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Does the Food Sovereignty Movement Exist in Negros? The BIND and ONOPRA Experiences

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ABSTRACT. While food sovereignty as a term is virtually absent in Negros Occidental development literature, the concept is not. The efforts to address hunger, unemployment, and underemployment during annual *tiempos muertos* also comprise a movement that seeks to resolve sugarcane monocultures in Negrense haciendas. Organic agriculture, on the other hand, was and is the means to diversify the provincial rural economy, restore the degraded environmental resource base, and attain food security among the perennially hungry food producers. The food sovereignty movement as such arose in Negros Occidental in the mid-1980s to address the near-famine proportions spawned by the crisis of the monoculture-based sugar industry. The emphasis on smallholder food producers, the concerted resistance to transnational companies' promotion of genetic engineering to increase crop productivity, recognition of food security as a human right, the role of the state policy to protect and defend the right to seeds, indigenous knowledge systems, and the promotion of ecologically friendly farm technologies hew to the classical definitions of food sovereignty. The Negrense experience has put organic agriculture in its definition of "sustainable agriculture." Moreover, the Negros food sovereignty movement sees subsistence agriculture and food security not as the be-all and end-all of organic agriculture but as the foundation to move beyond subsistence toward demand-driven organic crop production, including possible export to the international market.

KEYWORDS. food sovereignty · food security · *tiempo muerto* · subsistence agriculture · organic agriculture · sugarcane monocultures · monopolies · value chain · demand-driven economy · agrobiodiversity

Introduction

Food sovereignty as a term is largely absent in the literature among civil society organizations working on food insecurity issues among poor Negrense farmworkers and hinterland food-producing communities. Yet the Negrense food security movement has exhibited many features advocated by food sovereignty activists. Indeed, Negrense civil society organizations have invariably tied food security with organic agriculture

and food diversification, agrarian reform, and democratic good governance—major planks of the global food sovereignty movement.

At the outset, the author sees food sovereignty as an evolving paradigm, with various nuances in the theoretical fields and even conflicting definitions. As such, Negrense food activists could invoke the "right" to synthesize their own experiences to define what makes sense in the ground, and in the process contribute to the debate on food sovereignty based on good practices and lessons learned on the ground.

Sugarcane Monoculture and Food Insecurity

The structural weakness of Negros economy is that it has a "highly inequitable land ownership pattern, total dependence on an export crop subject to price fluctuations beyond the country's control ... that has suppressed the legitimate demands of workers for improved conditions" (Wunder 1986). Moreover, it is underpinned by sugarcane monoculture, and hacienda plantation owners decide on export-based crop production, mode of farming, and distribution of benefits. This made the province, especially the rural poor, vulnerable to exogenous economic upheavals and price fluctuations in the world market. Negros had no other crops or industries to serve as alternatives to absorb the shocks of changes in the world market. The lifestyle of its people, both rich and poor, rose and fell with, and was determined by, the vagaries of the market in a globalized economic system (ibid.).

Negrense planters depended on large acquisitions to attain economies of scale by converting even mountain-based tropical forests into sugarcane monoculture plantations. The forests of the Philippines (and other Southeast Asian countries) are unusual in their high concentration of hardwood species of the *Dipterocarpaceae* family, offering high commercial yields. "Yet these precious natural resources have been cleared for conversion of forest lands for sugarcane, causing deforestation" (TED 1997) to cash in on guaranteed export quotas and time-high prices in the international spot market. "Forest cover declined from 50 percent of the national territory in 1970 to less than 21 percent in 1987. Thus, forest lands decreased from 30 percent of total area in 1980 to 5 percent in 1992. Moreover, the upland migration of sugarcane workers has reduced the forest" (ibid).

During that same period in the 1980s, the planters were riding a wave of profits. They built new homes, bought new cars, and gave

Bacolod, the provincial capital, a jumping nightlife. But very few bothered to diversify the provincial economy. Few saw then that time was running out for Negros and its one-crop economy. Former governor and Negrense sugarcane planter Daniel L. Lacson Jr. warned in the mid-1980s that Negrenses were putting "all [its] eggs ... in one basket. Times were so good that nobody listened" (Williams 1985).

