FOOD AND COVID-19: LESSONS TO LEARN DURING THE PANDEMIC

by:
Laura T. Timbang
Teacher I, E.C. Bernabe National High School

We have learned so many lessons from the COVID-19 Pandemic. It reminds us of the things which matter most, like family, solidarity, and food in our table.

Agriculture plays an important role in every country as it ensures food security while providing employment and reducing the effects of poverty (Birthal et al., 2013). When the economy was put to an abrupt halt on mid-March of 2020 as a result of the growing concern on the spread of the infection, we have experienced a dilemma which we have not seen before. This has resulted to lost of jobs and food shortages. There was social unrest as people were fearing for things which they do not know. Countries and regions became worried of their own food sustainability that they closed borders and restricted food exports.

Life in many parts of the country has been difficult because of the pandemic. Our farmers are greatly affected and may of them could not engage in farming activities as part of the early restrictions of the government to minimize human movement. As a result, the farmers could not tend to their crops and they could not bring their products to the market. The food supply chains were heavily strained and distribution of goods were minimized as movements of both goods and people within and across the border were limited. The challenge then was not on the availability of food but on how they can be accessed.

Self-quarantine enabled us to develop new hobbies and most saw interest in farming and gardening. Known for their resiliency, the Filipino people began to plant crops or have livestock of their own. Planting has been considered by many as a way to
pass time or as a hobby. This time however, it has become a way to ensure that they will have food on their table. What this implies is that the sense of self-preservation is what drives people to resort back to the basics of farming.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us the fragility of the food system and our vulnerabilities in the event of a crisis. Therefore, we ought to learn to redefine the focus of our government in terms of agricultural improvement. It is important that short-term and long-term solutions are explored in the midst of any crisis. The problem of food security that the pandemic brought has to be resolved in order for us to sustain the needs of the country. Policy makers are planning ahead beyond the pandemic by developing a framework titled “We Recover as One.” This plan should provide us the opportunity to reconstruct agriculture and to rebuild the food system so that it can be resilient, inclusive, competitive and sustainable. There is a need to transform the agricultural landscape and to create policies that would help us respond to the needs of the people in the midst of any crisis.

In a speech, Diop (2020) said that “agriculture can clearly play an important role in the economic recovery of the Philippines as it works to gain back the ground it lost during the pandemic.” He further emphasized the need to modernize the country’s agricultural sector. Philippine agriculture should be transformed into a dynamic sector which can mitigate the effects of poverty, provides inclusive growth and uplifting quality of life. Diop contended that “no country has successfully transitioned from middle- to high-income status without having achieved an effective transformation of their agri-food systems.”

Such transformation can start from the school level. At such a young age, school children could be made aware of the relevance and importance of agriculture to society, to the economy and to the preservation of life itself. There are many issues that surround food security but agricultural education can provide the basic concepts and tenets that could guide future farmers and future consumers to take responsibility in securing food
to every table with or without a crisis. Livelihood education can be further strengthened during this pandemic alongside the efforts to achieve academic growth in the midst of the pandemic.

Resiliency is the main lesson that the pandemic has taught us. Despite all the intricacies and limitations, Filipinos continue to thrive for themselves and for their families. In this struggle, we have learned volatility of the food system and the vulnerability of humans. For this, we also should have learned the importance of agriculture and our responsibilities to maintain agricultural development. The pandemic has taught us so many things and by now we should appreciate the importance of agriculture in ensuring the availability of food in our tables.

References:


