



Fostering the engagement of smallholder farmers and fishers in the policy processes and program development within the context of UNDF: The Case of ARDKPP in the Philippines

Irish P. Baguilat, AFA, Honey Bermudez Tabiola, UPCIDS-AltDev, and
Raul Socrates Banzuela, PAKISAMA

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I. Background

At its 72nd Session, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 2019-2028 as the UN Decade of Family Farming (UNDF) building on the achievement of UN's International Year of Family Farming (IFYF) in 2014, which put family farming at the center of national agendas and agricultural, environmental and social policies towards equitable and sustainable development. "UNDF serves as a framework for countries to develop public policies and investments to support family farming and contribute to the achievement of the SDGs [Sustainable Development Goals]" (FAO and IFAD, 2019, p. 8-9).

The UNDF taps into the pivotal role of family farming to promote "diversified and innovative food systems" while contributing to the 2030 Development Agenda for Sustainable Development. In FAO and IFAD's telling, "nothing comes closer to the paradigm of sustainable food production than family farming" (p. 7). Recognized for their multidimensionality and multifunctionality, family farmers are seen as "key actors" and "caretakers" as they "produce most of the world's food," "preserve biodiversity," "manage natural resources and ecosystems," "preserve and share traditional knowledge," and "contribute to the resilience of people and ecosystems" (p. 10). In short, family farmers contribute to the attainment of the three dimensions of sustainable development, namely economic growth, social inclusion, and

environmental protection. To support Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO-UN) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

In the Philippines, one of enabling mechanisms in the implementation of UNDFP is 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), the DA-Agricultural Training Institute (ATI), the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), academic and research institutions, among others.

The initiation of ARDKPP can be traced to a joint advocacy among farmers' federations and CSOs leading to the approval of the UN Resolution in 2012, which eventually became the UN Declaration for the International Year for Family Farming (IYFF) in 2014 (FAO-IFAD, 2021). The major achievements of ARDKPP include:

(a) Knowledge and Learning Market - Policy Engagement (KLMPE) Conference which is an annual two-day conference bringing together stakeholders participating in knowledge-sharing sessions, exhibits, agricultural product displays, interactive workshops, testimonies and cultural performances, and policy engagement sessions with key government officials.

(b) National Action Plan (i.e., PAP4FF). The Philippine National Action Plan for Family Farming (PAP4FF) is the national action plan of the country to contextualize the implementation of the UNDFP Global Action Plan. A series of consultation meetings and planning workshops to draft this document was organized among DA-attached agencies and bureaus, CSOs, NGOs, youth groups, farmer organizations, as well as NGAs, SUCs, and research institutions.

II. Key lessons from the Philippine experience: Enabling factors

Using Magadia's framework of state-society synergy, the achievement of the drafting of the PAP4FF is driven by:

1. The openness of the Department of Agriculture and related agricultural agencies to the demands of the societal organizations within ARDKPP;
2. The efficient and strategic "programmatic demand making" of the societal organizations; and
3. The high profile of the PAP4FF as a policy domain.

Each of these will be explained in the following sections below.



Openness

The concerned agricultural state agencies who are members of the ARDKPP may be characterized as "incorporative," that is, these state agencies are open to the participation of societal organizations and to hear out their demands.

This "openness" is made possible by (a) institutional openings and (b) the presence of sympathetic "key allies" within the agencies.

- **Institutional Openings**

On the global level, the UNDIFF called member states to center the participation of farmers and producer organizations in the operationalization and contextualization of the Global Action Plan. The second institutional opening is on the national level. Following the global declaration of the UNDIFF, the DA issued Special Order No. 792, series of 2019, formally creating the National Committee for Family Farming (NCFF) for the UNDIFF (2019-2028) and designating the DA-ATI as lead agency and mandating the participation of civil society in the processes.

