

Role of Social Organizers in Communal Irrigation Development in the Philippines

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INTRODUCTION

THE PARTICIPATORY-APPROACH PROGRAM for developing communal-irrigation systems in the Philippines applies the concept of combining financial and technical assistance to farmers with obtaining their maximum participation in the planning, design, construction, and in their eventual assumption of operation and maintenance of the completed systems. This concept evolved from the unsatisfactory experiences of constructing communal-irrigation systems through the “dole-out” method of assistance in the 1950s to the early 1970s. These were designed and constructed without farmers’ involvement., ‘They were poorly operated and maintained and their costs were not repaid. These contrasted with the centuries-old, indigenous, farmer-built irrigation systems which are operated and managed by strong and cohesive farmer organizations without state intervention. The following are the general lessons derived from case studies of **some** indigenous farmer-built systems (Siy, Jr., 1989):

1. The collective effort to build the irrigation system and subsequently to maintain it resulted in a strong sense of ownership of the system.
2. The physical and institutional aspects of the irrigation system evolved simultaneously.
3. Over a period of time the organization developed the ability to find specific solutions suited to local circumstances and resources.
4. These associations nurtured leadership skills.

The Participatory-Approach Program was pilot tested by the National Irrigation Administration in two systems in 1976 and in two other systems in 1979. The Program was expanded to 14

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systems in **12** regions in **1980** and further expanded to **25** systems in **1981** and to **108** in **1982**. In **1983**, the Program was applied in all National Irrigation Administration-assisted communal-irrigation systems. At present, there are already **1,694** systems with an area of **232,163** hectares (ha) that have been completed under this Program.

An impact evaluation study conducted for National Irrigation Administration's Participatory-Approach Program (de los Reyes and Jopillo, **1989**) indicated better performance compared to non-Participatory-Approach Program systems. Irrigation facilities constructed under the Participatory-Approach Program are viewed by farmers to be more functional, systems **are** more productive (with greater increases in rice yields and in irrigated area during the dry season), and the irrigation associations are stronger.

PHASES OF IRRIGATION DEVELOPMENT AND ACTIVITIES OF THE IRRIGATION-COMMUNITY ORGANIZER/IRRIGATION- ORGANIZATION WORKER

Investigation and Selection Phase

The work of the Irrigation-Community Organizer/Irrigation-Organization Worker fielded **as** profile writer during this phase could be compared to that of a researcher. The Irrigation-Community Organizer/Irrigation-Organization Worker collects data and information that are used in determining the institutional feasibility of a project or system. This is **done** through the development of a project-institutional profile. These data are used to select and prioritize projects to be implemented. The profile is also used by the Irrigation-Community **Organizers/Irrigation-Organization Workers** to develop their intervention strategies prior to deployment in the project area.

Preconstruction Phase

Six to nine months before the start of construction an Irrigation-Community Organizer/Irrigation-Organization Worker is fielded in the project area to facilitate organization of the farmers **into an** irrigation association. The following are the different institutional activities undertaken by the Irrigation-Community **Organizer/Irrigation-Organization** Worker during the **preconstruction** phase:

- * Integration with the community.
- * Social investigation.
- * Facilitating farmers' meetings.
- * Mobilization of farmers.

- * Formation of preconstruction committees.
- * Right-of-way negotiations.
- * Membership recruitment
- * Securities and Exchange Commission registration.
- * Water permit application.
- * Presentation of project-development scheme.
- * Conducting of preconstruction conferences to **discuss** and formulate. ~~the~~ National Irrigation Administration and the Irrigation Association policies for construction, to **discuss** provisions of the Memoranda of Agreement, and present the final system design.
- * Training of irrigation-association officers and **selected** members.

Construction Phase

After the signing of the Memoranda of Agreement construction may **start**. In this phase, the Irrigation-Community **Organizer/Irrigation-Organization** Worker role centers on facilitating the participation of the Irrigation Association in system construction and in strengthening the leadership and decision-making capabilities of ~~the~~ association. The Irrigation-Community Organizer/ Irrigation-Organization Worker also acts **as** coordinator between ~~the~~ Irrigation Association and ~~the~~ technical staff for discussion of issues that crop up and **as** mediator or facilitator during such discussions. The Irrigation-Community Organizer/Irrigation-Organization Worker would also continuously provide advice or suggestions on what the Irrigation Association should do and constantly remind them of their responsibilities. The activities during **this** phase include:

- * Creation of additional committees such **as**
 - 1) quality-control and quantity-control committee.
 - 2) cost-control committee,
 - 3) manpower and inventory committee,
 - 4) equity-generation committee.
- * Procurement of construction materials.
- * Manpower mobilization.
- * Material delivery and issuance.
- * Inventory of materials and equipment
- * Cost recording.
- * Cost-reconciliation sessions.
- * Equity generation through cash, labor, and materials.
- * Construction of structures and facilities.
- * Test run before the turnover of the system to identify any defects in the constructed facilities and structures.
- * Debugging.