But the foundation of the opulence of the few landed rich proved to be fragile sand castles. The crisis in the sugar industry began to unravel in 1975. A year earlier, a preferential trade agreement with the United States expired, eliminating a guaranteed market for Philippine sugar that had completed the cycle of financing here. In the 1980s, the crisis worsened, with Philippine sugar losing most of its preferential access privileges to the US market as the United States reduced the Philippine sugar export quota, causing a sweeping retrenchment in the financing of the annual crop loans (mainly with the Philippine National Bank). Although a series of International Sugar Agreements have controlled world prices to some extent, massive fluctuations have been the norm over the last quarter century. The world price sank from more than 60 cents per pound in 1974 to 40 cents in 1980 to an abysmal 3 cents in 1985. This led to the grave crisis that hit Negros during that period when sugar farm workers, consisting of 85 percent of Negros Occidental's population, lost their jobs and their capacity to feed their families. The fall in world sugar prices and the Negros crisis are a direct result of the collapse of the international quota system for trading in this product (SAPRIN 2001).

Complicating the situation was the sugar trading monopoly imposed on the industry by virtue of a presidential decree. Roberto S. Benedicto, a law school classmate and fraternity brother of the dictator Ferdinand Marcos, came to account for 27 percent of the country's dollar earnings. .Many planters, in fact, blame their plight on the government, particularly the Philippine Sugar Commission and the National Sugar Trading Corporation. Both were created by Marcos in 1977, and together they gave the government a monopoly over the industry (Wurden 1986). Then, through inept speculation and corrupt practices, Benedicto effectively ruined the industry, bringing starvation to thousands of farmworker families who were already among the country's poorest and most exploited agricultural workers (ibid.).

Almost overnight, the face of Negros changed from that of arrogant, jetsetting, free-spending hacenderos to that of Joel Abong, representing the extremely malnourished and dying children of

farmworkers. The precursor of the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, *Mr. & Ms.* magazine, featured Abong's gaunt face to link the travails of the Negrense economy to the sugar trading monopoly of the Marcos dictatorship.[1]

Resolving Landlessness and Hunger: Responses

Empowering sugarcane workers over what to produce in farmlands, with food security as the major goal over that of the export market for the benefit of a few—in other words, the advancement of food sovereignty—became the battle cry of civil society development workers and the farmworkers themselves. The 1980s sugar crisis proved to be the wake-up call that sustainable development should address the perennial hunger associated with the *tiempo muerto* inherent in sugarcane monocultures owned and managed by landowners with monopolies of decisionmaking on what, where, when, and how to plant in the hacienda system. Inevitably, the campaign to attain food security for the farmworkers is inexorably tied to the process of achieving social equity through agrarian reform.

> Previous agrarian reform programs have been "restricted to grain crops (rice and corn) on the argument that the inclusion of export crops traditionally grown on plantations may disrupt production and endanger an important source of foreign exchange. At the same time, the Marcos administration pursued policies which encouraged the development of large-scale agricultural plantations and the entry of foreign investments in agriculture. Thus, whatever efforts were made toward redistribution of land ownership in rice and corn was counteracted by policies which served to increase asset contribution in the plantation sector" (Quisumbing 1987).

The sugar crisis spawned a class war in the province based on the issue of landownership and control of agricultural crop production over food security versus export-based sugar monocultures. The Catholic Church found that only one in sixty to seventy people owned land. In Negros Occidental, one in a thousand, or 330 families, owned almost half the sugarcane land (Stevenson 2007, 465).

