

# Balitang



The Official Newsletter of the Department of Agrarian Reform

Special Edition

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AND SPECIAL  
PROJECTS:**

- 1. MINSAAD PAGE 3
- 2. CONVERGE PAGE 7
- 3. IARCDSP PAGE 10

# FASPO Q1 HIGHLIGHTS

February 27, 2019

## DAR-MinSAAD brings connectivity to farmers, residents in Banisilan Town

The DAR-MinSAAD Project is financing the construction of Capanican Bridge in Poblacion 2 of Banisilan, North Cotabato.

The 20-linear meter bridge is a connectivity structure which will connect Sitio Sabang to the Poblacion of the municipality that has been the long-awaited solution to the residents' three-decade-long problem.

"Whenever there's a considerable amount of rain, Capanican Creek becomes

impassable which cuts the traffic and access of farmers and children to go the market and the school, respectively," said the barangay chairman of Poblacion 2 during the pre-construction meeting held February 27, 2019.

This farm-to-market road will also connect the two segments of Poblacion 2-Sabang FMR which DAR-MinSAAD also completed and turned over to the LGU last year.



March 12, 2019

## DPWH to begin construction of P58M Alamada FMR under MinSAAD

Another farm-to-market road is to be built under the MinSAAD Project in Barangay Barangiran, Alamada, Cotabato and a preconstruction meeting and groundbreaking event was held on March 12, 2019.

The DPWH Cotabato 2nd District Engineering Office will implement the construction of Purok 5, Barangiran-Sitio Lama-Bayang-Makikilo FMR under contract with Llaban Construction and Supply which is expected to be completed by the last quarter of the year.

Present in the event was Mayor Noemia Demetillo-Bartolome who addressed residents of Brgy. Barangiran.

"This road will not only bring faster and better access for farmers, this FMR will also benefit people by bringing labor employment with at least 11 million pesos in labor generation," said Dr. Bartolome.

This FMR is the fourth to be implemented under the DAR-MinSAAD funding in the Municipality of Alamada.



February 11, 2019

## Construction and Rehabilitation to begin for 9.93-kilometer FMR in Carmen

A groundbreaking ceremony and preconstruction conference were held on February 11, 2019 for the construction and rehabilitation of Cadiis-Sitio Libertad-Sitio Negan-Sitio Baruyon Farm-to-Market Road in Brgy. Cadiis, Carmen, North Cotabato.

The DAR-MinSAAD Project Management Office, together with the Department of Public Works and Highways Cotabato 2nd District Engineering Office and the local government of Carmen, led the ceremonies that signaled the start of the 279-day construction timeline.



February 28, 2019

## MinSAAD turns over P58-M rural road, facilities to Bukidnon beneficiaries.

The DAR-MinSAAD Project led the groundbreaking and pre-construction meeting for the construction and rehabilitation of a farm-to-market road (FMR) in Barangay Matampay in the Municipality of Kadingilan in Bukidnon on February 28, 2019.

The 5.5-kilometer concrete and gravel road is expected to address the three-decade longing of Kadingilanians for a better route in bringing their farm products to the market due to the terrible road condition from Matampay to the town proper which hinders their productivity.

Mayor Jerry Canoy recalled in his speech that the FMR project has gone through a long

process before their proposal was approved by the subproject approval committee and the project coordinating council of the DAR-MinSAAD.

The rural road is expected to serve more than 1,200 residents in Matampay including its adjacent barangays.

DAR's Undersecretary for Foreign-Assisted and Special Projects Bernie F. Cruz stressed in his keynote address the importance of FMRs in improving road conditions and consequently reducing travel time and transportation cost, as well as increasing the income of corn, which is the main product of the barangay.





# AN OLD FARMER'S P TEN THOUSAND

Ten thousand pesos don't seem worth a year of grueling work in the coffee fields – constantly exposed under the heat of the sun or drenched in the rain. But this is not the case for farmer Rolando Tenig, 76, of Barangay Masiag in Bagumbayan, Sultan Kudarat.

Rolando and his wife are parents to five children and grandparents to a brood of 12.

"My children already have their own livelihood so we only help in some of their needs, especially those for our grandchildren. (An additional) P10,000 is big enough to help put kids through schooling," he said.

Rolando's eldest son helps him tend their five-hectare farm, a sizable portion of which are planted with fruit trees like durian, pomelo

and lanzones. They also plant upland rice for their own consumption.

In 2017, Rolando was also able to harvest 10 sacks of fresh coffee berries. He sold most of his harvest locally but set aside 10 kilos of dried beans as contribution to his farmers' group, Masiag Farmers and Coffee Growers Association (MAFACGA). Their association was in partnership with coffee giant Nestle and, in that year, they were able to consolidate 12.5 tons for the company.

MAFACGA's netted P1.4 million of income from the deal.

Compared to other MAFACGA member's coffee farms, Rolando's is one of the smallest. "One member was able to contribute 1,300 kilos to what we delivered to Nestle," Jennifer Farillon, president

of MAFACGA said.