Operation and Maintenance Phase

For system turnover the Irrigation-Community **Organizer/Irrigation-Organization Worker** facilitates:

- * Irrigation **Association** acceptance of the **final** statement of chargeable **costs** which would become the Irrigation Association loan after deducting the equity generated by irrigation association.
- * Signing of turnover papers.
- * Formulation and signing of the amortization schedule.

Before or immediately after the turnover a training on System Management is coordinated by the Irrigation-Community **Organizer/Irrigation-Organization Worker** for the Irrigation **Association**. During training the Irrigation-Community **Organizer/Irrigation-Organization Worker** often acts as a resource **person**. The System Management features the preparation of actual Irrigation-**Association** plans on 1) cropping calendars, 2) water distribution. 3) farm facilities improvement. 4) maintenance, 5) problems of conflict management, and 6) delineation of **duties** and **responsibilities** of officers and members on operation and maintenance.

The functions of the Irrigation-Community Organizer/Irrigation-Organization Worker during the operation and maintenance phase **are** to assist the Irrigation Association in:

- * Mobilization for operation and maintenance of committees such as the irrigation committee, membership and education committee, financial management committee. and audit and inventory committee.
- * Development of operation and maintenance plans.
- * Collection of amortization payments.
- * Record keeping.

The Irrigation-Community Organizer/Irrigation-Organization Worker remains in the project area for two cropping **seasons** (one year). **After** the two cropping **seasons** the Irrigation-Community **Organizer/Irrigation-Organization Worker** is withdrawn and the **Irrigation Association** assumes full responsibility for operation and maintenance of the system. The system however, is visited periodically by the Irrigation Technician or Irrigation-Community **Organizer/Irrigation-Organization Worker** assigned to a nearby project to determine whether the Irrigation **Association** may **need** any assistance.

THE IRRIGATION COMMUNITY ORGANIZER/IRRIGATION ORGANIZATION WORKER: IDEOLOGY, RESPONSIBILITIES, ROLES, AND POSITIONS

The Irrigation Community **Organizer/Irrigation-Organization Worker** acts as a catalyst and **facilitator**. He assists, advises, encourages, guides, questions, and argues with the farmers but leaves the decision making to the Irrigation Association. He does not do work which the Irrigation Association should undertake but rather guides the Irrigation Association in realizing its potential in carrying out responsibilities and tasks through group action. An effective Irrigation Community **Organizer/Irrigation-Organization Worker** is one who can leave the Irrigation Association after project completion without impairing the stability and capability of the association (National Irrigation Administration, 1985). The National Irrigation Administration's Irrigation Community Organizers/Irrigation Organization Workers adhere to the "pro-farmer standpoint," considering the interests of the farmers as their primary concern.

Responsibilities

1. Assist farmers/Irrigators to organize themselves into a cohesive and functional Irrigation Association that can responsibly participate in the planning, design, construction, and eventual operation and maintenance of the system.
2. Coordinate with technical staff to facilitate farmers' participation in all phases of project development.
3. Facilitate assessment of Irrigation community needs and resources. The Irrigation Community **Organizer/Irrigation-Organization Worker** initiates discussions of needs and problems thereby training the Irrigation Association in problem-solving and decision-making processes.
4. Facilitate the development, conduct, and evaluation of capability development programs on Irrigation Association leadership, financial management, and Irrigation system management.
5. Monitor and evaluate the progress and status of the Irrigation Association.
6. Prepare and submit periodic progress reports.

Roles

The different roles that an Irrigation Community Organizer/Irrigation Organization Worker plays in facilitating Irrigation Association organizational development are the following:

Catalyst

- * Helps the irrigation community establish means to achieve its goals.
- * Helps the community to formulate its direction by encouraging local initiatives.

Facilitator or Enabler

- * Facilitates the organization of the Irrigation Association.
- * Helps the farmers to recognize the existing circumstances of their community.
- * Motivates people to express their ideas and feelings.
- * Consistently guides the community to realize its potential and strengths in cooperative work.

Consultant

- * Provides data, technical expertise, and resource materials.
- * Points out community situations and issues.
- * Acquaints the community with experiences of other projects to instruct in useful principles.
- * Provides evaluation and interpretation of the process of collective action.

Change-Agent

- * Helps farmers *to* realize the need for change.
- * Facilitates farmers' decisions on problems, action planning, and implementation of plans.
- * Guides the farmers in the evaluation and assessment of their progress.
- * *Makes* provisions to sustain the changes adopted.

Trainer

- * Assists the Irrigation Association in the development of its problem-solving and decision-making capabilities.
- * Facilitates provision of capability-development programs to the Irrigation Association on leadership, financial management, and irrigation-system management.
- * Develops the capabilities of the Irrigation Association in conducting action-reflection sessions for any activity it undertakes, so it should be able to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of its actions and plans, and thus develop the basis for further improvement.

