

## CHAPTER 3

System Turnover to Farmers in the  
Philippines**Leonardo S. Gonzales<sup>†</sup>**

IN THE EARLY 1970s, the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) of the Philippines became seriously concerned about problems of irrigation system operation and maintenance. Service areas of its irrigation systems were not being fully irrigated and the irrigation fees being collected were far below the operation and maintenance (O&M) costs. The phasing out of subsidies for O&M of the national irrigation systems that NIA administered posed another big problem. NIA realized that it would need to organize irrigators' associations capable of effectively carrying out the partial or full management of the O&M of irrigation systems.

In 1976, NIA initiated two pilot projects to organize farmers into irrigators' associations. It hired irrigation community organizers who were college graduates and experienced in working with the rural and urban poor, able to communicate with farmers and dedicated to the participatory concept. This was implemented in two communal irrigation projects, to maximize the participation of farmers from the grass-roots level in all undertakings within the irrigators' associations. These pilot projects developed the basic processes for inducing farmers' participation, in spite of some problems encountered in their implementation.

**NEW APPROACH**

Having achieved encouraging results in communal irrigation projects, NIA turned towards national systems and in 1983, a similar approach with a new concept was piloted and initiated in the Angat nit Argat-Maasim Rivers Irrigation System and the Porac-Gumain Rivers Irrigation System in Region 3, in the provinces of Bulacan and Pampanga in Luzon. Entitled the Farmer Irrigator Organizer Program (FIOP), the new approach requires the utilization of farmers in organizing co-farmers into irrigators' associations.

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<sup>†</sup> Leonardo S. Gonzales, IIMI's Special Awards recipient in 1990, recorded his successful experiences in the Philippines in turning over a pump irrigation system to a farmers' organization as a case study under the guidance and training of IIMI's Awards Program. This is a summary of this case study.

To ensure smooth implementation of the new approach, NIA created the following teams or groups:

### **Project Management Team**

This team was composed of the NIA Regional Irrigation Director as de facto head, the Manager of the Institutional Development Division as the Project Officer and the Chief of the Operation Division, the Irrigation Superintendents and the Farmer Irrigator Organizer Supervisors of the two pilot systems as members. This team was responsible for the conduct of the Project Management Team meetings, monitoring and evaluation of the program and the submission of monthly progress reports.

### **The Supervisory/Organizing Group**

This group was headed by the Irrigation Superintendent (Chief of system) who directly supervised and coordinated all FIO and O&M activities of the system, validated farmers' demands and conducted coordination meetings at least once a month. Under him were the following personnel:

- Water Management Technologist/Watermaster: Assigned to assist in FIO (Farmer Irrigator Organizer) identification, assist FIOs in validating the list of farmers and identification of irrigation system problems.
- FIO Supervisor (FIOS): Directly supervised the FIOs in organizing activities and prepared monthly progress reports of activities.
- Farmer Irrigator Organizers (FIOs): Conducted house visits, making contacts and identifying problems, and created farmer awareness of collective problem-solving.

The selection of the FIOs was made on the basis of their leadership potential, availability, age, educational attainment, economic status, etc. Selecting a farmer organizer that fits all the qualifications set forth was a very difficult task. A farmer may be good in oral communication and be well-respected, but he may not be able to read and write. Whatever difficulties there were in the FIO selection, the Watermaster was instructed to choose and submit the names of the best three farmers he knew in each deployment area.

### **TRAINING**

When all the FIOs were selected, a pre-deployment training was given during May 2-7, 1983, at the NIA Training Center in San Rafael, Bulacan. The objective of the training was to acquaint and familiarize each of them with all aspects of organizing work, their area of deployment and possible problems to be encountered. Trainees were given parcellary maps showing areas under their jurisdiction, together with the list of farmers in each area. Some of the topics discussed during the training were: orientation of the

FIOF; present status of the system and its operation; decision making; guides and steps in organizing the irrigators' association (IA); and farmers' problems in irrigation and suggested solutions. The topic on farmers' problems in irrigation and the corresponding solutions produced very lengthy and productive discussions. It was at this point, that the FIOs realized the importance of farmers' participation in the O&M of irrigation systems.

