



AGRICULTURE PERSONNEL READINESS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF DECENTRALIZED CITY PROVINCIAL-LED AGRICULTURE AND FISHERY EXTENSION SERVICES UNDER THE MANDANAS-GARCIA RULING

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Abstract:

This study utilized the underlying qualitative research design and examines the dimensions of the readiness of the City Agriculture Personnel in the Implementation of City Agriculture Fishery Extension Services (CAFES) and developed an institutional framework model. Data were derived from interviews with key respondents of the Davao City Agriculture Office and supported by secondary information. Thematic-content analysis was used to analyze transcripts of their own personal opinions, experiences, and insights. Findings from this qualitative inquiry, show that Devolution Transition Plan (DTP); Personnel Structure and Budget, Policies and Ordinances, and enabling mechanisms such as Strategic Action Plans and Projects are the significant elements in the effective implementation of the decentralized agricultural and fishery extension services delivery.

Keywords: Mandanas-Garcia Ruling, devolution transition plan, personnel structure and budget, policies, and ordinances, enabling mechanisms, decentralize agricultural services

1. Background of the Study

Agriculture and fisheries are important sectors of the Philippine economy, with agricultural production increasing by 0.7% in the third quarter of 2020 due to an increase in crop and fishery production (PSA, 2021). From 1970 to 2010, extension programs served rural areas, primarily farmers and fishermen, using efficient interpersonal communication methods and low-cost information products to distribute information.

In the Philippines, the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) is the principal agency for the Department of Agriculture's (DA) agriculture and fishery extension programs. The DA-Regional Field Offices and other affiliated entities also provide productivity and livelihood training to farmer organizations. Despite the Department's considerable

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attention and efforts, the agricultural industry continues to face recurring challenges and issues. Weak AF extension services continue at the forefront, impeding the flow of knowledge and the adoption of new technologies. Inefficiencies are frequently linked to a lack of funding and human resource assistance, which affects training and the delivery of information, education, and communication (IEC) products.

The Local Government Code of 1991 delegated jurisdiction and responsibility for delivering essential services and foods to LGUs, improving extension support by providing season-long training Farmer Field School, technological demonstrations, capacity building, and Rice Crop Manager recommendations. Consequently, must conduct a situational analysis to engage farmers in the extension system, but there are still challenges such as inadequate manpower and lack of professionals.

The Supreme Court's ruling on the Mandanas-Garcia Petition increases funding for local governments by 40% of previously untaxed tax receipts, resulting in an incremental IRA of P959.0 billion in 2022. The Supreme Court's ruling has increased resources for Local Government Units (LGUs), but it also has implications for the National Government (NG's) fiscal position. Executive Order No. 138 allows for a progressive devolution of tasks between 2022 and 2024, requiring additional budgetary requirements. With this, evaluating how the LGUs utilize their funds and the scope of their capabilities will serve as a guide on rethinking who should do what and outsource or privatize certain branches of the extension system.

2. Objectives of the Study

This research is being conducted to achieve the following goals:

- 1) Determine the implementation Province-City Agriculture Fishery Extension Services (PAFES) prior to full devolution under the Mandanas Garcia ruling, as well as the issues and challenges involved?
- 2) Explain What are your perceived concerns and challenges in the upcoming (full) implementation of PAFES?
- 3) Provide recommendations or framework for properly implementing the PAFES in the complete decentralization regime?

2.1 Scope and Limitation of the Study

The study focused on understanding the current status of CAFES in Davao City and exploring the desired institutional management framework among its stakeholders. There are several limitations in this study:

- 1) The perceptions of the participants were guided by the research interests, but were ultimately restricted by the availability of people and time to participate.
- 2) Some interviews were conducted using video chat which limits the interviewer's ability to interpret body language and non-verbal cues.

- 3) All respondents have extensive experience in working with the agriculture units of the city.

3. Literature Review

The devolution of extension services to LGUs has resulted in widespread demoralization of agricultural extension workers due to salary disparity, narrow opportunities for promotion, and political machinations. The Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization Act (AFMA) was passed in 1997 to modernize the agriculture and fisheries sector. It defines extension services as training, FBAS, demonstration, and information and communication support. The IRR supports the development of the National Extension System for Agriculture and Fisheries.

The NESAF is composed of three subsystems: the national government, the local government, and the private sector. The local government is responsible for providing direct extension services, while the private sector is encouraged to participate in training and other complementary extension services.