- **The presence of key allies within the state sector**

A few key officials within the DA have also emerged to fulfill their mandate of nationally implementing the UNDIFF, including providing space for societal organizations (i.e., FOs and CSOs) for participation and consultation (FAO-IFAD, 2021, pp. 67-70). First were the officials from the DA-International Affairs Division (DA-IAD) and liaison officer for the UNDIFF Philippines, who updated the ARDKPP that there have already been committees within the DA especially created for UNDIFF. Second were the officials from the DA-ATI who formed a committee within the DA who is tasked to produce the National Action Plan (NAP) and committed that the DA shall involve other agencies and the FOs and CSOs in the drafting.

However, when the FOs and CSOs within the ARDKPP expressed their deep concerns about the narrowness and insufficiency of their participation in the drafting of the NAP, DA officials agreed to meet with the representatives of IFAD and FAO and some representatives of societal organizations. As a result, they expressed their willingness to enhance the quality of participation of the societal organizations, namely including representations of the organizations to be part of the drafting committee. The DA-ATI official has been the go-to person of societal organizations and the IFAD and FAO representatives every time they have important concerns, perspectives, and interventions.



Programmatic demand-making

Another important dimension is the efficient and strategic "programmatic demand-making" (PDM) of the organized groups. FOs and CSOs articulated their policy positions comprehensively and efficiently to promote their policy preferences and influence the DA-ATI and related government line agencies. This is done through the following:

- **Deployment of professional or semiprofessional staff**

The organizations within ARDKPP devoted their key staff to represent their respective organizations and participate in the activities of ARDKPP. Most if not all of these staff are salaried, full-time professionals, each bringing a set of skills

and expertise, suggesting that the societal organizations are invested and committed to the goals and objectives of the ARDKPP. Most importantly, in organizing ARDKPP activities annually, these member organizations contribute and pool their financial resources to pay for the venue, food, equipment, and other necessary expenses.

- **Cohesive demands**

The organizations within ARDKPP identified and asserted their demands with their partners in the state sector. They identified the gaps in their participation and actively lobbied for how they could be addressed. The cohesion of the demands of the societal organizations was always forged in a series of meetings and planning sessions. The organized groups also asserted every time the quality of their participation is compromised.

For example, despite the opportunity given to the organizations to participate in a series of consultations for the drafting of the PAP4FF, they felt a growing sense of discomfort and discontent regarding the process and outcome of the drafting. As such, on November 27, 2020, fourteen FOs-CSO members of the ARDKPP TWG met on Zoom video conferencing to evaluate the ongoing process. While the groups recognized the value of being invited to these consultations, they still felt that the process could be improved. In the meeting, the following observations emerged: (1) the draft of the PAP4FF at that point did not build on the body of work of the ARDKPP in the past six years; (2) there was no explicit recognition of the ARDKPP TWG as a national multi-stakeholder platform on family farming which is already duly recognized by the FAO and IFAD; (3) there has been limited participation given to the FO and CSO members of the ARDKPP TWG in the drafting process. During this meeting, the societal organizations decided to propose concrete steps to enhance their participation, namely the inclusion of FO-CSO members in the drafting committee and making the 2020 KLMPE Conference a space where the draft could be properly discussed and approved. The IFAD and FAO representatives who were present at the meeting agreed to convey these recommendations to the DA-ATI.

In a separate meeting on December 2, 2020, DA and DA-ATI agreed to the proposals of the FOs and CSOs and committed to present the draft of the PAP4FF for review and feedback at the then-upcoming December 11 KLMPE Conference. During the said conference, recommendations were generated from the participants and were further polished, firmed up, and elaborated upon by FO and CSO members. These recommendations were successfully incorporated into the final draft.

- **Clear decision-making strategies**

The identification and consolidation of the demands among the FOs and CSOs at the ARDKPP involved a certain process, always remembering that the process is as important as the product.

