

PHILIPPINE AGRICULTURE AND FISHERY EXTENSION SYSTEM: LESSONS LEARNED AND THE WAY FORWARD AFTER FIFTEEN YEARS OF DEVOLUTION

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INTRODUCTION

- Being dynamic, the country's agriculture and fishery sectors have been continuously faced with challenges and situations that influenced its performance in the past years.
- The agricultural extension system in the Philippines became a little more complicated when E.O. 116 was issued by then President Corazon Aquino in 1987.
- The agricultural decentralization, which took effect during the devolution of powers to the Local Government Units (LGUs) as per Local Government Code of 1991 further complicated the situation.

- From one central government that would supervise and facilitate agricultural extension and training services for farmers, fishers and other beneficiaries – extension and training activities were passed on to the LGUs.
- As agricultural extension services became decentralized, several issues and concerns that directly affected the farmers and fishers at the grassroots level, surfaced.
- Often, agricultural extension in the provinces and municipalities became less of a priority.
- In a lot of localities, it became more of a luxury rather than a need.

DA Bureaus and Attached Agencies with Extension and Training Activities

- Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI)
- Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI)
- Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR)
- Bureau of Post-Harvest Research and Extension (BPRE)
- Bureau of Soils and Water Management (BSWM)
- Agricultural Training Institute (ATI)

- Cotton Development Authority (CODA)
- Fiber Development Authority (FIDA)
- National Tobacco Administration (NTA)
- Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA)
- Philippine Carabao Center (PCC)
- Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice)
- Sugar Regulatory Authority (SRA)

Extension and Training Activities of the DA

- Technology Demonstration
- Training Services
- Diffusion of Information Through Tri-Media
- Advisory Services

However, due to the decentralization of functions in the agriculture sector, the people in the grassroots level were not able to experience these programs on a first-hand basis.

Objectives

- This paper aims to look into the current situation of the agriculture extension and training in the country.
- It also looks into some of the weaknesses of the current agricultural training and extension system, thus, corresponding recommendations will be given.

The Decentralized Agriculture Extension System: An Overview

- RA 7160 known as the Local Government Code of 1991 is the legal instrument of the Decentralization of the Agricultural Extension System in the Philippines.
- On the basis of the Local Government Code, The Department of Agriculture's (DA) extension services, was devolved to:
 - Provincial LGU;
 - City LGU; and
 - Municipal LGU

Agricultural Extension Work of the Local Government Units

- The largest proportion of the country's agricultural extension force are with the LGUs which consists of 79 provinces, 84 cities and 1,525 municipalities and more or less 42,000 barangays.
- The LGU inherited the general agriculture extension (BAEx, now the Agricultural Training Institute).

Some Limitations Encountered by the LGUs

- Knowledge management strategies are more restricted than when extension was not yet devolved.
- Reports indicate that extension workers are office bound due to shortage of operational funds for travel and information materials.
- In the context of the Agricultural Knowledge and Information Systems (AKIS), the devolved extension seems isolated and therefore has a very weak linkage with national and international agricultural research.
- Strangely, the LGU extension service is highly dependent on the Central Government (IRA) for funding.

The Legal and Institutional Aspect of Decentralization

- As per Local Government Code of 1991, the entire budget and personnel of DA assigned at the local level were transferred to the LGUs – composed of 79 provincial, 84 cities and about 1,525 municipalities.
- These 1,687 LGUs provide services to 42,000 barangays.
- The BAEx remained at the central level but became a part of the national Agricultural Training Institute (ATI).
- ATI was mandated to train the agriculture staff of the DA and the extension staff of the LGUs. It now serves as the national policy and coordination agency for the decentralized and fisheries modernization system.

LGU Clientele

- Men, women and youth within their geographical boundaries.
- Small, medium and big farmers of different commodities as well as fishermen.
- Traders and consumers

Objective of Decentralization

- Bring government service closer to the people;
- Give the local people the control and opportunity to participate in the planning and implementation of extension program;
- Make the responsible local government less dependent on the central government for support of extension services that benefits the constituents;
- Reduce the top heavy central government budget and personnel; and
- Make the LGUs responsible for the cost of providing needed agricultural services to their constituents.

