

Agrarian reform project essay sample

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Land-related struggles have been a recurring feature of Philippine history, thus demonstrating the importance accorded by farmers to their lands. Over the years, there have been many State-sponsored efforts to reform the agrarian structure in the country, but few have had much success. Nevertheless, the struggle to implement genuine agrarian reform in the country continues. In fact, nongovernment and people's organizations (NGOs and POs) have long been involved in this effort.

Agrarian Reform: A Protracted Struggle in the Philippines

The Philippines has seen over 400 uprisings — many of them land-related and peasant-led — in its long history. The intensity of agrarian conflict in the country is rooted in a highly skewed land ownership pattern — a legacy of colonial rule — and not coincidentally, widespread rural poverty.

Poverty in the Philippines is largely rural. According to the National Statistical Coordinating Board (NSCB) in 2006, farmers and fishermen are estimated to have the highest poverty incidence among the country's basic sectors ("Development of Poverty Statistics for the Basic Sectors", NSCB, Feb. 2006). The fact that more than half of all rural households is absolutely landless is no mere happenstance. The Philippine government's response to the problem is the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP), which it has been implementing since 1988. The CARP was conceived around the "land-to-the-tiller" principle and at its inception aimed to redistribute 8.1 million hectares to landless farmers and farmworkers. As of 2004, the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) has distributed a total of 3.45 million hectares to 1.975 million farmer-beneficiaries. However, the pace at which the DAR has

undertaken its land acquisition and distribution (LAD) operations has slowed worryingly in the past 10 years.

Since 1994, when the DAR distributed some 434, 000 hectares — DAR's highest LAD record thus far — its accomplishments in land distribution have progressively declined. From 2000 to 2003, DAR has been able to move an average of just 110, 000 hectares each year. The Philippine Congress had previously given the CARP a 10-year extension on its original 1998 deadline after the government failed to complete the transfer, particularly of privately owned agricultural lands. Then, in June 2004, the DAR announced that it would ask for another two-year extension of its 2008 deadline, to 2010, citing budgetary constraints. Landowner resistance usually takes the form of physical harassment of CARP beneficiaries, as the case study (CARRUF: Chronicle of a Local Struggle) shows, but landlords have just as effectively exploited their media contacts and their influence with local authorities to discredit farmer beneficiaries. They have also resorted to dilatory tactics, like filing innumerable court cases to decide questions like coverage and landowner compensation, knowing fully well how long it would take the courts to settle the matter.

Insufficient Budgetary Support

Besides the resistance from landowners, CARP is burdened by a dwindling budget for land acquisition. The DAR's recent budget allocations have allowed it to cover a mere 50, 000 hectares per year despite the 100, 000-hectare-per year commitment made by President Gloria Arroyo.

CARRUF: CHRONICLE OF A LOCAL STRUGGLE

The CARRUF estate is a 147-hectare sugarland located in Valencia, Bukidnon, a province in Southern Philippines. The tenants and farmworkers who had been cultivating the estate since 1974 had been told that the land was State-owned and was commissioned to a rich landowning family under a Pasture Lease Agreement. However, in 1995, the farmers learned that the land really belonged to a private corporation, the Carpio-Rufino Agricultural Corporation (CARRUF), and that the owners were cronies of former Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos. Following the 1986 “ People Power” Revolution, the CARRUF estate was sequestered by the Presidential Commission on Good Government, an agency set up by the administration of Corazon Aquino to ferret illegally acquired assets, or Marcos’s so-called “ hidden wealth”. By virtue of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law (CARL) that came into effect in June 1988, the CARRUF estate was compulsorily acquired by the government and tabled for redistribution to the farmer-beneficiaries.

