Rural Development Support Program, Philippines

Summary Version of the Evaluation
Preface

This study was commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and is part of a series evaluation with the German Church Development Services “Catholic Central Agency for Development Cooperation” (KZE) and “Protestant Association for Cooperation in Development” (EZE). It analyses results and experiences of projects that contribute to the Program of Action 2015 goal “Ensuring the Participation of the Poor – Strengthening Good Governance”. The evaluation is geared towards projects that support advocacy for poor and disadvantaged sections of the population and civil participation in decentralization and poverty reduction strategy (PRS) processes, for example. In particular, the evaluation answers the following questions:

- In relation to the representation of interests, which framework conditions and reactions of decision makers promote or obstruct the work of the poor’s organizations as well as advocacy and advisory organizations for the poor?

- To what extent are the partner organizations of KZE and EZE able to boost and expand the poor’s scope for participation and political action?

- As regards achievements at local, regional and national levels, what role do networks, alliances and cooperation among the poor, their representatives, and advocacy organizations play?

- How do they interact with each other? The present study, which was finalised in July 2007, is an independent evaluation carried out by Maria Lourdes A. de la Paz-Balce, Goldelino D. Chan, and Oliver Karkoschka (team leader).

The views taken by the authors do not necessarily reflect those of the BMZ. A comment by the BMZ on the findings of the evaluation can be found at the end of this report.

All summary reports of the series evaluation are also available online. Reports in German can be found at http://www.bmz.de/de/service/infothek/evaluierung/BMZEvaluierungsberichte/index.html, English reports at http://www.bmz.de/en/service/infothek/evaluation/BMZEvaluierungsberichte/index.html.

Division Evaluation of Development Cooperation
Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
Summary

1. Background

The subject of this evaluation is a rural development support program implemented by a Philippine non-governmental organization (NGO). The NGO has been supported by the Catholic Central Agency for Development Aid (Katholische Zentralstelle für Entwicklungshilfe) with funds from BMZ since 1996.

The evaluation analyses the extent to which strategies aiming to empower the poor and their organizations are capable to enhance and support “bottom-up processes” of poverty reduction and respective societal processes on various levels. The objective is to derive lessons learned for comparable approaches and programs. The evaluation was carried out during a three-week visit to Manila and the program areas using mostly qualitative methods such as interviews, group discussions and workshops.

The legal and policy environments in the Philippines are conducive to people’s participation in governance and development processes, including redistributive strategies towards poverty reduction such as agrarian reform. But there is a wide gap between the legal and political framework and actual opportunities for participation in everyday life. Possibilities for participation are limited by mostly landowning families who dominate politics and defend their power in the economic systems at national and local level. Another major constraint to participation is the self-perception of the poor who do not know their political rights sufficiently and who are subsequently not aware of their potential political power/influence.

To increase access to land and its resources by men and women farmers and farm workers is the program’s overall goal. The implementing NGO works towards the empowerment of communities so they themselves can claim their rightful share of resources from the state and local level administration.

2. Major findings and conclusions

The program clearly responds to the needs of farmers and farm workers, their organizations and their communities. Objectives and strategies target their key problems (low income and lack of alternative income sources, high dependency on landowners, traders or moneylenders, and lack of participation opportunities in local decision making processes) and aim at increasing their access to land and decision making processes in governance and regarding poverty reduction.

With the logframe as a reference, the program’s objectives were achieved to a satisfactory level. Linking local activities on issues identified by the concerned people according to their priorities with creative national lobbying and networking made the NGO not only a credible partner for other NGOs, but also a convener of networks for NGOs with different political backgrounds and from various fields of activity such as agrarian reform, local governance, and alternative law. Many accredit the NGO with a bridging function between different fractions of civil society as well as between civil society and the government.

The NGO’s most important strategies are capacity development of farmers and constructive dialogues with the government at local and national levels including skills trainings for government officials. The program neither provides for any area-specific planning and target setting nor does it take outcomes and impacts sufficiently
into consideration. Instead, the program’s focus is limited to implementing activities and outputs. This approach goes hand in hand with an instrumental rather than political understanding of participation and empowerment, even though the program’s achievements have a clear political and societal dimension.