During a 1998 International Conference of the Swiss Interchurch Aid (HEKS) Partners and Friends held in Bacolod, participants from thirteen Asian and African countries held out the commonalities in these countries that the root causes of their food insecurity are "natural

and human-made environmental degradation, worsened by the absence of environmentally sound policies. Prolonged droughts alternate with intense flooding. Forestlands and multiple cropping farming systems are being transformed into export-oriented monocrop plantations to feed not the bellies of the hungry of the South but that of the well-fed of the North. Prime agricultural lands for domestic food production are being converted into industrial estates and playgrounds like golf courses of the rich and CEOs of transnational corporations."[2]

The sugar crisis coincided with the national political crisis triggered by the assassination of opposition leader Benigno S. Aquino. However, while the 1986 EDSA People Power Revolution put an end to the Marcos dictatorship, the monoculture-based province continued to sink deeper with the continuing sugar crisis.

It is thus no accident that Negros became fertile territory for recruiting guerillas to the communist New People's Army. It had "successfully organized and mobilized populations throughout the haciendas' lowlands. It had established a shadow government in rural and urban communities, captured part of the local resources, supported massive rallies and '*welgang bayan*' (people's strikes)" (Rutten 2008).

Agrarian Reform in Plantations

To defuse the eruption of a violent social revolution triggered by heightened hunger, unemployment, and landlessness in the late 1980s, which activist Bishop Antonio Fortich warned about, the national government addressed the landownership issue in Negros Occidental sugarcane monoculture plantations through land acquisition in favor of agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARBs)—against opposition from hacenderos.

With the downfall of the Marcos dictatorship and the call for social justice, agrarian reform finally touched on export-based monocultures. The 1986 Constitution provided the escape hatch by mandating the national government to legislate and implement agrarian reform policies. Given its constitutional marching orders, the Cory Aquino administration instituted several major decisions such as Presidential Proclamation 131 instituting the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP); Executive Order (EO) 229 establishing a CARP and providing the mechanisms for its implementation; EO 129-A that modified EO 129, which is aimed at reorganizing and strengthening the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) and for

other purposes; EO 228 amending certain provisions of Presidential Decree 27; and Republic Act 6657 or the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law (CARL) of 1988 (Garcia, n.d.).

Agrarian reform became the centerpiece program of the Aquino administration for economic growth and development, which it hopes will lead to the massive and rapid increase in agricultural productivity (DAR-Region 6, n.d., 2) and reduction in inequalities in the distribution of wealth and power in the countryside through

a. transfer of landownership to tillers to secure their tenure,

b. promotion of the small farmers' access to capital through liberalized credits and investment programs, and

c. provision of a host of other services (i.e., education and organization of beneficiaries, infrastructure, technology, postharvest and marketing facilities, etc.) to enhance the tiller's net gains. (Negros Occidental Provincial Government 2007, 9-10)

Negros Occidental continues to be one of the CARP's big targets in terms of land distribution. Yet agrarian reform proved insufficient to solve food insecurity during the *tiempos muertos*. While there have been successes claimed by DAR, it cannot be denied that in the last ten years, implementation in the province has been "marred with peace and order conflicts, legal battles, conflicting policies" (Negros Occidental Provincial Government 2007, 2).

The provincial government study pinpointed the problems to CARP implementation. Foremost is the resistance of the original landowners to part with their lands. It did not help that the Land Bank of the Philippines showed lack of or nonpayment of equitable compensation for the property and the DAR exhibited lack of monitoring or laxity in the implementation. The situation spawned disagreements between the original landowners and beneficiaries. Another problem is the lack of funds or capital on the part of the beneficiaries to finance the planting of crops and the purchase of farming equipment, which often results in their either leasing out their lands to another party, selling the rights to their lands to another party, or leaving their lands to remain undeveloped (Negros Occidental Provincial Government 2007, 19).

The length of the cropping period is one reason why ARBs are forced to mortgage, lease, or put their lot under the financing scheme with an individual, which in many cases turned out to be the former landowner. Because of the sugarcane monoculture, however, the ARBs' production skills as former sugarcane workers were largely limited to sugarcane farms even after they received their Certificates of Land Ownership Awards (CLOAs) (Negros Occidental Provincial Government 2007, 36).