In September 1989 the Municipal Agrarian Reform Officer (MARO) of Valencia, Bukidnon notified CARRUF Corporation that the estate was covered by the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP). The corporation rejected this notice, including the PhP8. 3 million offered for the land. Nevertheless, the Land Bank of the Philippines (LBP) issued a Certificate of Trust Deposit of PhP8. 3 million for the CARRUF estate. Subsequently, the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) began to screen three petitioning farmer groups as beneficiaries, and by February 28, 1996 the final list of qualified beneficiaries for the CARRUF estate was posted

CARRUF Corporation tried to block the issuance of a Certificate of Land Ownership Award (CLOA) to the beneficiaries by filing a restraining order before the DAR Adjudication Board (DARAB) in Bukidnon. It also hired a security agency to barricade the property. The security guards put up a barbed wire fence to prevent the farmers from entering the estate to harvest their crops. In February 1997, CLOAs were distributed to 111 identified farmer beneficiaries but the farmers still couldn't get into the estate. With the help of an NGO, 11 of the farmer-beneficiaries went to Manila to seek the intervention of DAR Central as well as the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG). Officials of the two agencies promised their support, and the farmers went home. The night before the farmer's scheduled entry into the estate (called "installation"), the security guards set fire to the standing crop of sugarcane, causing damage to 30 hectares amounting to some PhP7 million. There were tense moments on the day of installation, but the farmers were eventually allowed to enter the estate. The presence of the Philippine National Police (PNP), and members of the local and national media helped to defuse the tension. However, the situation in the estate remained volatile for some time after the farmers' installation.

Moreover, in March 2004 the government came under fire when it became known that it had not made any budget allocations for agrarian reform implementation. Apparently, it intended to take the entire budget for CARP out of the Agrarian Reform Fund (ARF), which includes the recovered P38 billion ill-gotten wealth of the Marcoses and is intended to fast-track the LAD process. By law, the ARF should be spent on LAD and delivery of support services to farmer-beneficiaries, and not for any other purpose. Hence,

unless the government stops raiding the ARF and restores the mandatory fund allocations for CARP, it will virtually ensure the failure of its land redistribution efforts.

Land Conversion and other Ways to Circumvent CARP

In CARP's over 15 years of implementation, land conversion has been a source of intense conflict. There are enough legal and executive provisions prohibiting the conversion of CARP-covered agricultural lands, but more recent laws have tended to overturn these. One major law that has been pitted against CARP is a section in the 1991 Local Government Code, which allows the local government to reclassify the use of land under their jurisdiction. Many potential and actual beneficiaries of the CARP have been displaced as the result of such policy conflicts.

Beneficiary-Related Issues

In some areas, particularly the large sugar-growing haciendas (plantations) in Negros Province, beneficiaries have actually refused lands awarded to them. Many sugarworkers fear reprisals from their former landlords, but most of them are simply too dependent on the landowner to cut their ties. On the other hand, some beneficiaries who had taken hold of awarded land have committed a number of violations that put their tenure at risk. The most prominent of these violations are nonpayment of the amortization on the land, mortgaging the land or rights to it, selling the land, subleasing it, or surrendering it to its former

owner. Erring beneficiaries claim that they had been forced to resort to such money-making schemes to cope with poverty and family emergencies.

Some Lessons from Past Struggles

Ü Strong people's organizations are key. As the case of CARRUF has shown (See box article), strong people's organizations are indispensable to the success of agrarian reform efforts.

Ü Alliance-building is the next step. Even strong people's organizations need extensive linkages with groups at the community, national and international levels to buttress their case. The broader the support from outside, the better. Hence, farmers organizations must collaborate with NGOs, the DAR, the church, and the media. These groups can use their influence with the public to mobilize support for the farmers' cause. NGOs themselves should link up to push their agenda and forge a national consensus.

Ü Real alternatives to land conversion — more persuasive than words. Proponents of land conversion use well-packaged development plans to entice local officials to do their bidding. Hence, it is a major challenge for agrarian reform advocates to counter with equally persuasive alternatives that emphasize equity, food security and environmental integrity. They must be able to sell the idea of building small food-sufficient, family-size, diversified and integrated farms that are linked to an agro-industrial component in place of putting up shopping malls, golf courses or luxury housing.

Ü NGOs must acquire new skills and tools. A retooling of NGO skills to promote agribusiness is necessary so that they may facilitate the growth of

the new ownercultivators into agricultural entrepreneurs. NGOs must also learn the language of business and local government in order to negotiate more effectively on behalf of and for the benefit of farmers.