

**Philippine Agriculture 2020: A Strategy for Poverty Alleviation, Food Security, Global Competitiveness, Sustainability, Justice and Peace**

**THE NUEVA VIZCAYA EXPERIENCE**

**Rodolfo Agbayani**

Congressman, Lone District of Nueva Vizcaya

I would like to thank the organizers particularly the NAST people for having invited us from Nueva Vizcaya to share our experiences in managing and utilizing its uplands. Nueva Vizcaya is 265 km north of Manila and the first province you will encounter in going to Cagayan Valley. Nueva Vizcaya is a landlocked province bounded by six provinces, Isabela, Quirino, Aurora, Nueva Ecija, Benguet and Ifugao. The province of Nueva Vizcaya is the watershed of the big dams in the surrounding provinces, and thus, Nueva Vizcaya has been assigned the role as the watershed haven and an outgrow forestry hub by the Regional Development Council of Region 2.

This morning, I will present to you the agro-forestry activities we have conducted in the province of Nueva Vizcaya. In 2000, our province won 3<sup>rd</sup> place in the *Gawad Sapat Ani* which gave us a price of PhP 25 M which we used in starting the agricultural terminal in Nueva Vizcaya. The province of Nueva Vizcaya consists of 437,000 ha, 80% of which or 349,000 ha are classified as forest zone. Of this classified forest zone, 50% of the total land area is classified as critical water shed and 30% is production area.

In the 1980s, Nueva Vizcaya had 86% forest cover, which has been reduced drastically to 25% or 87,000 ha and of the watershed, 75% of the forest are without trees. The alienable and disposal lands are about 88,000 ha or 20% of the total land area of Nueva Vizcaya. The 88,000 ha which are alienable and disposable consist of 26,000 ha fully-irrigated rice lands and 5,000 ha rain-fed, 20,000 ha potentially-irrigated ricelands and vegetables, banana lands, 5,000 ha corn lands, and 32,000 ha settlement which are for residential, commercial infrastructure, roads, irrigation and for other purposes.

Nueva Vizcaya has 15 municipalities and 275 barangays. It is a lone district. We do not have a city yet, no first class municipality, only one

second class and the rest 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> classes. In the year 2000 census, the population stood at 367, 000. The poverty incidence in 1992 was 45% and when I assumed the governorship, it was 52% and most of these are in the upland communities mostly belonging to the indigenous tribes.

Migration of our population in the upland resulted in marginalization of forest lands through kaingin and other activities in the forest land. Thus, heavy downpour or rain or typhoons would result in flash floods in the low lands, with erosion of the riverbanks, widening of river beds, damage to agriculture, residential and commercial properties and infrastructure projects. This has cost a lot of expenditure on the part of government. There is low productivity of agriculture in the lowlands inspite of increased cost of production.

What interventions have we made in the uplands? We started first with the hill of about 120 ha in the lowlands, the Bangon Hill which is owned by the State College, now a university located at the capital town of Bayombong of our province. We first negotiated with the state college to lease 50 ha of that hill. It was barren and a grazing land; grass fire occurs every now and then especially during summer. Squatters had also settled on parts of the hill. The state university was just too glad to lease it to the provincial government at P1.00 a year as rental for 25 years. So what did we do? We subdivided this into one hectare each then invited civil society and different government agencies to sublease one hectare each, and plant it with fruit bearing trees. We started with P200,000 granted by Sen. Alvarez and the condition was that they are going to harvest the fruits of whatever they plant there during the period of 25 years.

The second intervention we made was with the Barobog watershed. We asked the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) to devolve the 439-ha Barobog watershed to the province of Nueva Vizcaya although in the Local Government Code, the municipalities and not the province can manage the watershed. Since we were supplying the potable water of two municipalities, Bayombong and Solano, the two biggest towns in our province, we were allowed to manage the said watershed and it is supplying also the irrigation water in seven barangays and municipalities of Bayombong and Solano. This is a case of partnership between the provincial government and the stakeholders or the occupants. When DENR was administering the watershed, they had difficulties in containing the migration of people to the watershed. What did we do to prevent this? We subdivided again or we recognized the occupants of the watershed and we granted to

them a Memorandum of Agreement assuring them that if they will make good in managing the respective areas in accordance with the development plan which they have prepared with the assistance of the provincial government, then they can have it renewed for 25 years, otherwise they will be evicted from their place. And we, therefore, were able to convert the squatters or the occupants into land managers and this made them very proud to be even called in the Memorandum of Agreement as land managers, instead of being squatters who are chased by the DENR.

The third intervention we made was in the Lower Magat Reforestation Project which is an example of a partnership among the provincial government, the DENR and the stakeholders. This covers 24,000 ha located in two municipalities with 24 barangays and a population of 19,000; the area is heavily settled with squatters. We granted the Memorandum of Agreement to occupants to manage this area which is the watershed of the Magat Dam. We also issued this instrument to the occupants with a Tree-for-Legacy which gives the right to tree planters to harvest provided they are going to protect the natural grown-up trees in the area which is allocated to them, and this covers the whole province of Nueva Vizcaya.

Let me mention some of the impacts of these projects. They have provided production of forest products and conservation of natural grown forest trees, and allowed the rehabilitation of denuded forests. They have also resulted in revival of springs. What lessons have we learned? That there is a need for continuing DENR's expertise in resource management, partnered with LGUs capability in the delivery of basic services and instilling people's management as a practical strategy in national resource management. The DENR provides the expertise while the local government units provide all basic services needed by the occupants. Thank you.