The processes among the organizations in the ARDKPP may be characterized by inclusiveness, full participation, and consensus. Decisions were made hours upon hours of meeting and deliberation (both on-site and virtual). Also, drafts of important proposals or documents were circulated online a few days or weeks before the meeting, so members could send in their comments and amendments in case they could not attend the actual meeting. The proposals and suggestions were exhaustively discussed until they were refined and galvanized.

- **Performing strategic support services**

Owing to their committed and skilled staff, the organizations were able to perform strategic support services that complemented or ran parallel with the activities of their government partners. First, given the enormous preparation in mounting events, the staff of organizations within ARDKPP have been the prime movers of the annual KLMPE Conferences, particularly in designing the program and implementing the activities under it, including conducting trade and photo exhibit, publishing the case studies of best practices on family farming into a book, and gathering policy proposals for policy dialogue which later served as a wellspring of materials for the drafting of the PAP4FF.

Collectively and on their own, member organizations conducted various initiatives to further the goals of UNDAF in the country. For example, PAKISAMA (Pambansang Kilusan ng mga Samahang Magsasaka) proposed and secured funding from the World Rural Forum and European Union (EU) titled, “Ensuring Maximum Family Farmers Participation in PAP4FF Implementation.” The major objective of the project was to strengthen the participation of the FOs/ CSOs in the completion of the PAP4FF and increase their awareness of and involvement in its implementation – in partnership with the government’s focal unit which is DA-ATI.

The activities under the project include the designing of the baseline and profiling study of family farmers in the country; conducting desk and field research; drafting of the communication, sustainability, monitoring, and evaluation plans and budget; putting up a website and designing a mobile platform; production and dissemination of briefers on PAP4FF; organizing the 2021 Knowledge Learning Market-Policy Engagement (KLMPE) Conference; co-drafting of the PAP4FF; conducting sectoral consultations and selection of representatives to NDAF National Steering Committee; strengthening the ARDKPP Network Coordination; finalizing the PAP4FF Draft; and the participation of FFOs/CSOs in PAP4FF Official Launch.

The organizations within ARDKPP employed their intellectual and human resources to assert their demands, perspectives, and even sentiments to the DA-ATI. They also maximized their working relationship with IFAD and FAO to advance their demands cohesively and strategically. They know full well that it often takes pressure and proactive engagement to have their demands heard.



High-Profile Policy Domain

The members of the ARDKPP TWG, especially the FOs and CSOS, banked on the high-profile global declaration of the UNDFP to promote the best interests of Filipino farmers. The Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs) such as the IFAD and FAO were also proactive mediators and bridge builders between the societal organizations and the state agencies.

First, the FOs and CSOs keenly asserted their critical diagnosis of the challenges plaguing Filipino family farmers, which was later accepted by all stakeholders and reflected in the final draft of the PAP4FF. In particular, the societal organizations had to make sure that the problem analysis of the PAP4FF is not short-term, myopic, and cosmetic, not merely focusing on technological and technocratic fixes but also confronting head-on the systemic and multilayered nature of the problem as a product of elite power politics and special interests. The disenfranchisement of ordinary Filipino farmers is attributed to "the elite capture of the executive, legislative, and judiciary branches and shrinking democratic spaces contribute to the weak implementation of existing asset reform laws," alongside the absence of fundamental laws that secure the empowerment of farmers (IFAD-FAO, 2021, p. 28).

Second, organizations within ARDKPP are allotted a particular section in the NAP to enumerate a few key policies that need to be reviewed, amended, or even jettisoned. The FOs and CSOs particularly insisted that some problematic key policies need to be spotlighted, and they volunteered to elaborate on the flaws and/or deficiencies of some of these policies.

