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POLICY BRIEF 1

ORGANIZING A COUNTRY FORUM FOR THE PHILIPPINES

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WHAT IS A COUNTRY FORUM (CF)?

One of the ways to network pluralistic agricultural extension and rural advisory services (RAS) providers and stakeholders is the formation of a country forum (CF). **The country forum, a virtual organization of RAS providers and stakeholders in the fields of agriculture, forestry, and natural resources (AFNR), serves as a platform for the discussion and articulation of the stakeholders' agenda, issues, and concerns in rural advisory services and agricultural innovation systems. Stakeholders in a CF shall aim for a shared, common agenda for pluralistic, effective, and efficient rural advisory services towards the empowerment of smallholder farmers.**

The conceptual and structural development of the CF started in Africa. Part of the development of the African Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services (AFAAS) was the establishment of country fora. The role of AFAAS was to “facilitate the CFs in the various countries in aligning their [agricultural advisory services] strategies and programmes with the AFAAS Strategic Plan.”¹

THE ROLE OF CF IN RURAL ADVISORY SERVICES

The country forum serves as a platform both for the country's RAS stakeholders and international (regional and sub-regional) networks.

In the country level, the CF brings together national and local government agencies delivering rural advisory services, civic and non-government organizations, farmers, and other stakeholders involved in agriculture in an aim to harmonize the delivery of RAS in the country. Through this, stakeholders lay down their current and future efforts in their RAS initiatives and thrusts, discuss the issues and problems they face in the delivery of RAS, sort out possible redundancies and duplication of work, and set the future of RAS in the country.

At the same time, the country forum serves as “the building blocks of the regional networks” and “an entry point for regional and international initiatives in improving rural advisory services and rural livelihood in general.”²

CF AND “THE NEW EXTENSIONIST”

The formation of a country forum can take off from the “New Extensionist,” a new perspective on the delivery of agricultural and rural advisory services being forwarded by the Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS). The “New Extensionist” posits that there is a need to strengthen the capacities of not just individual RAS practitioners, but also institutions, organizations, and networks involved in the delivery of RAS.³

The “New Extensionist” further argues that capacities shall be developed in the individual, organizational, and system

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levels. In the individual level, RAS practitioners should have the appropriate technical and social expertise.⁴ In the organizational level, aspects that should be taken into consideration include organizational management and structure, processes, financial and human resources, and necessary infrastructure.⁵ There should also be an enabling policy environment in order for RAS to be provided with efficiency and good results. Areas that should be taken into consideration include sound economic, financial, and political policies, clear policy framework, literacy, infrastructure, and training.

Because the CF is a platform for congregating agricultural extension practitioners, providers, and stakeholders, the virtues of the “New Extensionist” can be integrated, articulated, and put forward in the CF.

POTENTIAL CF PLATFORMS AND PARTNER-STAKEHOLDERS IN THE PHILIPPINES

There are six potential partner-stakeholders in the formation of a country forum in the Philippines, namely: the Agriculture and Fisheries Extension Network, Agricultural Training Institute, Philippine Extension and Advisory Services Network, agriculture and fisheries councils in the national and local levels, state universities and colleges, and nongovernment organizations.

Agriculture and Fisheries Extension Networks

The Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization Act (AFMA) stipulates that the Philippine Department of Agriculture (DA) and other related agencies “shall formulate a National Extension System for Agriculture and Fisheries” (NESAF). The NESAF shall have three components comprising the national government, local governments, and the private sector, respectively.

The national Agricultural and Fisheries Extension Network (AFEN) is a network of agencies delivering agricultural extension services. It is composed of attached agencies and government-owned and –controlled corporations (GOCCs) of the Philippine Department of Agriculture (DA) providing extension services and other government agencies outside DA with extension services that are under the Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization Act (AFMA). State universities and colleges, local government units, and the private sector are also represented in the network.

Aside from the national AFEN, regional AFENs have also been established, composed of the respective regional office of the DA and other relevant national government agencies, SUCs, LGUs, and the private sector.