Scope of LGU extension services as mandated by the Government

Barangay Level

- Agricultural support services including distribution of planting materials and operation of farm produce collection and buying stations.

Municipal Level

- Extension and on-site research services and facilities related to agriculture and fisheries activities, including dispersal of livestock and poultry, fingerlings and other seedling materials for aquaculture, palay, corn and vegetable seed farms, medicinal plant gardens, fruit trees, coconut and other kinds of seedling nurseries, demonstration farms, quality control of copra and improvement and development of local distribution channels, preferably through cooperatives, inter-barangay irrigation system, water and soil resource utilization and conservation projects; and enforcement of fishery laws in municipal waters including the conservation of mangroves.

Municipal Level

- Pursuant to national policies and subject to supervision, control and review of the DENR, implementation of community-based forestry projects which include integrated social forestry programs and similar projects; management and control of communal forests with an area not exceeding 50 square kilometers; establishments of tree parks, green belts and similar forest development projects.

Municipal Level

- Information services which include investment and job placement information systems, tax and marketing information systems, and maintenance of public library.
- Infrastructure facilities communal irrigation, small water impounding projects and other similar projects, fish ports, artesian wells, spring development, rainwater collectors and water supply systems, seawalls, dikes, drainage and sewerage and flood control, traffic signals and road signs similar facilities.
- Public markets, slaughterhouses and other municipal enterprises,

Provincial Level

- Agricultural extension and on-site research services and facilities which include the prevention and control of plant and animal pests and diseases, dairy farms, livestock markets, animal breeding stations and artificial insemination centers and assistance in the organization of farmers and fishermen's cooperatives, and other collective organizations as well as the transfer of appropriate technology.
- Pursuant to national policies and subject to supervision, control and review of the DENR, enforcement of forestry laws limited to community-based forestry projects, pollution control law, small-scale mining law and other laws on the protection of the environment, and mini-hydroelectric projects for local purposes.
- Irrigation systems, reclamation projects and similar facilities.

City Level

- Disseminate information
- Render technical assistance to clientele
- Assist and coordinate with local and national agency representatives
- Promote and maintain clientele organizations
- Monitor and evaluate agricultural projects and programs
- Assist SMS and clientele
- Implement regulatory quarantine laws
- Formulate farm and family development plans
- Assist in the development of agribusiness projects
- Conduct farm and home surveys
- Assist in formulation plans, programs and home visit, followed by training and techno-demo approaches.

Structure of Agricultural Extension Services in the Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization Act of 1997 (AFMA)

- The AFMA mandates the:
“provision of training, information and support services by the government and non-government organizations to the agriculture and fisheries sectors to improve the technical, business and social capabilities of farmers and fisherfolk”
- However, the Local Government Code failed to provide mechanisms for the central government or next higher level of LGU to direct assistance or augment services and facilities assigned to the LGUs.

Corrective Measures included in the AFMA of 1997

- Chapter 2 of AFMA calls for the “utilization of research results through formal and non-formal education, extension and training services”
- “Development of national extension system that will help accelerate the transformation of Philippine agriculture and fisheries from a resource-based to a technology-based industry.”
- Agriculture and Fisheries services included training services, farm or business advisory services, demonstration services and information and communication support services through tri-media.

- The “delivery of agriculture and fisheries extension services shall be multidisciplinary and shall involve the farmers, fisherfolks and their organizations and those engaged in food and non-food production and processing, including the private and public sectors.”
- Participation of LGUs, state colleges and universities was clearly defined.

Defined Roles of LGUs, SUCs and Private Sector

- LGU is responsible for delivering direct agriculture and fisheries extension services. The province is mandated to “integrate the operations of the agriculture extension services and undertake an annual evaluation of all municipal extension programs.
- Private sector contribution is encouraged especially the participation of farmers and fisherfolk cooperatives and associations and others in the private sector in the training and other complimentary extension services especially in community organizing, use of participatory approaches, popularization of training materials, regenerative agricultural technologies, agri-business and management skills.