The group started in 2009 with only 45 members but are now 239-strong with a combined farm area of more than 100 hectares. Many members maintain coffee plots that are at least one hectare, which is enough to plant 800 to 1,100 trees depending on plot spacing.

In 2015, MAFACGA put-up a coffee seedlings nursery to cope with the demand of its members through the assistance of the Department of Agrarian Reform – Mindanao Sustainable Agrarian and Agriculture Development (DAR-MinSAAD) project.

"We have been able to grow and sell a total of 36,000 seedlings since the nursery was built," said Farillon.

Members were also trained in

the techniques of coffee production through the support of the DAR-MinSAAD project.

"(Our) farmers believed they could only harvest once a year. However, this was disproven after learning that we were not using the correct harvesting technique," Farillon said.

"We were taught that if we changed our harvesting method from hamros (Ilonggo for grab and strip) to picking, we could actually harvest the whole year round," she added.

With the hamros method even unripe beans are harvested. But through picking, these can be reaped at a later time, even during off-season.

A year-round production is, now, also possible because of the

**Continue on page 4**

## MINDANAO SUSTAINABLE AGRARIAN AND AGRICULTURE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

MinSAAD aims to increase agricultural productivity, product value, and income of ARBs and other small scale farmers through the implementation of capacity building programs and provision of basic rural infrastructures to enhance their competitiveness and the sustainability of agriculture in the covered areas.

Implementation period is from 2012 to 2019 which shall benefit a total of 69,091 ARBs in 12 settlement areas in Northern Mindanao (Region 10), Davao Region (Region 11) and Central Mindanao (Region 12). These three regions cover a total of 2,015 barangays in 27 municipalities.

The total cost for the project is P4,402 Million, 74 percent of which is loan proceeds and the rest is the counterpart fund of the Philippine government.

MinSAAD is funded by the Japanese government through the Japan International Cooperation Agency. It is being implemented by the DAR in cooperation with the Departments of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), the Department of Agriculture (DA), the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), the National Irrigation Administration (NIA), the Mindanao Development Authority, the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, the National Commission on Indigenous People, concerned local government units, state colleges and universities, non-government organizations, private sector, and peoples' organizations. 🌱



# INNOVATION AS STRENGTH IN FARMING

By: Shariffa L. Macabalang



**T**UBOD, LANAOS DEL NORTE – Tucked in the middle of Tubod town in Lanao del Norte, a community of coconut farmers continues to explore ways to improve their lives by innovating their agricultural practice.

With nothing but their clothes and rudimentary farm tools saved from a series of wars in the Visayas, a group of farmers from Cebu crossed the seas and rebuild their lives in Lanao del Norte.

Sixty-year-old Filomino Duterte said that it was in 1966 when their family left their home in Danao, Cebu and settled here.

“It was an extremely difficult time for our family. I was nine years old then. I remembered my parents doing their best to make both ends meet by tilling land from dawn until dusk,” Duterte said.

In 1994, the farmers realized the need to organize themselves for the future of their community. And the

Bualan Multipurpose Cooperative came to life, named after their barangay, which was home to 746 families. It was later renamed as the Bualan Agrarian Reform Community Cooperative (Barcoco).

Since its foundation, the group’s main crop has been coconut. Cardava banana is the other staple crop for many of its farmer-members.

“We practice intercropping to increase our income. I used to grow coffee in between coconuts. I later uprooted its trees and shifted to corn and pumpkins,” said Elmer Peñaranda, Barcoco vice president.

He explained that changing crops is but normal, depending on the demand for specific farm products. Besides, cooperative members have been experimenting on different crops in between coconut seasons to maximize the potential of their farms.

In 2015, the Department

## An old farmer’s ten thousand

From page 3

solar dryer and warehouse built year. through the DAR-MinSAAD project in November of 2016.

Still, these implements are not enough to keep up with the growing supply. The solar dryer can only cater up to 30 sacks of crops per day, leaving other farmers with no choice but to pay for the services of private solar dryers.

“We are not even in the peak of our production yet,” Farillon said.

The situation is expected to turn around once new machineries and tools purchased through the DAR-MINSAAD project are turned over to the farmers’ group. Already, its members see 2019 as their big

“Coffee is good because its benefits are long-term but for now our biggest source of income still come from producing corn, upland rice and peanuts,” Farillon said.

She hopes that other government agencies, the local government of Sultan Kudarat, and other organizations will also help them reach their full potential.

As for Rolando, he wishes that he lives long enough to see the growth of their industry.

“What I think about – what we think about – is that it is the children who will eventually benefit from this,” he said.

of Agrarian Reform-Mindanao Sustainable Agrarian and Agriculture Development (DAR-MinSAAD) project arrived and launched a series of consultations to look at the needs of the farmers.

The projects that resulted from the talks soon came the year after, bringing in more opportunities for the villagers.

With intercropping already in place, the DAR-MinSAAD project explored ways to maximize this practice. The agency introduced new approaches in processing the farmers’ bananas. The result was encouraging as the farmers were able to process in one day what they used to do in four to five days.