Restructuring the Means of Production

For many development workers in Negros Occidental, beyond agrarian reform are the low-level skills suited to work in sugarcane monoculture that stands as a stumbling block for developing a diversified economy. Thus, the agrobiodiversity[3] promoted in organic agriculture serves as the counterpoint to break the dependence on the export-based sugarcane monoculture, and is defined by many of its advocates as the sustainable economic future of Negros Occidental, if not of Negros Island. Organic agriculture reinforced agrarian reform and other tenurial instruments in reshaping landownership relations and retrofitted the forces of production from becoming dependent farmworkers to farm managers.

The Bacolod Food Security Covenant foreshadowed nearly a decade earlier the Nyéléni Declaration calls on food sovereignty when the covenant criticized some governments of practicing social and economic exclusion on rights claims of smallholder food producers and women, and criticized global trade liberalization. The covenant cited "anti-poor and anti-women policies, delivering inadequate economic and social support services toward the rural, small farm food producers and fishers. Governments are liberalizing their trade barriers to enable them to access loans from multilateral financial institutions and are providing TNCs [transnational corporations] with incentives to dump their chemically-laden, increasingly genetically modified food commodities into the food baskets of the South" (Bacolod Covenant 1998).

The covenant batted for the collective food security of various players; to cope with dwindling domestic food production, communities should link up with other players, such as nongovernment organizations (NGOs), to help them shift to "sustainable agriculture, relying on community-based planting materials and ecosystem-based soil fertility and pest management," raising food security in the process.

To ensure collective food security, marginal rural communities recognized how the rural poor help one another through "mutual labor exchanges [as expressed in] the Philippine words *bayanihan*, *dagyaw* or *alayon*, the Indonesian *gotong royong*, the southern African words *amalima*, *nhimbe* or *tsima*, to help lower farm labor costs. Farmers exchange among themselves farm innovations, farmer-bred seeds and other genetic materials" (Bacolod Covenant 1998).

The conference delegates pledged that, among other tasks, the participating organizations will use the resolutions as basis for their program development:

a. Implement integrated food security program goals characterized not only in economic terms but also in its social, political, environmental, cultural, technical, and gender dimensions;

b. Adopt sustainable agriculture as a nonnegotiable framework in achieving food security that is community-based, self-sufficient, diversified, and sustainable. Our local communities must preserve and conserve their own seeds and other genetic resources and the indigenous knowledge imbedded in them. They must actively oppose the efforts to supplant community-based farm resources with TNC-produced high-yield seed varieties.

It has been thirteen years since then, and many of the resolutions are seeing the light of day in Negros Occidental. The campaigns to enable the organic producers' right to food have meshed with other concerns on land tenure and control over planting stocks.

The militant agrarian reform organization Task Force Mapalad (TFM) noted that "with secured access to land and access to productivity development support services, safety nets are established for long-term food security. TFM's experience in Hacienda Vélez Malaga proved that the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program works, as it improves the lives of agrarian reform beneficiaries by opening economic opportunities, like the Muscovado Sugar Mill project ... These agrarian reform beneficiaries may still be far from being well-off but many of them can now better provide nutritious food for their families, afford to send their children to school, buy basic appliances" (Miggiano, Taylor, and Mauro 2010, 7).

But as other organizations learned in the crucible of field practice, "secured access to land and access to productivity development

support services" is not on autopilot to attain food security and food sovereignty. There has to be more than mere transfer of landownership. The central question is: how can new landholders be equipped with new production skills that would not be just a replication of old monocultural practices of the former export-based agricultural regime of former landowners, skills that are moreover attuned not to the export market but to meeting food security and the needs of the local green market?

Organic Rice as Basis for Food Security: The BIND Experience

To address the social, economic, and political root causes of food insecurity and powerlessness, the Broad Initiatives for Negros Development (BIND) embarked on community processes to define the farmers' development agenda, with a strong component on gender and development among the women peasants. These workshops motivated the participants to question their own lives and situations, to produce a development paradigm that rests on the principles of social justice, gender equality, and environmental sustainability (de la Merced 2000).

Harnessing the power of cooperation, several contiguous communities planned the sustainable management of their natural resources—the soil, forests, plants, water, animals, and insects—for food production, income generation, and ecosystem conservation and rehabilitation. Targeted were communities adjacent to the forest reserves and national parks, including those in the buffer zones (de la Merced 2000).

