

PARTICIPATION AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION IN THE PHILIPPINES

The Social Reform Agenda in Bicol Region

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ABSTRACT

Recently years, there are a growing trend for people's participation in development and decision-making especially in developing countries, Since authoritative social and political decisions are normally made at the structures of power, people's participation in these structures is strategically important in defining the priorities of human development and poverty alleviation. This article aims to cast some light on the current moves toward participation and poverty alleviation in the Philippines from a case study of Bicol region. Analysis is mainly focused on implementation procedure of Social Reform Agenda (SRA). It provides an overview of the SRA policy framework and regional action include institutional structure building and implementation process of SRA, discusses key points and main constraints of participation on a basis of an examination of performance of local government and communities. At the end, it points out the problems on the quality of community participation, finding that quality of participation covers a much wider range of activity and larger scope for both democratic local government and community strategy than initially appears.

Keyword: community participation, poverty alleviation, Social Reform Agenda, local government, Bicol region

1. INTRODUCTION

Recently years, there are a growing demand and trend for people's participation in development and decision-making throughout the world. In this trend, people's participation in the processe of governance are enhancing the progress of democracy as participatory politics and decentralization. Since authoritative social and political decisions are normally made at the structures of power, people's participation in these structures is strategically important in defining the priorities of human development and poverty alleviation. Especially in the developing countries, an unfair economic and politic structure under inequality of control over wealth and resources and unequal distribution of land and income, which are partly a legacy of colonial era and a result of elite policies and decisions, have critically constrained the objective for poverty alleviation.

On the other hand, while resources address development needs are traditionally lodged with national government agencies, development demands are more locally-driven. The mismatch between local needs and national response has been the historical cause of

operational bottlenecks, slowing the pace of achieving anti-poverty gains. Especially since local government units (LGUs) is the closest to the poor who needs appropriate infrastructure, better living environment and other social service delivery, it plays an key role in poverty alleviation. Decentralization aims to accelerate the transfer of public budget allocation, policy-making process, human resources from central to local government and enhance the democratic local governance. Much of its attraction as a development strategy is the promise to include the people in local decision-making, which is expected to benefit all groups. The central idea of participation is to give citizens a meaningful role in local policy decision that affect them directly. Thus, improvement in local policy decision is expected to reduce poverty and enhance equity among all groups.

In the Philippines context, enhancing of people's participation and decentralization in every level's governance through reformation of the existing structural constrains reflected in oligarchic politics and centralized but ineffective governance have a significant meaning on poverty alleviation and social service delivery. From early 1990's, national policy interventions of decentralization and social policy have been taken on action for promoting participation, poverty alleviation and social service delivery. Two of the most important policies are the Local Government Code which are mandated in 1991, and Social Reform Agenda (SRA) program launched from 1994. It has been ten years after the two policies were taken at action. The question, though, is whether the increase in participation leads to increase in the subsequent elements of representation of local communities, human resources empowerment, benefits for all groups and poverty alleviation.

Using the case study of Bicol region (Region V) which is one of the poorest regions in the Philippines, this article aims to cast some light on the current moves toward participation and poverty alleviation in the Philippines from a case study of Bicol region. Analysis is mainly focused on implementation procedure of Social Reform Agenda (SRA). It provides an overview of the SRA policy framework and regional action include institutional structure building and implementation process of SRA, discusses key points and main constraints of participation on a basis of an examination of performance of local government (province, city/municipal, and barangay) and communities (include NGO/POs and other community-based organizations). At the end, it points out the problems on the quality of community participation, finding that quality of participation covers a much wider range of activity and larger scope for both democratic local government and community strategy than initially appears.

2. POLICY FRAMEWORK OF SRA

2.1 Approach and Program

The Social Reform Agenda is formally known as the main anti-poverty program in the Philippines, which launched by President Ramos in mid-1994. The SRA is the package of government interventions aimed at integrating society's disadvantaged groups into the political and economic mainstream. The goals of SRA are focused on the following aspects: the eradication of absolute poverty, the reduction of relative poverty, the fast-tracking of the growth and development of twenty of the poorest provinces¹.

In the SRA programs, there are 6 types of disadvantaged groups have been identified as

targeted beneficiary groups whose exhibited characteristics generally associated with poverty. The targeted beneficiary groups include: 1)farmers and landless rural workers, 2) fisherfolks, 3) urban poor, 4)indigenous cultural communities, 5)informal sector workers, 6)others including women, youth, disabled, elderly, and victims of disasters and calamities.