The evaluation reveals that many important impacts were achieved in regard to poverty reduction, social equity, participation, empowerment and good governance: The program established new local actors within the context of strengthened people’s organizations (POs). It is also thanks to this commitment that POs developed into political actors who newly claimed their rights and confronted the government and landowners with their demands. Key factors for this successful empowerment of POs were their increased self-confidence acquired in trainings and forums for exchange and strategizing and their improved access to information. In addition, POs successfully organized their own activities instead of only benefiting from the commitment of others. Consequently, PO members also gained a new self-perception. They have gained self-confidence and hope and perceive themselves as a political actor. This has changed also their relationships to local government officials and landowners.

The NGO’s most relevant impacts on poverty reduction are less of a purely economic nature, but reveal themselves for instance in a better access to land for farmers, an improved infrastructure, services (electricity, access to education, local government commitment to and financing of sustainable agriculture, etc.) and enhanced political capabilities of the poor.

**New legal spaces for participation** were created in particular at the barangay (i.e. village) level in particular through participation of marginalized groups in local development planning and other new forums for enhanced interaction between the population (or organized groups) and officials at local level. Most of these spaces were already designed in the laws, but have not been implemented as yet. Joint claims by local NGOs and POs were necessary to de facto establish these opportunities for participation. However, without the changes in attitude and behavior of government officials in some of the program-supported areas, these forums would not have become effective. Where such changes have materialized, they are reflected in the government’s more friendly communication pattern towards POs, in a better treatment as well as in more favorable decisions that address POs’ concerns, benefit them economically and through infrastructure. Changed attitudes of politicians and officials are foremost a result of voting PO-friendly persons into the respective positions. The program’s paralegal training in which many politicians and officials took part (sometimes before being elected) played a crucial role in this regard. The increased power and stronger voice of POs is reflected in the changed relationship between poor PO members on the one hand and government officials and former landowners on the other, e.g. when farmers make claims to local government units or negotiate with landowners. Given the limited resources and the reduced possibilities of the implementing NGO to act against opposing powerful interests, the degree and the quality of achieved impacts are particularly satisfying.

Also at national level, some achievements were made even though the general political context was rather/very unfavorable. The NGO contributed to a number of internal decisions with respect to the implementation of the agrarian reform. In addition, the NGO lobbied an increased number of policies regarding the promotion of farmers’ rights, which were subsequently passed in the Department of Agrarian Reform. Bringing local cases to national courts, the NGO brought about some path-breaking court decisions with effects also beyond the program areas.
The achieved **degree of sustainability** is very satisfying with respect to changed attitudes and self-perceptions of the poor. However, their power is still small in most other political and social fields. The program was successful in widening the poor’s opportunities for participation and in developing their capacities to use these spaces. But the poor are not yet able to ensure the sustainability of these spaces and they have not yet developed the capacity to extend their scope of participation to higher levels and to other areas. Therefore, issues that remain to be addressed are further institutionalization of POS, scaling up of participatory processes also at higher administrative levels and the development of the capacities of the civil society to assume a control function of the administration at all levels.

As a conclusion, the sustainability of program impacts still depends to a high degree on the support by NGOs (and their funding by donors) and on individual attitudes of local politicians and officials. In addition, sustainability of impacts requires also at least the continuation (and not degradation) of the national political framework. The context for implementation of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) is becoming more and more difficult. The funding is only ensured until 2008 and it is very unclear whether it will be continued. In addition, the remaining areas for land transfer are more and more difficult. The funding is only ensured until 2008 and it is very unclear whether it will be continued. In addition, the remaining areas for land transfer are more and more difficult to be put under CARP. There are also efforts to implement a constitutional reform that is likely also to affect the local government code and that may reduce opportunities for participation at local level.

### 3. **Recommendations and lessons learned**

The program achieved valuable societal changes that were not within the scope of its objectives. Therefore, the program should be adapted accordingly and be geared **more towards societal processes and changes**. The NGO and its partners should address the poor’s powerlessness more comprehensively as the main cause of poverty. This must involve the analysis of power relations and the facilitation of changes in societal relations, for example the relations between peasants and landlords, producers and traders, constituencies and politicians, constituencies and civil servants as well as gender relations. The NGO should also develop a more thorough strategy to address the poor’s difficult economic situation and in particular problems arising after land acquisition. It should support the poor to analyze causes and mechanisms of impoverishment on the one hand and enrichment on the other hand.

Program staff should facilitate **barangay** governments in institutionalizing participatory approaches and should work more systematically with municipal and city governments in scaling up these approaches from the **barangay** to the municipal and city levels.