Thus, a large section of the local populace comprising the women, men, and youth sectors within the community were mobilized so that the potential for sustainable management of their natural resources, indigenous knowledge, and agricultural systems are maximized to meet the ever-growing demands for food in the face of increasing threats to their ecosystems and highly unpredictable economic and political climate borne of the 1997 Asian financial crisis and unbridled trade liberalization.

Training and education were important elements in mobilizing the community toward shared goals and concerns on the environment and food security as well as basis for building partnerships. As early as the late 1990s, BIND linked up with national organizations such as the Southeast Asia Regional Initiatives on Community Empowerment

(SEARICE) and Greenpeace to warn of the perils of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), as well as with the Non-Timber Forest Product–Task Force for nonfarm-based livelihoods.

BIND changed gears and decided to emphasize "organic" over "sustainable" agriculture to sharply demarcate the difference of agroecological systems from the "sustainable agriculture" of transnational promoters of GMOs and synthetic fertilizers and pesticides.

BIND's organic agriculture training program discusses a range of issues and topics such as Green Revolution and its impact on Philippine agriculture, principles and philosophy of organic farming, soil and organic fertility management, crops and cropping system, sustainability of integrated farm design, and farm planning. In the uplands, more discussions and training are about agroforestry as a system that weaves together trees, environmental stability, food and income, and various soil and water conservation technology (de la Merced 2000).

The School in the Ricefield, one of BIND's initiatives, is a five-month ecological pest management training conducted in rice-farming systems making use of the farmers' indigenous knowledge. The program facilitates discussions first about the concept of community ecology and its connection to rice cultivation and local agriculture, growth and stages of rice, identification of insects and their life cycles, dynamics of pests and "beneficials," and weeds identification and collection. The farmers also undertake comparative studies on the economic viability of farmer-bred rice cultivars using soil fertility measures sourced from carabao, cow, or chicken manure, and composting and recycling of biomass that is locally available (de la Merced 2000).

BIND built Kampo Berde (KB, Green Farms) to promote the science and practice of organic farming in Negros. Since 1995, KB has trained a thousand farmers, produced organic seeds sent or exchanged in numerous communities, done field research on soil fertility management, demonstrated integrated farming, and produced safer and healthier vegetables and fruits for the local market. Today, KB stands as a sanctuary of green biodiversity in the midst of monocrop sugarcane farms.

Concerned about the rapid erosion of plant genetic resources, women, men, and youth farmers began to conserve various food crops in order to improve agricultural production and to provide a variety of food that are safe, adequate, reliable, and accessible. They collect and store seeds to ensure that local and adaptable seeds are available. With

their own seeds they are free to choose what crops to grow and free to use organic farming techniques they have learned from the training and from their field researches. They continually improve their varieties by mass selection and breeding.

Alternative credit supports the new generation of organic farmer conservationists. At a much lower interest rate per cropping, the credit program has been a viable alternative to local moneylenders who charge 100 percent interest per cropping. Often, this has left the farmers with very little for consumption and new planting materials (de la Merced 2000).

BIND's low interest credit without collateral has helped them in applying ecologically friendly farming techniques to diversify their farm enterprises, incorporating rice, corn, vegetables, root crops, flowers, herbs, fruit trees, trees, and livestock into their farm planning and development. This way they have learned to manage their resources while increasing production and disposable income.

From individual farms in agrarian reform and community forestry areas in 1996, BIND went into the conservation of threatened ecosystems. It forged a joint project with the government to organize several barangays into community forestry at the Northern Negros Forest Reserve, which, despite strong protests from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), integrated food security and organic agriculture with forestry conservation and rehabilitation within the public domain. In 2000, BIND joined the Protected Area Management Board of the Mount Kanlaon Natural Park. There, farmers in the buffer zones and in the adjacent areas of the forests are trained not only in sustainable enterprise development but also in forest resource management. Their community-based organizations have been given legal privileges over limited resource use in exchange for their participation in conserving and rehabilitating the forests.

BIND-assisted farmers faced daunting challenges in 1998 and 1999. The initial economic gains from bumper harvests amid favorable weather conditions in previous years were wiped out by a triple whammy of global proportion. Months of the El Niño heat and La Niña rains and the Asian financial crisis pulled down Philippine agriculture to 8 percent negative growth.

The BIND food security program taught crucial lessons. At a time when the world is experiencing global warming, weather anomalies like El Niño and La Niña, and dwindling forest resources, it realized that organic agriculture has to go beyond farm-based concerns and into

broader community-based forest conservation and rehabilitation. Combining short- and medium-term organically grown food crops with permanent crops such as tree regimes can balance the hydrological cycle and microclimates, thus maintaining good harvests to sustain food security.

Community forest management has now become a community agenda, with more and more mountain farmers planting more varieties of timber, fruit trees, and endemic species including dipterocarps around their farms, close to their houses, in the streambanks, and in many spaces everywhere. El Niño taught them that only balanced forest ecosystems can prevent soil erosion and water shortages.

In some cases, forest biodiversity losses caused organic farmers to suffer from poor yields because of imbalances in the food chain within degraded forests with the corresponding shrinkage of predator populations to check the population growth of pest herbivores such as rats, and severe climatic conditions (BIND, n.d., 11).

Even the upland rice varieties that for almost a decade had vanished from their community—Cot-9, Azucena, Sampaguita, and Fortuna—did not fare well because of bird infestation. The farmers planted again during the first cropping of 1999 the small quantities of rice seeds they were able to salvage. The infestations were clear indications of gross imbalances in the food chain.

According to farmers, rats had been infesting their farms for almost three years. The worst attack happened in 1999, forcing most of them to plant corn three times in one cropping season. The farmers estimated the damage from rats to have reached more than P200,000—a high price to pay for a small farmers community barely surviving from the age-old structural problem of hunger and poverty (BIND, n.d.).

While most lowland rice farms suffered, food production improved in areas adjacent to the forest reserves, yielding an average of 3.4 metric tons per hectare of rice (fresh matter), higher than the provincial average of 2.4 metric tons per hectare. In barely three years, many have crossed subsistence level and started producing surplus for the market. From sales income, they are able to spend for other basic needs like education and shelter improvement.

In fact, BIND-assisted farmers have been achieving an average yield of 100 cavans (or 5 metric tons per hectare) and have even recorded a high yield of 200 cavans (10 metric tons per hectare). An advantage of planting BIND's rice is that, under the System of Rice Intensification, it requires water depth of only 1-2 cm, unlike traditional varieties that

need 12 cm water depth. Its seed requirement is only six to eight kilos per hectare unlike broadcast planting, which could need three to four sacks (Aguiba 2004).[4]

BIND's presentation of its experience in the 1990s at the conference IFOAM 2000: "The World Grows Organic" impelled it to spearhead Negros Goes Organic festivals usually timed for the October 16 World Food Day celebrations. BIND linked up with the University of Negros Occidental–Recoletos and the Office of the Provincial Agriculturist to promote organic agriculture. The linkage also drew in planters and entrepreneurs who are veering toward organic agriculture.

Aligned with the Negros Goes Organic was BIND's networking and advocacy campaigns for the 2002 International Year of the Mountains. The process gained the support of not only the DENR but also the provincial government, corporations, and the academe, in close coordination with the Food and Agriculture Organization based in Rome, Italy.

The growth is sustained not only at the farm level but in the expansion and linkages among provincial policy makers, civil society organizations, people's organizations, and industrial manufacturers, which eventually evolved into Organic na Negros! Organic Producers and Retailers Association (ONOPRA) (Sánchez 2010b), with allies in hotel and restaurant services and in partnership with international environmental NGOs (*Philippine Daily Inquirer* 2009).

