



Source: CARRD

Collective Land Ownership Empowers Farmers to Choose Their Pathways to Recovery and Resilience

**A Case Study of How Land Rights Security
Improves Sustainable Rice Farming and
Increases Climate Mitigation in Upland
Communities in Passi City, Iloilo, Philippines**

***By Marie Joy Demaluan and Caryl Mae Pillora
Center for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (CARRD)***

Key Messages

- The government must ensure that land titles are not just awarded to farmers but that farmers actually occupy and make use of the land. Though the collective Certificates of Land Ownership Award (CLOAs) received by the farmers in Passi City provide them with the right to occupy and till the land, the government should support and expedite the process of parcelizing collective land titles and issue individual land titles without delay. Individual titles offer stronger land tenure security.
- The experience of the Passi farmers has shown that the practice of organic agriculture offers an effective pathway towards livelihood recovery and resilience in the aftermath of climate-induced devastation of croplands. Organic agriculture promoted the use of seeds with high adaptive capacity; increased farmers' income, thus reducing their need to take out loans; improved soil texture and fertility; and, opened up access to government support services for organic farmers.
- In order to incentivize the practice of organic agriculture, the government must offer and strengthen its support for farmers so that they would not be lured to go back to conventional farming. The government must promote organic agriculture both for its environmental and commercial values.

- In the absence of civil society organizations (CSOs) that help promote organic agriculture in the communities, local governments should provide dedicated technical person/s with in-depth knowledge of organic agriculture who could educate and guide the farmers in shifting to organic agriculture practices.



Source: CARRD

In the early hours of 8 November 2013, super Typhoon Haiyan raged in the southern Philippines. The Category 5 storm struck the Visayas region with devastating winds and towering waves. Haiyan, locally known as “Yolanda,” is one of the deadliest Philippine typhoons on record. The storm affected more than 14 million people across 44 provinces, taking the lives of more than 68,000 people, with 1,800 still missing, and leaving over 14 million people homeless (Wignaraja and Ramachandran, 2022). Overall agricultural losses were estimated at 10.6 billion Philippine Pesos (241 million US Dollars, with production losses accounting for 8.6 billion Philippine Pesos (195 million US Dollars) and agricultural infrastructure damage amounting to 2.0 billion Philippine Pesos (45 million US Dollars) (Verzani and Corpuz, 2003).

In November this year, the Philippines will mark 10 years since this unprecedented natural disaster laid waste to the entire Visayas region of the country. Sadly, even after a decade, reconstruction and rebuilding have not yet been completed in all of the affected communities.

Experts of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) presciently reported on 27 November 2013, a few weeks after the typhoon, that post-typhoon reconstruction could take as long as 10 years, citing complex problems such as property rights, missing title deeds and land zoning (ABS-CBN News, 2013).

Typhoon Yolanda Brings Out the Strength of Passi Farmers

Passi City, one of 42 municipalities in the province of Iloilo, in Western Visayas, was pummeled by Typhoon Yolanda. Over 3,000 families in the city lost their homes and approximately 19,351 hectares of agricultural land (77 percent of the total land area of the city) were affected.

The farmers were getting ready to harvest their sugarcane and rice when Yolanda struck the city, causing utter financial ruin for the farmers. Debris and logs, carried away by flood waters, ended up on farmlands and destroyed lot boundaries. Soil fertility dropped because of erosion and surface runoff. Farming activities were put on hold for months because of the soaring labor costs of rehabilitating the lands. A number of farmers practicing organic farming returned to chemical farming, for which they could receive more fertilizer and seed subsidies and which required less labor. Rural women farmers were further burdened with care work for children and the sick.

The farmers of Passi City suffered no less from Yolanda than the millions of other farmers in the Visayas region. However, their livelihood recovery proved to be much faster.

Just less than three years after the typhoon, the Passi City farmers were producing more organic rice than the local market could absorb. In 2016, they received organic certification for their crops and developed a partnership with a marketing company to sell their organic rice at mainstream markets for a premium price.

The Passi City farmers' recovery and resilience were built on legal proof of land ownership—the Collective Land Ownership Award (CLOA).

The City of Passi covers a land area of 25,139 hectares — a predominantly mountainous area dominated by rolling hills and narrow valley plains with relatively flat land stretching alongside the Jalaur and Lamunan rivers.