“We can now harvest our bananas unripe, dry them using our new tools and mill them into flour. Then, we make ketchup out of the product,” Peñaranda said.

Barcoco can produce 60 liters of ketchup a day. In addition,

they also produce at least 60 kilograms of banana chips a week.

“Our newfound business enterprise is a big hit in our own community. Sari-sari stores are stable markets for our chips and ketchup,” Peñaranda said.

The farmers attribute the increase in their productivity to the new ketchup processing plant and equipment provided by the DAR-MinSAAD project.

These achievements would not be possible without the support from the setting up of nursery for tissue culture and planting materials, and the technical support and training workshops provided to improve our skills and knowledge in management and finances, Peñaranda said.

A farm-to-market road is also being constructed to improve trade and commerce and make life more comfortable for the farmers and their families.



# LONG & WINDING

## ROAD TO A BETTER LIFE



**THIS WAY**  
**TO**  
**BARANGAY NED**  
 PROPER NED, NED, LAKE SEBU, SO. COT.  
**27 KILOMETERS**

**SOUTH COTABATO** - It was a tumultuous time when settlers arrived in the municipality of Lake Sebu in South Cotabato in the late 1980s.

Sixty-three-year-old Jose de Juan's face bares markings of the hardships he had encountered in life. "We were originally from Tupi when we were enticed to relocate here. We carried the name of our town and called our new home Sitio New Tupi in Barangay Ned, Lake Sebu," de Juan said.

He was aware of the complex dynamics in the area but de Juan focused on what he could do to bring food on the table for his family.

"A year after we coming here, a group of armed men stormed our settlement and ransacked our homes. They also torched several houses and took away our food supplies," de Juan said.

Security continues to be a concern for the farmers in Barangay Ned but this does not keep them from reaching for their dreams.

A father of eight children and now a grandfather to 10 kids, de Juan shared that raising a family this big requires hard work in Lake Sebu because of its location and terrain.

"It's difficult to cultivate the land here knowing that there are many limitations including our safety, access to market, and lacking technology," de Juan said.

With an elevation of 900 meters above sea level, Barangay Ned is accessible through a winding road with a scenic view of South Cotabato and Sultan Kudarat.

The main agricultural products in the area are corn, peanut and upland rice, which they deliver to the provincial capital of Isulan by traveling across the mountains for about four to five hours.

"The area used to be a lush forest. It was paradise," de Juan said.

"But we could not plant corn and palay because wild pigs and monkeys ravaged our fields. These all changed because of our practice of kaingin," he added.

Apart from increasing their productivity, restoring the natural beauty of Barangay Ned is also one of the dreams of the New Tupi Multipurpose Cooperative. Formally established in December 2, 1991, the New Tupi MPC started with 15 members with a meager capital of P4,500.

Challenges in the operations of the cooperative seemed endless for bookkeeper Teresa Nuñez. "Collecting loans, among other tasks, was and still is a continuing challenge for us," she said.

"We used a bayanihan or volunteerism because we can't afford to hire anyone that time," Nuñez added.

In 2011, the cooperative was looted. This forced members to do take turns in securing the office and its warehouse.

Apart from their security and internal problems, the absence of efficient farm facilities created frustration and, sometimes, even

desperation among the farmers.

"We do not even have a solar dryer. We made do tarpaulins as makeshift ones," de Juan said.

Weather is extremely unpredictable in Lake Sebu and rains come without warning. This leads to high moisture which cause our corns to sprout," de Juan said.

Although there are private solar dryers available in the area, the members feel that the rental fees are too costly.

After consulting with the farmers, the Department of Agrarian Reform-Mindanao Sustainable Agrarian and Agriculture Development (DAR-MinSAAD) project delivered a variety of assistance to help farmers in New Tupi. This includes a solar dryer, a warehouse, a corn sheller and a nursery for coffee and cacao.

The solar dryer, which can accommodate 100 sacks in a single day, is a game changer for many farmers.

"What we did was charge two pesos less than the rate of private solar dryers. This small saving is already important for farmers," de Juan said.

Meanwhile, the cooperative members only pay a peso per sack for a month of storage in the warehouse, which can store up to 2,000 sacks of corn.

Cooperative officers and members had also been given opportunities to participate in numerous trainings and workshops

that helped them improve their skills and knowledge.

"From a cooperative lost and confused, we are now smooth sailing," de Juan said.

The staff members are now receiving regular wages while the cooperative mini-store is also generating profit. Membership has grown to 115 from the original 15 founding members and the cooperative now have at least P8 million in assets.

"Over-over na ang grasya (The blessings are already overwhelming). Thank you so much. We will cherish it," de Juan said. 🌱





# TABLEA DE BUKIDNON

## A MOTHER'S HEIRLOOM

**B**UKIDNON - The cramped space and high temperature of the processing facility and office of the Balaoro Farmers Association (BAFA) can't keep the toothy grins of their members from showing.

The invigorating smell of roasting cacao that fills the air may be to blame.