Minimum Basic Need (MBN) constitutes the core strategy of the SRA policy. The MBN tool consists of 33 indicators corresponding to survival needs, security needs and empowering needs². It is administered by barangay volunteers to all households in the area. The MBNs approach allows communities to determine their needs and mobilize resources to respond to them. It also acts as an important planning tool for local government units (LGUs) particularly in the delivery of basic services.

There are ten SRA flagship programs implemented with each flagship covering specific problems in MBN approach. It covers 1)agricultural development, 2)fisheries and aquatic resource management, 3)ancestral domain for indigenous peoples, 4)socialized housing, 5) workers welfare, 6)credit expansion, 7)livelihood development, 8)institution-building, 9) comprehensive and integrated delivery of social services and 10)strategic infrastructure development³.

2.2 Legislation for SRA

It is important to note that the SRA has taken an institutional approach to the poverty problem. This meant that the impact from the reforms would be for the long-term. To this end, 10 legislative bills were named as priority social legislation of the Ramos government. Of these, 8 have been enacted into law. These laws institutionalized the government's anti-poverty program and provided regular funds therefor (the Anti-Poverty Law), recognized the rights of indigenous cultural communities (Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act), decriminalized squatting (Act Repealing Presidential Decree 772), allotted funds to modernize agriculture and the fisheries sector (Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization Act), substantially increased funds for agrarian reform (Act Providing for Augmentation Funding for Agrarian Reform), adopted principles for the sound management of aquatic resources (Fisheries Code), reclassified and raised the penalty for rape (Anti-Rape Law), and provided for a system of adjudication for family and youth cases (the Family Courts Act). However, only the first 6 appear to have a direct bearing on poverty and not one of them has been implemented due to the delay in the issuance of the implementing rules.

3. REGIONAL ACTION

According to the report from regional office, the SRA program has been integrated and networked at the grassroots level starting with Masbate, a Club 20 province which had implemented SRA localization by the end of 1995.

Anti-poverty initiatives in Bicol region have been identified and focused on seven aspects: agrarian reform, environment and natural resources, agricultural and fishery development, health and nutrition, education and manpower development, social welfare and housing. According to regional poverty situation, major thrusts are focused on the following six approaches: agri-industrialization, sustainable development through resource management program, reliable power supply and rational rates, human development, self-sufficiency

and self-reliance for disadvantaged communities, infrastructure support.

By the end of 1997, all provinces and cities have adopted SRA as the National Action Agenda on anti-poverty. Most provinces have integrated SRA into their local development plans, identified priority barangay/convergence areas, set up local SRA Councils and strengthen the participation of NGOs⁴.

3.1 Institutional Structure Building

Table 1. Local Institutional Structure of SRA program

	Policy-making body	Chairman	Members	Technical support group	
Regional level	Regional Development Council (RDC)	RDC Chairman	-All provincial governors and city Mayors, -All regional directors of agencies of NEDA Board and DOT, DECS and DSWD, -Representatives selected from private sectors	Regional Technical Working Group (RTWG)	Regional Secretariat (NEDA)
Provincial level	Provincial Local Social Reform Council	Governor	-Representatives of component cities, municipal mayors, -Representatives selected from NGOs and other basic sectors	Local Technical Working Group (LTWG) composed by Technical Action Officers from the LGUs, NGAs, NGOs and basic sectors	Local Planning and Development Office
Municipal level	Municipal Social Reform Council	Mayor			
Barangay level	Barangay Social Reform Council	Barangay chairperson			

In Bicol region, a multi-sectoral Regional Development Council (RDC) serve as the regional policy-making body for anti-poverty. The Cabinet Officers for Regional Development (CORD) together with the Chairman of the RDC and the local chief executives, oversee and orchestrate the planning, implementation and monitoring of anti-poverty programs at regional level. It mobilizes the different line agencies of LGUs and has a secretariat to backstop its efforts. There are two groups that provide support to the RDC in the anti-poverty effort: The SRA Regional Technical Working Group (RTWG), composed of the Technical Action Officers, as well as representatives from the NGOs and basic sectors regional networks (see Table 1). At provincial, city, municipal and barangay level, the set of Local Social Reform Councils and Technical Working Group are also established and assigned to oversee the implementation of the SRA at local communities.

