

Plenary Report: Food Price Volatility and Food Reserves in Asean

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Just over two years after the 2008 food price crisis, in recent months the international community has been concerned again about high food prices on national and international markets. Many governments, international agencies and producers organizations are currently involved in debates about food price volatility and what policy responses may mitigate it and reduce its impact on poor consumers. Farmers are likewise asked how price volatility impacts them. What causes food price volatility? What policies and programs can help mitigate food price volatility?

Our simple analysis:

The high food prices in many ASEAN countries are caused by extreme weather patterns, export restrictions, decades of underinvestment in agriculture, expansion of bio/agro fuel production, commodity speculation, rising prices of inputs and transportation costs due to increase in oil and fuel prices, and land grabbing. This has resulted to increase in hunger, malnutrition and poverty in the region, aggravating the living conditions of farmers, fishers, indigenous peoples', laborers, especially rural women and children.

Our responses:

Amidst the difficulties that we face, we continue our struggles to make our communities resilient. We intensify our work along:

1. Organizing and mobilizations to bring peasants' and workers' voices to the attention of policy makers, especially on the issues of Land reform, national and regional agricultural policies and decent wages. We promote multi-stakeholder meetings on the price of rice and other related issues.
2. Increasing our food production efforts to ensure food in our community and alternative markets resulting to shorter journey of food from producer to consumer. We promote agro-ecology which allows farmers to be more in control of production inputs and markets and to protect our environment. We also conduct rice and maize seeds cross-breeding.

3. Strengthening production and marketing cooperatives for effective following a value chain approach.
4. Establishing local food reserves – “lumbung pangan”(Indonesia)

We Recommend to ASEAN and the ASEAN Member States:

1. To increase public investments for smallholder agriculture, giving significant involvement of women, towards increasing food productivity through sustainable and agri-ecological farming systems, strengthening market-access initiatives, empowering peoples' organizations, and supporting the redistribution of arable lands to small food producers. Governments should enact Land Use policies that promote sustainable resource management. Support services must be adequately provided including seed, water, farm inputs, credit, social insurance, research and extension, basic infrastructure, storage and transportation, etc.
2. To strengthen regional cooperation on developing a more responsive Regional Food Reserves that will help stabilize food supply and discourage speculation. More importantly, it should intensify its support to establishing national and community Food Reserves. Social protection measures to cushion the effects of the food price crisis should be developed, especially to rural women and children who are most vulnerable to the food price increase and food volatility.
3. To create institutionalized mechanisms at the regional and national levels where organized rural and labor sectors can programmatically engage with policy makers towards strategic policy making and program implementation.
4. To Increase investment in research, education, and program support on diversifying food production and dietary habits to reduce dependence on rice.

Among us, Civil Society Organizations:

Once again, we commit to strengthen our capacities for policy advocacy and dialogues at national and regional levels to address this chronic issue. We will continue to build closer cooperation among farmers organizations , labor and workers' groups and various rural development organizations in the region to share experiences, lessons, and build solidarity.