Passi has relatively good soil types with substantial surface and groundwater. It has no distinct dry and wet seasons, making it suitable for growing a wide range of crops, such as rice, sugarcane, and pineapple.

Its population of 79,663 people (Census, 2010), or 16,058 households, grows at a rate of 1.36 percent per year. The city is subdivided into 51 barangays, 38 of which are rural and 13, urban. Passi is a fourth-class city and has a poverty incidence of 21 percent (Mapa, 2021).

The CLOA is a document that provides evidence of ownership of the land granted or awarded to agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARBs) under the Philippines' Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP).

Land reform has been the cornerstone of every administration in the Philippines. On 10 June 1988, the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law was enacted with the avowed aim of achieving genuine land reform. The CARP, which was implemented by the government to enforce the law, sought to promote equity and productivity in the agriculture sector by redistributing agricultural lands to landless farmers, farm workers, and tenants, and ultimately to achieve societal goals of advancing social justice and sound rural development.

Land redistribution under the CARP has been one of the highest in Asia in terms of the percentage of agricultural lands awarded and rural populations covered. On the other hand, it has been slow to acquire lands from politically connected landed elites for distribution to intended beneficiaries.

The CARP was supposed to have completed agrarian reform in 10 years. However, 35 years after the government began implementing it, 562,873

hectares of land have yet to be redistributed, and 1,380,422 hectares remain under *collective* CLOAs that need to be parcelized so that individual titles could be issued to ARBs.

As of 2020, DAR's inventory of collective CLOAs in Passi City under the Support to Parcelization of Lands for Individual Titling (SPLIT) project recorded 367 collective CLOAs covering 7,213 hectares and 4,666 ARBs.

In 2004, the Center for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (CARRD),¹ a non-profit organization that provides technical assistance to farmers covered by CARP expanded its operations to Passi City, Iloilo to offer technical support for farmers that were undertaking the parcelization of their collective CLOAs into individual CLOAs or land titles.

From 2018 to present, CARRD has been working on the parcelization of 39 collective CLOAs, or 10 percent of the 367 collective CLOAs in Passi City. These CLOAs cover 2,328 hectares and will benefit 1,369 ARBs.

In particular, this study covers eight upland communities of Passi City – Agtagbo, Alimono, Dalicanan, Jaguimitan, Magdungao, Salngan, Tagubong and Talungonan. The majority of these farmers were among the earliest batches who benefited from CARP by way of collective ownership registered under the name of their farmer associations or cooperatives.²

CARRD's interventions on and advocacy for the parcelization of collective CLOAs are based on evidence that individual CLOAs offer stronger land tenure security. While collective ownership provides a sense of security among farmers in the face of aggression and resistance from landowners, it has resulted in second-generation ownership issues, such as boundary disputes among farmers within the collective land; intermittent threats and harassment from the former landowners; the entry of dummy farmers;

¹ CARRD is a non-profit organization providing technical assistance to farmers covered by CARP in the provinces of Batangas, Capiz and Iloilo. Its land rights security project in Passi City is supported by the German Catholic Bishops' Organization for Development Cooperation (Misereor).

² In the early years of the implementation of the CARP, one of the approaches used by the government to fast-track the acquisition of lands from private landowners and distribution of the lands to farmers was through collective land ownership awards where vast tracks of lands were titled under the name of farmers' associations and cooperatives.



Source: CARRD

accumulation of arrears on land amortization and real property tax payments; selling of rights due to inadequate support services; and, succession issues for ARBs who have died or are no longer capable to farm. Individual CLOAs would help to minimize these issues.

CARRD also reported that in the aftermath of Typhoon Yolanda, individual titleholders were more invested in the quality of their recovery and were more motivated to fix the damage to their farm. They regarded their land as a valuable and permanent asset for the family in the long-term.

Collective Land Ownership: The Bedrock of Passi Farmers' Recovery and Resilience

Despite not having received their individual CLOAs, the Passi City farmers were empowered by their collective ownership of their lands to make decisions on how to manage and rehabilitate their farms.

Aside from supporting farmers to reinforce the security of their land ownership, CARRD taught the farmers on organic farming.

Classroom-type training and actual field practice were provided to the farmers in a staggered format. Because of the massive soil erosion brought about by the typhoon, each farm underwent rapid soil analysis to determine the level of organic matter and soil fertility. This also helped in determining the right proportion of materials for making compost and biofertilizers.

