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THE WORKING GROUP AS A MECHANISM FOR MANAGING BUREAUCRATIC REORIENTATION: EXPERIENCE FROM THE PHILIPPINES

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper analyzes the experience of the Philippine National Irrigation Administration (NIA) in the use of a working group mechanism to facilitate the introduction of a participatory approach to working with farmer owned and operated irrigation systems. Two exhibits provide a history of this effort, which called for the introduction of basic changes in the NIA's institutional norms, procedures, staffing, and organization. The working group is described as a mechanism for legitimizing and supporting an informal coalition committed to the change objectives and comprised of: 1) key people within the action agency concerned about how well the agency serves the needs of its intended beneficiaries; 2) a number of talented individuals external to the agency who are unfettered by the usual bureaucratic constraints; and 3) a donor which provides an independent source of flexible financial resources and assistance in forming and helping the members of the coalition work together. In combination, these elements serve to relieve a number of the common constraints to change faced within the typical bureaucracy.

A major focus of attention of the working group is on field operations--specifically, the interface between the agency and its beneficiary population. Working group members develop close working relationships with selected agency personnel at regional and provincial levels to support them in the development, testing, and refinement of new

methods of working with the beneficiary population. The working group closely monitors this activity to identify and act on changes needed in agency policies, procedures, and organizational structures to support the participatory approach. It sponsors a variety of a research, training, workshop, and technical assistance activities which support this field level experimentation and the gradual expansion throughout the agency of the application of methods proven in the initial sites.

Involvement of an external donor is seen as important to the dynamics of the change process. It is suggested that the effectiveness of the donor in playing its role as a member of the change coalition is likely to be dependent on its ability: 1) to act quickly and flexibly in making a series of relatively small funding commitments over time; and 2) to dedicate a substantial input of direct hire or contract staff time to performance of a facilitator role.

May, 1982
Manila, Philippines

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The development experience of the past two decades has produced substantial evidence that government agencies engaged in rural development are not geared to reaching people in rural villages in an effective way--especially in ways that strengthen the people's capacities for self-reliant management of their own local resource base. To become more effective, these agencies must redefine their purposes and their relationship to the rural communities they would serve. Achieving such change is difficult, even when there is acknowledgement within the agency that its present approaches are inadequate.

Given the widespread need for such reorientation, considerable interest has been generated by the experience of the Philippine National Irrigation Administration (NIA), which is engaged in a systematic and well documented effort to achieve such a reorientation in its approach to its client group. Some years ago, the NIA recognized that approximately half of the irrigated area of the Philippines is served by small-scale, farmer-owned and operated irrigation systems. It also recognized that it had not been sufficiently effective in serving the needs of these farmers for upgrading their systems and strengthening their capacities to manage them. Developing the capacity to be effective in these tasks has since become a major national priority of the agency. This has not proven easy

for an organization which traditionally viewed itself primarily as an engineering and construction firm engaged in the development and operation of large-scale, centrally-managed irrigation schemes.

The central theme has been the introduction of a participatory approach to communal irrigation development. For the NIA this has meant learning to assist farmers in proposed project areas in organizing themselves into strong farmer-controlled irrigator associations able both to represent farmer interests during system development and to manage those systems independently after the NIA's withdrawal. It has meant in turn learning to respond to farmer demands and initiatives.

Under the participatory approach the farmers play a major role in determining the nature and location of system structures, assume responsibility for obtaining water rights and rights of way, participate in canvassing, bidding, certifying the quantity and quality of construction materials, recruiting and placing laborers, determining and recording counterpart contributions, reconciling accounts, providing paid labor under performance contracts, and certifying acceptance of the completed system. The result is a more technically sound and socially acceptable irrigation system, and a substantially strengthened association better able to operate and maintain the system once completed.

NIA's effort to develop and institutionalize a participatory approach began in 1976 and is still underway. The change strategy has been based on using a series of centrally-initiated, agency-managed pilot projects to: a) develop organizing methods; b) develop workable approaches to NIA-irrigator association collaboration in system planning and construction; c) build the commitment and competence of agency personnel in applying the new methods and approaches; and d) identify changes in agency organizational structures, management systems, and procedures needed to support the above.

As the new support systems were put into place and agency personnel developed the new skills and commitment required to use the new methods effectively, their application was extended throughout the country. Personnel who gained experience in the early pilots were used to orient and support those trying the new approaches for the first time. By 1982, the participatory approach was being used in over 100 projects in all twelve regions of the country and in 60 provinces. The expansion called for it to be the standard mode of operation in all communal irrigation projects assisted by the NIA by 1984.

Introducing the participatory approach has involved substantial changes in the NIA's approach to irrigation system planning and construction, and in the supporting institutional norms and management procedures. A staff of community organizers has been added, a team approach to project management has been introduced, evaluation and budgeting systems are being changed, irrigation engineers are being retrained in the new approach, site selection procedures have been revised and strengthened, and project personnel have been made accountable to the irrigator associations.

Such changes do not come easily in a large (the NIA has 38,000 employees), technocratic bureaucracy known internationally for its relatively high standard of technical performance. It has involved dedicated leadership, the effective use of a team of committed professionals drawn from within the agency and from external source institutions, and a well-thought-out change strategy. It has also involved a willingness to accept and learn from mistakes, and to accept and work through the inevitable tensions faced in any change process.

Central to the success of the effort has been a special working group known as the Communal Irrigation Committee (CIC). Headed by NIA Assistant Administrator Benjamin Bagadion, the CIC has taken on a critical role in

supporting and guiding the change process. The success of the NIA effort has generated interest in the formation and support of similar working groups in other development agencies to facilitate similar change processes. The CIC was a response to particular set of needs in a particular setting. Any attempt at replication must be similarly responsive. At the same time, an understanding of the essential dynamics of the NIA process may prove helpful in the design of similar processes even in quite different settings.

