

## FOOD SECURITY PROGRAM

# Policy Coherence for Facilitating Food Sovereignty in Topdac, Atok, Benguet

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## Introduction

Food insecurity in the Philippines, while still a persistent challenge, has notably eased over the last decade. Based on the National Nutrition Survey of the Department of Science and Technology - Food and Nutrition Research Institute (DOST-FNRI), the proportion of households experiencing moderate to severe levels of food insecurity dropped from 50.8 percent in 2013 to 31.4 percent in 2023, with a higher incidence in rural areas (35.3 percent) than in urban areas (27.8 percent). The downward trend in food insecurity can be attributed to rising household incomes, institutionalization of the *Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino* Program (4Ps), and increased food supply. Worth noting is the strategic policy shift from self-sufficiency to food security.

Strengthening the local food system is one of the approaches mentioned in the Philippine Development Plan (PDP) 2023-2028 to ensure food and nutrition security. The PDP serves as the national government's medium-term blueprint for economic and social

development in the Philippines. Given the ever-changing geopolitical climate worldwide, as seen in the Russia–Ukraine War and the brewing tensions between the United States and Iran, reducing reliance on international sources of agricultural inputs and food supplies has become increasingly imperative. To reduce the effect of external shocks, the PDP 2023-2028 plans to achieve a sufficient and stable supply of food commodities.

While the PDP explicitly states its goal of ensuring food security, still, there are criticisms on this concept, among which are: 1) focus on availability which practically empowers large food manufacturers and displaces the small local producers; access to food is treated as secondary only to increasing production ignoring the fact that availability is not synonymous to accessibility; 2) implicit in increasing productivity are environmental footprints that could have deleterious effects on future production; 3) increasing productivity often neglects local culture

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and values resulting to marginalization and social inequities; 4) and food security is vulnerable to threats of political instability as what has been happening now in world trade, and to shocks caused by disasters and hazardous events. In contrast, there is growing literature that supports food sovereignty, which is seen as more sustainable and respectful of the social and environmental elements of sustainability without disregarding economic stability. Food sovereignty is the right of communities to self-govern their food systems, including cultivation, distribution, and consumption, in ways that respect cultural traditions, safeguard the integrity of the environment, and ensure social justice. According to Pimbert (2009):

... this alternative policy framework for food and agriculture aims to guarantee and protect people's space, ability and right to define their own models of production, food distribution and consumption patterns. This notion of 'food sovereignty' is perhaps best understood as a transformative process that seeks to recreate the democratic realm and regenerate a diversity of autonomous food systems based on equity, social justice and ecological sustainability.

Delos Reyes and Aquino (2025) studied the levels of food insecurity across three food environments representing the upland (Topdac, Atok, Benguet), coastal (Laois, Labrador, Pangasinan), and urban area (Balsigan in Baguio City). The study found that the upland community of Topdac in Atok, Benguet had the lowest proportion of food-insecure households at 48 percent, compared with the 88 percent of the coastal community, and 100 percent in the urban community of Balsigan. The same study recommended doing further research on the possibility of Topdac pursuing food sovereignty. Buenaseda et al. (2026a) picked up the idea and assessed the readiness of Barangay Topdac to migrate to food sovereignty. Topdac is a community situated in the mountainous areas of Atok, Benguet. It was found to have strong potential for food sovereignty through its vegetable production, cultural food traditions, and community cooperation. Yet interconnected barriers remain: farmers lack productive capacity, intermediaries lack program knowledge, and consumers lack the community reinforcement needed to sustain behavioral change. These gaps are mutually dependent, with each group's limitation weakening the others. Additionally, local government support and agricultural programs are already in place, but they remain fragmented and unaligned under any unified food sovereignty agenda. While the farmers, intermediaries, and consumers express willingness to support local food production

and traditional practices, food sovereignty exists more as an unspoken byproduct of their way of life than a deliberate collective goal (Buenaseda et al. 2026b).

For food sovereignty to fully gain a foothold in the area, existing programs must be more deliberately coordinated and redirected toward a clear, integrated food system framework. Policy coherence across national and local levels is thus seen as imperative, taking into account that alignment of activities called for by policies is assured, along with coordination of all stakeholders for maximum synergies that could lead to the end goal of attaining food sovereignty. According to the United Nations Environment Program (2025), policy coherence is the systematic promotion of consistent policy actions across different government sectors, agencies, and levels to achieve common goals (i.e., food sovereignty). Vertical policy coherence, in particular, pertains to coherence in different levels of government administration (i.e., national and local government). To assess the degree of vertical policy coherence, local and national plans, programs, and policies are reviewed to check for convergence or divergence from the existing capacities of the Topdac community and the food sovereignty principles.