Located in Barangay Balaoro in the Kadingilan town of Bukidnon, members of BAFA claim that the combination of plains and hills in their village provides the perfect environment for cacao production.

Carrying the name of their very province, BAFA's Tsokolate de Bukidnon produces tablea or chocolate nibs made of pure cacao. They also plan to sell chocolate bars if only their produce can meet the demand.

"We are still trying to perfect the chocolate bars. We can't sell it to the public yet because all that we produce is bought by our members," BAFA chairman Emmanuel Perales says.



Perales says their story may sound like a fairy tale but they actually went through numerous challenges before becoming what they are today.

"It all started when we were young and audacious. Our story began in 1987 when my buddies and I thought about organizing ourselves into an association," Perales recalls.

A non-government organization helped organized BAFA and it convened its first official assembly the same year where Perales

"We felt like we were doing really great in running our association that time. We achieved several of our goals. Those were the best moments in our lives until the NGO decided to (sever its ties) with us," Perales said.

BAFA was embroiled in organizational issues.

"At that time, we still received support, including livestock dispersal projects. But it was mismanaged. Monitoring was weak," Perales says.

Most of the farmers settled in the town in the 1980s and early 1990s and toiled on their lands, producing corn, rice and banana. They also ventured into planting rubber and oil palm, which became the priority crops in the village.

But it was Perales' mother who turned things around when she brought cacao seedlings from Cebu.

"Mothers really know best," Perales says. "We were originally from (the municipality of) Compostela in Cebu. Since I was a

child my mother was already making and selling tablea."

Perales planted the seedlings in his four-hectare farm in Kadingilan and his mother would sell the tablea they produced. This helped Perales send his eight children to school. Three of his kids are now in college, four are in high school, and the youngest is in grade school.

He soon became the envy of his fellow farmers, especially when the DAR introduced the Mindanao Sustainable Agrarian and Agriculture Development (MinSAAD). So, they, too, tried planting cacao in their farms.

DAR-MinSAAD provided BAFA with a grinding machine and a nursery, enabling it to significantly increase the tablea production capacity of the association.

And the help kept on coming. The local government launched a cacao project, which provided farmers quality seedlings and trainings on new farming and processing technology and business management.

BAFA has also ventured into selling good quality grafted cacao to other farmers. At first the group's target market was only around Barangay Balaoro but farmers from other towns later started making orders for seedlings. Each grafted cacao costs P20.

Meanwhile, demand for cacao pods has also increased with buyers coming all the way to Balaoro to purchase the products. BAFA sells pods at P10 per piece and P100 per kilo.

For the tablea, BAFA has been consistently producing 40 kilos

or about 100 dozen per day. Their products are sold in local markets and trade fairs.

With a bright future ahead, Perales says BAFA members are optimistic that their lives have become better, especially with DAR-MinSAAD backing them up. Just recently, DAR-MinSAAD provided them a butter fat extractor, a grinder, a sheller and a freezer.

While there are still issues to iron out within the organization, Perales believes that they can hurdle them for as long as they work together as one.

The success that BAFA is reaping right now has become a household by-word in their province so that many farmers' association in Bukidnon are requesting that they impart their knowledge to them.

And Perales and his group are just too willing to oblige.

"This is our way of returning the favor," Perales quips. 🌱





## CONVERGENCE ON VALUE CHAIN ENHANCEMENT FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND EMPOWERMENT

Project ConVERGE aims to contribute to the reduction of poverty incidence of 10 target provinces in Western Mindanao (Region 9), Northern Mindanao (Region 10) and CARAGA through the promotion of sustainable livelihood activities based on key commodities, e.g. rice, rubber, coffee, cassava and coco sugar that are deemed competitive in the areas.

Implementation period started for Component A in 2014-2015 and 2016-2021 for full project implementation, to cover 300,512 smallholder farmers, 38,724 ARBs and 261,788 other stallholder farmers and rural workers in 92 ARCs of 11 ARCCs

in 10 provinces of the above-mentioned regions.

The total project cost is P2.284 billion, of which 48 percent is loan proceeds. The remaining 52 percent serves as the counterpart fund of the Philippine government, the recipient local government units and the beneficiaries themselves.

Project ConVERGE is funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and is being implemented by the DAR in cooperation with DA, DTI, DPWH, Department of the Interior and Local Government, NCIP, NIA, OPAPP, MINDA, the recipient local government units and the private sector. 🌱

# SPEEDY implementation of DAR-UN projects sought

**BUTUAN CITY—** Faster enactment of Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) projects in cooperation with a United Nations (UN) agency was sought in a meeting last April at the Butuan Grand Palace Hotel.

The supervision implementation support mission for the Convergence on Value Chain Enhancement for Rural Growth and Empowerment (Project ConVERGE) addressed roadblocks that hinder the

smooth implementation of the program.

“We aim to succeed in empowering farmers with knowledge, infrastructure and other support services to uplift their living condition,” said Yolando Arban, Special Adviser to the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), a specialized agency of the UN dedicated to eradicate rural poverty in developing countries.