This paper provides an analysis of the CIC and its role in the NIA experience, with special attention to its special characteristics, its mode of functioning, and the nature of the support systems which sustain it.1/

1/ This paper draws freely and extensively on contributions made by a number of colleagues in a workshop sponsored by USAID/Philippines on November 10, 1981 to examine the experience of the NIA working group and of a more recently formed working group based in the Philippine Bureau of Forest Development which was inspired by the NIA experience. Resource persons from the NIA group were Edilberto de Jesus. Romana de los Reyes, and Frances F. Korten; and from the Bureau of Forest Development Group, Rosemary Aquino, Romy del Castillo, and Victor Magno. The present paper, with annexes, limits its focus to the working group as a management mechanism. It does not address the operational aspects of the NIA experience or provide details on how NIA personnel and farmer irrigators worked out their new relationships at field level. Nor does it detail the changes in policies and operating procedures that resulted. Two current presentations of these data are Frances F. Korten, "Building National Capacity to Develop Water Users' Associations: Experience from the Philippines," which will be available in early 1982 as a World Bank Staff Working Paper, and Benjamin U. Bagadion, "Developing Farmers Participation in Managing Irrigation Systems under the National Irrigation Administration," a paper presented at the Social Forestry Forum of the Bureau of Forest Development, January 5, 1982. Also useful in understanding the NIA experience are a number of papers which articulate the conceptual and theoretical frameworks which in part provided a guide to the development of the change process and in part were a product of that experience. See David C. Korten, "Community Organization and Rural Development: A Learning Process Approach," Public Administration Review, Vol. 40, No. 5, Sept-Oct. 1980, pp. 480-511; David C. Korten and Norman T. Uphoff, "Bureaucratic Reorientation for Participatory Rural Development," April 1981, distributed as a discussion paper by the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration, 1225 Connecticut Ave., N.W., Washington D. C. 20036; and David C. Korten, "Management of Social Transformation," Public Administration Review, Vol. 41, No. 6, Nov-Dec 1981, pp. 609-618. With the exception of the Bagadion paper, all of the above papers are available from S&T/RAD, Agency for International Development, Washington D. C. 20523.

A brief schematic history of the CIC is provided in Exhibit 1. A detailed narrative history is provided in Exhibit 2. The serious reader is urged to give these exhibits careful attention as they are helpful in giving substance to the points made in the analysis and in understanding the difficulties and tensions which such efforts face. The paper itself concentrates on the factors which seem to be significant contributors to the success of the NIA effort. Exhibit 2 provides a sense of the development of the working group and of the difficulties encountered along the way which the paper itself does not attempt to convey.

The CIC: Critical Characteristics and Social Dynamics

In some ways the CIC resembles innumerable project committees found in development agencies around the world. For example, it is headed by a key official of the NIA, and its membership is multidisciplinary, including individuals from a variety of agency departments and a number of resource persons drawn from collaborating research and training institutions. Perhaps less typical is the fact that its head is actually present and presides at every meeting, makes the business of the committee one of his top priorities, and has the authority to make decisions on behalf of the agency; and the outside resource persons take a very active role, not only in the meetings, but also in working on a day-to-day basis on the problems the committee is addressing. The reasons for this unusually high degree of involvement and effectiveness relate to a variety of special characteristics of the committee.

- It is a product of process. The formation of the CIC did not initiate a set of relationships and action processes; rather, its formation served to legitimize an existing set of relationships and action processes. The core members around which it was formed had already established their interest in the problem and their ability to contribute creatively toward its solution.

2. Its membership are largely informal. The CIC has no formal membership and the individuals involved do not formally represent their organizational unit or institution. Members join and/or withdraw as their interests and the needs of the process dictate. For example, a small consulting group was contracted at one point to develop a model financial system for use by communals and they sent a representative for a time. Once that contract was over, they dropped out. Yet, all the members of the core group around which the committee was originally formed have remained active, providing significant continuity and allowing the build-up of substantial expertise. Even though mandated by the Administrator of the NIA and headed by an Assistant Administrator, the CIC is not a decision making body. Responsibility for CIC funds is vested in Assistant Administrator Bagadion, not in the CIC itself, and all contracts for activities carried out by the CIC are between NIA and the institutions or individuals involved, not with the CIC as such. Bagadion is the decision maker in all matters and the CIC is essentially advisory to him.

3. It is most accurately described as a coalition of committed individuals. The CIC is not so much a committee in actual function as it is a loosely structured coalition of able professionals drawn together by a common commitment. In some instances people were asked to participate primarily on the basis of their institutional affiliation, but this has rarely led to a sustained relationship. By contrast, once an individual has established a record of effective contribution, committee participation follows the individual rather than the position or institutional affiliation.

4. Multiple Leadership Roles Have Emerged. Each member of the core group has developed an important and distinctive leadership role over time. Bagadion

has been the ultimate decision maker on all matters relating to the CIC. The community organizer consultant takes the lead in matters relating to community organizing. The head of NIA's Communal Projects Implementation Department leads in engineering and project funding matters. Members from the Asian Institute of Management (AIM) deal with organization of workshops, management systems development, and management training. The social scientists originally at the IPC and currently with the Development Academy of the Philippines and the Ateneo de Naga, provide leadership in matters relating to social science methodologies and the sociology of water user groups. The head of NIA's training department provides the link into NIA's training system network. A member from the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) leads the water management research effort. And a member from the Ford Foundation leads in maintaining the informal processses critical to CIC effectiveness.

5. Most members commit a major portion of their time to the work of the CIC. The CIC meets once each month. But much of its work is carried out in the interactions between its members, especially the core group, which occur on an almost daily basis. Most of these individuals have engaged in the work of the CIC as a major personal and professional commitment. There is a broadly shared consensus regarding the basic change process which they are jointly supporting.

6. It has ready access to flexible financial resources. A special financial fund (1/3 provided by the Ford Foundation and 2/3 counterpart funds provided by the NIA) is available to support the work of the committee. These funds can be committed rapidly and flexibly to mutually supportive research, training, monitoring, and technical assistance activities, all directed to achieving the phased reorientation of NIA's operating systems.