Having completed the six-day training, the FIOs went to work. The first month of actual organizing had no results at all. Farmers were always saying that they were fed up with NIA. Ever since the irrigation system was constructed, they had brought their problems to NIA which had not taken any action. These problems were then brought to the attention of the Irrigation Superintendent (IS) during the coordination meeting. The IS immediately inspected each area of the FIO to investigate and validate farmers' problems. Knowing their needs, he talked to the farmers about a joint undertaking. The NIA would provide all materials needed and the farmers would provide free labor. After getting the consensus of the farmers, the Superintendent facilitated the delivery of construction materials or equipment needed, even without having a program of work and funding support. Seeing the arrival of a NIA truck loaded with construction materials on the agreed schedule or soon thereafter, the farmers were greatly motivated. The FIOs were instant local heroes. The farmers believed in them and saw that NIA was serious this time. The FIOs then started organizing small groups of farmers called BSM (Buketeng Samahan ng Magpapatubig in the Tagalog dialect, meaning Farmers' Irrigators' Groups).

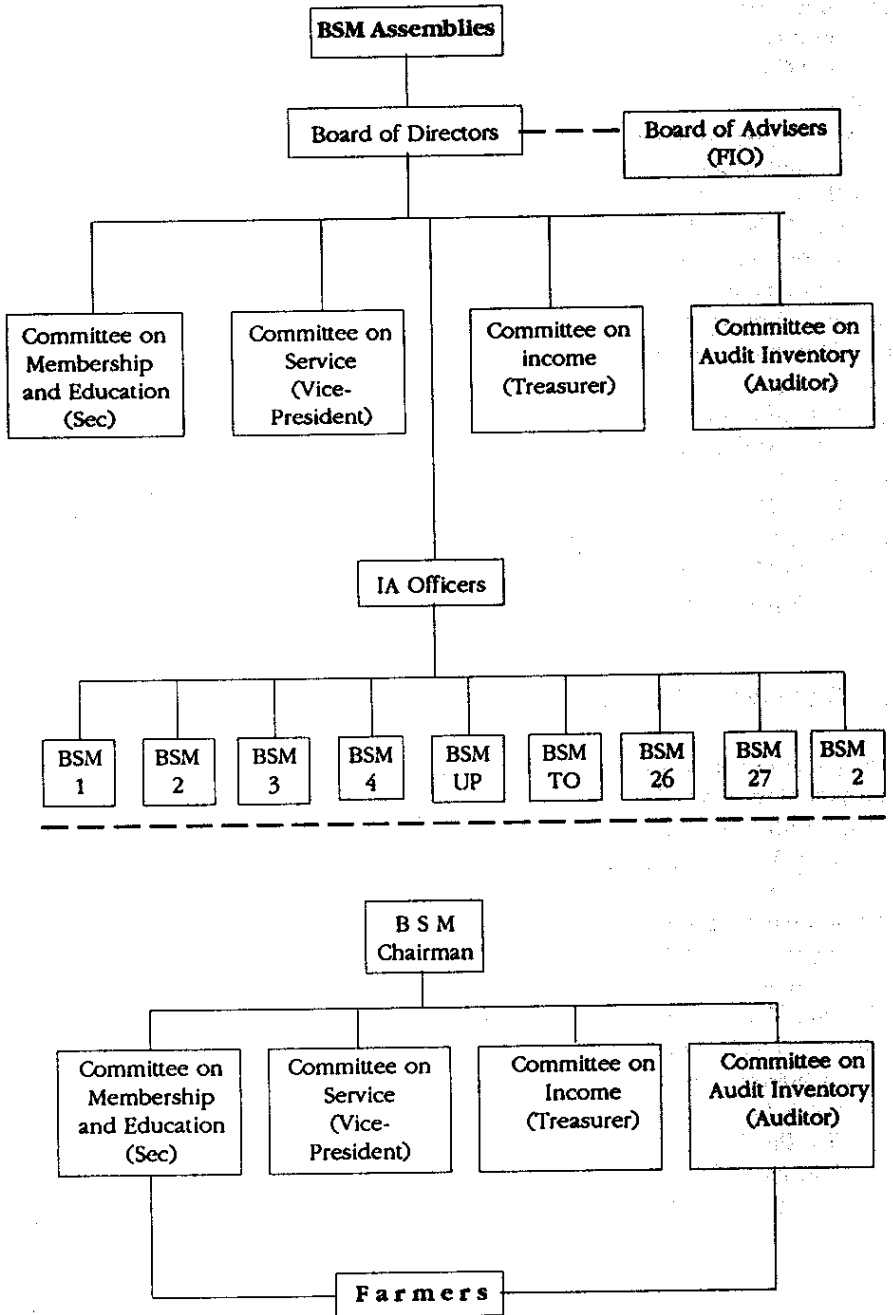
## **IRRIGATORS' ASSOCIATION**

During a seminar workshop, on October 6, 1983, (five months after the FIO pre-deployment training) the Bustos Pandi Extension Pump Irrigation System became the Bustos-Pandi Irrigators' Association Incorporated, or BUSPAN IA, Inc. The Chairmen of the 28 BSMs (or FIGs) formed the IA. FIOs attended the seminar. In the workshop, the bylaws of the association were formulated, improved and revised. The 28 BSM Chairmen were installed as the Board of Directors (BOD) of the association and from the BOD, they elected their sets of officers. They created four committees to handle various activities of the association. Figure 3.1 shows the organizational structure of the irrigators' association.

Officers elected from among the 28 BSM chairmen were as follows:

- President: Acts as the head of the IA. He is responsible for all IA business transactions.
- Vice-President: Two vice-presidents are elected. The first vice-president is the chairman of the committee on service while the second vice-president acts as co-chairman. They are responsible for overall water distribution within the IA.

Figure 3.1. Organizational structure at the IA level (upper box) and at the BSM level (lower box).



- **Secretary:** Acts as the chairman of the committee on membership and education. He is in charge of the follow-up activities for training and application of new members.
- **Auditor:** Is the chairman of the committee on Audit and Inventory. He is responsible for checking financial transactions and for all properties acquired by the Association.

