



Inclusive natural resource governance and rural development in the Philippines

A case study on FAO's Participatory Area Planning activities

Introduction

The Republic of the Philippines faces significant natural resource governance challenges and opportunities. The country has abundant natural resources including rich forestry, fishery, water and mineral resources. However, land distribution is highly concentrated and the majority of the rural population is landless, which contributes to social conflict, environmental degradation, and poverty (USAID Philippines Country Profile, 2016).

In addressing some of these issues, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has worked with local communities and the Government of the Philippines (GOP) toward implementing inclusive natural resource governance through rights-based and gender-sensitive Participatory Area Planning (PAP). This approach has resulted in several positive impacts, including improved natural resource governance, reduced social conflict and increased decision-making opportunities and access to agricultural services for (marginalized) women. The main purpose of this case study is to share the experience and lessons learned through adopting the PAP approach in the Philippines. This will contribute to strengthening the capacities of policy and decision-makers to address gender issues in the analysis of governance issues, and provide them with options for integrated agricultural and natural resource sector sustainability.

The Philippines country profile

Approximately 30 percent of the Philippines' more than 100 million citizens are located in rural areas and are employed in the agriculture sector (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2016). The vast majority (90 percent) of these rural dwellers are small-scale farmers with an average land parcel size of 2 hectares (BBC Philippines Country Profile, 2016). These farmers generally use traditional methods of production for subsistence livelihoods and face significant challenges: 10.2 million farmers and farm workers are classified as marginalized, with 70 percent of them being landless (BBC Philippines Country Profile, 2016).



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Major issues impacting the small-scale farming sector include (Philippines Country Programming Framework, 2016):

- Insecure land tenure
- Increasingly degraded natural resource base
- Lack of institutional support and agricultural services.

These challenges have resulted in the rapid rise in rural poverty and urbanization, with a third of the urban population living in informal settlements on marginalized lands outside of cities, a situation that exacerbates environmental degradation, pollution, and strains on institutional services (USAID Philippines Country Profile, 2016). These unsustainable trends are compounded by a lack of institutional capacity to provide social protection schemes and effectively coordinate natural resource policy, which contributes to increasing social conflict.

Gender Issues

In 2007 women accounted for only 24 percent of the agricultural labour force in the Philippines. However, this figure does not capture household-level agricultural activities in which there are almost three times more women than men (FAO Gender and Land Rights Database, 2016). Formal and informal agricultural activities are highly segregated by gender: women play a critical role in household agricultural production and food security, as well as post-harvest processing, value-addition and marketing, but are less recognized in the formal agricultural economy.

On the other hand, the legal framework for gender equality in the Philippines is well established. The Philippine constitution establishes equality between men and women, encompassing issues related to property rights. The Magna Carta of Women (Republic Act No. 9710), passed in 2009, is a comprehensive human rights law that seeks to eliminate discrimination against women by recognizing, protecting, fulfilling and promoting their rights, especially those in marginalized sectors. The Philippines has also ratified a number of anti-discrimination treaties supporting gender equality, including the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 2016). Despite these advances, significant gaps remain at the field level in terms of effectively translating these standards into equal opportunities for women in the agriculture sector. Weak institutional capacity to fully implement and enforce gender-responsive policy is an important factor. Overall, gender discrimination remains a significant barrier for women in the following governance areas (USAID Philippines Country Profile, 2016):

- Access to land
- Conflict resolution
- Access to credit and other agricultural services

Given these challenges, the GOP and FAO have identified “mainstreaming gender considerations” as being of “utmost importance” across all priority areas of the Country Programming Framework related to FAO’s future work on participatory governance and rural development (Philippines Country Programming Framework, 2016).

Land access

Since the early 1970s the GOP's Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program has redistributed 4.4 million hectares to 2.56 million farmer beneficiaries, approximately a third of which were women (Republic of the Philippines Department of Agrarian Reform: DAR AO 1-2001, 2001). Despite these efforts, prime agricultural lands continue to be monopolized by a few large-scale private land owners (USAID Philippines Country Profile, 2016). Furthermore, factors such as competition over natural resources and weak government capacity to enforce the land rights of marginalized stakeholders have resulted in a number of armed conflicts, mass evictions and land grabs. Within this complex scenario, the lack of effective governance mechanisms has challenged food security and poverty reduction efforts.

