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Going to scale: community resource appraisal and planning in the Philippines

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• Introduction

Since 1986, the European Union has supported a series of integrated agricultural development programmes in the Philippines working in some of the poorest and most remote parts of the country. A major concern of these programmes has been the development of community based methodologies which foster local participation in planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating micro-projects.

In this paper we describe the community resource appraisal and planning process which was developed and piloted in one geographical area (Zone 1) of one of these programmes, the Small Islands Agricultural Support Services Programme (SMISLE). We show how structured Community Resource Appraisal and Planning Workshops have been successfully used to: gather baseline information, establish an expanding programme of micro-projects which directly benefit the community planners, and reorient the local government bureaucracy toward a participatory, community-based development process.

• Programme background

SMISLE is a five-year Ecu 22.5 million grant-funded programme executed by the Department of Agriculture. The programme's core objectives are: to strengthen the capacity of rural communities, people's organisations, local NGOs and Local Government Units to organise their own development and resource conservation agendas and actions and to achieve sustainable increases in production and income through market-led economic opportunities in crops, livestock and fisheries.

SMISLE is mandated to support a micro-project based approach to development. Typically, micro-projects are directed at achieving a priority objective of a community, using local knowledge, resources and expertise where possible, and the capital and technical resources of SMISLE (and other development partners) where necessary. Emphasis is given to both quick-acting assistance to increase productivity, production and income, and actions necessary to sustain development initiatives.

Individual communities usually participate in several micro-projects and take a progressively greater responsibility for the development and implementation of each successive micro-project. This learning process is integral to the programme's participatory extension process.

• The local context

Zone 1 covers the island province of Guimaras, one of the twenty provinces in the country targeted by the Government's poverty alleviation programme (Social Reform Agenda). The province includes three municipalities and ninety-six *barangays* (the smallest administrative unit of local government) covering a land area of 605 km². Each *barangay* includes several *sitios* (villages). The total population is 137,000 of which sixty percent are farmers and twenty percent are fisherfolk. More than seventy-five percent of households are below the poverty threshold.

Guimaras province was created in 1992 after the enactment of the Local Government Code (Republic Act 7160 of 1991). This devolves much of the responsibility for development planning to the local government. From the

outset, the appointed executive attempted to give voice to barangay-level informants in the provincial strategic planning process. We observed, however, that the existing process did not give voice to most of the potential beneficiaries of the SMISLE programme.

To redress this we decided to pilot a more community-based planning process which could be integrated into the existing barangay planning process. We felt that participatory techniques would be most effective with small groups of people. The average size of a sitio in Guimaras is 40 households. We therefore decided to work at sitio level and invite all households to participate.

- **Framework for consultation and community planning**

SMISLE began its activities in April 1994. Staff from the Department of Agriculture and the Office of the Provincial Agriculturist worked to develop and pilot a framework for community consultation and planning.

Consultations were launched at a two-day workshop gathering 21 key development agents active in Guimaras. During this workshop participants prioritised five barangays in each municipality for SMISLE pilot activities. This was based on their need, in terms of poverty and the relative shortage of assistance being provided by other development agencies.

Using this initial list and additional secondary data (on agro-ecosystems, land tenure, land use, key agricultural commodities, and access to markets and services) we identified one Strategic Agricultural Development Area (SADA) in each of the three municipalities in which to start field activities. These first three SADAs were validated with the relevant municipalities and Barangay Development Councils, which then prioritised sitios for SMISLE assistance.

- **Community resource appraisal and planning workshop**

We started sitio-level consultations with a walking transect with key informants. This was followed by a two-day workshop within the sitio. The objectives of this Community

Resource Appraisal and Planning Workshop were to identify sitio goals, gather baseline information, and prepare a Community Development Plan (CDP).

Through the workshop we wanted to set the tone for future interactions between the community, municipal agricultural technicians and SMISLE staff. Reorienting municipal agricultural technicians away from traditional technical delivery services toward participatory extension techniques was a key hidden objective. The workshop was designed to elicit as much community participation as possible.

It was decided to collect the baseline information required to assess the impact of assistance to the communities during these workshops. Care was taken to limit the information gathered to the minimum required for development planning and later impact evaluation. Local agricultural technicians required new participatory extension skills. Thus a three day workshop on essential group extension techniques was provided.

The first Community Resource Appraisal and Planning workshop was conducted in October 1994. This gathered information on natural resources and agricultural problems and opportunities. The workshop was also used to introduce the SMISLE programme to the community and to discuss what the programme means by participation.

In SMISLE, participation is used to mean the voluntary involvement of self-selected groups in formulating development plans for the communities to which they belong, implementing micro-projects to address identified problems and monitoring and evaluating the achievement (or not) of planned outputs and objectives. Thus SMISLE is viewed as participating in the development of communities, rather than the communities participating in SMISLE.

On the basis of these discussions the community was invited to discuss whether they would like to work with SMISLE. Subsequent sessions used various participatory techniques to prioritise goals, gather baseline socio-economic data and develop community plans (see Figure 1). The workshop concluded with the signing of a memorandum of

agreement between the community and SMISLE agreeing the proposed terms of a future development partnership.

All data collected was copied by programme staff during the workshop. Original material was kept by the communities. In the zone office, a baseline information database was formed and reports prepared for the sitio, local government and ourselves.

The CDP, listing prioritised micro-project ideas, was submitted to the Barangay Development Council for endorsement, to the Municipal Planning Office and SMISLE. This plan guided development in the sitio. Five micro-projects have already been implemented by community groups, with assistance from SMISLE and other development partners.

