementation. All that was needed was the political will no less than from the Chief Executive ordering DENR, LGUs and the police agencies to put their acts together.

Lack of economies of scale of small farms

And even where policy and legislation are wanting or misdirected, there are interim ways around these constraints while waiting for all the stars to be aligned.

Take the case of what Tito Contado had been pointing out all along – that our primary limitation is our small, fragmented farms which lack economies of scale. Unfortunately agrarian reform aggravated the problem. The problem can only get worse with each passing generation with our inheritance laws. The long-term solution of course is land consolidation.

The key is the limit to five hectares holding imposed by agrarian reform. That provision need to be voided but that is tantamount to reversing agrarian reform. Only a president elected with an overwhelming majority and a solid electoral base would dare expend precious political capital on this very emotional and divisive issue. President Duterte with his comfortable majority probably can afford to do so. But he won't because he has repeatedly announced his whole-hearted support for agrarian reform.

However failing to achieve land consolidation by way of land ownership, there are several options to operate our small farms into larger management units, namely: 1) outright lease arrangements, 2) production concentration in strategic agriculture and fisheries development zones (SAFDCs) and One-Town- One-Product approach (OTOP), 3) contract or outgrower programs, and 4) through cooperatives, farmers associations and irrigators associations.

The role of the corporate sector is key in for options 3 and 4: the popularization of the contract growing business model, and strengthening of cooperatives as a major objective in corporate social responsibility (CSR) portfolios. The ideal is for the private sector to help small farmers not out of altruism but because it makes business sense. However not all corporations are engaged in food and agriculture. Those not engaged in agriculture can still help by devoting significant part of their CSR portfolio to helping organize/strengthen farmers-cooperatives. These deserve further elucidation.

Coco Levy Funds Utilization

The same is true in the debate on the utilization of the coconut levy funds for the exclusive benefit of coconut farmers and the industry. The long-term future of the coconut industry lies in four strategic directions, namely, 1) promotion of high yielding coconut hybrids, 2) coconut

intercropping with other high value crops, 3) integrated wet processing at the village level, and 4) support for the oleo-chemical industry.

PCA with its mandate and annual appropriations need not wait for the resolution of the coconut levy fund to implement them.

Conclusion

To cut the story short, we need not be unnecessarily pre-occupied with policy reform and new legislation, albeit some issues need to be addressed this way, legislation of agricultural biotechnology being one of them. CAMP can spend more effort in assisting the implementing agencies, particularly the Department of Agriculture and its many agencies in crafting road maps, in drafting proper program plans and, as needed, advise in implementation, monitoring and feedback.

There are so many of these opportunities and the challenge is to recognize and prioritize them; identify the target agencies, and connect with their managers; designate lead persons among to take the initiative and seize opportunities as they arise.