



## **Nci-Srd as A Continuing Strategy for Complementation in Rural Development in the Philippines**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The National Convergence Initiative for Sustainable Rural Development (NCI-SRD) is a platform for complementation in sustainable rural development by the rural development agencies in the Philippines, in partnership with the local government units (LGUs). The ridge to reef approach was adopted by NCI-SRD as basis in program planning and implementation for watershed areas in all regions. NCI-SRD is contributory to agribusiness development, natural resources development program, national greening program, among others. There are challenges and issues in its implementation but NCI-SRD is considered a continuing strategy for complementation for rural development initiatives.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In order to ensure complementation of resources among rural development agencies, four (4) national government agencies (NGAs), namely, Department of Agriculture (DA), Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) implement the National Convergence Initiative for Sustainable Rural Development (NCI-SRD). This paper discusses the framework, major achievements and limitations of the NCI-SRD strategy.

### **THE NCI-SRD**

#### **The Need for Complementation**

A review conducted by the Congressional Policy and Budget Research Department (CPBRD) of the House of Representatives, cited the following reasons why complementation is inevitable for the DA, DAR and DENR:

1. The targeted service areas under their respective jurisdictions are found in the same ecosystems which are upland, lowland and coastal;
2. They are working with basically the same clientele who are the residents of rural areas with formal or informal access to resources that can be used for production and livelihood;
3. Environment and natural resources protection is part of enhancing and sustaining productivity and fertility of lands; and
4. The support services and capacity-building of the local government units (LGUs) under DILG and the farmers and fisherfolk beneficiaries are the responsibilities of the 3 departments.

#### **NCI-SRD Framework and Evolution**

The National Convergence Initiative (NCI) was formulated as a common framework for sustainable rural development and poverty reduction through the issuance of Joint Memorandum Circular (JMC) No. 01 Series of 1999. This was signed jointly by the secretaries or ministers of the Department of Agriculture (DA), Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) and the Department of Environment and

Natural Resources (DENR), or the rural development agencies focusing on agriculture, agrarian reform and natural resources (AARNR).

The identified roles of each agency were: 1. For DENR to lay the foundation for sustainable agricultural, fishery and forestry development in a regenerative environment adopting a “management of life forces approach” for water, soil, flora and fauna; 2. For DA to take over the tasks of using the regenerative life forces nurtured by DENR through the provision of community irrigation systems and other critical production and processing inputs and facilities for overall agricultural development; and 3. For DAR to ensure equity through land distribution, delivery of agrarian justice and social capital formation through organization development, institution building and cooperative enterprise promotion for Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries (ARBs) and other farmers; and for DILG to supervise the Local Government Units or LGUs (Figure 1) where the convergence projects and activities are being implemented.