- SUCs shall assist in the LGUs extension system by improving their effectiveness and efficiency through capability-building and complimentary extension activities, such as technical assistance, training of LGU extension personnel, improvement of physical facilities, extension cum research and information support services.

Other Provisions of the AFMA

The AFMA also provide for the financing of agriculture through:

1. Allocation of multi-year budgets that shall be treated as grants
2. Transfer of funds from the DA to the LGUs as extension grants, and
3. Placing the budget for agriculture and fishery at minimum of 1% of the Gross Value Added

Problems and Issues on the Decentralization of Agricultural Services (Legal Issues)

- **No provision in the Local Government Code for Local Government Units' agricultural extension to have functional relationship with the Central Government, particularly the Department of Agriculture.**

The Local Government Code does not have a specific provision for a functional and support relationship with the Department of Agriculture.

- **The local Government Code allows national government programs at the local government levels**

Although national banners programs involve the provision of agricultural services, they are still managed by the Central Government Agencies through the LGUs.

- **The Fisheries Code of 1998 (RA 8550) empowered the DA through BFAR to develop cost effective, practical and efficient extension services on a sustained basis to municipal fishers in underdevelop areas.**

This is in contradiction to the Local Government Code which provided that direct extension delivery services for farmers and fishermen is the responsibility of Local Government Units.

- **Unclear and inadequate legal basis for ATI to serve as the APEX agricultural extension agency of the country**

Until a study of the agricultural extension system was conducted in 2000, the national agency's records and profile on the decentralized agricultural extension services were inaccurate.

- **Municipalities are too small Operational Units for Agricultural Extension**

Due to small operational units for agricultural extension, they cannot afford to hire the needed Subject Matter Specialists (SMS), thus, extension is isolated from the agricultural research system. Also, these units cannot afford the needed administrative personnel that would provide logistical support.

- **No hierarchy of authority on Agricultural Extension Program in the Provinces**

The Provincial Agricultural Extension Service does not seem to have the authority to provide policy direction, allocate extension resources, coordinate/supervise and monitor the implementation of agricultural extension programs in the territory.

- **No functional APEX agency for agricultural extension at the national level**

DA has no institutional channel to work with LGUs on agricultural extension policy, coordination, support and monitoring. Also, the LGUs do not have a national institution to work with on matters of agricultural extension policy and coordination and partnership support on agricultural extension.

- **DA Decentralization to 15 Regions has no positive impact on the Devolved Agricultural Extension Service**

DA's resource allocation for the decentralization of agricultural services is not felt at the local level. Also, the DA does not have policies, coordinative and resource allocation functions for the devolved agricultural function.

Human Resource-Related Concerns

- **Number of Extension Personnel Devolved**

In 1992, 59% (17,673) out of the 29,638 DA personnel were devolved. Also, when PIDS conducted a study in 2000, results showed that there were about 25,097 personnel in the devolved agricultural services. This trend maybe favorable to the devolution policy, however, it clearly shows that the municipality is a small operational unit of agricultural extension compared to the provincial level, which could maximize the functions of the devolved personnel within its geographical coverage.

- **Cultural Adjustment**

The interest and priorities of each local government official vary, thus, funding for agricultural services depended on the economic class of the LGUs and interests of local officials.

- **Lack of incentives for career advancement**

One of the most common complaints of devolved agricultural extension staff was the limited opportunities for career growth. From stable and promising position, agricultural workers have closed priorities of climbing the career ladder since most of the provincial offices are not connected with the regional and national DA structure.

Financial Concerns

- **Funds for programs and projects for National Agricultural development agenda**

National agenda is not shared as a joint agenda with the decentralized government. In addition, when the extension components of the funds are directly administered by the DA agencies instead of coursing it through the LGU, it causes field operation disruption instead of improving and strengthening the extension work.