Participatory institutional structure became possible after 1991 that the Local Government Code was passed and conducted. The Code is an attempt to involve people , through their organizations, in the process of governance on a more regular basis, which accompanying with decentralization of decision-making power and revenue allocation from central to local government. The Code provides for NGO memberships in local governance, which includes two memberships in the local pre-qualification, bids and awards committee, and one each in the local development council, the peace and order council, and the people’s law enforcement board⁵. It requires that at least one-fourth of the council members, all of

whom are appointed, be representatives of NGOs. In Regional Development Council V (RDC V), there are 14 seats which are provided for the representatives from private sectors. One for the labor sector representation and the other 13 for the geographic and sectoral representation⁶. Also, in Local Social Council of province, city, and barangay, some representatives from NGOs and other sectors have been involved into regular operation activities. However, selection process of representative from NGOs controlled by local government officials is still not transparent.

3.2 Interventions In SRA Convergence Area

- 1). **Agrarian Reform Communities(ARCs):** ARCs program started at 1993 with a 28 identified ARCs. Under SRA, ARCs program focus on the development of agrarian reform beneficiaries. Its interventions include establishment of farmer organizations and conduct of capability building activities, credit assistance which are released to farmers or their cooperative organizations for livelihood assistance/production loans, provision of infrastructure support with funding support, resource mobilization for livelihood, basic social services, agricultural inputs, post-harvest facilities and infrastructure support.
- 2). **Comprehensive Integrated Delivery of Social Services (CIDSS):** CIDSS program started in 1994 in Masbate with only one municipality as a pilot area. To respond to the unmet MBNs of poor families, CIDSS has been adopted with various interventions introduced along 1)Survival needs which include food and nutrition, health, water and sanitation; 2)Security needs include shelter, income and livelihood, peace and order/public safety; 3)Enabling needs include basic education, literacy and people's participation.
- 3). **Coastal Communities and Priority Bays and Lakes (CCPBL):** Main intervention of CCPBL programs are establishment of Fishery and Aquatic Resource Management Councils (FAEMCs), which are organized for promoting the participation in the planning, management and development of the coastal communities. Besides that, loan assistance for community activities, training on livelihood and integrated coastal management, establishment of fisherfolk operation centers at LGU level have been conducted in this region.
- 4). **Certificate of Ancestral Domain Claims (CADCs):** CADCs program is developed for cultural communities to protect their ancestral domain rights and lack of basic services. In Bicol region, land grant and award for indigenous people are conducted on the base of identification of claims and ground survey of identified areas.
- 5). **Urban Areas/Project Resettlement Sites and Growth Centers (URAGs):** This is designated for providing strong support to the urban poor by socialized housing supply, resettlement sites and land provision. Several projects include relocation center for affected communities by natural calamities and socialized housing for urban poor have been conducted or are on its progress.

3.3 Budget Allocation and Fund Resource

For attaining its objectives, 3 special funds totaling P 6.1 billion were made available to the

SRA on top of social sector allotments in the national budget. These were the Poverty Alleviation Fund, which is divided into PAF-1 and PAF-2, and the Local Government Empowerment Fund. Official development assistance (ODA) also fund SRA projects. In the 1996 national budget, social reform funds totalled P 186.7 billion and P 269.34 billion from ODA⁷.

Table 2. Poverty Alleviation Fund (PAF) in 1997 and 1998 (Unit: Peso)

1997	Agency	SARO	NCA Releases	% of Releases	Disbursements	% of Utilization
	DSWD	8,735,000	1,997,520	23	1,997,520	100
	DTI	6,578,000	6,578,000	100	3,457,663	53
	DOH	26,308,000	19,478,250	74	8,221,253	42
	DENR	17,518,000	17,518,000	100	17,518,000	100
	DECS	17,750,000	15,501,000	87	/	/
	DILG	34,898,000	17,449,000	50	17,449,000	100
	NSO	5,719,135	5,514,253	96	4,266,253	77
	TOTAL	117,506,135	84,036,023	72	52,909,688	63
1998	Agency	SARO	NCA Releases	% of Releases	Disbursements	% of Utilization
	DSWD	8,934,033	5,937,121	65	2,389,508	40
	DTI	6,758,000	6,578,000	100	3,390,142	52
	DOH	26,201,714	19,377,260	74	16,394,512	85
	DENR	17,518,000	17,518,000	100	6,160,631	25
	DECS	17,700,000	14,473,364	82	796,770	6
	DILG	34,898,000	33,928,610	50	18,069,123	53
	NSO	5,691,536	2,794,943	49	2,296,240	82
	TOTAL	117,701,283	100,607,298	85	49,496,925	49

Source: NEDA V, Status of SRA Implementation in Region V (1997, 1998)

Besides that, all of national government agencies and LGUs allot a portion of their regular budget for SRA programs. After 1996, General Appropriations Act requires all departments, bureaus, agencies and offices to set aside at least 5 percent of their budgets for SRA projects.

4. IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

Participatory process of SRA in Region V could be divided into six strategic steps: 1) Community MBN installation, 2) Energizing the bureaucracy, 3) Synchronizing policy support, 4) Mobilizing resources, 5) Institutionalizing sectoral participation, 6) Communicating the SRA.

4.1 Community MBN Installation

Main task of the first step include gathering and consolidation poverty data for targeting setting and priority setting. MBNs survey and MBN Mapping must be conducted before target setting of flagship program, prioritization of convergence areas, and some other policy-making. Barangay Development Council (BDC) take the responsibility to conduct the MBN survey, and formulate Community Action Plan (CAP) based on appropriate data

analysis. Identified programs and projects which correspond to the priority unmet needs of families would be integrated into the Barangay Development Plan (BDP). Particularly, BDC also are encouraged to submit their project proposals to higher level local government, in which the most critical needs and concerns will be identified and integrated into Local Flagship Program. It also enhances the Regional Development to respond better to the local sectors needs and concerns. According to the report of RDC, installation of the MBN Community Information System (CBIS) has been completed in 1,576 barangays covering 278,158 families until 1997⁸. For strengthening the analytic capacity of local community member, MBNs Training, Project Proposal Formulation are organized regularly. Nevertheless, disadvantage of analytic capacity of municipal and barangay officials have been pointed out as the main reason of delay of survey report submission and program implementation⁹.

4.2 Energizing the Bureaucracy

Main tasks at the second step include creation and adoption of provincial structure and institutional arrangements, include creation of local level TWGs, provision of capacity-building inputs for TWGs members, conduction of regular TWG meetings and other technical assistance.

As a way of empowering volunteers, community leader and selected volunteers are sent to the training or seminar for capability building and strengthening, such as Barangay Administration Training Program, Leadership Training for Women, The Leaders Training for Youth. It is expected to help them to conduct the management of implementation of community projects, and provide supervision of social workers.

4.3 Synchronizing Policy Support

Main tasks at this step include provision of local executive and legislative policy support. Except national policies, local government also have made some efforts on establishing some local policies to support the implementation of SRA. Assigning accountability promotion is one of these local policies. From 1997, performance contract system have been established to assign accountabilities of major stakeholder in the SRA implementation process. At present, the provincial governors and mayors of the 35 municipalities and one city have outline their individual commitments vis-à-vis the SRA initiatives that must be put in place under their terms of office¹⁰. In fact, this system formulates an actual performance based evaluation tool for LGUs. Furthermore, it also have a significant meaning to give local government officials pressure and incentives on implementation of the SRA goals, and set up a mechanism on the promotion of the SRA programs.

4.4 Monitoring Resources

Objectives of this step is for generating resources for anti-poverty programs. Past experience in weak achievement of substantial advances in poverty reduction is considered as the result of non-availability by the poor of the resources intended for them. These weakness have been addressed through a budget desegregation process that allows provinces and municipalities to determine their budget allocation for particular programs which respond to unmet MBNs.

Table 3. Investment for SRA-CIDSS Program, 1997 (Unit: Ph. Peso)

Community	Barangay	Municipal	Provincial	NGAs	NGOs	POs	Others	TOTAL
1,467,373.00	1,578,475.00	4,071,760.00	270,470.00	40,451,871.88	1,992,146.50	88,000.00	650,000.00	50,570,096.38
2.90%	3.10%	8.10%	0.50%	80%	3.90%	0.20%	0.01%	100%

Source: NEDA V, *CIDSS, the Bicol Way*, 1998

In CIDSS projects implemented in 1997, there are a total investment of P 50,570,096.38, which comes from not only national government, but also LGUs and local communities (see Table 3). Local government units and local communities made a big contribution on investment for CIDSS projects which accounted totally 18.9 percent of all besides the part of 80 percent which hold by national government agencies. Especially, contribution from municipal units shared 8 percent which is the highest percentage compared with the other local communities and local government units. Contribution from NGOs and POs also shared a total 4.1 percent which is even more than investment from provincial government.