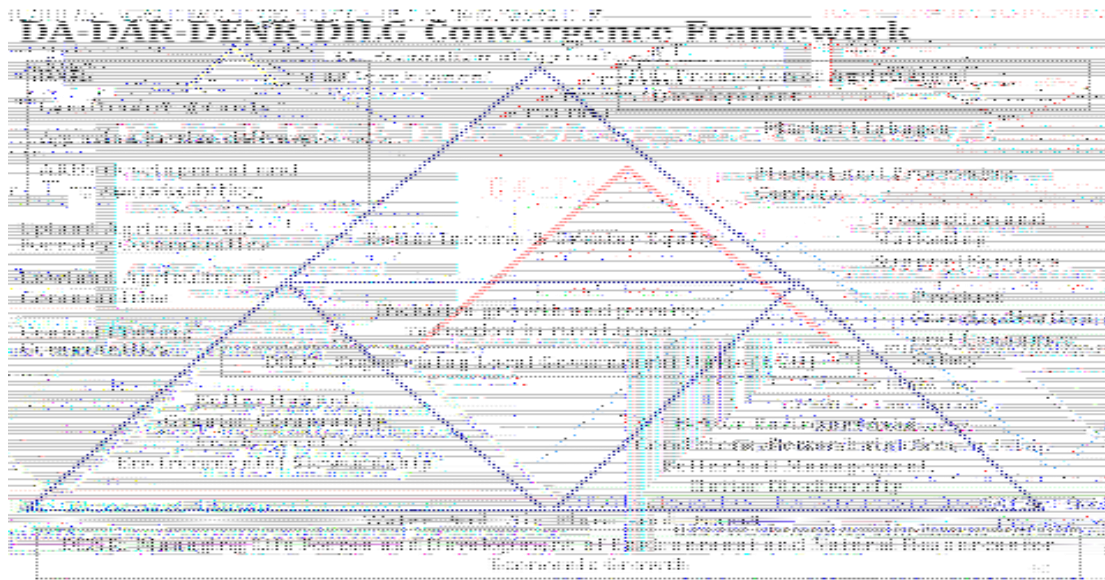
Nine pilot convergence areas were identified, namely: 1) Cagayan Valley River System 2) Central Luzon 3) Bicol River Basin System 4) Negros Island 5) Panay Island 6) Bohol 7) Zamboanga Peninsula 8) Caraga and 9) Davao del Norte where strategic investment plans were prepared. However, implementation was delayed due to change in leadership in the 3 agencies.

Five (5) years later, Joint Memorandum Circular (JMC) No. 01 Series of 2004 was issued by a new set of AARNR leadership to activate the NCI in line with the effort of the government to create a bigger impact in the countryside. Specific convergence zones were identified in each of the provinces under the nine pilot convergence sites to have more focus in the implementation of said plans.

The German Technical Cooperation (GIZ) also partnered with the DA, DAR and DENR NCI-SRD to align the GIZ’s rural development and natural resources management program with the convergence strategy.

In 2005, the National Steering Committee (NSC) composed of the three (3) AARNR agency ministers expanded NCI’s coverage into nationwide scale in line with the Medium Term Philippine Development Plan (MTPDP) for 2005-2010. Involvement of local government units (LGUs) was sought through the leagues of municipalities, cities and provinces sitting as members of the committees and working groups.

Figure 1. NCI-SRD Framework and Roles of AARNR Agencies



Source: NCI-SRD Policy Framework Presentation Materials for the Public Consultation on the NCI Roadmap, NCI Secretariat, BSWM, Quezon City, Philippines.

Under the 2010 JAO, the following guiding principles were defined:

1. DA-DAR-DENR Convergence Initiative as a complementation strategy between and among the three (3) rural development agencies;
2. LGUs as the sustainable integrating and converging force in local and rural developments;
3. Participatory approach in all phases of implementation;
4. Complementation of resources and expertise of the agencies and LGUs;
5. Mainstreaming of convergence in all programs/projects at the national and local levels;

6. Funds for the NCI-SRD as part of the work and financial plans each AARNR agency;
7. Networking and linkaging by the AARNR agencies to expand coverage for agribusiness development and
8. Secure an enabling environment to encourage investment in the private sector.

## **Expected Outcomes and Objectives**

In terms of outcome objectives, NCI-SRD is expected to contribute directly to the attainment of outcomes on AARNR sub-sector specifically in: 1) ensuring food security and increased income; 2) enhancing access to land and other natural resources and in improving the quality of the environment; and 3) developing the self-reliance of constituency and increased resilience of their communities.

Specific objectives of NCI-SRD are to: 1) facilitate the implementation of different agencies to ensure that resources are maximized by achieving synergy and institutional efficiency; 2) build partnership between and among the local communities, LGUs and government agencies to ensure that all development interventions are based on actual needs and aspirations of the community; 3) expand opportunities for agro-enterprise and agribusiness development for its constituency; and 4) achieve spatial integration within different ecosystems to ensure environmental integrity and sustainability.