The IRR also specified the financing of agriculture through the following modes:

- 1) Allocation of multi-year budgets that shall be treated as grants;
- 2) Transfer of funds from the DA to the LGUs as extension grants; and
- 3) Placing the budget for agriculture and fishery at a minimum of 1 percent of the GVA.

According to Executive Order 138, the National Government (NG) is fully committed to the decentralization policy enshrined in the Constitution and relevant laws, which aims to strengthen the local government's ability to provide basic social services and critical facilities to its constituents, boost productivity and provide employment, promote local economic growth and ensure accountability, competence, professionalism, and transparency of local leaders through the development of institutions.

3.1 Roles of Local Government Units

Local Government Units (LGUs) are responsible for delivering direct agriculture and fisheries extension services. The province or city is mandated to integrate the operations of the agriculture extension services and undertake an annual evaluation of all city/municipal extension programs. Worldwide and local developments and realities provide a broader perspective of several opportunities and threats that the agriculture and fisheries extension must take advantage of and harness. These conditions call for a more responsive extension service where stakeholders must collectively participate to address relevant development issues and concerns.

3.2 Demographics

With the country's population at 108 million in 2019 and still increasing, the pressure on agriculture and fisheries to supply the needs of a growing population with decreasing

land area devoted to agriculture points to productivity enhancement measures to cope up with the need for food in both local and international markets. Since it is also a source of raw materials for the industry, health and other sectors, this also adds up to the demands that must be met by the agriculture and fisheries sector. Based on a survey of LGU agricultural extension workers (AEWs) that was conducted by ATI, the age range of almost half of AEWs is between 43-65 years old (ATI, 2018). Moreover, since the majority of these farmers are poor, the adoption of modern technologies like the use of hybrid rice seeds poses difficulties for they perceive this as requiring more cost in terms of inputs. The adoption of productivity-enhancing technologies therefore is a great challenge for extension especially with the implementation the Agricultural and Fisheries Mechanization (AFMech) Law or R.A. 10601 where modern, appropriate, and environmentally safe agricultural and fisheries machinery and equipment shall be promoted to achieve food security and safety.

Agriculture Training Institute in 2011-2015 reported that Agricultural Fishery (AF) extension delivery recorded a huge growth. The dawn and development of modern ICT tools and applications enhanced access to AFE knowledge and products and services. Information became accessible to clients at any place and time using the internet, mobile phones and social media. ICT developers and researchers introduced applications such IRRI's Rice Crop Manager, Rice Director and Weed Identification Tool; Phil-Rice's Rice Knowledge Bank, Text Center, ATI's Farmer's Contact Center, among other systems. Extension support, education and training services such as training cum practicum activities, laderized course and laderized training programs, season-long training of trainers (TOT), farmer's field school, farmer's livestock school (FLS), and scholarship programs strengthened the capabilities and competitiveness of clients.

The Supreme Court (SC) ruling on the Mandanas-Garcia Petition concerning the Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA) (Diaz-Manalo, Pamela & Baluyot, Dulce & Estrada, Miguel Antonio (2021) follows a long and persistent effort of local government units (LGUs) and stakeholders in demanding greater autonomy and resources from the national government (NG).

The Ruling directly increases resources for LGUs as a result of a larger base for the computation of the IRA (now known as the National Tax Allotment or NTA). Local governments expect to receive an incremental IRA, equivalent to 40% of tax collections that were previously not part of the base. In 2022, in the first year of implementation of the SC ruling, the IRA is seen to substantially increase by P263.5 billion or 37.9% to a total of P959.0 billion.³ Of the amount, about P193.7 billion can be attributed to collections from the Bureau of Customs (BOC). While the SC ruling's effect is straightforward—greater number of resources for LGUs in implementing devolved functions—there are concomitant and equally important issues that the NG needs to contend with. Foremost of these is the ruling's effect on the NG fiscal situation. Complete devolution of functions related to NG-funded and administered programs, activities, and projects (PAPs) has its challenges and requires time. Executive Order No. 138, series of 2021, providing for

guidelines on the full devolution of certain functions, recognizes this reality and gives government agencies until FY 2024 to complete the transition. Hence, a gradual devolution of functions between 2022 and 2024 can be expected even as the NG is obliged to provide LGUs their due share in national taxes beginning FY 2022. This can mean additional NG budgetary requirements to support NG PAPs during the transition.