4.5 Institutionalizing Sectoral Participation

For strengthening public-private partnership and a solid participation of various sectors in the SRA implementation, LGUs are highly encouraged to involve the representatives of NGOs, POs and other basic sectors as a regular member into their Development Council, Task Working Group and other SRA related bodies. They hold regular meeting for continuous coordination and smooth project implementation. For promoting the basic sector participation, orientation seminar on SRA and Barangay-level seminar have been organized in several provinces, NGO/PO networking have been established in 5 municipalities and Legazpi City.

however, as general condition, it could be found that NGO activities in Bicol region is still limited and not actively especially compared with other regions. As Table 4 shows, NGO activities in Bicol mainly remain at the field of education and training program delivery on livelihood, nutrition and other social service delivery activities(see Table 4)¹¹. According to [Philippine Human Development Report 1994], there are 620 NGOs and its coalitions of 169 (in 1992) in Region V (see Table 5). The number is much fewer than the others, like Region I (2113) and VI (1289)¹². Among NGOs and POs applying for accreditation, 201 are approved in Region V, comparatively 796 and 434 in the two former region. Certainly, percentage of approved NGOs and POs (57.9 percent) are much lower than the other region (72.7 percent in Region I and 93.5 percent in Region VI). It could be said that NGOs in Region V are not much active comparing with the other region, which mainly due to the seemingly negative attitude of residents on participation of community development. On the other hand, politics environment here seems still critical and less democratic, which could be conceived from the lower percentage of approved NGOs/POs. It still remained as the main constraints which prevent the participation of civil society. Here, decision-makers at local level seemingly show reluctance to open the doors wider for peoples participation by preventing the implementation of the provision on sectoral representation, and by slowly accrediting POs and NGOs, or gives priorities to the NGOs which their relatives are active¹³.

Table 4. Summary of NGO Interventions for SRA, City of Legazpi, 1997

Activity/Program	Implementing NGO/PO	Project Cost
Self-Employment Assistance	Bagong Buhay Child Center, Inc.	21,697.96
Health and Nutrition	Ibid	48,516.71
Education Program	Ibid	141,262.50
Health Education	Simon of Cyrene Children's Rehab & Development Found, Inc.	12,000.00
Manufacture of Ortho-Devices & other Modified Assistive Devices for Disable Children	Ibid	60,000.00
Early Intervention Program and Education Assistance	Ibid	152,000.00
Family and Community Development Program	Child Sponsorship for Community Development, Inc.	200,000.00
Medical Outreach Program	Ibid	2,500,704.00
Nutrition Program	Ibid	1,630,616.00
Provision of Education Assistance	Ibid	5,034,400.00
TOTAL		9,801,197.17

Source: NEDA V, *Status of SRA Implementation in Region V, CY 1997*

Table 5. Accreditation and Selection of NGO/POs In Local Government Units

Region	No. of NGOs and POs	Coalitions (No. of Members)	No. of Applied	No. of Approved	Percent Approved
NCR	1,753	1,009	1,143	489	42.8
CAR	265	n.d.	14	8	557.1
I	2,113	162	1,095	796	72.7
II	1,159	382	211	67	31.8
III	525	238	131	136	103.8
IV	240	92	70	70	100.0
V	620	169	347	201	57.9
VI	1,289	161	464	434	93.5
VII	300	133	136	136	100.0
VIII	306	44	168	119	70.8
IX	199	149	126	299	78.6
X	305	259	120	91	75.8
XI	380	184	222	212	95.5
XII	408	194	243	208	85.6
ARMM	178	83	49	10	20.4
TOTAL	10,040	3,259	4,539	3,076	67.7

Source: UNDP, *Human Development Report 1994* (Manila, 1994)

4.6 Communicating the SRA

Activities for sharing local experience and breakthroughs mainly include publication of

case studies and success stories on replicable breakthroughs and experiences, organization of special events to generated public supports for SRA.

5. CHARACTERISTICS AND QUALITY OF PARTICIPATION

Although local community participation have seemly begun to be involved into the implementation process of SRA, there are still some problems remained constraining participation process as discussed above. Here, the quality of participation is much important than other superficial phenomena. Looking at performance and its characteristics of community participation in depth, it will be helpful to identify the problems and main constraints in community participation.

