

El Niño Update

April 26, 2016

Farmers' 5-day protest in Koronadal City forces government to release 2,000 sacks of rice

Farmers from different parts of SOCCSKSARGEN heavily affected by El Niño staged a camp-out in front of the Department of Agriculture (DA) Regional Office. Since April 21, 2016, farmers from different tribes held a protest rally and barricaded the Koronadal City national highway.

For five days, several negotiations were conducted and the government pledged to distribute 5 kg. of rice to each farmer. But the farmers refused the beggarly offer as compared to damages brought by El Niño to their farms and livelihood. The government later on promised to send 15-25 kg. of rice to those who will submit their names to their office. But farmers could no longer wait for the rice to be delivered to their municipalities and provinces. Twenty (20) days have already passed since the farmers first held a rally in front of DSWD Region 12 in Koronadal to appeal for rice assistance, and yet no rice was delivered to their communities.



Thus the farmers continued to stage rallies and blocked the national highway to push for their demand for at least 1 sack of rice for each family to tide them through the dry spell. At around 5pm on April 25, DSWD distributed 2,000 sacks of rice to the protesting farmers.

But the 5-day protest under the sun with 44-45 degrees heat index caused 38 persons to collapse, six hospitalized and two with acute high level of anxiety. Most of those who lost consciousness and hospitalized are elderlies also diagnosed with peptic ulcer or severe hyperacidity.

It has been seven months already since the onset of El Niño and almost a year without harvest because rats and other pests attacked the farmers' crops from July to December 2015. The effects to livelihood and lives of the poor farmers are widespread and severe. Water sources continue to

dry up. Farms become parched and barren. Farm animals including carabaos and horses are sold for survival. The elderly and children are most affected by drought-related diseases.

The farmers' triumph in their protest and demand for rice is a first in SOCCSKSARGEN after the bloody protest of farmers in Kidapawan City last April 1. They needed to gather together, shout and hold protest actions before the government responded to their demands for food assistance.

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