Research and development (R&D) according to Agricultural Training Institute (ATI 2018), is an important part of agricultural extension since it connects new technologies, methodologies, and approaches in agriculture to its intended users. R&D focuses on the generation of new technology by looking through the current state of agriculture and determining the issues and concerns that are encountered by the farmers and fisherfolks whereas extension provides the dissemination of information to the end users. The allocation for R&D has been consistently small and is spread over several bureaus and institutions such as BAR and BPI, where they fail to generate sufficient research output to help provide profitable technologies to the farmers and fisherfolks. The devolution created a weak linkage between research and extension specifically the transfer of information of matured technologies to the farmers and fisherfolks. Moreover, training programs that help improve the knowledge and skills of AEWs were not conducted regularly.

4. Methods

This study is a qualitative design, which employs a grounded theory approach and data will be from the fieldwork results (Creswell, J. W., 2017) which will utilize a cross-sectional survey research design. According to Lavrakas (2008), cross-sectional surveys can be conducted using any mode of data collection which includes telephone interviews, mailed questionnaires, face-to-face interviews and/or a mixture of data collection styles. Qualitative descriptive phenomenology will be used as it sought individual lived experiences and feelings of persons.

The researcher utilizes primary data obtained through face-to-face interviews among selected city agricultural personnel from the City Agriculture Office of Davao City and supported with secondary information which substantiates the study.

A face-to-face interview has been used in generating relevant information from the organic personnel of the city agriculture office as selected key respondents. Key respondent consent was obtained and voice recording of their responses was kept by the researchers. Secondary data was also taken as reference materials.

Purposive sampling or purposive selection of a qualified respondent is a sampling technique that qualitative researchers use to invite participants who can provide in-depth and detailed information about the subject of the study. They represented the local agriculture personnel as key players serving frontliners in the implementation of the province/city-led agricultural fishery extension services in Davao City.

Before conducting the study, the researcher secured approval from the City Agriculture Office of Davao and the University of Southeastern Philippines, as well as the consent of the respondents. Thereafter a free-flowing (snowball) interview with selected key personnel on this qualitative inquiry and subsequently the results generated thru content-thematic analysis.

4.1 Content Analysis

Content analysis was used to analyze the data collected from personal interviews. According to Moore & McCabe (2005), this is the type of research whereby data gathered is categorized into themes and sub-themes, to be able to be comparable. A main advantage of content analysis is that it helps in data collected being reduced and simplified, at the same time producing results that may then be measured using quantitative techniques. Furthermore, the content analysis provides the capability of researchers to structure the qualitative data collected in a way that satisfies the success of research objectives and will employ the approach to inquiry (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) with the primary purpose of generating theories or dimensions that explain the interaction or the certain event.

The researcher conducted Key Person Interviews using open-unstructured questions with the respondents. A Thematic Analysis was performed in determining the factors and their perceptions, hence conducting this type of methodology enabled them to expound their thoughts and explore emergent design output.

5. Findings and Discussion

Presented in Table 1 is the socio-demographic profile of the respondents. The total population was 4, and 75% were female and 25% were male. The majority of the respondents are Masters in Agriculture and Related Studies with an average of 23 years in agriculture.

Table 1: Socio-demographic profile of the respondents (N=4)

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex		
Male	3	75%
Female	1	25%
Civil Status		
Married	3	75%
Separated	1	25%
Degree Course		
B.S in Agriculture and Related Studies	1	25%
M.S in Agriculture and Related Studies	3	75%
Average Number of Years in Agriculture Service	23	

5.1 Problems and Issues Confronted by the Agriculture Personnel in Davao City

The problems and issues confronted by these agriculture personnel were summarized and categorized using the manual coding method. This study finds 4 dominant themes. These themes which comprise the *essences* of the narratives of the participants' problems during these periods before the full devolution effecting the Mandanas Garcia ruling are 1) *Budget, Policy and Ordinances* 2. *On Strategic Actions* 3. *Personnel structure* and 4. *On Devolution Transition Plan*. Further, Horizontalization is a method for understanding data through a phenomenological reduction by replacing vocabulary with similar terms.