Agricultural Training Institute

The Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) is the “national apex agency for extension of the Department of Agriculture (DA) in order to orchestrate the agriculture and fisheries extension system for a unified and efficient delivery of extension system” in the Philippines.⁶ As the apex agency, ATI is the lead agency in the development of a national extension agenda, implementation of national extension programs,

and the implementation of a national system for institutional development of agencies providing extension services.

As part of its functions, and in accordance with the AFMA, ATI has developed the National Extension Agenda and Programs (NEAP). The latest agenda, NEAP 2017-2022, has six thematic programs, namely:

- Enhancing access to AFE knowledge products and services;
- Strengthening competitiveness and capacities of the AF sector;
- Expanding partnerships in advancing excellence in AFE delivery;
- Scaling-up AFE innovations;
- Strengthening AFE stakeholders’ capacity in climate change adaptation and risk management; and
- Improving enabling environment and quality of governance.

ATI serves as the focal agency and secretariat of the AFEN.

Philippine Extension and Advisory Services Network

The Philippine Extension and Advisory Services Network (PhilEASNet) is a professional organization of agricultural extension and rural advisory services practitioners. PhilEASNet traces its roots from the Philippine Extension Network (PEN), established on 2 March 2001.⁷ PhilEASNet “serves as a partner advocate in creating avenues for the continuing development of a cadre of morally responsible, competent, dedicated and self-directed experts in the pursuit of advancing theory and practice of extension.”⁸ The organization aims to “enhance competency and promote ethical standards among professionals engaged in the practice, research, instruction and policy advocacy on extension.”⁹ PhilEASNet is also involved in policy advocacy, having a crucial role in the proposed Agriculture and Fisheries Extension Bill in the House of Representatives.

OTHER POTENTIAL STAKEHOLDERS

State universities and colleges, regional and provincial agriculture and fishery councils, the Philippine Council for Agriculture and Fisheries, relevant national government agencies (NGAs), nongovernment organizations, and the private sector shall also be included in the formation of the Philippine country forum.

Then Philippine Council for Agriculture and Fisheries (PCAF), an agency under the Department of Agriculture (DA), is mandated to “establish a nationwide network of agricultural and fishery councils to serve as the forum for consultative and continuing discussions within agriculture and fisheries sectors.”¹⁰ The National Agriculture and Fisheries Council (NAFC), national sectoral committees, and the Agriculture and Fishery Councils in the regions, provinces, cities, and municipalities comprise the advisory bodies under PCAF.

State universities and colleges also have a role in agricultural extension. Section 90 of the AFMA stipulates that SUCs “shall primarily focus on the improvement of the capability of the LGU extension service” through the following:¹¹

- a) Degree nad non-degree training programs;
- b) Technical assistance;
- c) Extension cum research activities;
- d) Monitoring and evaluation of LGU extension projects; and
- e) Information support services through the tri-media and electronics.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), and the Philippine Council for Agriculture, Aquatic, and Natural Resources Research and Development (PCAARRD), and other relevant agencies providing services in the agriculture, fisheries, and natural resources sector can also be tapped as partners in the country forum. Nongovernment organizations (NGOs) and stakeholders in the private sector involved in agriculture and rural advisory services can also take part in the country forum.

HOW THEY SHALL WORK TOGETHER

Figure 1 shows how the components of the country forum can work together. All components, namely the AFEN, PhilEASNet, SUCs, PAFC, RAFCs and PAFCs, and NGOs should interact with each other both by themselves and through the country forum. This is to allow maximum participation of all parties towards a shared, common agenda for rural advisory services, with CF as the primary platform.