## Analytical Framework

To fully understand how policy coherence could be supported for facilitation of food sovereignty, this paper employs an integrated analytical framework that combines two complementary theoretical lenses: the food sovereignty framework advanced by Pimbert and Claeys (2024), and the ADKAR model for change management espoused by Hiatt (2006). Together, these frameworks provide both a normative vision of what a just and self-determining food system ought to be and a diagnostic tool for understanding why communities and individuals may struggle to move toward food sovereignty (Figure 1). Applied to Barangay Topdac, this combined framework allows for a layered analysis that situates local food system dynamics within broader structural conditions while also attending to the behavioral and institutional barriers experienced by farmers, market intermediaries, and consumers.

### *Food Sovereignty as a Normative Benchmark*

Central to this framework is the argument that treating food security as mere access to sufficient calories is an insufficient measure of a community's relationship to its food system. Beyond food security is food sovereignty, which is defined as the right of peoples

to define their own food and agricultural systems in accordance with their values, traditions, and ecological contexts (Pimbert 2009). This is made possible through participatory governance and planned democracy. Genuine food system transformation cannot be achieved through top-down technical interventions alone, as it requires the redistribution of decision-making power to communities directly affected by food production and consumption (Pimbert 2009). This means creating institutional spaces where farmers, consumers, and local traders can meaningfully shape agricultural policy, land use decisions, and market structures.

A complementary idea is that of Pimbert and Claeys (2024), which anchored food sovereignty within the international human rights framework. They trace the emergence of peasant-led advocacy as a form of norm entrepreneurship, demonstrating how grassroots movements have progressively mainstreamed food sovereignty into global legal discourse, eventually leading to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP) in 2018. According to the authors, food sovereignty is not simply a policy aspiration, but an emerging collective right obligating states to protect the conditions under which rural communities can exercise control over their food systems.

### *ADKAR as a Diagnostic Lens*

Being a normative benchmark, the Pimbert-Claeys framework seems insufficient in analyzing the context of Barangay Topdac since it does not offer a granular account of why individuals and communities may fail to adopt practices or systems that would advance it. To address this, the paper draws on Hiatt's ADKAR framework for change management. Following ADKAR, a successful change or advancement to food sovereignty in Topdac requires that there must be Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability, and Reinforcement among the people within the community.

**Awareness** is a recognition that change is necessary or beneficial. In the case of Topdac, this encompasses whether farmers, intermediaries, and consumers understand the limitations of the current food system and the potential benefits of locally oriented alternatives such as food sovereignty. Without awareness of systemic problems such as postharvest losses, price volatility, or nutritional gaps, change efforts are unlikely to gain traction in the community. On the other hand, **Awareness** without **Desire** would be meaningless because the latter captures the

motivation to participate in or support a change. Even when stakeholders are aware of a problem, they may lack the will to act if the perceived costs outweigh the benefits, or if social norms discourage deviation from established practices. In Topdac, this dimension is particularly relevant to understand consumer preferences for commercially sourced food over community-produced alternatives, despite the latter's cultural and nutritional advantages.

**Knowledge** is also essential as it denotes the information, skills, and understanding required to implement a change. For food sovereignty, this includes technical knowledge on diversified farming methods, post-harvest processing, and market linkages, as well as awareness of available institutional support. In a similar vein, **Ability** is critical because it pertains to the practical capacity to translate knowledge into action. This is conditioned by access to material resources, which may include inputs, infrastructure, credit, and equipment. In Topdac, physical and logistical constraints are realities.

Once change has been implemented, it should be sustained over time and regression to prior behaviors should be prevented. **Reinforcement** in the form of institutional support, policy continuity, community accountability structures, and cultural endorsement may be needed. This is where policy coherence becomes critical because food sovereignty, while emanating from the ground, has national imperatives that need to be pursued. For example, local planning instruments are guided by the Philippine Development Plan and are influenced by the value system of the stakeholders within the local food system, including the municipal government, indigenous communities (predominantly Ibaloi and Kankana-ey), and highland vegetable farmers whose livelihoods anchor the local agricultural economy.