In order to boost the power of the poor also at these administrative levels, the program should offer services to POS to assist them in federalizing more closely and in developing strategies for cooperation and exchange with other POS and NGOs.

The NGO should determine more precisely what results and impacts are to be achieved in each program area within specific program phases and within the entire program support period (exit indicators). It is necessary that the NGO provides good reasons for selecting particular areas to be included in the program.

Furthermore, the NGO’s monitoring and evaluation system needs to be improved, in particular regarding results and the definition of indicators. For its strategic orientation, it is crucial that the NGO observes and analyses Agrarian Reform second-generation problems as well as related needs and challenges in a pro-active manner. The NGO should intensify its reflections on the
changing context for land reform at national level and its consequences for the program and the organization.

The evaluation recommends to KZE to demand from its partner NGO to give more attention to program results (outputs, outcomes and impacts) in planning, monitoring and reporting. In this respect, reporting not only includes identifying societal changes effected by the program, but also a more precise description of the desired changes in each project phase.

The experiences of the program provide many lessons learned. Those lessons, which are most important and which can also be useful in other contexts are:

- Linking local level activities on issues such as agrarian reform and local development planning with national level networking for lobbying and advocacy has proven to be a good practice.

- Self-confidence of the poor and their self-conception as political actors are key factors for democratic participation. They can be achieved through capacity development to use spaces for participation such as voting people’s representatives into local government bodies.

- Capacities need to be developed with regard to (a) skills of individuals, (b) organizational proficiency of POs and NGOs, (c) effective cooperation among civil society actors from different levels and (d) successful communication between civil society and the government.

- Participation has to produce benefits for both the POs (favorable local government decisions and channeling of funds for development) and for government officials (re-election into office, less work, more appreciation, etc.).

- Because government plays a crucial role in determining the de facto space of participation, a thorough strategy towards government institutions is essential. Capacity building of local government officials contributes to the application of the legal framework for participation in local politics.

- Focusing on participatory mechanisms such as local development planning may be the starting point for democratic participation, but it does not ensure good governance and the internalization of democratic principles.

- Land transfer alone is not a solution to poverty. Even if support measures have been planned, mortgaging and selling of newly acquired land are still frequent problems. Dependence of the poor often continues – it only switches from landowners to money-lenders or traders.

- Economic problems have to be addressed more comprehensively, including processes and power structures that are responsible for both impoverishment and enrichment.
Comment of BMZ
(Division Principles of Cooperation with Civil Society Forces)

The evaluation report provides clear and detailed insights into the program’s political, socioeconomic, socio-cultural and institutional environment. Moreover, it thoroughly describes factors that are either detrimental or conducive to participation of the poor and good governance. It examines in detail the tradeoffs between political and legal opportunities for action as well as factors that impede the participation and development of the poor. The report then looks at how these aspects are related to the strategy pursued by the project executing NGO.

The report’s impact analysis deserves special mention. Based on a plausible results chain, the authors describe changes and change processes on various impact levels ranging from knowledge transfer to the poor all the way to the modification of social and political relations and the adaptation of rules governing social and political action. One of the evaluation’s major findings is that the program’s approach is clearly focused on the needs of poor and disadvantaged rural people. Notwithstanding considerable achievements with regard to the establishment of strong people’s organizations and to the strengthening of the target group’s self-esteem and its social and political participation, there are some remaining challenges: The implementing NGO has to ensure that certain components of the program will be sustainable over the long term. Furthermore, achieving economic development in a sense of reducing people’s material poverty should be in the center of attention. These aspects are relevant for decisions regarding the program’s continuation, including the question of whether or not to pursue a needs-based or a rights-based approach, or both.

Most of the recommendations and lessons learned are plausible and specific. They provide valuable hints for the Catholic Central Agency for Development Aid and the program executing agency regarding future planning and strategic programming. Some of the recommendations and findings are also being discussed as part of the general dialogue between BMZ and the two church agencies with regard to impact monitoring and aid evaluation.

It should be emphasized that the evaluation not only looks at non-governmental, but also at governmental players and that it touches upon their strategic alliances and on win-win effects for both sides.

On the whole, the program is in line with the principles underlying BMZ’s support for church agencies’ development projects, that is, help towards self-help and a focus on the improvement of the situation of poor and disadvantaged population groups (“option for the poor”). With a view to fighting poverty and its causes, the project combines practical grassroots work for poverty reduction with activities to empower the poor and enhance their voice, as well as advocacy work, achieving impacts at a variety of levels.
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