Theme 1: On Budget, Policy, and Ordinances

As per discussion with an Agriculturist, Mr. D, he disclosed that a substantial budget supporting local policy and ordinances has to be assured because *"R. A. 7160 Local Government Code, as initiated by Senator Pimentel on devolution, only the personnel were devolved, but the budget was still with national, we were like beggars as the planning and budget were up to them (referring to National and Regional Offices). They could demand as much as 18 tons of harvest for 1 sack of urea given to a farmer per hectare. Their main reason was always the lack of money,"* says an Agriculturist (Mr. D.) of the City Agriculture Office. On programs he is passionate about, he stresses: *"It is hard to be a passionate visionary. I had to keep a low profile so others may not feel insecure."*

Here, Mr. D. was very clear about his critical position as he clearly said the mangosteen project was ideal but the farmers could not afford it. Armatya Sen in his capability approach clearly specifies the following well-being, namely:

Individuals can differ greatly in their abilities to convert the same resources into valuable functioning and in Mr. D's case local poverty. This is the same case with the opinion of Mr. E (Assistant City Agriculturist) where Agricultural Technicians (AT) are with the lowest salary grade: *"Among all agencies, our Agricultural Technicians have the lowest salary grade Level at 10. We were left behind so we raised the SG to Level 11 to become at par with PRC licensed professionals. We made the necessary recommendations and it was approved."* Among Sen's concerns: *"Because the value of a capability set represents a person's effective freedom to live a valuable life in terms of the value of the functioning available to that individual when the available functioning are improved, so is the person's effective freedom and in this case the ATs promotion to SG 11"*.

People can internalize the harshness of their circumstances so that they do not desire what they can never expect to achieve. This is the phenomenon of adaptive preferences. The story of the expensive mangosteen project also bears this: *"Too expensive. Off-season mangosteen. Proven good. But it is good if the farmer is rich!"*

Whether or not people take up the options they have, the fact that they do have valuable options is significant. According to Sen's concerns, this is not bad at all even if Mr.D. verbalizes the dismal experience with the agency: *"When we develop a funded rice processing center, then that is good but rice tariffication exempts importers where their products only cost 20 pesos in Vietnam and Thailand. Our fertilizers and programs are immature and*

incomplete. We also have rules where government agencies cannot manage facilities but only organizations when they are required to counterpart funds to prove financial capability.” To Sen, this may be complicated but significant which brings us to number 4.

Theme 2: On Strategic Actions

On strategic actions as enabling mechanisms in the preparation of the CAFES, Assistant City Agriculturist (Mr. E.) told that *“We already created plantilla positions in preparation of the EO 138 as we are gearing up to the full assumption of functions as detailed in the Devolution Transition Plan 2022. We are creating the Agriculture and Biosystems Division, the Agribusiness Division and the Fisheries Division. The Devolution Transition Committee will oversee the implementation of the DTP which includes all city departments: City AgriVet, CENRO, City Tourism among others. The 7 million warehouse is already approved and we are also expanding our nursery operation to purchase more seeds along with the seeding materials for inland and coastal fishery. We are also into biocon lab production and our equipment to manufacture biofertilizer is also available. From 4 divisions we have proposed 3 more wherein 1 division was already locally approved. The LGUs themselves should plan and implement. We are cooperating with the academe especially in the Provincial Agri-Fisheries Extension Service while the Rice Program is partially devolved. The research and other regulatory functions of the agencies are not covered in the devolution.”* However, the strategic actions are still in process and more workshops and consultations with a specific budget, and respective timelines have to be established and properly implemented.

Theme 3: Personnel Structure

Agriculturist Mr. E. told that “from 4 divisions we have proposed 3 more wherein 1 division was already locally approved. The LGUs themselves should plan and implement. We are cooperating with the academe especially in the Provincial Agri-Fisheries Extension Service while the Rice Program is partially devolved. The research and other regulatory functions of the agencies are not covered in the devolution.”

It was also noted that existing personnel at the City Agriculturist Office is not enough when the full implementation of the devolution started in CY 2024, a substantial budget has to be allocated to pay the salaries and wages of new additional personnel who will be a subject matter expert in their respective units. Personnel Capability is also needed to make them productive in their own and respective tasks and responsibilities.

Theme 4: On Devolution Transition Plan

On Devolution Transition Plan, as one of the important thematic anchors of the needs and issues presented by the participants.

