

CIRDAP's Second Regional Policy Dialogue Focus on Agrarian Reform in Asia

A Regional Policy Dialogue on 'Agrarian Reform and Rural Development: The Case of the Philippines' was held at the Traders Hotel, Manila, Philippines on 30th May 2007.

H.E. Mr. Noli De Castro, Honourable Vice-President of the Government of the Republic of the Philippines inaugurated the Policy Dialogue. Ministers representatives from 14 CIRDAP Member Countries (CMCs), policy experts, academicians, and representatives from UN and other donor organisations and I/NGOs participated in this Regional Policy Dialogue on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development issues. H.E. Mr. Md. Anwarul Iqbal, Chairperson of CIRDAP Governing Council (GC-15) and the Honourable Advisor, Ministry of Local Government Rural Development and Cooperatives, Government of Bangladesh Chaired the Policy Dialogue. The dialogue was jointly organised by the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) of the Government of the Republic of Philippines and CIRDAP.

Dr. Durga P. Paudyal, Director General of CIRDAP welcomed all the delegates from the CMCs in the Asia Pacific region as well as the various programme partners from the Philippines.

At the inception the Chair thanked all the participants for attending the significant activity and congratulated CIRDAP for initiating the Regional Policy Dialogue, along with the regular meeting of CIRDAP Policy Bodies. He emphasised that such activity is an opportunity for policy makers on rural development to exchange policy experiences among each other.

He stressed the relevance of the topic for the policy dialogue and added that without effective agrarian reform, equitable distribution of resources and opportunities for sustainable poverty alleviation and rural development is not possible. He added that most of the CMCs have tried several models of agrarian reform measures with varied levels of success, and made special mention of the Philippine experience as internationally acclaimed for its success and from which other countries could learn from its agrarian reform policies and their implementation experience.

The Chair requested the four presenters to discuss their papers.

Dr. Nasreen Khundker of CIRDAP presented a paper titled 'Status of Agrarian Reform and Rural Development in CIRDAP-Member Countries'. The paper presented an overview of the status of agrarian reform and rural development in CMCs based on the Rural Development Report (RDR) of 2007. The paper further suggested that while

the CMCs have generally made significant strides over the last two decades in terms of GDP growth and rise in per capita incomes, they would still to go a long way towards reducing poverty, achieving MDGs and fulfilling aspirations of the population in improving their living standards and quality of life.

The paper cited, among others, that the overall implementation process of the agrarian reform programmes in the Asian region has been slow and achieved only modest results. This is especially true in the South-Asian countries, with the probable exception of selected states of India. Strong political backing and deeper commitment of the government to participatory reforms have been the keys to success in these Indian States.

Further, the paper noted that the limited success achieved in acquiring enough surplus lands and redistributing them among the intended beneficiaries is ascribed to a confluence of factors. These include lack of strong political will, weak implementation mechanism, and absence of adequate financial support. Additionally, various legal difficulties, resistance from the surplus landowners, and imperfections of the land market also acted as formidable institutional barriers.

Mr. Antonio Quizon presented a paper titled 'Bridging Issues on Access to Land through Land Partnerships in the Philippines'. The paper presented the broad, enabling policy environment in which GO-CSO cooperation and partnership have taken place on issues of access to land. The study pointed how the numerous legislations have often brought about policy conflicts, questions about land use classification, overlapping functions of government agencies, and competing interests among the various sectors affected. The various forums and institutional mechanisms of engagement that have been instituted between government and CSOs on land-related issues over the past 16 years were highlighted.

Some of the emerging issues and challenges on land-related reform policies and programmes were categorised into five (5) broad thematic areas that require multi-stakeholder consultation, consensus-building and joint action. The paper suggests that any of these themes and sub-themes could well constitute the focus of a potential land partnership. Case studies related to such issues on indigenous peoples (IPs) and ancestral domain claims were presented to substantiate the discussion.