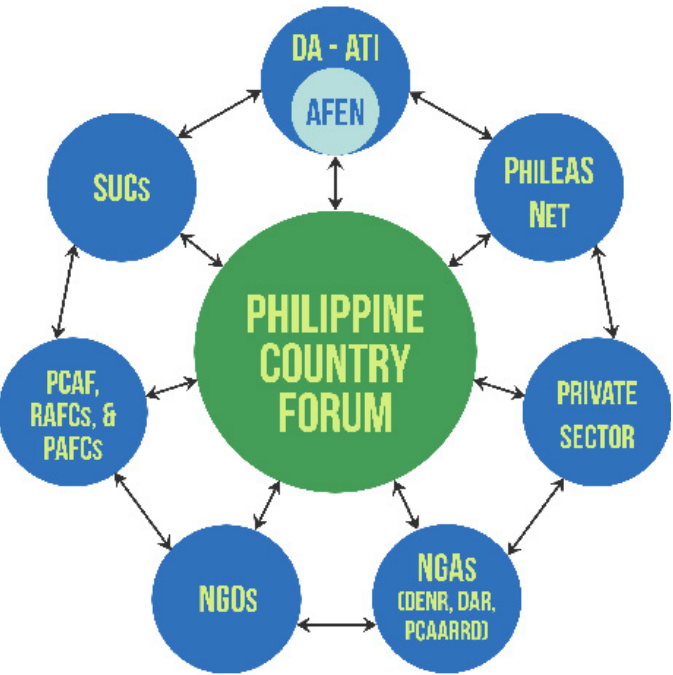


Figure 1. Interactions of the components of the proposed Philippine Country Forum.

The Philippine CF can adopt and put forward the thematic programs in the ATI’s NEAP 2017-2022, and the principles that the “New Extensionist” posits. Also, as the Philippine extension system is pluralistic, the country forum for the Philippines can adopt the following thematic programs proposed by Cardenas in 2005¹²:

- a) Improving rural productivity of dominant means of livelihood by emphasizing the following:
 - Mechanisms to improve public access to information, production inputs, and other services supportive of major livelihoods in a given production setting
 - Mechanisms for identifying priority crop-commodities under a particular livelihood system where technology transfer activities could be focused
 - Level of utilization of technologies
 - Approaches (tools, techniques, and institutional arrangements) in technology dissemination
 - Human resources development for participation and governance
- b) Developing, testing, and evaluating innovative mechanisms and alternative approaches to extension provision with focus on:
 - Enabling extension policies
 - Re-assessment of the roles of public-private extension to identify areas/opportunities of partnership
 - Financing options in extension systems and their efficiency, fiscal, and distribution impacts
 - Institutional arrangements/partnerships
 - Economics of investments in extension
 - Impact assessment/beneficiary assessment tools and techniques
 - Human resource development interventions for extension beneficiaries and implementers
 - Participatory research-extension-farmers linkages
 - Advisory services to promote information exchange and learning
 - Incentive system for participation
 - Livelihood systems and extension approaches
 - Structural constraints and support to participation by poor farmers
 - Support to decentralized systems of administering extension (local government, civil service, and other institutions)
 - Accountability and local governance
- c. Instituting best practices in agricultural extension:
 - Extension program management (planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation
 - Policy, program, and community response patterns
 - Facilitating techniques
 - Social participation and sustainable rural livelihood development
 - Local-level formation of farmer groups and linking with formal organizations

CONCLUSION

With multiple providers and stakeholders in rural advisory services in the Philippines having a variety of functions, roles, issues and concerns, a platform shall be established where they would be able to converge and develop a shared agenda for rural advisory services. The conception and development of a country forum will enable these stakeholders to interact, exchange information, knowledge, and best practices, and harmonize their expertise and services towards supporting and empowering smallholder farmers in the country.

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This policy brief is produced as part of the project *Supporting Smallholder Farmers in Asia and Pacific Islands Region Through Strengthened Agricultural Advisory Services*, which is funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). Together with APIRAS in this project are the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA), Agricultural Extension in South Asia (AESAs), Pacific Islands Rural Advisory Services (PIRAS), the Philippine Department of Agriculture – Agricultural Training Institute (DA-ATI), Bangladesh Agricultural Extension Network (BAEN), and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) in Fiji. APIRAS serves as the overseer in the Southeast Asian subregional component of the project, which is piloted in the Philippines.

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