The training activities organized by CARRD were aligned with the Philippine National Standards on Organic Agriculture, which were then being vigorously promoted following the enactment in 2010 of the Philippine Organic Agriculture Act. Farmers who showed a higher degree of learning and skills improvement were pooled to form a team that would conduct regular field inspections to monitor the level of practice and compliance with the standards. This team also provided mentoring to the farmers on improving farm design and developing farm plans.

The security of ownership that the collective CLOA reinforced facilitated the farmers' return to organic agriculture practices. Typhoon Yolanda had momentarily forced the Passi farmers to revert to chemical farming, which offered seed and fertilizer subsidies. However, the farmers subsequently realized that they had the power and control to choose which crop or variety of rice to plant, the type of inputs to use, and which practices to adopt. This helped them to go back to organic agriculture. The communities also made use of the rehabilitation programs that were being provided by the government and the private sector to access resources to rebuild infrastructures and improve their organic agriculture practices.

Instrumental in mobilizing farm production support services to the organic rice farmers was the *Katilingban sang mga Agraryo Padulong sa Pag-uswang sang Iloilo Agrarian Reform Cooperative* (KASAPPI ARC). KASAPPI ARC was organized by CARRD in 2007 to bring together farmers who have secured collective CLOAs and to increase their access to resources that could improve farm productivity. The cooperative became a conduit of all support services not just from CARRD but from the different government agencies as well. Among the services that KASAPPI ARC provides to organic rice farmers are agri-extension,



Source: CARRD

production loans, farm input supply, crop insurance, common service facilities (tractor, hauling, threshing, drying, and milling), and marketing support.

Women's leadership played also a vital role in sustaining agrarian reform advocacy in the communities and in managing the organic farms. Six out of the 11 paralegals in Iloilo are women farmers who provide regular mentoring to these farmers in their ongoing process of parcelization of lands for individual titling or whenever they experience threats from their former landowners. On the other hand, organic rice women farmers were well-entrenched in the actual farm operations. Forty percent of the total farms dedicated to organic rice production are managed by women farmers. They have significant contributions beginning from seed selection until the marketing of the milled rice (CARRD, 2020).

Organic Agriculture: Passi Farmers' Road to Recovery

Finding Seeds and Organic Inputs

Typhoon Yolanda not only flattened the standing rice crop in November 2013, but also the farmers' ability to secure seeds for the succeeding planting season. The farmers thus sourced from other rice-growing

Organic Agriculture and the Freedom to Make Farming Decisions

Ofelia Dela Cruz, a woman farmer and agrarian reform beneficiary (ARB) living in Barangay Salngan, a village in Passi City, recalls that in 1995, she started practicing organic agriculture because she wanted to apply the acquired knowledge from the season-long training she attended in her family's newly awarded land. She noticed that since her family started consuming organic food produced directly from their farm, none of them got sick.

“However, when Typhoon Yolanda hit us,” Mrs. Dela Cruz relates, “our farm was covered in rocks, logs, and debris.”

“We lost everything — our homes, food source, and fruit trees. It was a really traumatic experience that took years to fully recover from,” she says.

Despite the setbacks her family suffered, Mrs. Dela Cruz eventually returned to organic agriculture.

She explains: “Land tenure enabled us to pursue organic agriculture practices because we owned the land,” she explains. “We did not have to follow the dictates of a landowner. Organic agriculture was a big help in increasing our income and making our farm more resilient to pests and weather changes. I hope the government gives more attention to promoting organic agriculture, gives more incentives, and improves their implementation of existing programs on organic agriculture.”

areas, six traditional rice varieties that had the same characteristics as those that they used to grow. This increased the capacity of the community to produce its own planting materials.

Meanwhile, two sugar mills in Passi City enabled the farmers to produce organic fertilizer, by supplying them with by-products from sugar, such as mud press and mill ash. These were mixed with available waste on the farm, such as chicken manure and pruned leaves from plants rich in nitrogen, and the mixture was allowed to decompose for a month inside a controlled environment.³ Liquid biofertilizers and biopesticides were also produced individually by the farmers and collectively by the farmers' cooperative.