- **Lack of ideology of cooperation or interdependence in pursuing the country's agricultural and development agenda**

When the Local Government Code of 1991 was passed, agricultural services were assigned to the LGU without any reference to its being a part of the national responsibility and authority for agricultural modernization and development.

- **Lack of an institutional system of financial transfer for agricultural extension**

When the BAEx was abolished, the central government has lost a mechanism of working with the devolved agricultural extension service. On the other hand, the LGU, the devolved agricultural extension does not have an organizational set-up for the agricultural extension through which assistance in extension can be achieved.

Recommendations to make Decentralization Work

- **Strengthen partnership with LGUs and central government**

If the partnership of LGUs and the central government is not clearly spelled in the Local Government Code, a legislation, which includes terms of partnership – specifically on planning and financial sharing transfers – should be passed.

- **How else can partnership be institutionalized and strengthened?**
 - A state policy that agricultural and fisheries production, trade, safe and sustainable development is a joint responsibility between the central government and the LGUs.
 - A nationally declared policy that financing the devolved agricultural extension work is a joint or cooperative responsibility of the LGUs and the central government.
 - Strengthening of existing but useful mechanisms and creating new instruments and mechanisms of partnership between central government and LGUs on making the devolved agricultural extension work more efficient and cost-effective.

- **Performance-Based financial incentives**

The central government may use its financial contribution to the LGUs in exchange of well-defined outputs and achievements.

- **Retooling and Energizing the human resource in agricultural extension**

Respond to personnel who need retooling and energizing so that they can conduct themselves knowingly, with the proper attitude and needed competence.

- **Re-create and strengthen the ATI as the APEX and lead agency for agricultural extension system of the country**

Strengthen the ATI as the national Agricultural Extension and Training Agency.

- **The ATI should have the mandate and adequate resource allotment to perform the following essential functions:**
 - **Provide policy direction**
 - **Serve as the administrator of the transfer of national fund to support the devolved agricultural extension operation in accordance with defined performance targets**
 - **Coordinate and stimulate the exchange of experiences on extension among the LGU extension officials**
 - **Monitor, evaluate and plan the over-all decentralized agricultural extension service of the country.**
 - **Ensure access to research knowledge, and**
 - **Set standards to ensure cost-effective quality extension service.**

- **Achieve national and structural goals**

National goals such as poverty alleviation, competitiveness, safe and sustainable agriculture could be realized more efficiently and effectively if shared with the LGUs.

- **Improve the performance of farmers**

Every farmer in the locality should belong and enrolled to a participatory farmers' organization under the guidance of a well-trained and highly motivated and well-paid devolved agricultural extension worker.

General Recommendations

- **Greater Tax Decentralization**

LGUs in the Philippines suffer from vertical fiscal gap because many types of taxes are either easier to administer at the central level or are deemed unsuitable for local government imposition. This imbalance should be addressed by assigning more tax bases to the LGUs.

- **Reassessing Tax Revenue Assignment Across LGU levels**

There is a mismatch between the assignment of revenues and expenditure responsibilities to the different levels of local government.

- **Redesigning intergovernmental transfers**

This would address the disparities in the fiscal capacities of the LGUs as well as ensure that they get the appropriate financing for their basic services.

- **Re-orienting LGU and central government officials on partnership and interdependence in governance**

Create a realistic program of re-orienting LGU and central government officials to make their partnership interdependent.

- **Amendment of the Local Government Code and the AFMA or the enactment of a new law on agriculture and fisheries extension in the Philippines, with the following functions:**
 - **Lead in the development of a national extension policies and agenda**
 - **Develop and implement national policies and programs for continuous improvement of the quality of extension methods**
 - **Manage the national IEC budget for agriculture and fisheries**
 - **National leadership in the development and implementation of the National Information Network (NIN)**
 - **National leadership in developing IEC partnerships towards increased investment and private sector participation**
 - **National leadership in developing, implementing a national system of strengthening institutional IEC capacities**
 - **Ensure access to research knowledge; and**
 - **Set standards to ensure cost-effective quality extension services**

THANK you!