Figure 1. Completing socio-economic matrices for each household (Photo: M.P. Wilkie)



• Impact and lessons learned

Since October 1994, more than sixty workshops have been conducted in almost fifty Barangays. Much has been learned from this experience by all participants.

Communities

Communities have shown great enthusiasm for the workshops. Even though the design requires households to commit two days of their time, generally over 80% participate for the full duration. The selection of appropriate tools ensures that all participants actively contribute.

Communities respond enthusiastically to the process of planning. They are learning from the experience of implementing successive micro-projects. Communities now request SMISLE to provide more training on managing the development process. Beneficiary monitoring committees oversee the implementation of the micro-projects and the maintenance of outputs. The value of community contribution to micro-projects averages almost 30 percent. Where they have built small infrastructures, user groups collect maintenance fees.

Local government

Most local government agricultural technicians have embraced the workshops which require them to listen to local people. In some cases the consultations have encouraged the local agricultural offices to resume services, such as soil analysis, for which they mistakenly believed there was no longer any demand.

However, there have been some implementation difficulties. We soon found that many agricultural technicians were enthusiastically scheduling lots of workshops, because running them was easy. What they were meant to do next was less clear, as we had not provided a framework for follow-up consultations.

As Backhaus and Wagachchi (1995) observed, in the absence of an appropriate participatory framework, local government agri-technicians

can act as participatory change facilitators one day and revert to technical delivery extension 'we are the experts' type the next. We found that inadequately trained facilitators focused on producing workshop outputs and neglected the consultative process fostered by the workshop. Some of the old hands started suggesting favoured micro-project ideas for participants to 'volunteer'. To address this SMISLE has conducted a series of follow-up workshops on participatory extension techniques.

SMISLE

As a direct result of these workshops we have been able to introduce a participatory consultative process to local government agricultural extension workers and their supervisors. The Provincial Planning and Development Office has adopted the methodology for the implementation of the Social Reform Agenda in Guimaras. Municipal executives have also recognised that the process has improved the delivery of support services to the rural poor, and are among its strongest advocates. The process of transforming local development bureaucracies has begun.

The workshops have enabled us to establish a benchmark database, documenting the socio-economic status of communities when SMISLE first started working with them. The workshops result in excellent census-quality baseline data because it is validated by respondent's peers at the time it is collected.

The zone has already provided assistance to over 170 micro-projects initiated and managed by the communities themselves. These include water supply systems, rice seed production schemes, lobster culture and product marketing projects. However, sometimes we have found that micro-project ideas identified in the CDPs require further validation with the proponents. For instance, micro-projects which require land to be deeded by donation have to be reworked around the availability of resources.

To improve on the CDPs produced during the workshops, follow up consultations on problem and solution analysis are now structured using a series of extension

packages. Communities now undertake commodity analysis to ensure that the chosen solution to a problem is the most appropriate for the sitio and in the wider local development context.

When we designed the workshops, we felt it was inappropriate to collect information on incomes during the first dialogue with potential programme beneficiaries. However, we believe that it is important that ranking of the actual or perceived wealth of households in the community be undertaken as soon as possible. This will ensure that activities supported through micro-projects are not commandeered by the community elites. Wealth ranking is now undertaken after the first micro-project is completed, once SMISLE had demonstrated its commitment to the sitio.

• Conclusions

This structured approach to community consultation, data collection and planning is a compromise. It is necessitated by the programme's mandate to achieve physical results within a limited time frame (and to document the local impact of these results), and our desire to ensure that the micro-projects implemented are socially desirable, technologically appropriate and locally sustainable by the participating communities.

As Backhaus & Wagachchi (1995) have observed, participation encourages expectations. If poorly handled, workshops can result in wish lists of donor-funded interventions. The facilitating organisation must be able to explain to participants what type and scale of development activity it is prepared to support. The organisation must also have a transparent policy on the counterpart contribution which community stakeholders are expected to make on any such micro-project.

We believe that this type of structured consultation process can have a wider application. However, we urge development planning programmes which have no budget for follow-up action to avoid using community-based planning. One of our concerns about some other (often academic) initiatives in the Philippines and elsewhere which have used participatory appraisal and

planning tools is that there is no provision for follow-up.

These tools are intended to encourage communities to become stakeholders in a development process. We believe strongly that they should only be used if there are funds available to implement actions agreed on with communities. Otherwise we will hear the cries of "participation for what?" and "participation does not work", and with reason.

To address the credibility issue, SMISLE Zone 1 has worked hard to help communities rapidly implement a first micro-project within each of the sitios where we have facilitated workshops. Generally, we have been able to help communities implement a first micro-project within 3-4 months of the workshop. We counsel other development agencies seeking to embrace participatory appraisal and planning tools to adopt a similar policy.

In short, the workshops are only the tip of a participatory iceberg. They have little intrinsic merit if conducted in isolation from a participatory development process. Indeed they could dangerously erode participants' confidence in such a process.

We recognise that there are risks in "going for scale" (Chambers 1995) with participatory appraisal and planning tools. There is a danger the consultation process encouraged by these tools may be neglected as programme coverage increases. To ensure that the participatory development process initiated through the workshops is not diluted as programme coverage expands, SMISLE has developed a framework, the SMISLE Sustainable Development Process. This is designed to guide the evolution of development partnerships between communities and the programme.

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