Broader Adoption of Organic Agriculture

In 2014, less than two years after the onslaught of Typhoon Yolanda, the farmers restarted growing organic rice. At the time, 17.39 hectares were devoted to organic rice production in four communities. To date, a total of 93 farmers are involved in the project, cultivating a total of 50.33 hectares in eight communities.

Rebuilding the Rice Mill

One of the most expensive stages of the rehabilitation was the restoration of the dedicated rice mill⁴ for colored rice, including the drying facility. CARRD, together with the farmers and their cooperatives – Salngan Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries Multi-Purpose Cooperative (SARB MPC) and *Katilingban Sang mga Agraryo Padulong sa Pag-uswag sang Iloilo Agrarian Reform Cooperative* (KASAPPI ARC) — pooled resources, both financial and in-kind, to rebuild the organic rice milling facility.⁵ Two years after the typhoon, the facility became not only functional but had become more efficient in producing grains required by the market.

³ The Local Government Unit of Passi City provided infrastructure that allows the farmers to mass produce organic fertilizer.

⁴ The rice mill was donated by the Japan Embassy in the Philippines in 2008 under their grant assistance for grassroots projects.

⁵ SARB MPC is the community-based cooperative while KASAPPI ARC is the district level cooperative. Farmers are both members of these cooperatives.

Breaching the Mainstream Market for Organic Rice

Passi farmers significantly increased their production of organic rice as more farmers enrolled in CARRD's organic farming program. They started to produce rice twice a year instead of the usual one cropping cycle a year.

Soon, the local market could no longer absorb their produce. KASAPPI ARC entered into a marketing agreement with the Global Wellness Organic Corporation (GlowCorp) to develop the product and distribute it in the mainstream market. The marketing agreement allows the farmers, through KASAPPI ARC, to negotiate and command a premium price for their organic rice.

Through GlowCorp, the farmers' organic rice is now being sold in major supermarkets. KASAPPI ARC is assured of a stable market regardless of fluctuating farmgate prices of rice.

At the same time, in 2016, the communities secured organic certification for their product from the Organic Certification Center of the Philippines (OCCP). This certification enables the communities to negotiate a higher price in the market. A year later, KASAPPI ARC and one of its members, Mrs. Ofelia dela Cruz, won the Department of Agriculture (DA) Western Visayas Region Organic Agriculture Achievers award.

Building Resilience through Social Protection

The devastation brought by Typhoon Haiyan put the spotlight on the urgency to expand the government's subsidy for crop insurance to boost the resilience of farmers in times of disaster. Through the Registry System for Basic Sector in Agriculture (RSBSA) of the DA, farmers register and submit their profiles. Farmers' enrolment in RSBSA provides them with the opportunity to access different forms of support services from the government, including crop insurance subsidies, especially for farmers availing of loans from government-facilitated loan infrastructures. KASAPPI ARC became an accredited underwriter for the Philippine Crop Insurance Corporation (PCIC), thus enabling the cooperative to facilitate crop insurance enrolment and renewal and the processing of claims on



Source: CARRD

behalf of its members. Farmers of the organic rice program are among those covered by these crop insurance subsidies.

In 2021, CARRD partnered with the Center for Informatics - University of San Agustin in piloting a telehealth project in the same communities in Passi City. The initiative provides accessible free medical services to farming households in times of health emergencies.

Benefits Gained by the Farmers and Their Cooperatives

Increased income

Low production costs, a premium price for their produce, and stable yields have boosted the economic returns to the farmers. On average, farmers currently enjoy a net income of 35,310 Philippine Pesos (620 US Dollars) per hectare. In contrast, farmers in the same community practicing conventional farming earn only between 20,200 and 26,000 Philippine Pesos (between 355 and 457 US Dollars) per hectare depending on the season and fluctuating farm gate price.

Reduced Need for Loans

Since the majority of the inputs are prepared by the farmers themselves (e.g., seeds, fertilizers, and biopesticides), farmers avail of loans from the cooperative only when they need to hire additional laborers during land preparation and harvesting.

Availability of Seeds that Have High Adaptive Capacity

According to some of the Passi farmers, traditional rice varieties are not attractive to pests and diseases. They attribute this to the fact that these varieties do not require heavy fertilization and only produce minimal yet productive tillers, unlike the conventional varieties. Moreover, farmers have observed that traditional varieties require less irrigation and are more tolerant to drought.