Convergence: The ONOPRA Experience

The ad hoc multistakeholder convergences on the Negros Goes Organic annual festivals took a major step in 2005. Then Negrense governors Joseph Marañon and George Arnaiz inked a memorandum of agreement (MOA) to make the whole island the organic food bowl of Asia. An important component of the MOA was the creation of the Negros Island Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development.

Civil society advocates, businesses, small-farm producers, and even hacenderos attended a series of training and shared best practices and standards. The end result was the creation of ONOPRA, which is registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission and accredited with the provincial government.

In support of the organic food bowl concept and to prove its seal of good housekeeping, the Negros Occidental Sangguniang Panlalawigan legislated a ban on the entry of genetically modified plants and animals

in the province and imposes penalties for violations. The "James Bond" ordinance, Provincial Ordinance 007, Series of 2007, officially known as "The Safeguard Against Living Genetically-Modified Organisms (GMO)," helps bring Negros Island closer to its goal of becoming the organic food bowl of Asia (Gomez 2007).

Another support system for the organic food bowl was the establishment of Negros Island Certification Services (NICERT), created to bring Negrense standards at par with international standards but at a cost much less than applying for international and national organic certification. Former BIND project coordinator Robert Gasparillo heads NICERT as its organic guarantee officer, which by September 2010 has certified twenty-four organic companies and smallholder groups from Negros Occidental and Cebu City. Among the twenty-four companies and community producers certified are Fresh Start General Merchandising, Sag-ang Organic Coffee Producers Association, Dublin Bio-Industries, Ramon Peñalosa Farms, Alternative Indigenous Development Foundation Inc., Iliranan Tribal Council, and Negros Institute for Rural Development (Gapac 2010).

NICERT is also working on its accreditation with the International Standards Organization (ISO) 65, used as a reference for most organic norms and regulations in European countries, Canada, and Japan (NICERT 2010).

The Future of Food Sovereignty in Negros

The attainment of food security for many organic agriculture practitioners among agrarian reform beneficiaries has relegated *tiempos muertos* to the past. Now the more enterprising sections—able to decide at their own level what, when, where, and how to plant not just subsistence but commercial crops—are poised to "graduate" from farmworkers to farm entrepreneurs. Serving as role models to subsistence farmers, these enterprising farmers have realized what previous generations of farmworkers never even dared to dream or aspire for: overcoming hunger year-round and being able to send their children to school.

With tenurial security and economic independence, these organic farmers have cut the umbilical cord that tied them to the cradle-to-grave safety nets in the hacienda system that hitherto has provided them with sources to microcredit, housing, and seasonal employment but has also kept them in the bondage of near perpetual poverty.

Notes

1. See, for example, luthientinuviel's blog site: "my mother always showed me the picture of joel abong whenever i threw tantrums and didn't want to eat. i was really a picky eater then. she often reminded me that i was fortunate that i had something to fill me up whereas joel abong did not. my nanny, yaya, caretaker what-have-you (i don't know what to call her) then told me i would become like joel abong if i didn't eat whatever thatwas on the table... but then i think the hacienderos are more to blame. i am now being political here" http://luthientinuviel.blog.com/2009/01/10/joel-abong-the-sakada-child/.
2. The Bacolod Covenant, International Conference of HEKS Partners and Friends, Bacolod City, Negros Occidental Philippines, HEKS 1998. The author drafted the document. After intense floor deliberations, the plenary adopted the amended version. The Broad Initiatives for Negros Development (BIND) hosted the international event.
3. Agrobiodiversity is "that part of biodiversity that feeds and nurtures people. It includes genetic resources for food and agriculture, such as harvested varieties, livestock breeds, fish species, and non-domesticated resources within field, forest, rangeland and in aquatic ecosystems. It also refers to activities in the field of agriculture, animal husbandry, aquaculture, and agroforestry including pest, microbial resources and the management of agro-ecosystems, wildlife and protected areas" (Kameri-Mbote and Cullet 1999, 259).
4. The organic rice export project, however, was a one-shot deal. The Swiss importer said that unlike Asia, Europe is not a rice-eating culture. Europeans consume rice once or twice a week, and in smaller quantities. Sales turnover was slow.

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