The DAR has implemented

various infrastructure and support service projects worth P62 million to more than 1,400 farming households in the Caraga Region, reported by Assistant Regional Director Naylinda Narisma during the Project ConVERGE meeting.

These include provision of farm machines, farm facilities, agricultural inputs and infrastructure. The projects were funded by the DAR with loan proceeds from the IFAD implemented under Project

ConVERGE which started in 2015 and will end in 2021.

“Project ConVERGE aims to reduce poverty by promoting sustainable livelihoods for farmers of abaca, rice, coco coir, and coffee. So far, more than 1,400 households are now benefitting from the farm-to-market roads, post-harvest facilities and potable water systems the project has implemented in the provinces of Caraga,” Narisma said.

“At present, Project

Continue on page 8



DAR Assistant Regional Director Naylinda Narisma (extreme left) welcomes the participants to the ConVERGE meeting.



IFAD International Special Adviser Yolando Arban (standing) discusses the strategies to be used for implementing projects.



The participants of the meeting in Butuan



# Speedy implementation of DAR-UN projects sought

From page 7

ConVERGE here in Caraga has provided trainings on production technology, processing, marketing, and entrepreneurship to 8,542 small holder farmers, half of which are agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARB). It has also provided farm machineries, seedlings, fertilizers and has established market linkages to farmers,” Narisma added.

The Project ConVERGE meeting was conducted to review

and evaluate projects that were implemented in the last three years and projects that will be implemented until 2021.

Arban said that last November, during the projects’ midterm review, various agreements needed to be acted pertaining to the projects efforts on capacity-building for business development and market linkages. 🌱

# RUBBER FARMERS FROM ZAMBO SIBUGAY GETS BOOST FROM DAR

**PIÑAN**, Zamboanga del Norte— The income of Zamboanga Sibugay farmers is expected to increase after the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) recently turned over P1.2-million worth of farm machineries to Agrarian Reform Communities (ARC) here.

“Our aim in providing these machines is to improve the rubber production of farmers by enabling them to have sufficient production, thereby increasing their income,” DAR Secretary John R. Castriciones said.

The equipment turned over were 37 grass cutters, seven fogging machines, and seven augers or drilling devices. These were distributed to the Salipyasin ARC cluster which covers the municipalities of Tungawan, R.T. Lim, Ipil, Titay, Naga and Kabalasan.

The Salipyasin ARC cluster is an agrarian area with rubber as its primary crop.

Castriciones said the farm machines were purchased and distributed to the ARC cluster through the DAR’s Project Convergence on Value Chain Enhancement for Rural Growth and Empowerment or Project ConVERGE. It is aimed at improving rubber farm production in agrarian reform communities.

“Project ConVERGE would help not only our agrarian reform

beneficiaries residing in the ARC cluster, but also those farmers in the surrounding area,” Castriciones said.

According to DAR project coordinator for ConVERGE Tony Teves farmers in the ARC cluster and those in the surrounding area numbers around 2,900 and would greatly benefit from the Project ConVERGE through the provision of the farms machines and the increase in employment opportunities.

“Mainly, the farm machines would be used in producing rubber crumbs needed by exporters and tire manufacturers,” said Teves.

“And with sufficient production of rubber crumbs, our farmers’ products will also fetch good market prices, thus, increasing their productivity and income. This project will not only provide employment for farmer-residents, this would also spur the growth of related industries here,” he added.

Zamboanga Sibugay is the leading rubber producing province in the Philippines, with an average annual production volume of about 77,812 MT of dry rubber in 2004 and 80,416 MT in 2005. It surpassed North Cotabato, formerly ranked first, which produced a volume of 76,607 MT in 2004 and 77,459 MT in 2005. 🌱



DAR Sec. John Castriciones inspects the farm equipment before turning them over to agrarian cooperatives of Zamboanga Sibugay.



Zamboanga Sibugay farmers give the thumbs up after receiving the farm equipment for their rubber production.



# Camiguin's strings of whitegold

By: Richard B. Gallardo



TREES abound in Camiguin, an island across Cagayan de Oro City. Logging is forbidden here and there is no exception to the stringent rule that the local government has enacted. Even tree planters themselves cannot just cut their trees without first securing a permit, a tough act to do.

Among these trees is the abaca. Its trunk is soft but the fibers from its leaf-stem is acclaimed as the world's strongest. Farmers call them strings of white gold.

Anna Cardenas, value chain specialist of Convergence on Value Change Enhancement for Rural Growth and Empowerment (ConVERGE), says that Glasfilter, a Germany-based company, confirmed this bragging right in its study, which cited Camiguin's abaca as the "strongest fiber in the world."

ConVERGE, a foreign-assisted project in the Philippines, is funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), in partnership with the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR). The latter oversees the operations.

Cardenas says that Glasfilter's findings prompted its affiliated company here in the Philippines, the Newtech Pulp Inc. (NPI), to enter into a memorandum of agreement with the clustered Labaco Agrarian Reform Community (Labaco) for the purchase of 22,000 tons of Class A abaca fiber at double its market price, P65 a kilo.