At the BSM level, the same sets of officers are elected with only one vice-president. Prior to the monthly BOD meeting, a monthly BSM meeting was also held. They discussed problems affecting their operations and all unresolved issues were raised to the BOD level for decisions. Once agreement or a decision is made at BOD level, this is brought down to the BSM level for implementation. The role of the FIOs has become advisory as they are permanently installed as the Board of Advisors (BOA). They attend the monthly BOD meetings and also give guidance and attend meetings at BSM level when requested to attend.

## CHANGES FOLLOWING TURNOVER

Thirteen months after the FIOP was initially launched (out of the projected 30 months of implementation), in June 1984, the BUSPAN IA Inc. took over full management of the operation and maintenance of the pump system. Even during the organizing phase of the project, significant changes occurred. As the IA were given training on system management, power consumption started to go down (see Figure 3.2).

By teaching simple water management practices, such as the closing of openings to the rice fields when they are already full of water and preventing water going to drains, the BUSPAN IA was able to save on power consumption. They were able to save 79,000 kwh from 1983 to 1984. Even in 1987, due to the late rainfall, they operated the pumps in the wet season as though it was a dry season. They were able to save 7,000 kwh, compared with the 1983 consumption.

Another area of significant change was the collection of the irrigation service fee. The BUSPAN IA, through NIA guidance, had increased the irrigation service fee from 8 cavans of unmilled rice (one cavan = 50 kg) to 10.5 cavans for two cropping seasons (wet and dry).

As shown in Figure 3.3, the average collection percentage for wet and dry seasons during NIA management up to 1983 was about 50 percent. Starting in 1984, when BUSPAN IA Inc. took over the collection, efficiency never went below 90 percent. They attained a 100 percent collection in 1989 and are trying to maintain it at that level.

There are several other changes worth mentioning. At present, farmers seldom interfere in the operation of the pumps. If they do, they inform the committee on service of their needs, so that the committee can make the necessary adjustments. Almost all farmers in each sector knew each other. Previously, a dispute could lead to a heated argument or even a fist fight and loss of life. Today, farmers request each other to stand as sponsors in the baptisms or weddings of their children. As a result of their coordination, farmers receive an equal distribution of water, resulting in increases in individual crop production.

Figure 3.2. Graph showing power consumption under NIA Management in 1983 and under BUSPAN IA starting 1984.