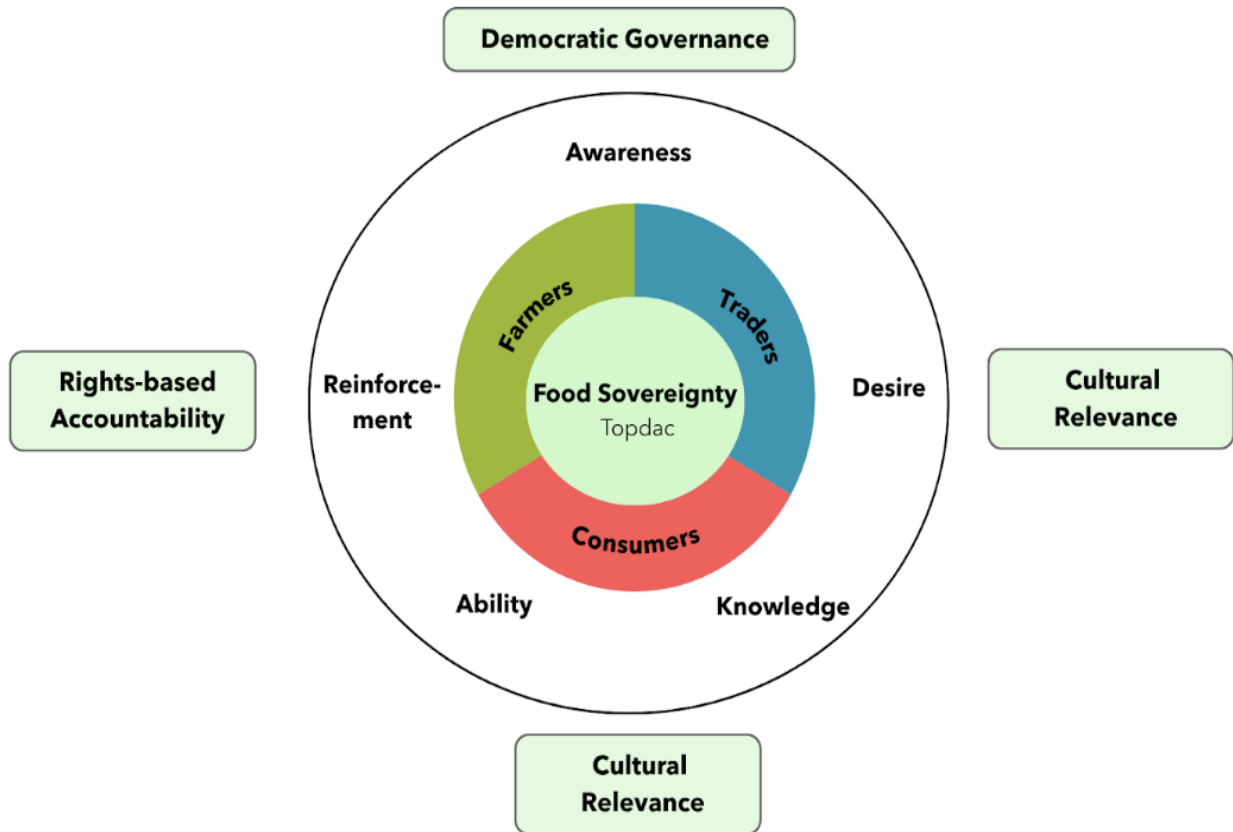


Figure 1. Integrated theoretical framework for food sovereignty [adapted from Pimbert and Claeys (2024) and Hiatt (2006)]

## Methodology

This policy brief is underpinned by the barriers to change as identified by Buenaseda et al. (2026b) in their evaluation of the existing capacity of the Topdac community to migrate to food sovereignty. In the process, they used the ADKAR model for change management to identify the barriers to change among the food system actors in Topdac (farmers, intermediaries, and consumers).

