

Local Government Units (LGUs) and Agrarian Reform Support Services in the Philippines: The Need to Sustain

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INTRODUCTION

Republic Act (R.A.) 7160, otherwise known as the Local Government Code of 1991, provides that local government units (LGUs) shall discharge the functions and responsibilities of national agencies and offices devolved to them pursuant to the Local Government Code. LGUs shall likewise exercise such other powers and discharge such other functions and responsibilities as are necessary, appropriate, or incidental to efficient and effective provision of the basic services and facilities enumerated in the code.

DAR works closely with LGUs at the municipal and barangay (village) levels for the implementation of certain steps in the process of land acquisition and distribution and the provision of support services for the agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARBs.)

Extent and limitations of LGUs' support

Many of the necessary program interventions for the development of agrarian reform communities (ARCs) are within the service delivery functions of the LGUs. These are agricultural extension, environmental conservation and protection, public health, farm to market infrastructure projects, school building program and social welfare and development, among others.

LGUs' involvement in providing support services for development of agrarian reform beneficiaries start with the preparation or updating of the ARC Development Plan (ARCDP) which contains major steps for developing the communities and the farmer organizations through the identified projects and activities for possible funding support from the local and national sources, and official development assistance (ODA) or foreign-assisted projects (FAPs). The ARCDP is integrated and mainstreamed into the development plans of the LGUs.

In the implementation of some FAPs, DAR is required to work closely with the LGUs concerned to administer specific infrastructure projects (farm to market roads, water supply, multi-purpose buildings) or contract out private contractors as part of LGUs' counterparts for the DAR's projects.

In some cases, the task performed by the LGU is limited to the coordination of various project preparatory activities, implementation of certain components (e.g. land survey), monitoring of project activities in coordination with DAR and maintenance of completed infrastructure facilities that have been turned over by the project. In reality, LGUs' capacity and performance during various phases of implementation vary considerably.

Some LGUs have been proven effective and efficient in the performance of their functions, while others fell below expectations because of limited absorptive capacity, limited manpower and inability to provide counterpart funds due to low internal revenue allocation (IRA).

In line with the convergence efforts and the devolution of major functions, the LGUs are expected to play more significant roles in the delivery of support services. However, since traditionally, LGUs were basically recipients of national development projects and the national agencies have the technical expertise on project implementation, the LGUs did not develop its agricultural extension delivery systems, technical capabilities in terms of infrastructure construction and maintenance, health care and environmental management (Arlanza *et al.*, 2006).

Another challenge to ensuring equity and sustainability in the LGUs leadership in support services delivery can be attributed to reasons such as limited term of office (3 years) of the local executives, and frequent changes of the development agenda of the LGUs depending on their biases and level and extent of development perspectives.

Strengthening the capability and sustainability of LGUs as support services providers

A 2001 study of the National College of Public Administration and Governance (NCPAG), University of the Philippines (UP), as cited by Arlanza, *et al.* (2006) proposed amendments relevant to the agrarian reform program, with the Sangguniang Bayan or Municipal/City Council taking an active role in ensuring the full implementation of the national agrarian reform program, and limiting the area of agricultural land that can be classified by LGUs.

The Belgian Integrated Agrarian Reform Support Project (BIARSP) completion report in 2004 as cited in the GTZ study by Arlanza *et al.* (2006) recommended, among others, that:

- DAR should take the opportunity to influence the newly elected officials in setting the development directions and the planning processes in coming-up with their medium-term (3-year) plan and to coordinate with the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) for a session during orientation of all elected officials;
- Capacity building for the ARBs should include local governance, negotiations and resource accessing. The ARBs capacity to lobby and engage the LGUs to address community priorities that would draw the LGUs to participate in ARC development in a sustainable manner can help in achieving paradigm shift by the LGUs; and
- Each ARC should prepare an institutionalization or sustainability plan to be done jointly by ARB/ARC members and LGUs with DAR assistance. This has been adopted and being undertaken.

It was also proposed that it would do well if DAR could seek LGU support by integrating LGUs into the formal policy process. Mainstreaming CARP activities into local development plans is crucial as more roles and responsibilities are expected to be devolved to LGUs in view of the ongoing review of the Local Government Code.

De los Reyes (2016), in his end of term report as DAR Secretary, identified the roles of government agencies in providing public goods and starter assets for smallholder farmers. He pointed out that the government agency, which is nearer to the people or the smallholder farmers, should provide the assistance on technical extension while national government agencies that are involved in agriculture, rural development and economic growth should provide tone from the top (economic growth vision and agriculture policy) to address the disjointed agriculture policy. Concretely, the LGUs, were identified as provider of agricultural technology and extension

services. Hence, the need to continue and strengthen the role of the Municipal Agriculture Office (MAO) of the LGUs to enable them to play the important role of reaching farmers and coaching them on how to plant new varieties and how to address production challenges (pests and diseases).

De los Reyes (2016) further proposed to consolidate support services in one national agency, with the LGUs (province, city and municipality, where applicable) maintaining an office devoted to agriculture. The function of the LGU's agriculture office should be primarily that of production technology.

CONCLUSION

Support services are essential complement to land tenure improvement interventions under the agrarian reform program. The LGUs are in the forefront in the delivery of basic services to the all basic sectors whether it be agricultural (which include the ARBs), and non-agricultural. The inadequacy of national agencies to provide sufficient agricultural support services, ideally, should be filled-in by the LGUs. However, due to insufficient capacity of LGUs, sustainability of support services provision from local sources is still a challenge. There is a need for continued support and guidance by the national agencies to the LGUs, with local governance being capacitated and less politicized to be able to deliver necessary basic social and agricultural support services not only for agrarian reform beneficiaries but for farmers in general.

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