Mr. Conrado Navarro presented a paper titled 'Institutional Aspects of Policy Implementation and Management of the Philippine Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Programme'. Mr. Navarro noted that the Philippine agrarian reform programme has been considered as one of the longest-running agrarian reform programmes worldwide, making it the widest in terms of land area coverage. Starting in 1902, the programme has evolved into the current *Comprehensive*

Agrarian Reform Programme(CARP). He explained that the programme is comprehensive because it covers all types of agricultural lands, regardless of crops planted (earlier decree issued in 1972 covered rice and corn lands only). Aside from transfer of land ownership, the programme also provides support services to the programme beneficiaries (that is, farm-to-market roads, irrigation, credit, and pre- and post-harvest facilities) to ensure that farmers could make their awarded lands productive.

The presentation highlighted the adoption of *convergence* as key in its implementation strategy and the 'complementation role' of civil society organisations, the programme's monitoring and evaluation system, and the regulatory environment, bureaucratic control, transparency and openness of various programme actors.

The presentation concluded with a discussion on the valuable insights and lessons drawn by the author in implementing CARP in the Philippines, having been with the Department of Agrarian Reform as Undersecretary for Field Operations and Support Services in 1998-2001 and as Executive Trustee of the Agrarian Justice Foundation which extends legal assistance to both CARP programme beneficiaries and implementers.

Dr. Arsenio Balisacan presented a paper titled 'Agrarian Reform and Poverty Reduction in the Philippines'. In his presentation, Dr. Balisacan said that the sustained increases in national income – that is, economic growth – are required for poverty reduction. He adds that every country that has chalked up significant achievements in poverty reduction and human development has also done quite well in securing long-term economic growth. Economic growth, he added, is an essential condition for the generation of resources needed to sustain investment in, among other things, health, education, infrastructure, and good governance (law enforcement, regulation).

Discussing on the Philippine's rural poverty and rural insurgency problems, Dr. Balisacan mentioned that these problems have often been linked to problems on access to land and tenure relations. He added that poverty incidence is relatively high among landless agricultural workers and farmers cultivating small plots of land.

He pointed out that the limited growth of productive employment opportunities outside of agriculture and the country's relatively high population growth may have been equally important determinants of rural poverty. He further said that institutional and policy changes concerning access to land resources have an important bearing on poverty reduction.

Dr. Balisacan winded up his presentation with the discussion on the link between land inequality and economic growth and poverty and the country's efforts in improving agrarian structure, the impact of the agrarian reform programmes in the Philippines.

His presentation concluded with a note that high inequality in land distribution is bad for both equity and overall economic growth and stressed that sustained reduction in rural poverty goes beyond agricultural land reforms to include putting in place institutions and an economy-wide policy environment that nurture growth in employment and human development opportunities.

Mr. Wim Polman, Rural Development Officer of FAO, who was an observer, emphasised that institutional set up for CARP is a most impressive wide ranging public sector effort which has been implemented through an interactive framework of decision-making, implementation and monitoring and evaluation institutions for Agrarian Reform at national and at decentralised levels leading towards the goal of poverty alleviation in the Philippines.

Mr. Polman pointed out some strengths and weaknesses of CARP as public sector mechanism, such as: the use of law to mobilise the Highest Policy level support to CARP, continuing efforts to ensure efficient and integrated planning and implementation of the programme that involves various stakeholders and partner organisations. As to the weaknesses of the programme, he enumerated five factors, these include: 1) lack of synergy among implementing institutions, 2) overemphasis on need for the highest level policy support; 3) limited attention given to assessing the impact of the programme on the programme beneficiaries, community and its contribution to rural economy; and 4) institutional capacities for quick policy reviews to address constraints in short period of time.

In conclusion Mr. Polman emphasised that policy makers for CARP implementation are recommended to consider development of a new conceptual approach (Access /Decentralisation /Local Governance) based upon an integrated ARC/LGU participatory planning model for poverty reduction including physical and human infrastructure development, while maximising use of local financial and human resources in combination with public and donor funds for ongoing local economic and political empowerment of marginal farmers and rural workers including both ARB's and non ARB's.