Document analysis and comparison with the food sovereignty framework were performed. The results from the ADKAR assessment were obtained from the discussion paper of Buenaseda et al. (2026b) and the eight-domain food sovereignty framework developed by Pimbert and Claeys (2024), which is an integration of the principles articulated during the World Food Summit in 1996 and the pillars established in the Nyéléni Declaration in 2006. Local planning instruments were obtained from the municipal office of Atok, Benguet. The planning instruments included are: the municipality's Comprehensive Development Plan (CDP) 2020–2025, Comprehensive Land Use Plan (CLUP), and barangay-level profiles, particularly that of Topdac, Atok, Benguet.

These documents were also considered alongside relevant national policies related to food sovereignty, including the Organic Agriculture Act (Republic Act No. 10068), *Masustansyang Pagkain para sa Batang Pilipino* Act of 2017 (Republic Act No. 11037), and the Food Safety Act (Republic Act No. 10611). Recent studies in Topdac that discussed the current supply and demand situation and existing food sovereignty practices are also included in the analysis.

### *Current Situation Supporting Food Sovereignty in Topdac*

The primary means of livelihood in Topdac is agriculture. The majority of the households engage in small-scale vegetable cultivation, which they market at the local trading posts and public markets, including Sayangan, La Trinidad, and Baguio City. Since the barangay does not have a fixed public market and is distant from major trading places, the cost of transportation increases the retail prices of food. The community thus relies on the outside markets to sell their produce and at the same time to purchase basic food commodities. The production data of Atok

shows that agricultural production is centered on chayote, cabbage, potato, carrot, and Chinese cabbage. The production of rice is limited to Barangays Naguey and Pasdong due mainly to their flatter fields that are suitable for paddy production. This fact shows that it is a highly specialized vegetable system, which has an implication in the diversity of food available. Livestock rearing, which includes hog, poultry, and egg production, remains primarily at a subsistence level.

Topdac farmers typically have small plots of land to work with. The average land size is about 0.25 ha, with 69 percent of the farmer-respondents engaged in crop production only. This figure presents an opportunity to pursue diversified farming to supply the protein requirement of the community (Buenaseda et al. 2026b). The farming households are just above

the poverty line with a median monthly income of PHP 14,000.00, implying the farm's limited capacity to adjust production to meet local demand, access necessary farming inputs, and raise animals alongside existing crops. They have also received minimal support from both private and public sectors (See Table 1).

These results suggest that the key limitations to food sovereignty lie not only in farmers' capacity but also in the broader enabling environment, which comprises local initiatives, national policies, and planning tools. Therefore, the next section explores how the current policies and plans facilitate or inhibit the shift towards a more food-sovereign local food system.

**Table 1. ADKAR mean score by component, 54 farmer-respondents, Topdac, Atok, Benguet, 2025**

Component	Mean Score
Awareness (on the need for change)	4.80
Desire (for migration to food sovereignty)	4.83
Knowledge (on the advantages and benefits of food sovereignty)	4.28
Ability (to apply knowledge and techniques for sustainable food production and marketing)	3.80
Reinforcement (to sustain food sovereignty in the long-term)	4.21

Source: Buenaseda et al. 2026b

### ***Local and National Plans, Programs, and Policies and their Alignment with Food Sovereignty Principles***

For policy alignment, it was found that the CDP 2020-2025 of Atok and the Philippine Development Plan 2023-2028 show areas of convergence. Interventions such as the expansion of irrigation systems and the High Value Crops Development Program support the provision of production and postharvest facilities aimed at enhancing productivity and increasing food supply in the area. The local development plan also aims to build the capacity of farmers by strengthening rural-based organizations and by facilitating access to inputs, credit, and extension services. Strengthening of local networks is also explicitly stated in the PDP. However, the programs and projects mentioned in

these plans, while perceived as highly aligned, have yet to be fully received and felt by Topdac farmers and traders, as they continue to face limited access to farming inputs and postharvest facilities.

There are national policies that are being implemented at the grassroots level. For instance, the promotion of organic agriculture and Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) is currently being implemented in the municipality of Atok. The Municipal Agriculture Office (MAO) of Atok conducts training programs, including the promotion and adoption of GAP. These locally initiated programs and activities strongly align with the Organic Agriculture Act of 2010 and the Food Safety Act. The CDP thus advances organic farming in R.A. No. 10068, encouraging the work

of the Atok Organic Practitioners Association, and safeguards the heirloom rice varieties. The organic farming practice at the barangay level is manifested in sites like Curoz Cadian Organic Farm in Topdac. The Food Safety Act and Good Agricultural Practices are pursued to maintain the quality and safety of food even though these requirements reinforce the dependence on external markets and standards.