7. The primary focus is on field level action. Initially, the CIC was focused on stimulating innovation in a few field operational settings, providing the special training, technical assistance, and policy flexibility required by those pilots. Careful documentation of the interactions of agency personnel with farmers provided a good understanding of needs from the farmers point of view and allowed for the identification of conflicts between farmer goals and agency policies and procedures. The goal was and is to learn from field level action and to adjust policies and management systems to the needs so identified.

Relieving Constraints to Change: The Role of the CIC

Bureaucracies are designed to insure reliability of performance--not to facilitate change. They are characterized by multiple control points intended to detect deviant behavior and bring it into line. They are built around formally defined positions which carry formally defined authority. Many positions have authority to block innovative ideas or actions; few have the mandate and resources to initiate them. One of the more effective control mechanisms is the typical committee in which committee membership is determined by position and each member is expected to represent and protect the interests of his or her organizational unit.

The typical bureaucracy provides few rewards for exercising individual leadership or for creative innovation and those who attempt it are often engaged in a heroic act of self-sacrifice. Moreover, most managers with line responsibilities in public agencies are so busy with day-to-day operational concerns and so constrained by the rigidities of the budgetary process that they have neither the time nor the resources to address basic questions regarding program and organizational effectiveness. If they are aware of basic weaknesses in the performance of their agency, they often have

little choice but to seek quick, off-the-shelf solutions such as packaged training programs or turn problems over to a consulting firm--actions that are easily understood and all within accepted budgetary line items. If the required changes are politically sensitive they may find their colleagues reluctant to accept the risk of questioning established practices. Those more inclined to accept such risks may be located in different offices and have no means of uniting in common purpose. Some changes may require the temporary addition of new personnel with specialized skills who do not fit within staff ceilings and may be difficult to attract given government salary scales.

The CIC proved to be a powerful mechanism for offsetting many of these constraining forces which make bureaucratic change so difficult. It is from this perspective that the significance of its unique characteristics become evident. Based on individuals rather than positions, there was less presumption that they would be representing bureaucratic interests. Those who might have been so inclined probably would have lost interest because the group conveyed no formal authority on its members and took no votes. Yet, it was established with a mandate from the top authority in the agency to achieve fundamental changes in the agency and its mode of operation. Thus, it provided legitimacy for the formation of a loose coalition within the agency of able people from various departments committed to the change objectives.

The CIC also allowed for inclusion in this coalition of a number of talented individuals based outside the agency, persons not burdened by its administrative routine and free from identification with the narrowly defined bureaucratic interests of any of its units. The primary motivation of these individuals was the satisfaction of seeing their contributions transformed into action by a major agency to the benefit of the rural poor.

The opportunities which the experience provided to learn and to develop professionally was also a powerful incentive. Each works closely with the agency while maintaining an independent external base and facing many competing demands for the use of his or her time. They are not dependent on the agency and their primary loyalty in the relationship has been to the beneficiaries and to change. They work with an independence and freedom of action seldom available to an individual working within his or her own organization. While tact is essential to sustaining the relationship, they are not constrained from raising difficult issues. While providing the agency with critical skills and an independent point of view, they also build national and international visibility for the change effort, which in turn encourages those within the agency to sustain their own commitment to it. The "Hawthorne Effect" becomes a management tool to support the change process.

The special fund provides a source of flexible financial resources not commonly available within a bureaucracy, which allows the coalition to rapidly capitalize on opportunities as they arise without the delays and needs for multiple approvals normally imposed as checks by bureaucratic systems.

Relationship to Field Operations

Given the CIC's focus on field operations, its relationships with field personnel have been critical to its effectiveness. Here again the key is found in the informal relationships which CIC members have generated and sustained. NIA communal projects are implemented by Provincial Irrigation Engineers (PIEs) who report to Regional Irrigation Directors (RIDs) who in turn report directly to the Administrator of the NIA. Neither the CIC nor Bagadion have formal authority over field operations--not even in the

pilot sites.[3/] Nor does the CIC fund the pilots, the basic costs of which are covered by normal agency budgets. CIC support funds are used only to provide special support to the pilot sites which otherwise would not be available. This includes special training, research, technical assistance, monitoring systems, workshops, and supplemental personnel (community organizers). The ability to provide such special support is a critical factor in the CIC's ability to gain the cooperation of field personnel in pilot activities.

Relationships between the CIC and the field have been through the RIDs and PIEs and depend on their interest. Gaining their cooperation has not been a problem. For one thing, there existed within the agency a widespread dissatisfaction with existing arrangements under which NIA devoted its attention only to design and construction, while a different agency, the Farm Systems Development Corporation, worked independently to organize the irrigator associations. Many RIDs and PIEs were interested in trying a new approach and initial efforts were focused on those considered most likely to be interested in the participatory approach being proposed. Since Bagadion is a well-respected, high-level official within the NIA, the pilot activities provided an opportunity for participating RIDs and PIEs to obtain a special visibility and recognition within the Agency. Participation has meant access to special resources, and an opportunity to try out ideas. As those persons involved initially gained experience, they were asked to communicate their experience to their colleagues in the organization, thus lending further credibility to the participatory approach.

3/ The original Laur pilots were an exception in that they were treated as special projects and project personnel reported directly to the Central Office. But subsequent pilots have by choice been carried out through the normal line structure.

People from the CIC have spent substantial time working directly with the RIDs and PIEs involved to provide support and recognition. The workshops sponsored by the CIC give participants an opportunity to communicate directly and openly regarding the problems they are facing and to make recommendations regarding needed changes in central policies and procedures. The top management interest in these problems provides an important incentive to participate. Furthermore, workshops are not used to criticize or issue orders, but rather to share experiences and problems so that appropriate adjustments can be made at central, regional, and field levels.