As shared by Mr. E., that *“We already created plantilla positions in preparation of the EO 138 as we are gearing up to the full assumption of functions as detailed in the Devolution Transition Plan 2022. We are creating the Agriculture and Biosystems Division, the Agribusiness Division and the Fisheries Division. The Devolution Transition Committee will oversee the*

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This means DPT will serve as a blueprint and a guide in the appropriate implementation of the Provincial/City Agriculture and Fishery Extension Services to be able to arrive its objectives and ultimate goals. *“Through the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), we have already discussed the preparation of the Devolution Transition Plans by creating the Committee on Devolution. Moreover, we are aiming for the Growth Equity Fund from the taxes at the Barangay Level the sources of which are either local or national. We have proposed a 1.3 trillion budget in Davao City alone as this covers Agri-Tourism with cable cars for people aside from the tramline which transport agricultural products. Our office is preparing for the Local Development Investment Plan based on the Mandanas ruling. Right now, the machinery funds are still with the Department of Agriculture National Office but fertilizers are locally available. We strategize to plan their planting and harvesting. But, we rely on the untapped ancestral domains as their land could reach as high as 153,000 hectares.” (Mr. E.)*

6. Conclusion and Recommendation

This chapter presents the salient findings generated from the study developed a localized framework for CAFES implementation in Davao City which would be effective and sustainable if driven by the following dimensions:

Budget, Policy, and Ordinances; Strategic Actions; Personnel structure and Devolution Transition Plan are important enabling mechanisms that are observed to be very essential in the full implementation of the program to be able to achieve its objectives and long-term goals. These may include in the program components the operations and commodity-based programs and projects that are locally prepared through “bottoms-up planning” at the local level that is enshrined or supported by the enhanced devolution approach through the Mandanas Garcia ruling. While the creation and accreditation of People’s Organizations are factors that would contribute to responsible budgeting. They had to learn which projects are to be prioritized and which ones to sacrifice along with the lessons on what is urgent, and the like.

As stated, the framework which was generated from this scientific inquiry confirmed by the insights from stakeholders (e.g., agriculture personnel) showed that in order to sustain CAFES management, all stakeholders within and outside of the agriculture areas should have a meaningful collaboration and integration of various

developmental interventions in the area. The decentralization through the Mandanas Garcia ruling propels the immediate localized implementation of the program reflective from the grassroots or local echelon.

Sustainable CAFES management simply means managing the resources to optimize socio-economic benefit, provide environmental services, and enhance ecological functions since there is a complex relationship among land, water, and people exist as expounded by (Narendra, B. H., et. al, 2021). With the full implementation of the decentralization by 2024, substantial funding that will be managed by the local agriculture office assumes a speedy, reflective, grassroots' (e.g farmers & fisherfolks) reflective and preferred programs and projects more particularly on operations, engineering, and distributions of agricultural commodities and extension training that are directly coordinated, managed by the local agriculture offices. The Department of Agriculture Regional Office (DA-RFO) and academe on the other hand will have an important role in the monitoring and evaluation of the program and project implementation.

This inquiry, however, provided information that the DA RFO will have significant roles in the conduct of regulatory, research, and development (R&D) that have stringent works, with specialized experts, laboratories, and facilities. The region will in turn provide support in the initial implementation of the PAFES and plays a "big brother, small brother" collaboration until the local units are ready enough to sustain the programs. The academe and other institutions have important roles to play both in project collaboration as well as acting as external evaluators and resource experts' providers too.

6.1 Recommendation

Based upon this scientific inquiry, it recommended that this locally developed Devolution Transition Plan, Personnel Structure and Budget Policy and Ordinance in barangays, and Strategic actions or enabling mechanisms should be collectively transformed into an institutional development framework that will be strongly supported by the local executives and planners to be able to have an efficient and effective, steady implementation such that agriculture endeavors should be given utmost priority among other local priorities. The barangay governance (units) should give priority to agricultural projects and push barangay ordinances to support the city-local ordinances. While enough funding and local institutions such as farmer groups, cooperatives, and organizations should also be empowered to be able to act as key players in local agricultural developments. While the local agricultural personnel who are front liners in the CAFES should be sustained with enthusiasm and learning skills enhancement to be able to become a competitive workforce.

An in-depth qualitative and quantitative study may be pursued to have a substantial, empirical assessment of the status of PAFES to be able to have a comprehensive framework, strategic actions and timely recommendations in the full

implementation of the PAFES comes 2024 through the enhanced decentralization mechanism.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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