

Choosing Leaders: Citizenship on the Line

All the Philippine presidential candidates presented good things in their respective platforms; but as responsible citizens, one should not just look at the platforms. One should also study and assess the candidates' qualities as potential leaders – do they have what it takes to lead the country?

This was the main message of Dr. Antonio La Viña, Dean of Ateneo School of Government (ASoG) last April 27 at the Philippine Department of Agriculture (DA). The event was the second DA Lecture Forum under the Umbrella Capacity Development Program for DA executives and professional staff being implemented by SEARCA and DA, together with ASoG, University of Asia and the Pacific School of Management, and the UPecon Foundation, Inc.

With the Philippine national election fast approaching, Dr. La Viña's talk served as venue for participants to learn how Filipino citizens should choose the next leader through the lenses of agriculture and food security. He used the phrase "citizenship on the line" because he believes that choosing our next leaders entails taking risks and responsibility as Filipino citizens.

"We can choose to repeat our own history or we can march forward as a people united by and to the future. But for that, we citizens must put ourselves on the line," he said. He also emphasized that Filipinos should look for candidates who can address the issue of food security in the country.

The participants agreed that the next President's platform should focus on making agriculture sustainable enough to compensate the demands for food not just in times of crisis and calamities but at all times. According to them, he or she should also consider feasible strategies to increase food production in the country. This means having adept knowledge of the problems in the agricultural sector. Dr. La Viña, on the other hand, pointed out more than having a good platform, a leader must be:

1. effective – one who has a good track record, is competent and know how to steer the nation into prosperity;
2. empowering – someone with a clear and comprehensive understanding of the government, is participative, promotes social justice, and works for the interests of the marginalized; and
3. ethical – he or she has a personal compliance to laws and rules, is of good moral character, possesses integrity, and is surrounded with right company.

Ms. Leah Abaoag of the Philippine Rice Research Institute shared that a leader should be able to inspire his or her people. Dr. La Viña concurred and concluded that the Philippines needs a transformational and inspiring leader – someone who can move others to lead.

In essence, the lecture-forum stressed that as responsible citizens who put themselves on the line, one must develop leaders not just in the national scale – Filipinos need to have a large pool from which leaders can be drawn. Individually, citizens ARE and should strive to become leaders in their specific capacities and spheres of influence or functions they serve. (*Glaiza Dolz, SEARCA KRU-KMD*)