"This development shows

that the market aspect of abaca here in the Labaco ARC cluster is much secured because of the attractive price offered by the NPI and the ability of the farmers to meet the volume requirements," Cardenas says.

Lolito A. Yamba, chairman of the Bonbon Sagay Upland Farmers Association (BSUFA), gives credit to the DAR for reviving abaca farming in the island in 2016, distributing seedlings and the much-needed decortivating machines. His group was awarded with two of the five machines given to different farmers' cooperatives.

Through ConVERGE, the DAR painstakingly worked on the farmers' social capital, a vital factor in value chain approach. If harnessed to the maximum level, it can help increase production efficiency, meet volume requirements of potentially huge markets and demand maximum value for their products for the least possible cost.

Labaco's journey to success, however, was long and full of heartaches.

"Nilapitan kami ng Department of Agriculture noong 1998 nang malaman nito na may mga magsasaka rito na interesado sa abaca farming. Nagtayo ito ng 25-hectare demo abaca farm sa bawat bayan ng Catarman, Mahinog, Mambajao at Sagay noong nasabi ring taon," Yamba says.

Everything was doing well until Typhoon Nanang struck the island in 2002, just when the

farmers were readying to make their first harvest of abaca. All demo farms were wiped out except for Sagay's, protected by the surrounding mountains.

"Ang aming 25-hectare farm lang ang hindi masyadong nasirangbagyokayapinagpatuloy namin. Ang iba halos maubos. Pinanghinaan ng loob ang mga apektadong magsasaka. Pinutol nila ang mga nalalabing puno sa kawalan ng pag-asa at nagtanim na lang ng ibang mga pananim tulad ng saging, balinghoy at kamote," Yamba says.

Besides the typhoon, the lack of appropriate and portable decortivating machines and market outlets also took its toll on the abaca farmers.

"Dumaan kami sa matitinding pagsubok. Hirap kami sa operation kasi ang mga (decortivating) machines namin malayo sa aming farms.

Napakabigat at hindi puwede dalhin sa mga lugar na mahirap daanan, BSUFA auditor Rex Yawing, Sr. says.

"Pero pagdating ng DAR at ng ConVERGE project, napakalaking tulong ang nangyari sa aming buhay. Gumaan ang pag-harvest namin. Ang kita namin talagang nag-improve na, hindi kagaya noon na ang pang araw-araw na gastusin namin hindi kaya sa kinikita lang namin sa harvest," Yawing adds.

The improved farming condition and increase in income drew back the farmers to abaca farming.

Trees abound in the Island of Camiguin. They are the people's pride. But for the farmers, one tree stands out the most: Abaca, the tree that many of them once turned their back from, is now fast becoming their newfound gold mine. 🌿





## ITALIAN ASSISTANCE TO THE AGRARIAN REFORMA COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT PROJECT

IARCDSP seeks to alleviate poverty, while promoting long lasting peace and order through various development components in Mindanao, in support of the

"Millennium Development Goals" of the Duterte administration.

A total of 18,058 ARBs or about 53,000 households in 35 agrarian reform communities, 26 municipalities, 117 barangays in Central Mindanao (Regions 12) and the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao are expected to benefit from the project. The said project, which commenced

in 2013, has been extended up to 2020.

The total project cost is P2.52 billion, consisting of a mix loan and grant from the Italian government, in the amount of P1.652 billion. The rest, P866 million, is shouldered by the Philippine government, in partnership with the recipient local government units and non-

government organizations.

While funded by the Italian government, the Philippine government, through the DAR, is overseeing the implementation of the IARCDSP, in cooperation with NIA, DPWH, DTI, DA, DENR, DSWD, Land Bank of the Philippines, DAR-ARMM, NCIP, OPAPP, MINDA and the recipient local government units. 🌱

# A ROAD TO A BETTER LIFE

Life in Barangay San Juan in Del Gallego, Camarines Sur moves at a snail's pace aboard their "paragos," a carabao-powered bamboo sled, which served as the community's mode of transportation.

While the fisherfolks uses motorized boats to harvest their catch, they barely have a choice in how to bring their haul of milkfish and shrimp to the town proper. Along with the farmers and their producer, they all make do with the paragos to transport their fare to the market, through rough and bumpy roads that separate their town to the center.

What should be a simple task always prove costly for the people of Barangay San Juan. Many times, their products arrive at the market spoiled or hardly fit for sale. After barely breaking even for their hard work and capital, they make their long way home aboard the paragos.

That was before.

The fate of the members of the Danawin Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries' Organization (ARBO) who are residents of Barangay San

Juan quickly turned around with the arrival of the Agrarian Reform Communities Project (ARCP) in 2009.

This project of the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) gave the long-suffering farmers and fisherfolks a much-needed relief by financing the construction of a farm-to-market road, worth P4.445 million.

