



From the Margins to the Center of Development

Thirty-three percent of the Philippine's 89 million (2007) population live below the poverty line.¹ The number of poor people is increasing, and average family incomes are falling despite growth in gross domestic product (GDP).² One of the major causes of poverty in the country is an underperforming agriculture sector and an unfinished land reform agenda.³

Agriculture is the dominant sector in the Philippine economy. It contributes 20% of GDP and more than 20% of total export earnings, and provides 36% of the labor force. However, a large part of Philippine agriculture continues to operate at a mere subsistence level.⁴

Increasing Agricultural Productivity through Irrigation Infrastructure Development

In 1998, the Government of the Philippines and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) agreed to implement the \$102 million Southern Philippines Irrigation Sector Project (SPISP)⁵ aimed at increasing the incomes of about 10,000 farm households and reducing the incidence of poverty in selected rural areas in the Southern Philippines. SPISP intends to achieve these through increased agricultural production and crop diversification resulting from the development and improvement of irrigation infrastructure.

The SPISP approach encourages farmers to improve performance of irrigation systems by transferring management of systems to them.

The project includes four mutually supportive components:

- **Beneficiary Participation and Transfer of Management of Irrigation Systems**—involves the development and implementation of participatory processes to involve users in decision making, organize irrigators' associations (IAs), build their capacity for sustained operation and maintenance, and transfer irrigation systems to self-reliant IAs
- **Physical Infrastructure**—includes the development of communal irrigation systems, national irrigation systems, small reservoirs, and the construction of farm-to-market roads
- **Environmental and Social Measures**—includes reforestation and management of degraded watersheds, resettlement of populations displaced by reservoir impoundment, prevention and control of schistosomiasis, and implementation of an indigenous peoples development plan
- **Project Management Support**—covers project implementation, staff training, and consulting services and equipment procurement

SPISP is being implemented by the National Irrigation Administration (NIA), in coordination with local government units and other national government agencies, such as the Department of Agriculture, Department of Public Works and Highways, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, and Department of Health. It covers four regions in the Southern Philippines: the Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), Caraga, Region VI, and Region VII.

For more than 3 decades, NIA has promoted participatory approaches to irrigation development

and management. Over the last 5 years under the SPISP, NIA has introduced several innovations in its participation programs. The SPISP approach encourages farmers to improve performance of irrigation systems by transferring management of systems to them. The project's underlying principle is to work in partnership with local communities throughout the feasibility, design, construction, and initial operations phases to ensure that communities have full ownership of new or upgraded facility and can take on the ongoing operation and management of the transferred system. The Participatory Irrigation Management and Transfer (PIMT) process developed in SPISP is now being implemented in 13 areas of the Southern Philippines.⁶

Building Community Ownership: Putting PIMT at Work

The Magballo–Balicotoc–Canlamay Integrated Irrigation Subproject (MBCIIS) is located in the upper barangays (Magballo, Balicotoc, and Canlamay) of the Municipality of Ilog and City of Kabankalan. Its 737-hectare service area is presently planted to sugarcane and rice with small patches of corn and vegetables. Most of these cropped areas are rain dependent (except those at the Communal Irrigation System) and with very low yield and net farm income. There are 554 households- beneficiaries initially organized into Turn-out Service Area Groups in each *sitio*,⁷ then into an Integrated Farmer Irrigators Associations (FIAs) in each barangay, and later into the Magballo–Balicotoc–Canlamay Federation of Integrated Farmer Irrigators' Associations (FIFA). The irrigation scheme is a combination of one dam-reservoir, three run-of-the-river-diversion dams, and five pump-set irrigation systems. Areas currently planted to sugarcane will gradually be converted into either vegetable or rice farms (in order to increase rice yields from 3 tons to 4.5 tons per hectare per cropping season). The subproject envisions to increase net farm income from a benchmark average of Philippine peso (P)9,375.00 per hectare per year to P71,245.00 per hectare per year.

The subproject site has been one of the main loci of insurgency in the province until the early 1990s. Farmers in the area were initially suspicious of Government-initiated projects as cover for anti-insurgency campaigns. The entry of

SPISP was no different. Community organizing work under the project was made complicated by certain principles and concepts, such as community/beneficiary contributions and cost-recovery schemes, community management of operations and maintenance, informed collective decision making, and women's participation irrigation infrastructure development.

The employment of participatory processes at the onset of project implementation and the continuous trust-building initiatives between the farmers and the MBCIIS project implementing team eventually paid off when, in 2002, farmer-irrigators' associations (FIAs) were organized in each of the three barangays covered by the project. In 2003, the three FIAs eventually formed the FIFA.

Guided by the PIMT process, the farmers actively participated in the various phases of the subproject—from the drafting of the feasibility study, the development of the subproject design, and actual civil work construction, the farmers collectively made key strategic policy and operational decisions. In addition, technology demonstration sites were established during the feasibility study phase to develop farmers' skills in high-value crops production and marketing and to prepare them for crop conversion.

By drawing the farmer-beneficiaries as key partners, the PIMT process managed to instill a strong community ownership of the subproject. This collective ownership was tested in 2005 when resettlement and water availability issues against the subproject were raised by certain quarters. This derailed its implementation for about 2 years. FIFA lobbied various government agencies to help address the issues and sought venues for constructive engagement. While resolving the issues, FIFA took on various income-generating activities: contract sewing, rice trading, food catering, and organic pesticide production.

In 2008, the Land Acquisition and Resettlement Plan (LARP) was finally approved, paving the way for the subproject's continued implementation. Moving on, FIFA finalized and started piloting the System Management and Agricultural Development (SMAD) plan, which details the planning and budgeting requirement for the operations and maintenance of the subproject. With the approval of SPISP extension until June 2010, FIFA, with the assistance of the NIA project management office, is busy working for the completion of the remaining civil works. As of October 2008, physical accomplishments had reached 88%.