Table 6 shows performance evaluation of local community and LGUS in SRA implementation. Firstly it could be pointed out that 72.7 percent of barangays could be generally defined as functional communities and POs. It shows a high rate of implementation on institutional building

Table 6. Capability and Community Participation in Localization of the SRA

1. Functionality of community structure & PO	No. of Organization	No. of structure functional		No. of structure need reactivation		No. of structure Non-functional	
	No.	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Barangay community	142	88	64.0	54	36.0	0	0
Peoples organization	267	194	72.7	73	27.3		
2. Level of convergence	No. of Barangay	Concerned Agencies participated, resources mobilized, NGOs/POs sector mobilized		Less participation and mobilization		No participation and no mobilization	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	56	19	33.9	28	50.0	9	16.1
3. Representation in BDC	Ibid.	Trained community leaders/Volunteers are official member of BDC with regular attendance in the monthly meeting		Less representation- Irregular attendance		No representation/ irregular attendance	
		7	13	25	44	24	43
4. Integration of community action plan in BDP	Ibid.	Community action plan formulated integrated in the BDP & approved by the BDC		Selected projects are integrated		Community action plan not integrated	
		15	27	30	54	11	19
5. Level of community members participation	Ibid.	At least 75% of community Members participated in community projects/activities		40%		30%	
		10	18	38	68	8	14

6.Capability of trained community leader/volunteers.	Ibid.	Core group of community leaders/volunteers capable to manage the implementation of community project/activities		Community leaders/volunteers mobilized close supervision of worker in the implementation		Inadequate capability of community leaders/volunteers	
		24	43	26	46	6	11
7.Support of LGU	Ibid.	Funds available & approved by LGU for projects/activities as reflected in BDR & MPS		Funds available & approval by LGU only in selected projects		No fund available	
		15	27	30	54	11	19
RESULT	Ibid.	15	26.7	30	53.3	11	20.0

Source: NEDA V (Draft Material), *the Bicol Region: Report of Accomplishment of SRA, 1997*

at local level. Additionally, it also shows good performance and implementation at the aspects of integration of community action plan in BDP, capability of trained community leader/volunteers. It could be said that a framework of participation have been set up at grass-root level.

On the contrary, representation of community leaders and trained volunteers in Barangay Development Council seem still at low level. Level of convergence which determined by participation of concerned agencies and mobilization of resources/NGOs/POs seems not so satisfactory. It shows fewer achievement of participation of concerned agencies and mobilization of resources and other sectors. Meanwhile, support to local communities from local government, especially the financial resources which is available for local communities, is limited. There are totally 53.67 percent barangays need to strengthen their capability for effecting the implementation of SRA. Also, level of community members participation seems not so good that shows the not so positive attitude of local people on participation.

Here, the problems seemly concentrate on the relationship between local communities and LGUs. Participation is only obtained in community projects and where there are functional community workers and leaders who could be depended on to pursue organizing work when community development plan have been adopted as part of BDP. Meanwhile, although community leader have some representation in BDC, however, representation is limited only in terms of raising issues and concerns of the community. There is also a limited sharing of resources from concerned NGOs, LGUs and the community in terms of responding to unmet MBN and community activities.

6. IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACTS

After near 5 years of promotion of SRA programs in Bicol region, some progress on social service delivery have been achieved now. From the initial 69 areas at the start of SRA in the Region, there are now 282 convergence areas in 5th and 6th class municipalities which have been identified . Of this total, 91 (32.27 percent) are Agrarian Reform Communities (ARCs) occupied by farmers and landless rural workers, 92 (32.62 percent) are Coastal

Communities and Priority Bays and Lakes (CCPBL) occupied by fisherfolk, 12 (4.25 percent) are Certificate of Ancestral Domain Claims (CADC) areas occupied indigenous people, 31 (11.0 percent) are urban areas, resettlements sites and growth center, occupied by the urban poor, and 56 (19.86 percent) are Comprehensive Integrated Delivery of Social Services (CIDSS) areas serving an aggregate of 15,425 families¹⁴. Through these programs and projects, LGUs are trying to provide direct services to increase productivity and raise income levels, extend technical assistance or provide capability building training for target beneficiaries.

The expansion areas have been able to realize an average reduction rate of 38.8 percent on the top ten unmet minimum basic needs and 54.35 percent in all the 33 MBN indicators of families in the CIDSS areas¹⁵ (see Table 7). Average reduction rate for the initial 100 targeted families climbed from 39.43 percent in 1996 to 45.12 percent in 1997 and 59.07 percent in 1998. Average reduction rate from 1996 to 1997 climbed by 5.69 percent while the average reduction rate from 1997 to 1998 improved by 13.95 percent.