Dr. Hans Meliczek observed that the expansion of arable lands has reached its limit and due to this, growth rate in agricultural production could not be increased further. The situation is worsened by continuous population growth, failure to adopt new technologies, insufficient infrastructure and basic social services and neglect to develop the non-farm sector. The impacts on increased access to land have not

been satisfactory due to lack of political will, resistance of landlords, weak implementation mechanisms, insufficient funding, non-availability of land records and insufficient supporting services for the reform beneficiaries.

He agreed that to significantly reduce rural poverty, a 'new wave' of modest land reforms with support from the civil society and private sector is needed. However, he observed the limited discourse on the important role of regional organisations in Asia in fostering exchange of experiences in agrarian reform and rural development and noted the author's concern on FAO's continued support to agrarian reform and rural development as it abolished its Rural Development Division in January this year.

While agrarian reforms play an important role, they are not a panacea for rural poverty reduction. For this purpose, it is necessary to go beyond agricultural reforms to include the creation of institutions and an economy-wide policy environment that facilitates growth in employment and human development. The Philippines' public investments in basic social services, especially rural infrastructure, education and health have lagged behind the requirements of a rapid growing population and regrets that trade, macroeconomic and pricing policies have created strong incentive biases against small farmers and small industrial enterprises which in the end have had adverse effects on agricultural performance and on the economy as a whole and have inhibited poverty reduction.

Sri V.S. Sampath , IAS, Director General, NIRD, India shared how agrarian reform began in India and some of the sad lessons they had experienced such as the lack of both political and judicial will and cited some cases. Due to these weaknesses, some scrupulous practices such as the proliferation of spurious documents (e.g., falsification of birthdates, etc) to maintain surplus landholdings have emerged. These experiences are common in many countries with land reform programmes, such as India and the Philippines.

He stressed that the issue of agrarian reform will always be there. Suspension or absence of focus on agrarian reform will only be momentary. The Philippines can have third, or fourth, or fifth programme renewal – the point is, agrarian reform is a long-term issue. When India adopted liberalisation in the 1990s, agrarian reform became a silent issue. But starting 2004, the issue of agrarian reform is emerging again in India because a great number of farmers are still landless. The clamor for social justice and equity will always surface and the millions of landless and poor farmers are always there waiting for something positive to happen.

Mr. V. K. Nanayakkara, Director, HARTI, Sri Lanka said that the three presentations on the agrarian reform programme of the Philippines provide useful insights and perspectives to Sri Lanka, a South Asian country with one of the highest population densities in the world.

In the Philippines, the subject of agrarian reform is placed at the highest policy level in the executive arm of the government. In contrast, the institutional framework is fragmented at the policy-making level in Sri Lanka, with several sectoral Ministries being responsible for subjects such as agriculture, land and water. Agrarian reform and rural development comprise cross-cutting areas where decision-making is difficult in sectoral ministries.

Sri Lanka's agrarian reform constitutes three areas. Under the Land Development Ordinance of 1935, the Government of Sri Lanka has alienated and distributed a substantial area of land in the public domain for cultivation and to relieve landlessness.

Tenurial reform was introduced in 1958 to ensure security of tenure to the tenant cultivators of rice lands. It attempted to guarantee tenure security to the tenant cultivator and to limit the rent paid to the landlord to a 25 percent of the yield. However, delays in the implementation of the law meant that many landlords could evict their tenants before they were forced to lower the rents.

Redistributive land reform introduced in 1972 imposed an upper limit of 50 acres of private ownership of land per family. It was based on the argument that where the distribution of land is highly skewed, the benefits of agricultural growth may not be shared by the rural poor.

Prof. Kaida, JICA, IRD Expert emphasised two points: The first relates to the promotion of non-farm sector and the other is on interfacing with local government units. He said non-farm sector in urban areas has a very good urban plan, as such the preparation of rural plan is encouraged to realise the goal in RD. The rural plan should have effective zoning of the area. The plan should likewise comprise of infrastructures, marketing services and ICT including basic services such as health, education etc. He also cited lessons from China which could be used on adopting growth centers.

He explained interface as effective coordination, collaboration and partnership with local government, meaning decentralise implementation of programmes and projects related to agriculture and agrarian reform. In some part of Asia, integration of AR and RD programme through local government is encourage to be done in a decentralise condition.