NAP draws attention to not just one but at least five (5) highly contentious policies (2021, pp. 21-26) that would disrupt the dominant economic and political interests in the country. On their own and collectively, the policies speak to the systemic marginalization of specific types of family farmers. More, the short commentaries on these policies at the NAP suggest that the problems confronting the policy domain of agriculture and rural development are intrinsically and intersectionally imbricated with other policy domains having to do with gender inequality, environmental destruction via runaway extractivism, discrimination against the indigenous peoples, etc. The NAP calls for either amending the existing policy or submitting it for a comprehensive review of its merits and infirmities. These policies include (1) further review of the Rice tariffication law; (2) invoking the Indigenous Communities Conserved Territories and Areas (ICCA) Bill and its recommendations; (3) speeding up the delineation of municipal waters through the issuance of local ordinances under the 1998 Philippine Fisheries Code (Republic Act 8550); (4) repealing the 1995 Philippine Mining Act; passing an Alternative Minerals Management Bill (AMMB), among others.

III. Recommendations

Given that agriculture is a high-profile policy domain and one that is close to the gut of the Filipino population, it is crucial for societal organizations to sustain the mobilization efforts and advocacy around agricultural issues and policies, including recognizing “crisis events” in the sector when they emerge and politicizing them to draw national attention and induce strategic action on the part of policymakers and the general public.

Moreover, an enormous collective power has always been on the side of societal organizations. Moving forward, the organizations need to remind themselves of the tools and strategies that they deployed to significantly shape the process and the outcomes of the UNdff such as their strategic programmatic demand-making. It is also important to maintain their autonomy from the state sector and continue enlisting the assistance of FAO and IFAD in terms of building bridges and offering material resources. The groups should also show that they can push back whenever their full participation is compromised.

If CSOs, FOs, and other non-state actors choose to take part in the activities and share the resources of the state (that is, choosing incorporation over disengagement), the state sector, in this case, the DA-ATI, must maintain and fortify the “institutional openings” for societal organizations. Beyond heeding out and incorporating the demands of societal organizations, the state sector must transform the multi-stakeholder governance structures of UNdff (i.e., the Ncff) to truly serve as a platform for centering family farmers. This includes assigning key FOs, CSOs, and development partners as co-conveners or co-chairs with DA-ATI as a matter of collective ownership and democratic power-sharing.

In terms of the strengthening of the national implementation of UNdff, overall, it is recommended for ARDKPP to lobby this to the current Philippine President, Ferdinand Marcos Jr., (who is also the Chair of the National Steering Committee as stipulated in the PAP4FF). The President is enjoined to issue an Executive Order focusing on the national implementation of the PAP4FF, especially institutionalizing the activation of Ncff and guaranteeing its annual budget allocation. Instead of an EO, national legislation on family farming in the country may also be explored.

This EO or national legislation may include the following provisions:

1. Appointment of one government position (e.g., a Cabinet Secretary) outside of the different departments of government to convene and oversee the meetings, gatherings, and activities of the Ncff.

Ncff is a multistakeholder platform that is composed of CSOs as well as various government agencies. Appointing one government position as high as a Cabinet Secretary would address the difficulty of DA-ATI (as only one bureau

(within the DA) in summoning other government agencies to meetings and gatherings.

2. Pay close attention to how NCFF interacts with already existing platform mechanisms within DA. Currently, within the DA, the Philippine Council for Agriculture and Fisheries (PCAF) is one agency that already convenes committees that involve different CSOs and FOs within the agriculture sector. Paying focused attention to this would help avoid overlaps, fragmentation, and siloes as well as reinforce synergies across these platforms towards the consolidation of the needs and concerns of the FOs, leading to more focused and strategic interventions. As for the CSOs, the perennial challenge is knowing what government mechanisms are available and figuring out how to navigate and influence them.

3. In terms of the structure of NCFF, FOs, CSOs, and development partners shall sit as co-convenors or co-chairs with DA-ATI or the Cabinet Secretary as a matter of co-ownership of the platform.

4. To facilitate the cascading of the ARDKPP activities to the local level, the DILG is encouraged to issue an administrative order or memorandum circular to facilitate compliance of the various LGUs. It is also hoped that the setting up of the different task forces of the NCFF at the national level will also set in motion the setting up of their local counterparts in various LGUs.

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