Table 7. Reduction Rate of CIDSS Areas Top 10 Unmet Needs (Saturation)

Rank	MBN Indicators	1995	1996		1997		1998	
		Baseline	Latest Data	Percent Reduction	Latest Data	Percent Reduction	Latest Data	Percent Reduction
1	Family with income below subsistence level	7,247	5,408	25.40	4,486	38.10	5,570	23.14
2	Other members 18 years and above unemployed	5,849	3,691	37.00	3,484	40.43	2,031	65.30
3	Head of family employed	5,600	2,731	51.23	2,012	64.07	1,512	73.00
4	Family members involved in at least 1 legitimate PO for community development	5,176	3,459	33.17	2,492	52.00	1,903	63.23
5	Children 2-5 not attending day care center	4,589	2,763	40.00	2,080	55.00	1,941	58.00
6	Family without sanitary toilet	4,501	3,305	27.00	2,730	39.35	2,594	42.37
7	Couples without access to family planning services	4,016	2,463	39.00	2,064	49.00	1,955	51.32
8	Housing not durable for at least 5 years	3,351	2,327	31.00	1,881	44.00	1,675	50.01
9	Family without access to potable water within 250 meters	3,321	1,953	41.19	2,112	36.40	2,004	40.00
10	Children 6-12 not attending elementary School	3,166	1,471	54.00	706	78.00	744	77.00
Average Reduction				38.00%		50.00%		54.34%

Source: NEDA V Secretariat, *Status of Poverty Alleviation Programs and Projects*, 1998

Despite of the above progress which have been achieved under the SRA programs and projects, especially the aspects on social service delivery and community participation, it is still difficult to evaluate the actual impact of SRA on poverty reduction. Because of its too ground-based target-setting, what programs or thematic areas actually fall under the criteria of social spending also remain ambiguous. Besides the lack of focus in SRA programs, it is also due to fund resources expansion to all the line agencies and

departments, which have been required to set aside at least 5 percent of their budgets for these projects. For instance, even the Philippine National Police can pass off its budget as SRA funds. Moreover, it is particularly true in Bicol region, which is the poorest region in this country, that poverty alleviation are driven by economic development and income-based growth, more than public provision of facilities.

7. KEY POINTS AND CONSTRAINTS

7.1 Local Government Units

- 1). **Institutional structure:** The major implementer of the SRA is local government units. Decentralization of revenues, personnel and decision-making power from national to local government and democratic governance have achieved some progress. SRA encourages LGUs to realize their responsibility for poverty reduction and make efforts for this objectives. Openness, transparency, accountability and partnership become main concerns at local government level. In this context, partnership for poverty reduction efforts has taken a step forward, viz., the participation of local communities at the high level of decision making for social reform. However, it is pointed out that lack of incentives, funds, and coordination between LGU and the other agencies have slowed down the implementation of anti-poverty programs¹⁶. Even after performance contract system have been established to form a mechanism for promoting the implementation of the SRA, this condition have not been improved due to the problems of its executive effect.
- 2). **Financial constraints:** In the implementation of the SRA, development of anti-poverty financial mechanism is enhanced by a shift from pure equity considerations towards local empowerment and equalization of resources among stakeholders. This transformation is accompanied and enhanced by the process of decentralization. However, the decrease of SRA budget is continuing now. Fund constraint of SRA program is mainly caused by national policy that only around 5 percent of GNP is spent on social service¹⁷. Meanwhile, the effectiveness of fund spending is ambiguous because of lack of focus on program setting, and un-accountability of fund spending due to encompassment of fund resource include every line agencies and all government levels.
- 3). **Capability of LGUs:** Disadvantage of local government capability is another main constraints of deepening the effectiveness of the SRA implementation. Slow data gathering and proposal submission, non-formulation of plans and allocation of funds for SRA at the local government and barangay level is mostly complained. These problems are due to not only lack of personnel, fund and skills on data gathering and analysis at local government level, especially at municipal and barangay level. Additionally, lack of guidelines and sufficient technical support which are expected to be provided by national or regional agencies is another reason for this disadvantage of LGUs.

Meanwhile, leadership skills is also the important factor which affect the implementation of community projects and programs. Lack of leadership skills have affected the representation of barangay officials in BDC and also limited the quality of mobilization of resources in local governments as shown in the survey result of LGUs.