Participatory natural resource governance in the Philippines

In 2003, following an analysis of natural resource governance challenges faced by agricultural communities in the Philippines, FAO partnered with the GOP's Department of Agrarian Reform, along with the Department of Trade and Industry and concerned provincial and municipal local government units, to implement a community-based rural development strategy that focused on participatory natural resource governance. This work was funded by the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) under the Philippines-Australia Technical Support for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development Project. The primary goals of the Participatory Area Planning approach were to support a range of local agricultural stakeholders by:

- Identifying and addressing agricultural development challenges for small-scale farmers;
- Promoting communities' access to institutional support services;
- Increasing household levels of productivity and income on a sustainable basis.

The **PAP approach** is a holistic and participatory planning technique that uses community and local institutional capacity development to empower stakeholders to reach consensus decisions on natural resource governance. By proactively engaging different groups of women and men within households and communities in the governance process, the approach aims to build social cohesion and prevent conflict by giving all stakeholders the political space to advocate for their needs and address competition over resources through dialogue. Three core objectives of the PAP approach include:

- Development of a flexible framework to adapt to local stakeholders' needs and interests
- High level of participation by local stakeholders to support the governance process
- Political will and accountability by local government institutions

Gender-inclusiveness and the PAP process

The fact that women are marginalized in governance processes often leads to their exclusion from decision-making opportunities and agricultural services. To overcome these barriers and promote gender-inclusiveness, the PAP approach incorporates the following measures:

- Carry out an in-depth analysis to identify the specific roles, interests and barriers faced by women
- Define equal quotas for women and men in multi-stakeholder platforms divided by *purok* (village sections), age groups (youth, working age and elderly), and sector (land-less farmers, small farm owners, non-farming individuals and professionals).
- Provide equal negotiating power between women and men in the consensus process (enforced by an independent facilitation team) and equal voting rights when consensus cannot be reached and decisions must be made by majority voting.

The **PAP process** includes five main steps:

1. Stakeholder training on the governance framework and development process
2. Stakeholder profiling and identification of interests, relationships and conflicts
3. Data gathering and stakeholder capacity development on territorial planning
4. Drafting of natural resource governance plans
5. Governance plan finalization and stakeholder training for implementation

Through these steps, local communities were trained and engaged in the governance process. When consensus on natural resource governance issues was reached among stakeholders, they were then incorporated into the local governance plan, and the document was finalized with government stakeholders and then implemented. Development stakeholders and local agricultural communities agreed on this natural resource governance approach and then identified target territories and communities to initiate the PAP process together with the GOP Department of Agrarian Reform and FAO. Other stakeholders and partners of the project such as the local provincial and municipal government units, and Department of Trade and Industry, among others, were involved in the process.

Successes of the Participatory Area Planning approach

PAP activities were conducted in 293 communities throughout the country and had the following results:

- Increased social cohesion, as evidenced by community consensus decisions on natural resource management issues.
- New allocations of local government financial resources for community-based development projects.
- Increased government investment in public infrastructure and agricultural projects leading to greater rural access to roads and bridges for reaching markets, irrigation infrastructure and agricultural institutions such as credit centres.
- Widespread political support at local and national levels for PAP and decentralized natural resource governance approaches.
- Empowerment of rural communities and enhanced skills of local development workers through capacity development.
- Increased participation of women and marginalized groups in the governance process.

Through participatory dialogue, local stakeholders were able to make more equitable natural resource governance decisions, thus benefiting more rural households and avoiding conflicts. The effectiveness of the PAP approach in unifying efforts undertaken by various institutions, local communities and private interests led other communities and municipalities to gain interest and contact FAO and the GOP Department of Agrarian Reform to replicate this governance approach.

Future work on governance and gender issues in the Philippines

The Philippines' increasing attention to addressing gender inequalities and land concentration challenges, as well as the emerging political will at the local level to include agricultural communities in natural resource governance mechanisms, offer a strategic entry point to promote community-based territorial development activities in the country. Based on the lessons learned from the PAP approach in promoting participatory natural resource governance and capacity development, there is a need to further assist the GOP and other governments in the region in the following three areas:

- Supporting the social inclusion and gender responsiveness in natural resource governance mechanisms at local and national levels;
- Developing women's capacity to increase their access to land and agricultural services;
- Addressing natural resource concentration, access and management issues, taking into account the gender dimensions.

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