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The MBCIIS employs various elements of the community-driven development⁸ approach. Establishing partnership with community organizations, allowing them to decide on subproject planning and design, and involving them in subproject management provided the farmer-beneficiaries the self-respect and integrity they have somewhat lost due to poverty.

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The farming communities of Magballo, Balicotoc, and Canlamay know what living in the margins mean. Physically isolated and mired in poverty, they were vulnerable to civil strife—until the farmers were offered a space for pursuing development, with them at the helm. SPISP, specifically MBCIIS, provided the tools for the farmers to visualize where they want to go and the steps to get there. They developed what they call their “8-Point Priority Agenda”⁹ with the end-goal of creating a “united, peaceful, and prosperous community.”

They have embarked on an organic pesticide (using *Trichogramma* parasitoids as biological control agent) production and advocacy, establishing and maintaining a laboratory that serves as a venue for educational field trips for local students in the province. The laboratory is managed by a farmer-scientist trained under SPISP. Additional household incomes are brought in by women involved in contract sewing managed by the Livelihood and Networking Committee of FIFA. Sewers are being paid about \$0.76 per dress completed, and a sewer can finish as many as 10 dresses per day. More often, the sewers would earn five times more than the actual daily wage of \$1.52 and almost twice more than the minimum daily legal wage of \$4.40. There are currently 17 women employed in contract sewing, which has discouraged them from leaving their communities to work in the cities.

FIFA has started collecting irrigation fees and has ventured to other income-generating activities, such as catering services and marketing of farm inputs, to finance maintenance of irrigation pump schemes and organic pesticide laboratory; federation administrative expenses; and environmental campaigns (tree planting, river clean-up, organic farming).

Development cooperation has been forged with various government agencies (the Department of Trade and Industry, provincial Technology and Livelihood Development Center, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, and Department of Agriculture) providing services to the federation and to the communities.

On 4 December 2008,¹⁰ the three communities covered by MBCIIS were abuzz with excitement. Guests from the People’s Republic of China, Mongolia, Nepal, and the United States were coming to visit and exchange lessons on community-driven development. The event showcased the federation’s success after being thrust into the center of development.

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Endnotes

- ¹ Asian Development Bank (ADB). 2008. *Philippines 2008 A Fact Sheet*. Available: www.adb.org/Documents/Fact_Sheets/PHI.pdf.
- ² ADB. 2005. *Poverty in the Philippines: Income, Assets and Access*. Available: www.adb.org/Documents/Books/Poverty-in-the-Philippines/executive-summary.pdf.
- ³ _____. 2005. *Poverty in the Philippines: Income, Assets and Access: Chapter 8 Conclusion*. Available: www.adb.org/Documents/Books/Poverty-in-the-Philippines/chap8.pdf.
- ⁴ National Economic Development Authority (NEDA). 2004. *Medium-Term Philippines Development Plan 2004–2010*. Pasig City. Available: www.neda.gov.ph/ads/mtpdp/MTPDP2004-2010/MTPDP%202004-2010%20NEDA%20v11-12.pdf?bcsi_scan_D4A612CF62FE9576=0&bcsi_scan_filename=MTPDP%202004-2010%20NEDA%20v11-12.pdf.
- ⁵ Southern Philippines Irrigation Sector Project (SPISP, Loan 1668 PHI). Amount of Loan: \$60 million. Date of Approval: December 1998. Expected date of completion: June 2010. Executing Agencies: National Irrigation Administration and the Provincial Government of Agusan del Sur.
- ⁶ Mohammed, R.A. and Swete Kelly, D. *Effective Community Irrigation Associations—Participatory Approaches for Effective Engagement*. Available: www.wca-infonet.org/servlet/BinaryDownloaderServlet?filename=1136411736077_Mohammed_Robert_final.pdf&bcsi_scan_D4A612CF62FE9576=le1ui1RNM3RGdQcAXV9oowYAAACK1ZgD.
- ⁷ A *sitio* is a territorial enclave inside a barangay (village), especially in rural areas.
- ⁸ Community-Driven Development (CDD) is an approach that gives control over planning decisions and investment resources of local development projects to community groups. World Bank. *2008 Community Driven Development*. Available: <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTSOCIALDEVELOPMENT/EXTCDD/0,,menuPK:430167~pagePK:149018~piPK:149093~theSitePK:430161,00.html>.
- ⁹ 8-Point Priority Agenda: tertiary education for the young and future generations; establish domestic water supply; provide electricity in inner sitios of the three barangays; stabilize price of palay in the community; protect and improve environmental conditions; promote strong family life and peaceful community; improve road network; increase family income through improved farming and livelihood opportunities.
- ¹⁰ On 4 December 2008, a field visit to the MBCIIS site was arranged by ADB, NIA, and the City Government of Kabankalan for delegates to observe on-site demonstration of community-driven development.

Disclaimer

This case study was written by Mario Randolph Dacanay (RETA Consultant) under the Regional TA 6400: Supporting Community-Driven Development (CDD) in Developing Member Countries, with inputs from Clifford Burkley, Social Development Specialist, ADB. The views and assessments contained herein do not necessarily reflect the views of ADB or its Board of Directors or the governments they represent. ADB does not guarantee the accuracy of the data and accepts no responsibility for any consequence of their use.

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Contact Information

Clifford Burkley
Social Development Specialist
Gender, Social Development, and
Civil Society Division
Regional and Sustainable Development
Department
Asian Development Bank
6 ADB Avenue, Mandaluyong City
1550 Metro Manila, Philippines
Tel +63 2 632 4444
Fax +63 2 636 2444
www.adb.org