## **Implementing Mechanisms and Structure**

The NCI Steering Committee (NCI-SC) composed of the secretaries of DA, DAR, DENR and DILG acts as the policy making body of NCI-SRD. A National Technical Working Group (NTWG) and the four (4) Component Working Groups (CWGs) on Policy and Advocacy, Capacity Development, Agro-enterprise Cluster and Agribusiness, and Knowledge Management are composed by the concerned officials and technical staff of the four (4) agencies.

At the field levels, the Regional and Provincial NCI-SRD Working Groups are composed of key officials and technical staff of the same agencies. Projects and activities are coordinated at the municipal level.

## **NCI-SRD and Agribusiness Development**

The convergence strategy was considered an appropriate platform for Goal 1 of the medium-term Philippine Development Plan (PDP) from 2005-2010. Goal 1 intended to develop two (2) million hectares of new lands for agribusiness and generate 2 million jobs through the programs of AARNR agencies. It was reported that by the 1st quarter of 2010, around 1.83 million hectares of lands were developed and 2.67 million jobs were generated from agribusiness development programs of the 3 agencies during the period.

Earlier, in 2008 and 2009, agribusiness investment proposals from regional NCI-SRD working groups were generated. The 1st National Agri-Investment Forum was organized in September 2009 to attract potential investors.

## **The Ridge to Reef Approach**

This approach had been adopted by DENR in 1999 as basis in program planning and implementation for watershed areas in all regions and adopted by the NCI-SRD. It was defined as a holistic, collaborative, multiple use and sustainable management of all resources within the watershed taking into account the human interventions in the forest and upland areas and its impact on lowland areas as well as coastal and marine areas. Under this approach, ecosystems are considered as inter-dependent and that intervention in one ecosystem will impact other ecosystems (Diola, 2014).

The adoption of the ridge to reef approach was provided for in JMC No. 01, series of 2010 by the new secretaries of AARNR incorporating a watershed and ecosystem management approach in the convergence areas. From then on, the presence of watersheds in the same or adjacent municipalities was adopted as one of the major criteria in selection of convergence areas.

## **Institutional Support from German International Cooperation (GIZ)**

In November 2004, DA, DAR, and DENR signed a joint resolution to seek the support of the German Development Cooperation (GIZ) through the Environment and Natural Resources Development (EnRD) project. GIZ was a major implementation partner of NCI-SRD for over a period of twelve (12) years through two (2) major programs: the Support to Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (SARRD) in 2002-2004, and the Environment and Rural Development (EnRD) Program Phase 1 and Final Phase in 2009 – 2014.

Major activities in relation to policy advocacy, capacity-building, knowledge management, and agro-enterprise cluster development were supported by GIZ. It also contributed to the drafting of the manual of operations which provides guidelines for the national as well as sub-national planning and implementation of activities.

Based on Organizational Development (OD) assessment for NCI-SRD, (Diola, 2014) GIZ funded and further supported NCI through the following major activities:

1. Policies, systems and processes improvement which brought forth the following: Enhanced NCI Strategy Framework, a design for Results-based Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E), harmonized policy protocol, a Knowledge Management (KM) concept in project management and a communication strategy for NCI-SRD;
2. Development of new concepts such as the modified Conditional Cash Transfer, the Environmental Conditional Cash Transfer, (eCCT) and the Green Agribusiness Development for Inclusive Growth;
3. Trainings on Value Chain Analysis (VCA), Results-based M&E, Knowledge Management, Integrated Ecosystem Management (IEM), Green Agribusiness/Agro-enterprises Development for Inclusive Growth; and
4. Promoting and increasing the visibility of NCI through co-organizing of several high-level dialogues and discussions on public lands utilization, national land use policy advocacy and promoting the Voluntary Guidelines for Responsible Land Governance or VGGT.

