



## Engaging with national government agencies on UNDIFF, UNFCCC, and UNCBD: Lessons for CSOs based on the UNDIFF implementation in the Philippines

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*This write-up was produced through the partnership of Asian Farmers' Association for Sustainable Rural Development and FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific*

Over the years, the democratic ideal of inclusion and participation has gained ground at the level of global governance in the form of multistakeholder institutions (MSI) and networks. It is a system of governance composed of formal and informal rules and norms that is hoped to solve the world's most important problems by convening stakeholders such as United Nations (UN) bodies, trade unions, business/ industry, affected grassroots

communities, academic and research institutions, government agencies of countries in the Global South, international financial institutions, development finance institutions, and philanthropies.

The UN Declaration of the Decade of Family Farming (UNDFF) is of utmost importance for farmers globally because it has recognized the multiple and significant roles that they play in producing most of the world's natural food while also protecting biodiversity, preserving indigenous knowledge and cultural systems, and contributing to the resilience of communities and the natural ecosystems. Moreover, it has developed a holistic framework and mechanisms for inclusive governance and implementation from 2019 to 2028.

A UNDIFF global steering committee has been set up with the inclusion of farmers' organizations (FOs). It promoted the following tools and

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mechanisms such as i) a holistic framework for countries to craft public policies and investments to support family farming in the form of a Global Action Plan with 7 mutually reinforcing pillars to be translated into National Action Plan on Family Farming and ii) an inclusive implementation mechanism in the form of National Committee of Family Farming.

While small-scale farmers hold a big part of the solutions to many of today's challenges, they are among the most vulnerable groups affected by climate change, energy crisis, environmental degradation, and biodiversity loss, among others. Therefore, farmers' engagement in all related programs and projects on climate action and representation in decision-making processes at all levels must be ensured to take full advantage of the solutions and take into account their current realities.

There are two important global conventions that have, to a limited extent, created opportunities for the engagement of the most affected group of actors. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) created a space - Koronivia Joint Work on Agriculture (KJWA) - in 2017 to discuss the potential of agriculture to tackle climate change. This was then extended in COP27 (2022) under the space - Joint Work on Implementation of Climate Action on Agriculture and Food Security. Meanwhile, the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity that was finalized in 2022 acknowledges

“the important roles and contributions of indigenous peoples and local communities as custodians of biodiversity and as partners in its conservation, restoration, and sustainable use” (Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework).

For global frameworks and mechanisms to take root on national soil, a country needs to adapt them by mobilizing national actors, such as government agencies and civil society partners to work together. Unfortunately, the meaningful participation of family farmers through their organizations in the national processes is yet to be fully realized.

In the Philippines, one of the enabling mechanisms for UNDIFF is the creation of the Agriculture and Rural Development Knowledge and Policy Platform (ARDKPP), a technical working group composed of various international and local stakeholders, including prominent farmers' organizations, non-government organizations, IFAD, FAO-UN, the Department of Agriculture (DA), and DA-Agricultural Training Institute (ATI), the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), academic and research institutions, among others.

Looking at the engagement of CSOs with government partners within ARDKPP, here are some lessons and insights for CSOs and citizen groups on how they might better interact with their government partners implementing some of the global frameworks such as the UNFCCC and Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.

## ***1. LOOK FOR OPENINGS***

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Farmer's Organizations (FOs) and CSOs recognized openings for dialogue and consultation within the state apparatus. These organizations saw the global declaration of the UNDFP and the Department of Agriculture's issuance of Special Order No. 792, series of 2019, as formal avenues that carve out spaces for civil society to assert their demands and policy preferences. The CSOs lobbied and persuaded the national government agencies that they be made partners for this multistakeholder platform considering that ARDKPP has already an established track record of gathering family farmers and advocating for policies and programs that advance their interests.

## ***2. FIND YOUR CHAMPION***

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FOs and CSOs sought their key allies in the government sector. First was the DA-International Affairs Division (DA-IAD) who was the initiator of the UNDFP implementation in the Philippines. Through the DA-IAD, the FOs and CSOs learned that there are already committees within the DA especially created for UNDFP. Second was the DA-ATI, which was appointed as the focal unit to produce the National Action Plan (NAP). A representative from DA-ATI announced that the DA planned to involve other agencies, the FOs, and CSOs in the drafting. Also, the FOs and CSOs continue to cultivate trust and good working relationships with these sympathetic government officials to whom they can reach out every time they have important concerns, perspectives, and interventions.