The 1.7-kilometer road, completed in 2013 and officially turned over to the Del Gallego municipal government three years later, has made travelling easier, faster and less worrisome to the farmers and fisherfolks. Their harvest now reach the market place fresh and sold at a fair price.

The road provided the residents greater access to economic and social services. It has lowered hauling fees for farm inputs and outputs and reduced spoilage of farm produce and other agricultural products.

Consumers, at times, now go directly to the now accessible barangay just to make direct orders.



Further, the DAR also provided the Danawin ARBO a fish processing facility where it can ensure the quality of its milkfish products.

The marinated and boneless bangus enterprise of Barangay San Juan has caught the attention of the ARCP management, which didn't waste time in making it a part of its value chain development program.

There are other barangays that are into the same business. But the ARCP picked Barangay San Juan, because it was the most organized and its council the most receptive to rural development interventions.

The proud product was instrumental in raising the price of milkfish from Del Gallego. It has also been identified as the municipality's "One Town One Product."

Based on the income report

for the marinated boneless bangus in the 1st quarter of 2018, Bayanihan Saving Replication Organization, which markets the products, grossed P97,123.75 and netted P40,087.50. Not bad for a community that once sold its products at a loss due to spoilage.

Once in a while, the paragos is still seen plodding along the road from Barangay San Juan to the national road, a fitting reminder of how tough life was for the residents until DAR-ARCP came to the rescue a decade ago.





# FASPO thrusts & directives

Undersecretary for Foreign-Assisted and Special Projects Bernie Cruz faces a tough task ahead – the mobilization of resources from the Official Development Assistance (ODA), international financing institutions and organizations, and private development partners.

During the 2018 Year-End Summative Assessment and 2019 Planning Conference last January 22-25 in Iloilo City, Usec. Cruz presented the thrusts and directives of the Foreign-Assisted and Special Projects Office (FASPO) for 2019-2025.

To realize his ambitious goals, Usec. Cruz outlined the following courses of actions:

1. Package three globally competitive rural development projects for agrarian reform areas:

a. Sustainable and Resilient Agrarian Reform Community Cluster Development Project – Japan International Cooperation Agency;

b. Support to Parcelization of Land for Individual Titling – World Bank; and

c. Smallholder Agri-Enterprise Competitiveness and Social Protection – Asian Development Bank

2. Conduct Donors' Forum in June or July 2019 to generate development assistance from funding institutions for the projects in the pipeline;

3. Power-up ongoing projects, specifically the

Mindanao Sustainable Agrarian and Agriculture Development, Italian Assistance to Agrarian Communities Development Support Program, and Project Convergence on Value Chain Enhancement for Rural Growth and Empowerment through the following:

a. Fast-track implementation and monitoring of all approved sub-projects (SP) especially those with downloaded funds to LGUs;

b. Unclog bottlenecks impeding disbursements of all obligated funds;

c. Ensure prompt release of funds and corresponding liquidation reports; and

d. Expedite liquidation of completed and on-going SPs; deploy finance assistants to speed up the process

4. Finalize Project Completion Reports and Turn-over documents of recently completed projects (ARISP III and ARCP II); and

5. Coordinate closely with the various Project Stakeholders (Congressmen/Governors/Mayors) and other partner agencies (NIA, DPWH) in the implementation/launching/turn-over of SPs.

The Undersecretary for FASPO, who also stands as the Project Implementation Officer (PIO) for FAPs, vowed to implement the strategic plan according to its intent and purposes. 🌱

## USEC. BERNIE CRUZ, ACTION MAN

From page 12



Usec. Cruz is not about to let that distinction go down the drain.

He displayed his steely commitment when he called off the turnover of two farm-to-market roads in Sultan Kudarat that were found to be poorly constructed. Some portions of the 4.15-kilometer road, worth P34.55 million in Barangay Masiag in the municipality Bagumbayan, Sultan Kudarat were thinly layered with gravel and sand where sticky red clay could easily be seen on the surface of the road.

