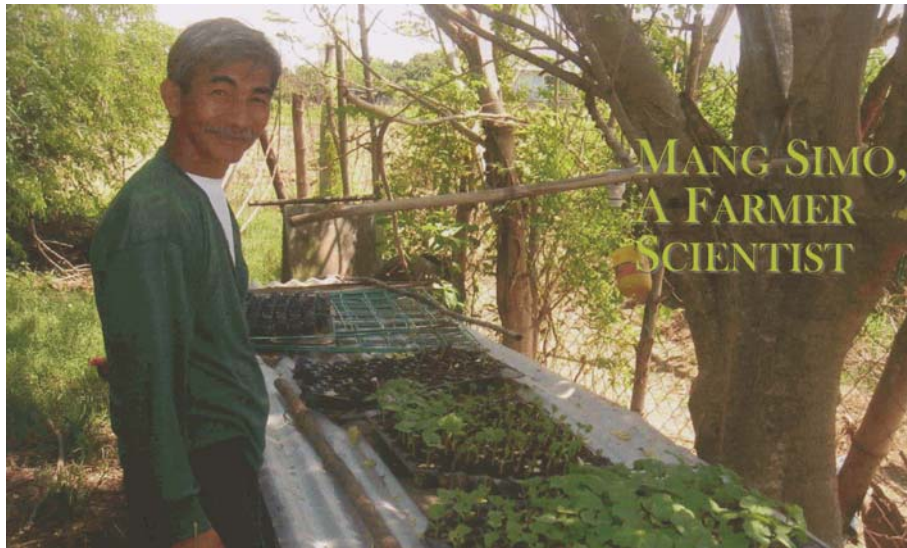


Mang Simo, A Farmer Scientist



It was a rainy Thursday morning when the ARB validating team headed north, where the famous cobblestone streets are delimited with well-maintained antique houses and other structures built way back to the Spanish era, and where “longanisa” is not fatty and matched with its equally delectable “sukang iloko”. The town was originally called Biga’a. It was derived from a native plant but as time passed the name eventually evolved to Vigan.

It took us 12 exhausting hours to reach the place, with several bus stops where one can stretch cramped-up legs, attend to personal needs and eat!!. We arrived in Vigan past eight in the evening, sleepy and hastily proceeded to the place where we were to be accommodated.

The following morning, and after a hearty breakfast, we headed to our purpose, to interview the pride of Ilocos Sur, Mr. Maximo Rabanal or Mang Simo as he is fondly called by his town mates.

As we approached our destination, we’ve noticed that the roads are well paved. We were told that farm-to-market road was a grant project under the World Bank, and constructed in coordination with the local government unit to help the ARBs in the area in transporting their produce. But unfortunately, the well-paved road did not reach Brgy. Pantay Daya.

We were greeted by a group of people; and one of them was Mang Simo. Of slim frame, with sun-burnt skin, typical of most Ilocanos, garbed in a pink shirt, with hair newly-cut through gray strands were left tint-free and sporting a warm welcoming smile, Mang Simo led us to the heart of his newly constructed bungalow where we carried out the interview.

His humble beginnings....



Mang Simo is a native of Brgy. Cabittaogan in Sta. Catalina, Ilocos Sur. Born to a poor farming family who subsisted in a hand-to-mouth existence. At an early age, he and his two brothers were orphaned by his father. To survive and to help their mother raise their family, the brothers did menial jobs for their neighbors. Through his persistence and against all odds, he finished high school and pursued a two-year course in automotive mechanics. However, luck was not with him at first for he was unable to find a job. Thus, he decided to be a tricycle driver. Through hard work and sheer determination, he eventually bought his own unit, albeit on an installment basis.

In his 30's, he married Remedios Rapadan and sired two sons, Rex and Ryan. Unsatisfied with his earnings as a tricycle driver, and due to his growing family needs, he decided to go back to farming.

Reaching out to his dreams....



He used to be a tenant in a small parcel of land in Pantay Daya, Vigan, in the late 80's. Though he resided in Cabittaogan, Sta. Catalina, he made sure that he attended to his farm everyday.

When R.A. 6657 was signed by former President Corazon Aquino in 1988, hope ran high of owning the land he cultivated. And in 1990, his dream came true when the Department of Agrarian Reform, under the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) awarded to him the 0.4573 hectare of land that he was tilling. Payment of the land amortization was not a problem, since he diligently saved a portion of the income from the land. After only two years, he was able to fully pay his land amortization.

Though the land is small, he makes sure that it is productive. High value commercial crops, upo and patola are cultivated all-year round. He practices crop rotation to maximize the use of his land. Ryan, his youngest son helps him deliver his produce to the nearby local market.

He also allocated a portion of the land to swine raising and fattening. He designed and created the pig sty with the help of his youngest son, who is a trained welder. Now, 11 sows contribute substantially to his farm income.

Thereafter, he was able to lease a 1.8 ha. farm land in the nearby barangay, which is planted to palay from May to December and corn every October and February.