As application of the approach has expended, the number of community organizers in the NIA has increased and their function has become established in the operating structure of the organization. This builds an internal constituency which depends on the participatory approach for its positions, a factor helpful to insuring that it will be sustained indefinitely as a normal part of operations.

Use of Donor Assistance

The case illustrates the effective use of donor assistance by a change coalition. In this instance the NIA based coalition obtained four key inputs from the collaborating donor: 1) intellectual sanction; 2) support for development of new capacities in collaborating resource institutions; 3) an independent source of flexible funding; and 4) special staff assistance in identifying and linking together coalition participants.

1. Intellectual Sanction

The experimental effort required deviation from accepted procedures by NIA personnel. Collaborators from the assisting resource institutions

had to experiment with new research frameworks and methods, and to enter into unfamiliar role relationships with a government agency. Such changes do not come easily either in irrigation agencies or in academic institutions. The credibility that the Ford Foundation had developed through its long years of support to research and education in the Philippines helped legitimate the experimentation.

2. Developing Resource Institution Capacities

The change process in the NIA depended on high quality inputs both from within the NIA and from a number of resource institutions. These were not types of inputs which could be bought off the shelf from contractors. Rather they called for non-standard capacities which were developed only over time as a group of bright, committed young professionals took on leadership roles in the CIC and developed unique skills, not only dealing with the problems of communal irrigation, but also in facilitating change processes in a major agency. In so doing they made concurrent contributions to development of social learning methodologies of broader relevance to other agencies and other countries. NIA was not in a position to commit the financial or staff resources required to develop such capability in the external institutions and was dependent on donors for such action. Thus, the funds which the Ford, Rockefeller, and Konrad Adenauer Foundations provided to AIM freed key members of the AIM faculty to become involved in activities such as the NIA communals effort long before a specific contractable need for their services was identified. Similarly Ford channeled research funds to the Central Luzon State University (CLSU), to help develop its capacity to assist communals in dealing with water management issues in anticipation of possible future needs for its services by the NIA.

3. Independent, Flexible Funding

The NIA group was able to use the availability of Ford funds in a number of crucial ways. First, it used them to gain commitment of NIA counterpart funds to a special account which could be used with uncommon flexibility in support of activities of the CIC. At the same time Ford's ability to take further independent funding action proved useful in meeting needs which NIA could not address even with the flexible funds. The institutional development actions noted above were only one example. Other examples included Ford support to individuals such as the social scientists in developing methodological papers on process documentation and insuring their continued involvement between NIA contracts. NIA also made use of Ford to overcome some of the limitations of its own contracting procedures. For example when a contract was being negotiated between NIA and the Ateneo de Naga University to do process documentation, an impass was reached because the Ateneo had no funds of its own to provide the necessary working capital. A special Ford grant of $5,000 to the University to create a working capital fund allowed the contract to be finalized.

4. Facilitation Assistance

Forming and building a coalition is a difficult and time-consuming undertaking. People from a variety of institutions must be identified, their interests in the problem at hand encouraged, their roles in the group established, and the inevitable personal and professional conflicts resolved. High level administrators such as Bagadion simply do not have the time required to ferret out potential collaborators and to engage in the intensive daily interactions required to build and sustain the informal processes involved. Members of a collaborating resource

institution might have such time, but are unlikely to see this as part of their responsibility and may find such initiatives on their part viewed with suspicion by colleagues sensitive to the status implications and the potential competitive interests. The relative independence and neutrality of a properly oriented foreign donor staff member or contractor can make it easier to gain acceptance in such a role and to work across departmental, institutional, and even hierarchical lines. In the NIA case Bagadion was able to obtain from mid-1978 onward the nearly full-time services of a Ford Foundation program officer to perform this facilitation role.

The NIA experience demonstrates the potential benefits of involving a donor as a full collaborator within the change coalition. The donor which is content simply to turn over funds to the agency may be much less useful than one which remains an active member of the coalition throughout, taking on roles which it is difficult if not impossible for other members of the coalition to play given constraints imposed on them by time, resources, and their institutional setting.