The Municipal Government of Atok also has nutrition interventions that patronize its agricultural support programs, thereby enhancing the local food system. For instance, the Supplementary Feeding Program implemented by the Municipal Social Welfare and Development Office (MSWDO) and the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) among day-care children aged three to four years old get most of the vegetables used in the program from local producers like the Caliking Multipurpose Cooperative, indicating that local supply is supported, and is mutually strengthening. The program provides 120 feeding days of free hot meals and milk daily at PHP 25.00 per child daily and PHP 11.00 per child daily as shouldered by the DSWD and LGU, respectively. The total budget of the feeding program in 2025 was PHP 900,000.00 under the allotment of DSWD and PHP 400,000.00 from the municipal government. Parents also have an active involvement in local food and nutrition projects by participating in the program by taking turns cooking and sometimes providing additional ingredients. These initiatives at the local level show strong vertical alignment with the Masustansyang Pagkain para sa Batang Pilipino Act of 2017. While alignment is seen, the need for visibility through wider reach remains a challenge as there are still farmers in Topdac who are not that aware of these programs, as reflected in the low Reinforcement score on government support received (See Table 1).

Atok's CLUP projects democratic control of resources. The plan classifies the municipal land into agricultural, forest, and protected areas and regulates these through zoning policies intended to preserve lands and prevent uncontrolled land conversion. Development thrusts and strategies such as Agriculture Development and Natural Resources Development highlight the significance of land as the foundation of the livelihood of the locals. The plan outlines provisions on forest protection, watershed protection, ecological solid waste management, climate-resilient agriculture, and regulated land-use conversion, all aimed at ensuring ecological balance recommended for upland farming. However, the document still recognizes the existence of pressures and stresses on agricultural development, such as deforestation, suggesting the conflict between

economic demands of livelihood and sustainability of the environment. It is to be noted that although these policies shield the resource base for food production, the document is still largely placed in the context of development planning and does not directly encourage or promote local food autonomy.

The data and recent studies taken at the barangay level indicate that there are already food sovereignty-related practices in Topdac, which include household food production, cultivation of diverse crops, livestock raising, and the persistence of traditional farming knowledge among Kankana-ey and Ibaloi farmers. These indicate that food sovereignty practices exist at the community level, although not formally stated as a developmental goal in CDP, CLUP, and PDP. This could have some implications for the trajectory toward the transition to a more food-sovereign system. What is currently happening on the ground is still incidental and not mainly intended to support the food sovereignty of the local community. This is brought about by the limited institutional support and uneven alignment between existing local opportunities and planned programs and projects.

To further explore this alignment, Table 2 presents a comparison of the national policies, local planning tools, and current practices in Barangay Topdac with the food sovereignty framework of Pimbert and Claeys (2024) to examine how existing policies, plans, and activities correspond with the principles of food sovereignty. The lack of dedicated policies and programs for food sovereignty is evident with the noticeable absence of specific ordinances or pronouncements at the LGU levels (both municipality and barangay levels). This affirms the observation that grounded practices in Barangay Topdac are mainly incidental or ingrained individual initiatives and not a collective endeavor explicitly aiming for the attainment of food sovereignty.

## Conclusion

Examination of existing policies for coherence underscores the fact that while the country has made progress in improving food security at the national level and to some extent at the municipal level, policies towards food sovereignty are only implicit. This was noted in the fact that national and local development plans of the municipality of Atok exhibit substantial convergence with food sovereignty principles, particularly in promoting local and sustainable agricultural production. Locally initiated programs and activities such as training on organic farming and

Good Agricultural Practices strongly align with the Organic Agriculture Act of 2010 and the Food Safety Act of 2013. The supplemental feeding program of MSWDO is also in alignment with the Masustansyang

Pagkain para sa Batang Pilipino Act of 2017. None of these, however, were specifically targeted to promote food sovereignty.