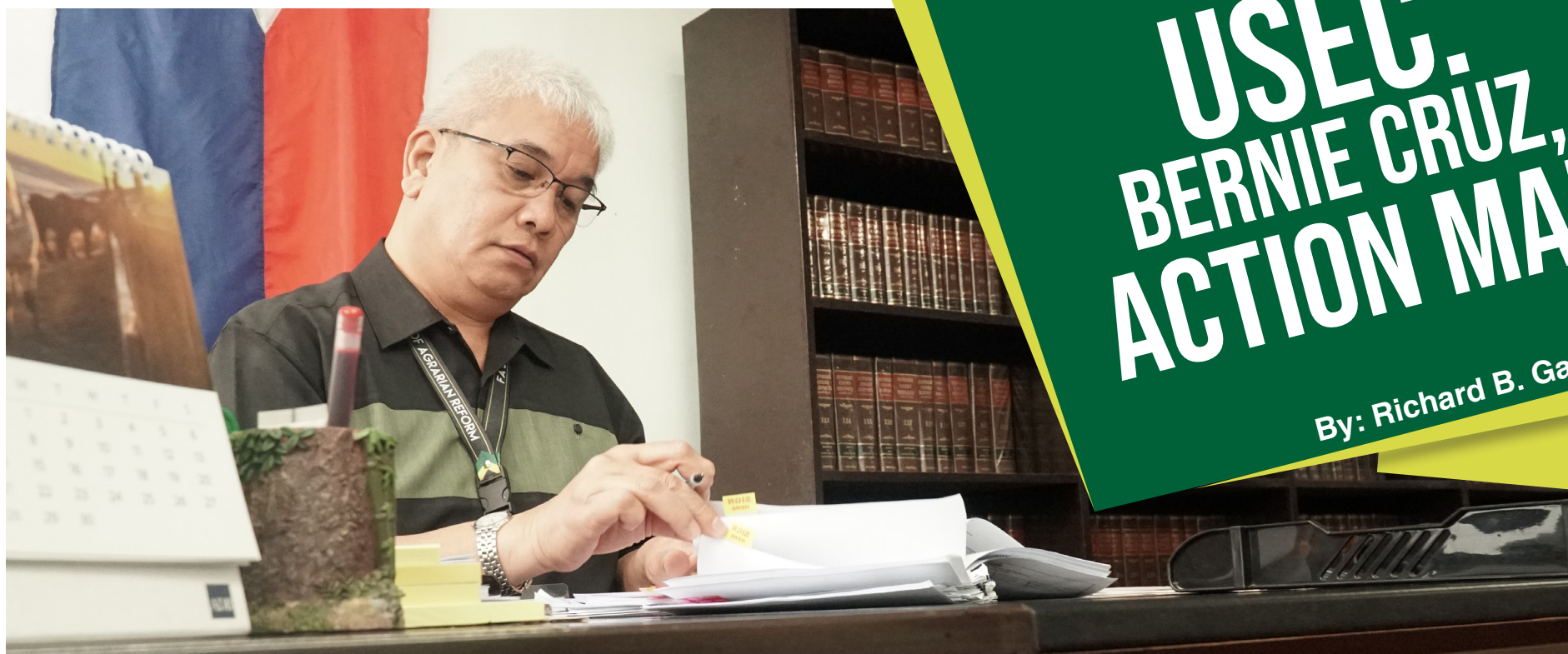
Meanwhile, cracks were found in the 822-meter long farm-to-market road, worth P7.36-million, in Barangay Mapantig Proper in the town of

Isulan.

Usec. Cruz then called out the contractors "to deliver defect-free projects" under pain of delaying the turnover, if done haphazardly.

So far, Usec. Cruz has already turned over a total of 20 infrastructure subprojects in Mindanao – a bridge project, four farm-to-market roads, 3 potable water systems and 12 post-harvest facilities with solar dryers.

Furthermore, Usec. Cruz is closely coordinating with other partners, urging them to support the many projects of the Department to ensure continued delivery of support services to its farmer-beneficiaries. 🌱



# USEC. BERNIE CRUZ, ACTION MAN

By: Richard B. Gallardo

**U**ndersecretary Bernie Cruz is a man of few words. But make no mistake, he won't hesitate to say "no" for anything that falls below his standard.

It is this no-nonsense character that made him the choice of Agrarian Reform Secretary John R. Castriciones as head of the agency's Foreign-Assisted and Special Projects Office (FASPO).

Under Special Order No. 523, series of 2018, Usec. Cruz also acts in a concurrent position as the project implementation officer of the Department of Agrarian Reform's (DAR) official development assistance portfolio.

Like a good soldier, Usec. Cruz buckled down to work, visiting various areas in Mindanao which are under the coverage of

three foreign-assisted special projects to determine issues and concerns encountered in the course of their implementation.

The three projects are the Mindanao Sustainable Agrarian and Agriculture Development Project, Convergence on Value-Chain Enhancement for Rural Growth and Empowerment, and the Italian-Agrarian Reform Communities Development Support Project. All these are currently on a catch-up mode to meet their targets and financial disbursements.

Usec. Cruz have also met with project management officers, partner agencies and steering committees, and the agrarian reform beneficiaries to discuss the strategies in implementing the projects and the 2019–2025

thrusts and priorities for foreign-assisted special projects of the administration.

If the DAR-Field Operations Office, which oversees the distribution of acquired agricultural lands to landless farmers, is the heart of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP), the FASPO is the soul for it delivers vital support services that give life to the program.

The land acquisition and distribution and the provision of support services are the two major components of the CARP and the latter makes the local program one of a kind, the envy of the international community. The Philippine's CARP has been hailed as the only land reform program in the world that

distributes farmlands and, at the same time, provides support services to its beneficiaries.

**Continue on page 4**

**Balitang DAR**

**Cleon Lester G. Chaves**  
Editor-in-Chief

**Kelvin Angelo R. Paulino**  
Editorial Consultant

**Richard B. Gallardo**  
Senior Writer

**Alexandra Mae M. Puno**  
Layout and Design

**Medel Mercado**  
**Resurreccion Arcainah**  
Staff Members

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**Office**

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