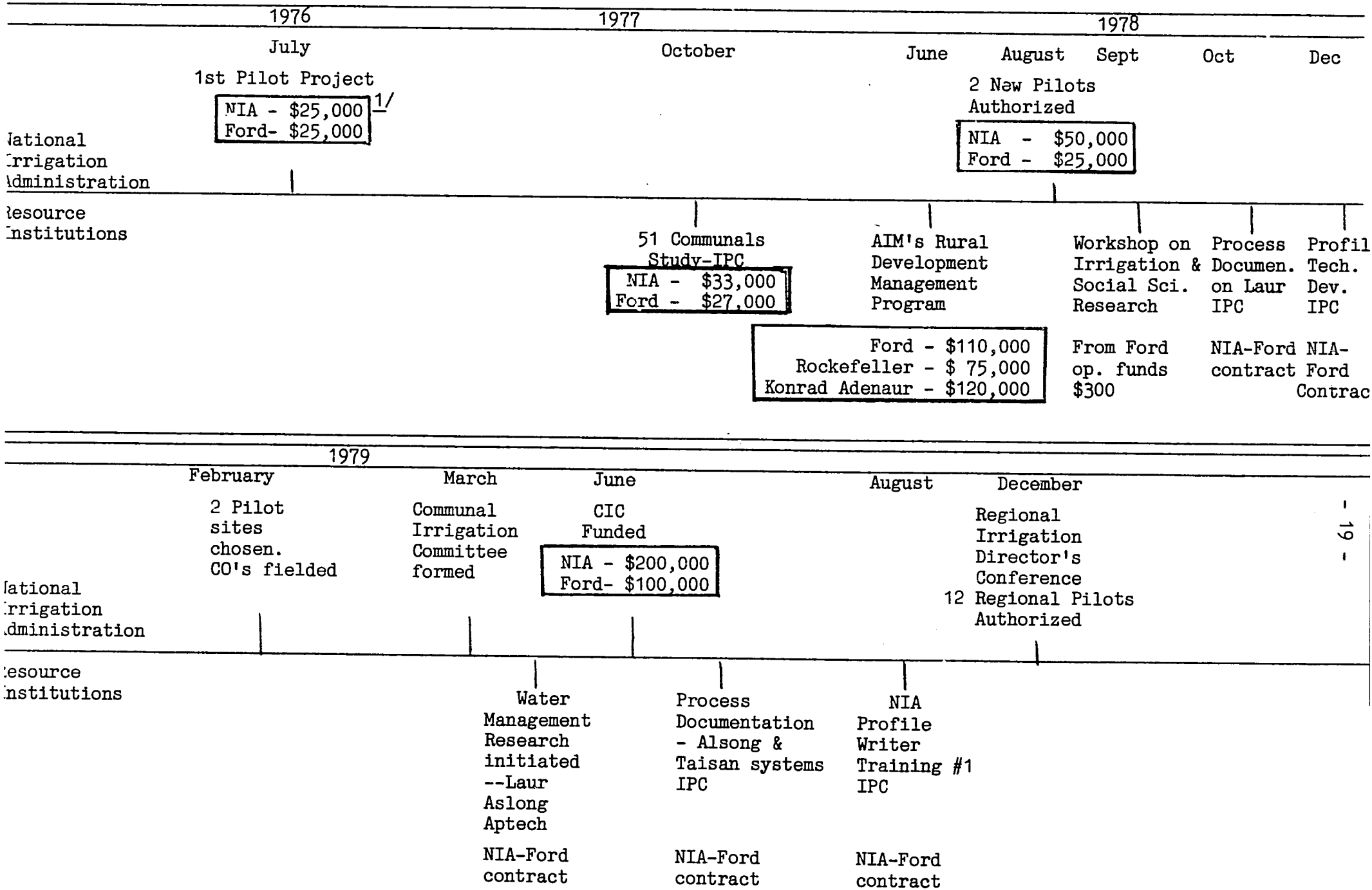
Not all donors can play such a collaborative role. It calls for the capability to provide flexible funding support and to commit significant time of direct hire staff and/or contract personnel to the process. The donor participant should also be in a position to make independent commitments of relatively small amounts of funds as needs arise. And its staff must understand and be committed to the concept of true collaboration.

The NIA experience demonstrates that the reorientation of a major bureaucracy toward a more people centered approach to development is possible, though difficult. Examination of the critical factors which supported

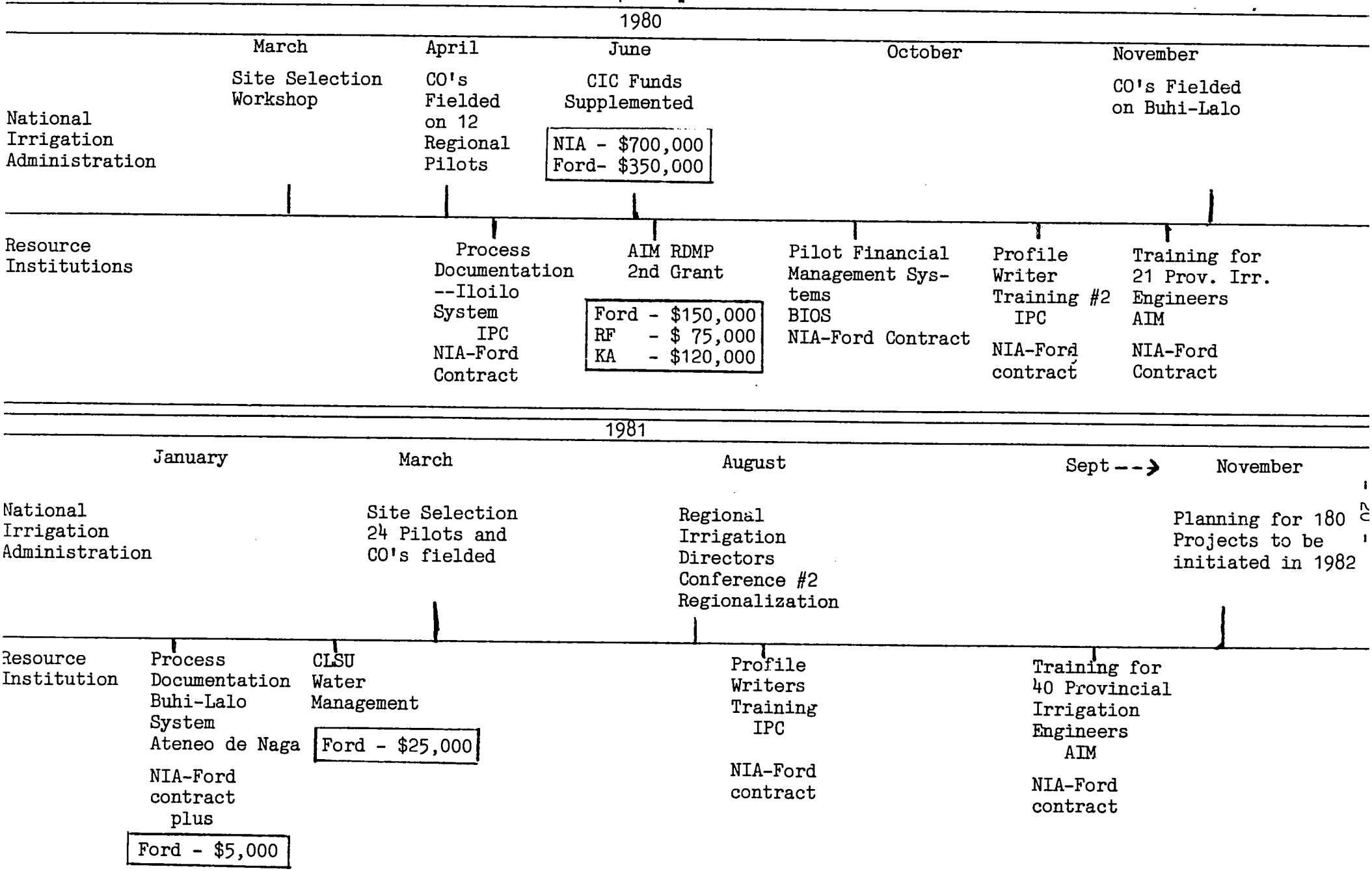
success in this particular case provides numerous insights which should prove relevant to other agencies in other settings with concerns similar to those of the NIA. But there is no model here for easy replication. There is, for example, nothing magical about forming a committee and providing it with flexible funding. The key is found in the commitment of the many talented individuals involved and in the informal social dynamics which allowed each to contribute in numerous creative ways. Formal structures are easy to replicate. Talented people and informal social processes are not. It is important that any effort to replicate the NIA experience recognize this reality. Those who would undertake such replication must focus on locating such people, drawing them into involvement in the process, and facilitating the informal processes by which they can work effectively together.