**Table 2. Alignment of food sovereignty domains with local planning tools, the national policies, and practices at the barangay Topdac, Atok, Benguet, 2025.**

Food Sovereignty Domain/National Policies	Atok CLUP Provisions	Atok CDP Programs	Topdac Practices
<b>Reinventing Modernity</b>			
<p>RA 10068 (Organic Agriculture Act of 2010) - aims to shift agriculture towards a more sustainable model, encouraging the use of natural fertilizers and pesticides rather than synthetic alternatives</p> <p>RA 10611 (Food Safety Act of 2013) - establishes strict regulations on food hygiene, labeling and quality standards</p>	-	Promotion of safe food through Good Agricultural Practices (GAP)	Participation in GAP training and adoption of GAP practices
<b>Rights to land, seeds, and natural resources</b>			
<p>IPRA (Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act) - implementing policies ensuring ownership of ancestral domains, cultural integrity, and self-determination</p> <p>RA 10068 (Organic Agriculture Act of 2010) - Promotes sustainability by protecting natural resources</p>	Agricultural zoning, forest protection, ancestral domain recognition, land use regulation	Agriculture support programs, crop and livestock development	Indigenous land use, farming within ancestral domain
<b>Healing the Metabolic Rift</b>			
RA 10068 (Organic Agriculture Act of 2010) - promotes, develops, and implements organic farming to enrich soil fertility, reduce pollution, and protect farmers' health.	Forest and watershed protection, environmental management, ecological solid waste management, land use control	Promotion of organic farming practices	Organic farming practices, reduce reliance on agro-chemicals, crop rotation
<b>Supporting Local Organizations and Networks</b>			
<p>RA 11037 ("Masustansyang Pagkain para sa Batang Pilipino Act") - Encourages sourcing food supplies from local farmers and cooperatives</p> <p>RA 7900 (High Value Crops Development Act of 1995) - goal is to boost rural income, alleviate poverty, and promote sustainable growth by moving beyond traditional farming, often through cooperatives and agribusiness development</p>	-	<p>Implementation of supplemental feeding program</p> <p>High Value Crops Development Program</p>	Local sourcing from Caliking Multipurpose Cooperative

<b>Gender and Intersectional Justice</b>			
RA 11037(“Masustansyang Pagkain para sa Batang Pilipino Act”) - Day Care Supplemental Feeding Program	Social services planning, health and welfare provisions	Health, feeding, child development, nutrition, social welfare programs	Household food roles with women actively participating in the feeding program
<b>Democratizing governance</b>			
RA 7160 (Local Government Code of 1991) - empowers provinces, cities, municipalities, and barangays to manage resources, enhance local autonomy, and ensure participation in local development.	Participatory planning, LGU–barangay coordination, land use consultation	Community programs, farmer organizations, local planning processes	Barangay-level decision-making, community participation

## Policy Recommendations

It should be emphasized that effective transition toward food sovereignty requires more than aligned policy intentions; it should be **explicitly articulated in the CDP and CLUP**, and even in the **Barangay Development Plan (BDP)**. Local, municipal, and national policies should be harmonized to create a unified and coherent food sovereignty framework that supports Barangay Topdac’s existing agricultural and cultural food practices.

At the barangay level, the Barangay Development Council (BDC) should pass a resolution formally recognizing food sovereignty as a local development priority. It should be integrated into the BDP, carefully identifying and documenting traditional food practices, supporting community-based seed banks, and designating barangay-managed communal gardens as protected food production areas.

At the municipal level, the LGU of Atok can establish a Municipal Food Sovereignty Committee consolidating agricultural programs into a single, coordinated food sovereignty agenda. In support of this, linkages between farmers, market intermediaries, and consumers should be facilitated while ensuring that local food procurement policies prioritize Topdac-grown produce in public institutions such as schools and health centers.

At the national level, agencies such as the Department of Agriculture (DA), the National Nutrition Council (NNC), and the Philippine Council for Agriculture and Fisheries (PCAF) should align existing programs with food sovereignty principles. There is also a need for programs that would enhance the abilities of the

local stakeholders to translate knowledge on food sovereignty into action to address ability as a barrier to change. This should include access to material resources such as inputs, infrastructure (physical and logistical), credit, and equipment, among others. This also implies that national legislation should provide dedicated funding streams and technical assistance to barangays that demonstrate indigenous food system practices, ensuring that top-down programs do not undermine but instead reinforce local food autonomy.

This layered approach ensures that food sovereignty is not left as an implicit cultural practice but becomes an explicitly supported, institutionally coherent agenda from the ground up. This is also consistent with the results of the ADKAR diagnostic activity, which identified the need for more reinforcement for food sovereignty to be achieved and sustained.

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