

# Theme 3

## Food, Forests, and Farmers *Finding Sustainable Pathways for the Future*



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### ABSTRACT

## **Countering MAISAGANA: Highlights and Challenges in Improving and Conserving Native Corn**

by Gary Ben S. Villocino

The MAISAGANA corn program was instituted by former president Marcos through Issued Letter of Instruction 1181. This accordingly aimed to boost corn production to make it at par with the increasing demands from the livestock industry. Similar to its counterpart for Rice MASAGANA 99, the national corn program introduced hybrid seeds, synthetic fertilizers, and other chemicals, which laid the groundwork for corporate driven agricultural technologies including genetically modified (GM) crops.

Based on MASIPAG's farmer-led research, a few decades after the introduction of GM corn, farmers are left with rising debts owed to corn traders ultimately leaving some farmers landless. There have been observed ecological impacts as well including the drastic loss of farm biodiversity and increased erosion of topsoil.

Countering these challenges, MASIPAG's corn program offers a multi-pronged approach to address the complex issues faced by corn farmers. The corn program attempts to replicate MASIPAG's success in rice farming to corn. Admittedly, there have been challenges owing to the difficulties in establishing ecological islands to set-up corn seed banks and trial farms and recently the pervasiveness of counterfeit GM corn, locally known as sige-sige, which makes monitoring exponentially difficult.

#### **About the Author**

**Gary Ben S. Villocino** is the Advocacy Officer of Farmer-Scientist network MASIPAG Mindanao since 2020. He has been part of the network since 2016 working previously as the Cluster Coordinator for Eastern Mindanao. Before joining the network, he was the area coordinator of IFI-VIMROD, the development arm of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente. As area coordinator he helped mobilize support for farmers in Misamis Oriental. In his individual capacity, he volunteered as the Campaign and Media Relations Officer of various progressive grassroots organizations of farmers and indigenous peoples in Northern Mindanao, which he joined right after graduating from Mindanao State University – Iligan Institute of Technology with a degree in Sociology in 2010.

He belongs to a family of farmers so he was exposed to the realities of rural poverty and hunger at an early age and he believes that farmer empowerment can drive rural development as long as farmers are given access to land, seeds, and appropriate technologies.