Exhibit 1

CRITICAL EVENTS IN HISTORY OF NIA COMMUNAL IRRIGATION COMMITTEE



CRITICAL EVENTS IN HISTORY - NIA COMMUNAL IRRIGATION COMMITTEE (Continued)



Notes for Exhibit 1

[1]Boxes are used to indicate individual grant actions committing new funds to the communal irrigation work. Contracts with resource institutions were contracts between NIA and the institution financed from funds set aside as a result of the grant actions. Ford Foundation grants to resource institutions were generally made independently of the NIA, though the grants noted were intended in part to support the communal irrigation work. NIA funded all normal construction costs on all pilot projects from its regular budget. The special funds were used for organizers, technical assistance, training, and research.

[2]When first asked to take this contract, Ateneo de Naga declined as NIA could not provide money on the contract up front and Ateneo de Naga had no funds that could be used to cover cash flow while awaiting payments. The problem was resolved only by Ford making an independent grant of $5,000 for the specific purpose of providing a cash fund to be used to deal with the cash flow problem. Once the work is completed, Naga can convert it into a scholarship fund.

Exhibit 2

HISTORY OF THE COMMUNAL IRRIGATION COMMITTEE

The history of the Communal Irrigation Committee (CIC) began well before its formal creation in 1979. It is a history in which the Ford Foundation played a prominent role--one that is important in understanding the dynamics of the CIC's development and in identifying implications for donors that might attempt to assume similar roles with other agencies.

Events Preceding Formation of the CIC

In 1975, a Ford Foundation Program Officer concerned with resource management issues, began discussing with management of the Philippine National Irrigation Administration (NIA) the problems they were experiencing in the construction and rehabilitation of small-scale irrigation systems. NIA management was concerned that the lack of farmer involvement in the planning and construction of the communal irrigation systems was a critical contributor to the dissatisfaction farmers commonly expressed once construction was completed and the limited performance of some of these systems became apparent. They discussed the need for a new participatory approach to NIA work on communals which would involve adding community organizers to NIA's own staff to be fielded prior to construction to organize farmers in the proposed command area preparing them to work with NIA technical staff on system planning and construction. Engineer Bagadion who then headed the Office of Special Projects, was given formal mandate by NIA Administrator Alfredo Juinio to work on such institutional issues and to draw on resources of other offices of the NIA as required.

In July, 1976, the Ford Foundation provided a grant of $25,000 to the NIA to do a pilot project using the participatory approach in rehabilitation projects at two sites in Laur municipality of Nueva Ecija Province.

An individual with community organizing experience coordinated implementation of the new approach at these sites. Construction and engineering personnel costs were covered through normal NIA budgets. The Ford grant and the matching NIA counterpart funds allowed NIA to add community organizers to the project staff and to commission some socio-economic evaluation studies to be carried out by the Institute of Philippine Culture (IPC) at Ateneo de Manila University.

At the same time it was hoped to initiate a study showing how farmers manage existing communal irrigation systems. Difficulties of finding the right person to do this study delayed its funding and initiation until 1977 when an anthropologist knowledgeable in communal irrigation on the staff of the IPC became available. The Ford Foundation and NIA then provided $60,000 under a new grant for a survey of 51 communal systems. This study confirmed the potential capacity of farmers to manage their own systems and provided insights into the organizational arrangements which farmers found most effective under differing circumstances. This knowledge proved useful in subsequent action projects as it helped organizers be more effective in advising farmers as to how they should organize their associations.

In June, 1978 a quite independent set of initiatives led the Ford Foundation to make a grant of $110,000 to a group at the Asian Institute of Management (AIM) interested in the management of rural development programs. The Rockefeller and Konrad Adenaur Foundations made similar grants to AIM providing a total fund of some $300,000. Through this Ford Foundation connection, the head of the AIM Rural Development Management Program, was drawn into involvement with the NIA work, as were Ford Foundation staff who had joined the Ford Manila office at the beginning of 1978. All were interested in the problems of how government agencies could become more responsive to the needs of the rural poor. They saw in the NIA effort an

important opportunity to help a major agency actually develop such a response capability.

By mid-1978 the initial pilots were coming to an end and the question was raised: What now? Were these to be just two more pilot projects to be terminated and forgotten? These questions were addressed in the context of two critical lessons which had emerged out of the projects: 1) farmer beneficiaries did want to participate in irrigation development; and 2) it was very difficult for the agency to allow them to participate. The NIA's management felt that the agency should try again and two more pilots were authorized in August of 1978, with NIA and Ford again collaborating to provide the special funding needed.

At this time questions began to emerge regarding the utility of the conventional socio-economic survey mode of evaluation research done on the original pilot projects. The reports represented creative efforts at evaluation research, but gave no insights into what NIA personnel might do differently to be more effective in the second set of pilots. AIM and Ford staff collaborated on a case study to identify typical problems and useful lessons from the original two pilots. In doing so, they found that the anecdotes of the community organizers contained more information relevant to action than the carefully researched formal evaluation studies.