From his farm income, he was able to buy 2 parcels of farm land with a total area of 0.2462 ha. Adjacent to his yard which he utilizes as demo farm hybrid vegetable seeds and raising area for fighting cocks.

Bringing out his ability to greater heights...

Ever the inquisitive mind, and still discontented with what he has accomplished, he pursued on learning new techniques in farming by attending various seminars sponsored by the Department of Agriculture and other local organizations.

He considers the Integrated Farming Bio-System Training which he attended in 2004 in Benguet, as his biggest break. The training, sponsored by Shell Foundation, Inc. taught him how to formulate animal feeds and prepare organic fertilizer from animal manure and farm wastes. He also observes Integrated Pest Management Systems. These new knowledge which are environment-friendly were strictly applied in his farm activity which has resulted to a big impact, such as less farm input cost and increased crop production.

He makes sure to attend seminars and workshops offered in his area. Newly acquired knowledge are gladly re-echoed to his fellow beneficiaries through their cooperative. Being an advocate of organic farming, Mang Simo whole-heartedly accepted all the speaking engagements even in nearby municipalities to share his passion for farming whenever he is not pre-occupied with his own farming.

Eventually, his persistence paid off, as almost all of his neighbors and coop members are now practicing organic farming.

With such devotion to farming, he was acknowledged by the Ilocos Agriculture and Resource Research and Development Consortium (ILLARDEC) and appointed as Magsasakang Siyentista in 2007.

As a farmer scientist, he showcases various and latest agricultural technologies in his farm to his guests from nearby regions as part of their "Lakbay-Aral". The latest addition to his farm attraction is the bio-gas digester which was designed by the University of Northern Philippines and donated by the Department of Science and Technology in cooperation with DAR, ILLARDEC, Ayusan Norte FITS Center and the local government of Vigan. Hands-on training was also provided to Mang Simo in Batac in 2007.

This technology converts swine wastes into bio-gas that is used for cooking and component for making organic fertilizer. As Mang Simo said, "Libre na kami sa gas, libre pa sa pataba."

It also eliminates the foul odor from swine wastes hence no fly or other insects are present in his piggery.

Holding various positions in different organizations simultaneously may be a feather to his cap, but he considers it a challenge and as an avenue to introduce farm innovations and sustainable income-generating activities to his fellowmen.

He is currently the Manager of Ayusan Norte- Pantay Fatima MPC (APMPCI), a DAR-assisted cooperative in PANTAY ARC and at the same time the President of Pantay Daya Farmers Association in his barangay. He is also the Treasurer of City Agriculture and Fishery Council, CAFC MPC and Vigan City Hog Raisers Association.

At the Provincial level, he is the President of Magsasakang Siyentista of Ilocos Sur, Business Manager of Ilocos Sur Seed Growers MPC.

When we asked him how he dealt with his daily activities in his farm, in his family and in his organizations, he just said that there should be trust, open communication and proper scheduling in order to attend to all the responsibilities.

Carrying out his task naturally became possible due to his political background due to his political background. From 1982 to 1997 he held the position of Barangay Kagawad in Brgy. Cabittaogan, Sta. Catalina, Ilocos Sur. However, he refused the encouragement to join politics again. Quoting him, "...baka kung magpupunta ako diyan mapapabayaan and farming, mahahati ang time ko."

Savoring the fruits of his labor....



Aside from acquiring the 2 parcels of land from his farm income, the education of his two sons was his priority, ensuring that they finished their chosen courses. Rex, the eldest, finished Civil Engineering and is now working in a private firm. Ryan, preferred to complete an automotive course just like him. He believes his younger son would continue his advocacy.

In 1990, the Rabanals decided to migrate to Vigan City and built their humble home inside their CARP-awarded land. Later, they decided to build a modern house also within the vicinity. It took them years to finish the house and made sure every detail was in accordance to their dream home.

In addition, he obtained farm implements one after the other such as 2 units of kuliglig with trailer, 2 units of rice thresher, 3 units of water pumps and 3 heads of draft animals. Service jeep was also purchased to transport his produce.

Motorcycle is a necessity in their location, that is why he purchased 3 units, for him and his sons.

In 2008, his net income was PhP 500,000 generated from the proceeds of high value commercial crops, rice, certified seeds, yellow corn, and swine.

As Mang Simo said it with pride, “Malaking tulong po ang CARP, kasi kung wala ang CARP wala itong bahay, wala rin mga equipment ko jan... Dati tenant lang ako. Ngayon nasa akin na itong lupang ito, diyan umunlad na ang buhay namin. Kasi yan ang pinagsimulan namin na umasenso ang buhay namin.”

When asked about those ARBs who sold their awarded land, he expressed in dismay, “Yan ang malaking kamalian nila,...dahil baka yan din ang binigay ni Lord na para umangat ang kanilang buhay. Kaya dapat hindi nila ibebenta ‘yun.”