7.2 Local Communities

- 1). **Civil society attitude:** Residents attitude and democratic politics have the most direct impact on participation of civil society. Based on the participatory institutional structure, peoples, especially those organized peoples are gradually involved into the local governance bodies and have more right on policy making. In the SRA programs, local communities are given the right of prioritization of flagship programs and promotion of special program which met their most emergent needs. However, the reality in Bicol region shows attitude of residents on participation of community development is still not so positive. This condition also have been conceived in some other poverty alleviation programs like Agrarian Reform Programs. Farmers shows negative attitude to receive distributed land due to lack of skills and capitals, which caused the further more serious problems of less of independence and incentive.
- 2). **Political environment:** Decentralization have made an initiative progress in Bicol region. Local communities are gradually being involved into policy orientation and program operation. The most significant achievement is that the framework of a participatory institutional structure have been established at local level. However, the political environment is still seemingly critical. Generally civil participation on policy-making is still weak and limited because of the strong power of elite politics and the seemingly negative attitude of residents. As discussed above, the main problem could be conceived from selection process of representatives of NGO/POs, limitation of NGO/PO's activity field.
- 3). **Activity and capability of local communities:** In the implementation of the SRA, local communities showed efforts on helping each other. Volunteers take part in community projects by providing labor services and support to ensure project implementation. However, it could be conceived from above discussion, that NGO is still not active in this region. Their activities is limited and only very fewer NGO/POs have been involved into policy making. Besides political environment and civil society attitude, disadvantage on capacity building is another reason. Meanwhile, communication between local communities and LGUs is also insufficient.

8. CONCLUSIONS

After adoption of the SRA for anti-poverty in Bicol region, the local government has embarked on the pursuit of a reform package that provide not only short-term “social safety nets” for the disadvantaged basic sectors, but one that seeks just sharing of the “benefits of growth” and their empowerment. Thus, it will enable them to become not only the beneficiaries but also contributors of development. Development of anti-poverty financial mechanism are further enhanced by a shift from pure equity considerations towards local empowerment and equalization of resources among stakeholders.

In implementation of SRA, local communities have actually shown great efforts on helping each other responding to their unmet minimum basic needs. In the localization process, community leaders and residents are mobilized to actively participate in community development projects and activities. Community consciousness is growing gradually from

the seemingly passive posture to an assertive stance particularly on project implementation, resource utilization. As discussed above, community participation in the implementation of SRA actually enhanced the effectiveness of social service delivery through resource mobilization and enhancement of democratic governance at local level. It is actually helpful in promoting more universalistic local development activities that will benefit the weak, disadvantaged and vulnerable along with everyone else.

However, it is actually a reality that its impact on poverty alleviation is still ambiguous, which have been discussed from above. When regional economic growth is still heavily constrained, impact of limited social service delivery and decentralization is insufficient and ineffective, and the improvement on social political environment is also limited. Furthermore, community participation in implementation of the SRA have not been effectively led to community-based development promotion. This condition is mainly due to limited representation on policy-making for local communities, capacity disadvantage for both of LGUs and local communities on situation analysis, resource mobilization, project promotion. Here, the quality of participation not only measured by in which stage participation have been realized, but also what kind of impact and effectiveness on poverty alleviation it has.

As pointed out above, there are several problems need to be solved for poverty alleviation and participation enforcement. Firstly, decentralization at local level and promotion of democratic politics are still weak and need to be strengthened. Secondly, there are an urgent need of capability building and strengthening of LGUs and local communities on the following aspects: community analysis, mobilization of resources, leadership skills. Meanwhile, financial and technical support from higher level government units, close coordination among all levels of technical working groups would be expected to help local communities to strengthen their capability and smooth the project implementation.

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NOTE

¹ NEDA V, *Bicol Strategic Plan 1997-2004*

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ NEDA V, *Briefing Material on 43rd Regional Cabinet Meeting : Regional Socio-Economic Performance and Implementation of SRA: (19 Nov. 1998)(Unpublished)*

⁵ UNDP, *Philippine Human Development Report 1994: (Makati, 1994)*

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⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ NEDA V, *Status of SRA Implementation in Region V(1997)*

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² UNDP, *Philippine Human Development Report 1994: (Makati, 1994)*

¹³ UNDP, *Philippine Human Development Report 1994: (Makati, 1994)*

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ NEDA V, *Period Report: Accomplishment of SRA:*

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¹⁷ UNDP, *Philippine Human Development Report 1994: (Makati, 1994)*