Deployment

Generally, an Irrigation-Community Organizer/Irrigation-Organization Worker in the **Philippines** is given one base project (either a **preconstruction** or construction project) and one to two radiation systems (usually operation and maintenance systems or systems under rehabilitation with existing irrigation associations near his or her base) for periodic visits to assess the **need** for assistance.

Positions

The Irrigation-Community Organizer position was created in 1976 while the **Irrigation-Organization Worker** position was created in 1986 when the National Irrigation Administration embarked on a crash program in communal-irrigation system development. In the mid-1980s, the continued existence of the contractual Irrigation-Community Organizers was questioned because of a Civil Service rule that persons may be contracted only for a limited period (about 2 years). After that time, the technology should have been transferred to the regular staff of the institution. **Because** of this, since 1987 the National Irrigation Administration has not hired any additional Irrigation-Community Organizers. All Irrigation-Community Organizer positions vacated since then have remained vacant. In place of Irrigation-Community Organizers the National Irrigation Administration **had been** hiring Irrigation-Organization Workers on a daily-wage, temporary-hire basis. This, however, presents a problem to the agency. Because of the absence of permanent positions for organizers a large number of Irrigation-Organization Workers and Irrigation-Community Organizers had been transferring themselves to other agencies involved in extension, where they enjoy higher pay and security of tenure. As a result training costs of the National Irrigation Administration are higher, because replacements have to be hired and trained every year.

SELECTION AND TRAINING

The capability and efficiency of an Irrigation-Community Organizer/Irrigation-Organization Worker is a vital ingredient in the implementation of the Participatory-Approach Program. The scope of activity of an Irrigation-Community Organizer/Irrigation-Organization Worker **requires** a wide variety of **skills**, knowledge, and ability. To ensure hiring of qualified Irrigation-Community Organizers/Irrigation-Organization Workers, the National Irrigation Administration has developed a process and **guidelines** on Irrigation-Community Organizer/Irrigation-Organization Worker recruitment.

Recruitment and Selection

The Irrigation-Community Organizer/Irrigation-Organization Worker recruitment and selection process starts with the Provincial Irrigation Office determining its requirements. These are relayed to the Regional Irrigation Office for evaluation and then submitted to the central office for approval. Once approved the positions of vacancies are posted at the Provincial Irrigation Office and municipal halls and announced through the radio or local newspaper. Applicants are required to send their applications to the Provincial Irrigation Office within two to three weeks after posting and/or announcements. The following steps comprise the selection process:

- * Evaluation of application forms.
- * Initial interview.
- * Psychological testing.
- * Panel interview.
- * Field exposure.
- * Final evaluation.

Training

The Irrigation-Community Organizers/Irrigation-Organization Workers are given training to develop their capabilities in carrying out their responsibilities prior to fielding and again prior to construction. Other Irrigation-Community Organizer/Irrigation-Organization Worker training in leadership, financial management, and system management supplement these.

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

In the pilot stage of the Participatory-Approach Program, program management was the responsibility of a special group reporting directly to the National Irrigation Administration top management. As the policies, procedures, and guidelines for nationwide implementation were developed and adopted program management was gradually transferred to the regular units of the agency. At present the nationwide implementation is being supervised by the Institutional Development Department which is the unit of the agency responsible for overseeing the institutional-development activities nationwide. A recent change implemented is the creation of the Institutional Assistance Section at each Provincial Irrigation Office.

FARMER IRRIGATORS' ORGANIZING PROGRAM: AN ALTERNATIVE ORGANIZING SCHEME

An alternative organizing scheme utilizes farmers as organizers. The program, called Farmer Irrigators' Organizing Program, has been tried successfully in three national irrigation systems in the central Philippines. The advantage of this scheme is that farmer organizers are cheaper than professionals and they can also serve as advisers after the organization of irrigation associations while professional organizers are always transferred after the systems have been completed.

POTENTIAL AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

The following could be considered as areas of concern:

1. The unavailability of permanent positions for Irrigation-Community Organizers/Irrigation-Organization Workers has resulted in their getting transfers to agencies which offer better pay and job security. This is not only a drain of expertise but also adds to training costs for replacements.
2. Synchronization of the technical work and the institutional work although accepted in principle still requires close monitoring. In some instances because of a committed target date for physical completion the institutional aspect is sacrificed. On the other hand, slow accomplishment of institutional commitments delays the physical work.
3. A coordination mechanism to incorporate assistance of other agencies involved in agriculture must be developed. Irrigation development alone is not sufficient. Other agricultural assistance such as inputs and credit are essential to the process to complement the package of assistance to farmers.
4. The Farmer Irrigators' Organizing Program should be considered as an alternative for communal-irrigation system development.

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