IPC and Ford staff were simultaneously holding discussions on alternative roles of the social scientist in working with an action agency. A stumbling block to effective collaboration was revealed to be the prevalent view among academic social scientists that to work actively with a government agency was to risk becoming an apologist for incompetent performance. Serving as an independent external evaluator to point up deficiencies in performance was considered acceptable, but other roles were suspect.

These experiences and discussions led to a workshop on irrigation and the social sciences in September of 1978 at IPC. It was attended by staff of the NIA, IPC, AIM and the Ford Foundation. Attention centered on defining the type of research that would be most helpful to the NIA's participatory irrigation program. Consensus emerged that at this stage it was important to have a detailed record of the field level process. Various people could draw upon this record to understand better the nature of the problems encountered by NIA engineers, community organizers, and farmers and how these could be resolved. Thus, it was decided to use the research funds allocated for the new pilots to place a specially trained social scientist at each field site to provide a detailed record of process. Within two months after the workshop, process documentation was begun on the original pilot sites.

Another important question involved how to select the sites for the new pilots. A look at then existing site selection procedures followed by the NIA for communal irrigation development revealed that decisions were often based on inadequate technical data and that social data were not considered at all. It was decided that the NIA needed a methodology by which its field staff could do a rapid but adequate assessment of a proposed site covering essential technical and social features. The result was the development of a socio-technical profiling methodology which provided tested guidelines for gathering data, writing it up, and analyzing it to determine whether the proposed project is viable and to anticipate key problems likely to arise.

The IPC anthropologist conducting the study of 51 communals emerged as an important potential leader in providing the NIA effort with the needed social science backstopping. In carrying out the study of 51 communals, she had already begun developing a team of researchers with first-hand

understanding of communal irrigation systems and their problems. Working together with the head of NIA's Communal Projects Implementation Department, she took on the task of developing and field testing the profiling methodology and of training NIA personnel in its use. A new concept of the social scientist's role in assisting an action agency was beginning to emerge--as neither critic nor apologist, but as a member of an agency-based coalition engaged in helping the agency act constructively on its own errors.

During this period AIM staff were becoming increasingly involved and interested. Members of its Rural Development Management Project visited the original pilot sites, held a workshop for the project engineers, organizers, and farmers, and studied the process documentation reports.

Various people from NIA, IPC, AIM, the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), and Ford started working on the problem of where to locate the next pilot sites. It was felt they should be under the charge of a Provincial Irrigation Engineer (PIE), since PIE's were normally responsible for communal irrigation development. But since the participatory idea was new and the methods were still being developed, it was decided that a particularly able and receptive PIE should be selected. NIA management suggested the PIE of Camarines Sur Province. A number of people made trips there from Manila to talk with the PIE and the NIA regional staff to explain the idea, test their interest, and encourage their participation. There was considerable time spent discussing the new ideas and their implications with regional and provincial personnel assigned in the area. Four new community organizers were hired and trained to work under the direction of the PIE.

Using the special fund established by NIA and Ford to support the communals work, the IPC team moved quickly to develop the protocols for data gathering and preparation of socio-technical profiles. They then guided the NIA community organizers who gathered the social data on sites while the provincial engineering staff gathered the technical data.

In February, 1979, a workshop involving some 40 people was held in Camarines Sur Province attended by central office, regional, and provincial staff of the NIA, as well as interested people from IPC, AIM, the Ford Foundation, and IRRI. First, the original pilot site experience was presented by the NIA engineers and organizers who had led this first NIA pilot, and its implication were discussed by the workshop participants. Then the participants intensively examined the six profiles of candidate sites, finding that each site posed very different problems. Two were chosen as pilot sites for applying the participatory approach, and community organizers began work in those sites immediately after the workshop. The workshop discussion raised a host of issues needing further attention at both field and central office levels. Everyone left with a clearer sense of why it was essential that NIA approach communal irrigation development not simply as a construction task but as a task in developing both the social and technical capacities of a community to operate and maintain an irrigation system. The profiles represented the conversion of a research methodology into a planning tool for routine agency use. This planning tool had in turn been used to generate materials that were used simultaneously for planning and to provide agency personnel with a powerful learning experience.

Formation of the CIC

By this time a number of people, both within the NIA and the collaborating institutions, were devoting quite substantial amounts of time to the communal irrigation problem. There had been numerous site visits, preparations for and post-mortems of workshops, preparation of materials, discussions of the new ideas with regional and provincial personnel, etc. It had been somewhat awkward dealing with such matters as who would pay for travel expenses and what the non-NIA people would tell their institutions about what was consuming so much of their time. Even those from within the NIA were from various divisions and they too needed to be able to explain what justified taking so much time from their more immediate responsibilities. The effort needed an identity and a mechanism by which the individuals involved could work together on a more regular and structured basis.

Engineer Bagadion and Ford staff determined that a special committee would help resolve these problems. A memo was prepared to Administrator Juinio recommending creation of the special committee, which was subsequently approved. That committee, named the Communal Irrigation Committee, held its first formal meeting in March, 1979. Built around the people from NIA, IPC, AIM, and IRRI who had been working together already on an informal basis, it also included representation from other NIA offices felt to be important to the effort, as well as people from a variety of other institutions engaged in community organizing for irrigation. In June, 1979 the Ford Foundation made a grant of $100,000 to support the work of the CIC and NIA matched it two for one. Henceforth, the CIC coordinated all training, research, and technical assistance activities related to building NIA capacity for a participatory approach to communal irrigation development. It also assumed the task of identifying

conflicts between NIA management systems such as budgeting, evaluation, and contracting procedures on one hand and the requirements of the participatory approach on the other.