## ***3. COMMIT PEOPLE AND RESOURCES***

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The societal organizations within ARDKPP devote their key staff to represent their organizations in meetings and participate in activities. Each staff brings a set of skills and expertise to help carry out the activities, namely writing funding proposals, implementing funded projects, drafting executive orders for their government partners, organizing online and on-site events, and other activities that count as parallel activities and support services to the government. Most importantly, these member organizations also contribute and pool their financial resources to pay for the venue, food, equipment, and

other necessary expenses for their annual conferences and other independently organized activities.

#### ***4. CONSOLIDATE***

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The societal organizations in the ARDKPP make it a point to identify and assert their comprehensive demands before every important meeting with their partners in the government sector. They identify the gaps in their participation and actively lobby for how they can be addressed. The cohesion of their demands is always forged in a series of meetings, strategizing, and planning sessions. The proposals and suggestions are exhaustively discussed until they have been refined and galvanized.

The organized groups also make sure there is pushback every time the quality of their participation is compromised. For example, when they felt a growing sense of discontent regarding the process and outcome of the drafting of the National Action Plan (NAP), the societal organizations proposed to their government partners some concrete steps to enhance their participation, namely their inclusion in the drafting committee to which the latter agreed. This process of sorting out the issues was ably facilitated by their FAO and IFAD partners.

#### ***5. DO THE GROUNDWORK***

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Agriculture and rural development are a high-profile policy domain where the issues and concerns raised by societal organizations can be perceived by government authorities as threatening to the dominant political and economic elites. The FOs and CSOs are well aware that the policies they advocate are highly contentious, namely the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program, and the further review of the Rice Tariffication Law, among others. They actively persuaded their government partners to explicitly reflect in the NAP their critical diagnosis of the problems of Filipino family farmers that highlights their systematic disenfranchisement interwoven with youth disempowerment, gender inequality, environmental destruction via runaway extractivism, marginalization of the indigenous peoples, among others. They also know when and how to leverage their influence with their IFAD and FAO partners to nudge their government partners to be receptive to the views of CSOs.

#### ***6. BE FIERCELY AUTONOMOUS***

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CSOs working with government agencies means working with the traditional elite of the country. With a Congress dominated by political clans and families (especially the landed ones), it is always an uphill battle to push for and implement agricultural policies that center on family farmers because they often threaten the status quo that benefits the political and economic elite. The challenge for CSOs then is safeguarding their autonomy by always reminding themselves that the genesis and destination of their efforts is the best interest of the Filipino family farmers. This means holding their government partners accountable for their decisions, raising their resources to carry out their mobilizations, and preparing for pushback when genuine participation is compromised. Absent a mass-based political party that

conventionally links the interests of ordinary people to their government, this autonomy of CSOs outside government is their best chance of avoiding being captured by elite interests.

Government agencies have different priorities and a different sense of urgency than the CSOs. The challenge of FOs and CSOs is to create the conditions for the government to be compelled to act in ways that uphold the best interests of the farmers. These conditions include raising awareness through education and media engagement, advocating for crucial policies, and relentless mobilization of people and resources.

What drives and sustains lasting positive change is the people on the ground, not political leaders from up above. The history of successful social and civic mobilizations around the world is the history of a collective mass of people forcing candidates and politicians to do the things that they do not want to do.

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This article draws inspiration from Jose Magadia's "State-Society Dynamics: Policy Making in a Restored Democracy" (Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2003) and from the full-fledged case study produced by the Asian Farmers' Association for Sustainable Rural Development (AFA), University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies -Program on Alternative Development (UP CIDS-AltDev) and Pambansang Kilusan ng mga Samahang Magsasaka (PAKISAMA) with support from FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific. The authors would like to extend their appreciation to DA-ATI, FAO Philippines, IFAD Philippines, and all ARDKPP members for their valuable contribution to the case study that was used as a reference for this article. The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views FAO and the University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies -Program on Alternative Development (UP CIDS-AltDev).

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