Devolution of Agricultural Extension: The Philippine Experience

Dario A. Cidro
The Pennsylvania State University
dac255@psu.edu

Rama B. Radhakrishna
The Pennsylvania State University
brr100@psu.edu

Agricultural extension in the Philippines plays a vital role in technology transfer to improve the productivity and income of farmers. With 70% of Philippine population living in rural areas, and two-thirds of its 76.5 million population relying on agriculture and agriculture-related enterprise, agricultural development is a key factor for economic progress and food security for the country. Given the perennial problem of inefficiency and bureaucracy in implementing government programs, the Philippine Congress passed the Republic Act 7160 otherwise known as Local Government Code of 1991. This Code mandated the devolution of power, authority, resources, responsibilities, and accountabilities from the national government to the provincial, city, and municipal governments. Devolution was therefore expected to hasten the delivery of agricultural information and extension services to the farmers and other clientele.

Problems, Challenges, and Lessons Learned

Since the implementation of devolution, several studies have been conducted to assess the impact of devolution. Although a national evaluation on the impact of devolution on agricultural extension is yet to be made, the results of various studies conducted by different universities, public and private research organizations, and personal experience of the authors can be reported to provide a glimpse on the impact of devolution. Problems of devolution include: inadequate and low salaries; disparity in remuneration between high and low-income municipalities; inability to discharge functions of extension workers properly due to lack of funding; lack of training and professional development; low morale and confidence of extension workers; partisan politics and political interference; and in some cases, lack of support from the local chief executives. While there are negative results on devolution, there are also positive impacts as well and these include: proximity to local disbursing officer for receiving salaries, the hiring of personnel living in the locality, and doing away with bureaucratic procedures making transactions faster and easy. With the downsides of devolution seemingly towering over its positive impacts, several challenges have to be met to improve the implementation of the devolution.

After almost 10 years of implementation, there is a need to thoroughly review and assess the outcomes of the devolution. Was it successful? Did it really achieve the purpose of making extension services more accessible to farmers? Did the local governments respond favorably as the lead in planning and implementing agricultural programs? What were the benefits that the farmers gain from the devolution? These and other questions need to be answered in order to evaluate how far did the devolution achieved its purpose.

Educational Importance

A national evaluation should be designed and conducted so that a comprehensive assessment of devolution will provide information to policy makers, local governments, public and private organizations. Additionally, an effort must be made to gather and consolidate the various studies conducted about devolution by different universities, research institutions, and other private organizations to complement the national evaluation. There is also a need to look at the capacity of local governments to implement programs and to generate income to support various agricultural extension initiatives. Efforts should be made by all sectors concerned – national and local leaders, public and private institutions, the farmers themselves – to address the various issues and challenges of devolution to make it work for the people. This paper is a work in progress to look at the impact of devolution on agricultural extension, and identify possible areas of improvement for an effective and efficient devolved agricultural extension.