While most of the activity had so far focused on the preconstruction and construction phases of communal system development, it was recognized that attention also needed to be paid to how NIA could help irrigators associations with actual water management. So the group of researchers from IRRI and the University of the Philippines at Los Banos (UPLB) who had been working with the CIC contracted, through a private firm they established, to begin action research on water management for communal irrigation systems. In June, 1979, process documentation was started at the two pilot sites in Camarines Sur.

By late 1979 it was decided that the socio-technical profiling technology was sufficiently developed and tested to be applied selectively on a larger scale. The IPC anthropologists were engaged to assist in the training of NIA personnel to serve as profile writers.

Expansion Phase

Toward the end of 1979 the question again arose, what next? The CIC discussed the possibility of expanding the number of NIA assisted projects using the participatory approach so as to test it under a wider variety of conditions and simultaneously increase the number of NIA personnel experienced in its application. In December of 1979, CIC members and some community organizers and engineers from the pilot projects met in a workshop with the Regional Directors from NIA's 12 regions. They described the earlier pilot experiences, exposed the Directors to the profiling technology, and asked whether they would be interested in having pilots in their respective regions. Prior to this time the NIA had been working under an

arrangement through which the Farm Systems Development Corporation did the organizing work with farmers, while NIA did the construction. There had been little effective coordination and the conflicts which resulted between organizers and engineers had generated substantial unhappiness with the arrangement on the part of all concerned. The Regional Irrigation Directors were intrigued with the idea of NIA hiring its own organizers to be fielded with the engineers as part of an integrated project team. Each was interested in having a pilot project in his region.

The NIA then authorized twelve new pilots to begin the following year. Twenty-four new organizers were hired, with the organizers from earlier pilot projects serving as their trainers and supervisors. In March, 1980, the CIC sponsored a series of site selection workshops at which regional personnel analyzed the socio-technical profiles that had been recently developed on prospective pilot sites in their respective regions. Each region selected one site and the community organizers were fielded shortly after the workshops.

The CIC subsequently chose one of the 12 new pilots (Iloilo) for process documentation. Only one was chosen because of cost, personnel limitations (process documentation requires highly qualified researchers), and the desire to have detailed information on only a few systems so as not to generate more information than could be absorbed and used.

By mid-1980 the CIC needed additional funding and Ford provided NIA a grant of $350,000--again matched by NIA. Ford also provided a new grant of $150,000 to AIM. The involvement of AIM staff in CIC activities all through this period had been funded largely through the separate grants to AIM from Ford, Rockefeller, and Konrad Adenauer Foundations, which covered a variety of other activities as well. The substantial IPC participation in the CIC was, by contrast, financed through a series of individual contracts with the NIA using the special NIA-Ford fund.

The activities highlighted here are only a small part of the picture. There was and continues to be a continuing stream of conversations, meetings, workshops, memos, reports, and analyses carried out or prepared by members of the CIC and involving very substantial time commitments by individuals both within the NIA and from the collaborating institutions. Much of this time could not be related to specific contractable outputs. Planning and implementation were iterative rather than separable and sequential. The process depended on people having time committed to the general work of the CIC which could be used flexibly to respond to needs and opportunities as they arose. The AIM grants and the IPC contracts were arranged to provide this flexibility even though the IPC contracts were more clearly related to specific outputs.

By the time the second grant was made to NIA to support the work of the CIC, it was already evident that the twelve new pilots were just the first round in an expansion process that would soon be extended to include all provinces. So IPC was asked to provide a second course in profile writing. AIM received a contract from the NIA to provide a one-month training course for provincial irrigation engineers which covered a variety of basic management methods in addition to providing them an orientation to the participatory approach to communal irrigation development. AIM had by now developed substantial expertise relating to communal irrigation and NIA operations. Much of the training it provided utilized case studies which its staff had prepared based on experience from the earlier pilots. Twenty-four provincial engineers attended and in March, 1981, each of them initiated their own pilots using the participatory methods. Forty-eight new organizers were hired and trained to handle this new load, and again their trainers and supervisors came from the ranks of NIA's more experienced organizers.

In 1980 the question arose as to whether the methods used with the communal (farmer owned and operated, and generally smaller) systems might be adapted to the larger NIA managed systems. The idea was that the NIA could serve as a wholesaler of water to a number of irrigator associations within the command area of the larger system. An agreement was reached between NIA and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to use the USAID funded Buhi-Lalo system as a pilot to experiment with developing such associations and involving them in system design and construction using methods developed on the communals. Funds for the initial process documentation came from NIA's CIC funds. Since the social science research team working with the CIC had by this time broken off from IPC, the process documentation on Buhi-Lalo was contracted to former members of the IPC team through the Ateneo de Naga, a local university located near the project site.

Regionalization

By mid-1981, it was clear that the participatory approach would eventually be extended to all NIA-assisted communal irrigation projects as rapidly as the capacity could be developed to do so. Realistically, this could happen only to the extent that leadership and support activities were decentralized to regional levels. The CIC focused its attention on the requirements of this task.

Another conference was held with the Regional Irrigation Directors to review the participatory program, determine whether they were willing to take on more leadership in the effort, and explore what activities should be decentralized to the regional level. The Regional Directors were eager to move quickly in expanding the program and requested that the entire effort be regionalized. The CIC turned to developing the capacities and systems that would allow profile writing, site selection, hiring and

supervision of community organizers, and review of projects to be handled at the regional level with some central support. AIM assisted in training the 43 provincial irrigation engineers who had not yet entered the program and helped orient the numerous regional personnel involved so that they could adapt their activities to the requirements of the participatory approach.

In 1982, over 100 new projects were scheduled to use the participatory approach. The CIC, together with an array of regional personnel, was working to see that systems were in place to support using the participatory approach on that scale. Developing standardized training modules for the substantial number of new community organizers to be hired was one of their concerns in this regard. Institutionalizing within the NIA the training and support activities which previously had been carried out by external members of the CIC was another. It was assumed that once capacities were institutionalized to support application of the participatory approach on all NIA assisted projects, the external support could be substantially diminished.