Improved Soil Texture and Fertility

According to the farmers, the continuous application of compost and organic fertilizers makes soil texture more refined, thus increasing their capacity to absorb and retain water.

Access to Government Support Services

Being recognized as CARP beneficiaries as well as being certified as producers of organic rice, the farmers' cooperatives — SARB MPC and KASAPPI ARC — are prioritized for receiving support services from the government (e.g., training, production loans, common service facility, and crop insurance).

Income for KASAPPI ARC

The cooperative generates income from facilitating the purchase of dried “palay” — or rice that has not been husked — and marketing the rice in partnership with GlowCorp. Income earned by KASAPPI ARC is utilized to expand the project and improve milling operations.

Recommendations

Strengthening and Sustaining Land Rights Security

- ***Quality over quantity of land distribution.*** The government must focus more on the quality rather than the quantity of land distribution to ensure that land titles are not just awarded to farmers but that farmers actually occupy and make use of the land. Though the collective CLOAs received by the farmers in Passi City provide them with the right to occupy and till the land, the absence

of clear individual boundaries (which can be resolved by awarding individual titles) creates conflict among farmers and even opens up opportunities for former land owners to re-occupy the land through dummy farmers.

- **Prioritize social preparation.** The farmers must be educated not just about the benefits of the program but equally importantly about their roles and obligations. In the case of farmers in Passi City, their post-land distribution and acquisition obligations, including paying amortization and local taxes as new land owners, will further strengthen their ownership of their lands.
- **Improve agrarian reform database and documentation.** The government must improve its system of land documentation and harmonize related processes among different agencies to cut short the process of parcelization of collective land titles as well as to ensure more comprehensive action when issues arise.
- **Develop a more extensive cadre of paralegals and land rights defenders.** Paralegals and advocates are the first line of defense by the community who will represent them in negotiations in case there are issues and threats related to land ownership.



Source: CARRD

Improving Land Productivity through Sustainable Agriculture

- **Improve the capacity of local governments to promote organic agriculture.** In the absence of civil society organizations (CSOs) in the communities, local governments should provide dedicated technical person/s with in-depth knowledge of organic agriculture who could educate and guide the farmers in shifting to organic agriculture practices.
- **Incentivize the practice of organic agriculture.** The government must provide more incentives to farmers practicing organic agriculture so that they would not be lured to go back to conventional farming because of government subsidies, like hybrid seeds and commercial fertilizers. The government must promote organic agriculture both for its environmental and commercial values.
- **Ensure that the provision of support services is needs-based.** Support services provided by the government must be based on the felt needs of the farmers rather than a uniform, generic package provided throughout the country. Organic agriculture requires specialized training for the farmers, organic farm inputs, and dedicated post-harvest facilities which are totally distinct from conventional farming.
- **Increase the capacity of farmers' organizations to manage projects.** Farmers' cooperatives must be strengthened to make them more viable as conduits for support services. The more stable the organization is in terms of governance and finances, the better it can secure resources and projects.

Others

- **Provide substantial resources for evidence-based organic agriculture advocacy.** More substantial resources must be invested in the documentation of organic agriculture experiences in order to establish evidence of the benefits and gains of practicing such technology. These are crucial in advocating for effective policies and in persuading farmers to adopt the practices.



Source: CARRD

- **Improve the mechanism of land information and data sharing among government agencies.** There is an urgent need to improve coordination and data sharing among local government units (LGUs) and other CARP-implementing agencies to identify agricultural lands that should not be converted to non-agricultural purposes, especially in the absence of the National Land Use Act (NLUA). ■

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Citation:

Demaluan, M. J. and Pillora, C. (2023). *Collective Land Ownership Empowers Farmers to Choose Their Pathways to Recovery and Resilience: A Case Study of How Land Rights Security Improves Sustainable Rice Farming and Increases Climate Mitigation in Upland Communities in Passi City, Iloilo, Philippines*. Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ANGOC). [Paper prepared by the Center for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (CARRD) for the pilot phase of the Collective Action on Mainstreaming Land Rights of the Rural Poor in the Climate Discourse in Asia Pacific, zooming in on Bangladesh]. This collective action is supported by the Global Forum on Agricultural Research and Innovation (GFAR/GFAiR) and the European Union (EU)].