At the local level, GIZ supported model-building for two (2) convergence sites in the Visayas, with most of the funding directed to capacity-building, such as Comprehensive Land-use Planning (CLUP) and Coastal Resources Management (CRM) in Antique and CLUP and Community-based Forest Management (CBFM) in Javier, Leyte (Diola, 2014).

### **NCI-SRD and the National Greening Program (NGP)**

Executive Order (EO) No. 23, series of 2011 mandated the DA-DAR-DENR Convergence Initiative to develop a National Greening Program (NGP) in cooperation with the Department of Education (DepED), Commission on Higher Education (CHED), Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Department of Budget and Management (DBM), private sector and other concerned agencies and institutions. The members of the Steering Committee of the NCI to constitute the oversight committee and chaired by DENR-lead agency. EO No. 23 was further reiterated by EO 26. E.O. No. 26 further called for harmonization of initiatives of all government institutions especially the three (3) AARNR agencies and including CHED and DepED.

The AARNR agencies were assigned for the major activities such as nursery establishment and seedling production, site identification and site preparation, social mobilization, technical support and extension services, tree planting, provision of access roads and postharvest and processing facilities. DILG for its part shall provide transport, security and fire protection amenities; information, education and communication. Participation of the private sector, civil society organizations and academe in the monitoring and evaluation of the NGP shall be engaged.

**According to DENR, the NGP has generated over four million jobs, benefitting around 558,000 individuals, through partnership with various people's organizations (POs), particularly under the Community-based Forest Management (CBFM) program of DENR. From 2017 to 2018, NGP covered areas reached 335,185 hectares, which were planted with some 299.2 million seedlings and generated a total of 715,118 jobs, benefitting some 112,166 individuals.**

Implementation Challenges and Limitations of NCI-SRD

- A. The following implementation issues, among others were pointed out by the Congressional Policy and Budget Research Department (CPBRD) in its policy brief on the convergence strategy as the way forward for rural development.**
1. Lack of long-term political commitment. Changes in national, agency and LGU leadership result to interrupted or slow momentum of implementation of NCI-SRD projects and activities.
  2. Marginal role of the LGUs in NCI programs. The role of the LGUs as the “integrating and converging force” is emphasized as one of the guiding principles of NCI-SRD. The “primacy of the LGUs” is clear in the guidelines. However, this is still not attained due to the capacity constraints of the LGUs to link with the national planning process.
  3. Weaknesses of LGUs in terms of rural development (RD). LGUs are seen to be lacking in terms of a clear formulation of RD programs and projects. Management capabilities of continue to be weak in terms of RD info, planning, RDE regulation, financial planning and reporting.
  4. On the other hand, it was also considered that the NCI-SRD framework has not taken full advantage of the integrative and local governance role of LGUs. Activities to build the capacity of LGUs to perform the tasks associated with SRD are still insufficient.
  5. Budget Allocations do not reflect priority for convergence activities.

It was observed that pronouncements have not been translated into significant budget allocations that indicate the actual sustained allocation of resources to achieve true integration of RD programs and

activities and no concerted effort at “converged program and budget”. This is because of the “strategy” nature of NCI-SRD. There are no defined programs with dedicated budgets but the RD agencies are expected to complement resources in areas and projects where they have common grounds.

B. The sustainability of jobs generated from the reported agribusiness development is another limitation and challenge. Some of the earlier reported jobs created were spent only for the development activities of various crops based on a hectare to jobs conversion factor. There is need for a more systematic accounting of hectareage and jobs creation from NCI-SRD projects and activities and to implement more sustainable activities.

## CONCLUSION

NCI-SRD is a coordinative convergence mechanism that is limited to the defined programs and covered areas and working on available budgets from the four (4) agencies. There were recent efforts to level-up by establishing a convergence authority through legislations filed at the house of representatives. Such and related efforts are often construed as a major step at pursuing merging full convergence of the AARNR agencies. For now, the NCI-SRD is a continuing strategy for complementation by the rural development agencies and the DILG.

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