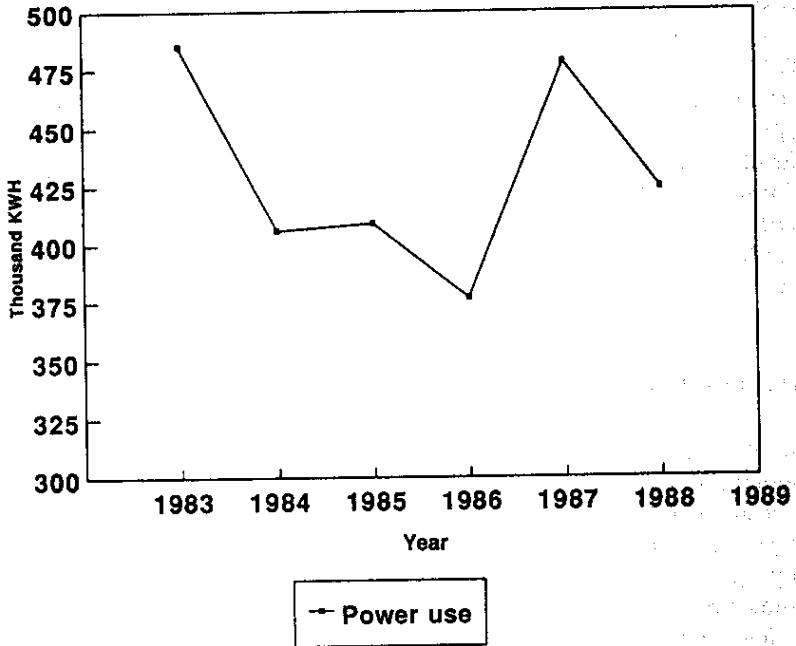
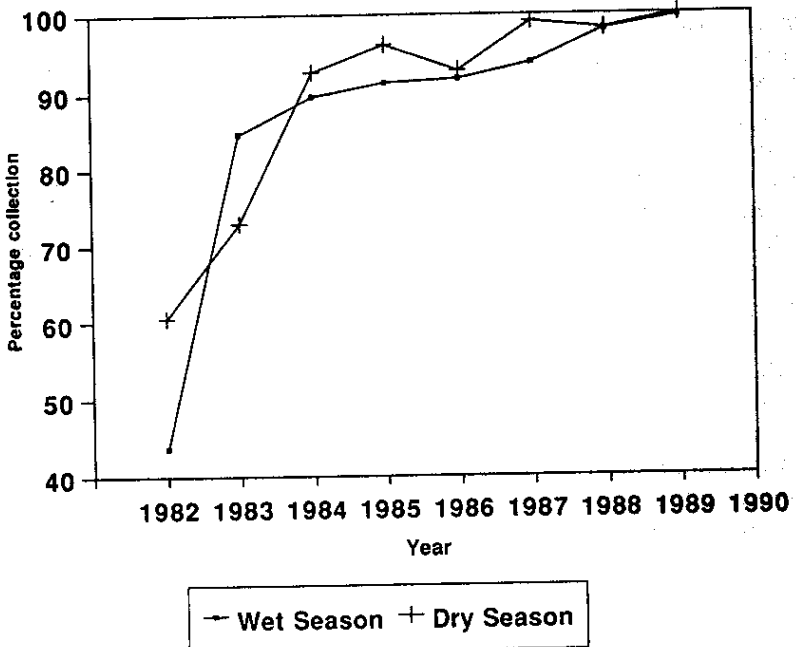


Figure 3.3. Graph showing collection percentage during NIA management up to 1983 and under BUSPAN IA starting 1984.



## FIOP NATIONWIDE

Following encouraging results from the initial implementation in Angat nit Argat-Maasim Rivers Irrigation System (AMRIS) the NIA Top Management decided to implement FIOP nationwide. In mid-1988, a World Bank assisted project, the Irrigation Operation Support Project (IOSP) was started in all the twelve regional offices of NIA. It involves the rehabilitation and improvement of all national irrigation systems in the country. The project includes the accelerated development of irrigators' associations in all national systems. As a result of this, the entire regional institutional development staff of Regional Office No. 3, all staff of the AMRIS, all FIO supervisors and officers of BUSPAN IA Inc. were invited as resource speakers in the training components of this project. They traveled from Region 3 to Region 2 in Cagayan Province, and as far as Region 5 in Bicol province in Central Luzon. They even took a plane to Region Ten in distant Cagayan de Oro in Mindanao to share their experiences. One of the farmer organizers said that he could not believe what was happening. He never expected in his entire life that some day he would be able to fly in a plane. Yet it happened.

There was a great deal of apprehension among the Board of Directors of the IA during the final discussions prior to the signing of the turnover agreement. They were unsure whether they could efficiently manage the operations of the pump system. There were so many questions of "how" and "if" from the farmers. However, the NIA managed to convince them that it would always support and guide them in their operation, emphasizing the need for their participation. In the end, the farmers agreed to take over the pump operation for a one-year trial period, from the wet season cropping of 1984 to the dry season cropping of 1985. By the end of the wet season cropping of 1984, they realized that they had reduced the power consumption and increased the collection to produce a surplus income of one hundred thousand pesos. The rest is history.