

## Agriculture and Sustainable Development

In the Philippines, as in many Asian developing countries where majority of the people are dependent on agriculture for their livelihood, the agriculture sector commands primary importance and serves as a building block for economic development. Food security, rural employment and level of poverty are very much linked to the development of the agriculture sector. While its contribution to the Philippine GDP may have declined over the years, it does not diminish its importance to national development.

The two most compelling agenda for the Philippine government in pursuit of sustainable agricultural development are providing access to land to millions of farmers and the provision of the necessary support services. Recognizing the inequitable access to land, the constitution specifically provides that “the State shall, by law, undertake an agrarian reform program founded on the right of farmers and regular farmworkers who are landless, to own directly or collectively the lands they till.”

Toward this objective, the Philippine government embarked on a number of programs. Two of the major programs are the *Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP)* and the *Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization Act (AFMA, RA 8435 of 1997)*. CARP promises a more equitable access to land while AFMA intends to modernize Philippine agriculture to enhance its competitiveness.

## Land Reform

With the *Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP)* and *CARP Extension with Reform (CARPER)*, a greater part of agricultural lands have been redistributed with low ownership ceiling and with restricted transferability.

But while substantial progress has been made in distributing agricultural lands, overall land governance in the Philippines remains intricate and complicated. Physical features at the national level largely determine land classification and the subsequent land rights attached to it.<sup>4</sup> Subsequent laws, however, provide equally important dimensions in appreciating land rights, such as the Indigenous People's Rights Act (RA 8371 of 1997) that vested land rights based on historical claim of ownership or actual occupation. The law on economic zones underscores economic development and allows government to acquire any private lands within or adjacent to the ECOZONE (RA7916 PEZA). The Local Government Code emphasizes local development and gives local government units the authority to reclassify lands (Sec 20 Art II of RA 7160, the Local Government Code of 1991).<sup>5</sup>

All of these laws have resulted in overlapping land tenure and jurisdiction among the many government agencies. While specific laws mandate the existence of DAR, Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the National Commission of Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), there is no harmony when it comes to their policies and operational processes. This concern is recognized by the various agencies as articulated in a Joint Administrative Order JAO 01-12.<sup>6</sup>

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- <sup>4</sup> Lands of the public domain with 18% in slope or over are classified as non-alienable and disposable and would include forest and timberland, mineral land and natural reserves. The remaining lands classified as alienable and disposable (A&D) are further subdivided into (a) agricultural lands, (b) residential, commercial, industrial or similar productive purposes, (c) educational, charitable, and other similar purposes and (d) reservations.
- <sup>5</sup> A city or municipality may, through an ordinance passed by the Sanggunian after conducting public hearings for the purpose, authorize the reclassification of agricultural lands and provide for the manner of their utilization or disposition.
- <sup>6</sup> The Joint DAR-DENR-LRA-NCIP Administrative Order No. 01-12 clarifies the respective policies and programs of the agencies and instituted mechanisms to resolve jurisdictional, operational and policy issues.

### Support Services

The support services envisioned to uplift agricultural development are embodied in AFMA. It recognized the multiple functions of agriculture and encompassed seven major principles: 1) poverty alleviation and social equity; 2) food security; 3) rational use of resources; 4) global competitiveness; 5) sustainable development; 6) people empowerment; and 7) protection from competition.

Admittedly, this plan is what the Philippine agriculture needs. The budget, however, did not match its intentions. The evaluation report of AFMA conducted in 2007 stated that “AFMA can be faulted for over-commitment and trying to do many things with too many agencies, and saddled with lack of resources. In the process, it faltered in implementation. The additional money of P20 billion in the first year (1999); and P15 billion a year in the next six years (2000 - 2005) did not materialize.”

It is not surprising, therefore, that the performance of the agriculture sector has been below par especially when compared with the other Asian countries. A report by Habito and Briones<sup>7</sup> concluded: “Data over the past 20 years show an unmistakable trend of deterioration in the performance of the Philippine agricultural sector, which becomes starker when taken against the performance of its neighboring countries in the region.”

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<sup>7</sup> Paper presented at the conference entitled “Policies to Strengthen Productivity in the Philippines,” sponsored by the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Trust Fund, Asian Institute of Management Policy Center, Foreign Investment Advisory Service, Philippines Institute of Development Studies and the World Bank, held in Makati City, June 27, 2005.