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# A PROMISE TO THE PEASANT

## The Development of Instruments of Progress for the Filipino Farmer, and Some Obstacles Confronting Him

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A PROMISE TO THE PEASANT
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Few peoples of the modern world have more intensely sought for instruments of progress to apply to their peasant communities than have the people of the Philippines. For all that may be said about inadequacies and shortcomings, that search itself is something to be deeply proud of. It has sent up beacons to other peoples of Asia and even to Latin America. It is the mark of a nation probing deeply into its own destiny.

A workshop in which the representatives of two nations meet to reassess the future of the farm and the farmer in The Philippines would be incomplete without a backward view. For in the last twenty years this search, this promise to the peasant who constitutes the foundation of national existence, has proliferated in many forms and institutions. Some have atrophied, others have been transformed, still others have persisted through difficult circumstances.

In this curious and complex history, however, several transcendent meanings have emerged. First of all, it has meant a recognition that nationhood is empty if it is not well founded in the texture of the people -- in the very lives of men and women as they are spun out in the fabric of the nation's most basic institutions, the family and the community. It is people that count -- not gross national product, nor bureaucracy, nor structures, nor statistics. These are important only if they touch or reflect the lives and aspirations of people. Secondly, the Philippine experience would seem to indicate that full progress in the rural sector calls for an integration of assets, local and national. Unlike local societies in technically sophisticated parts of the world, the rural peasant society retains an organic, holistic quality, and the functions of its members are not differentiated in technical and professional terms. It cannot easily digest technological specialization. The application of one kind of technical improvement has repercussions on all other local conditions, and this is a very subtle fact of life that is difficult for the specialist to understand. Hence, the Philippine experience has called into being a new kind of public service: call him what you will, he is an integrative agent of progressive change, living and serving in the fabric of the local society.

A third transcendent meaning of the Philippine experience in the development of its predominantly rural society lies in the recognition that rural "take-off" cannot occur without the strengthening of a local government system. And to represent the aspirations of local societies, that system must depend upon freely elected officers with powers and resources to act in response to the needs of their communities. Only then does the community become a viable, representative juridical person in the eyes of the nation. A representative local government, capable of integrating available local and national assets for the welfare of

local people, is the foundation upon which all the superstructure for people-oriented local development is built. The local government is indeed the creation of the nation-state, but giving it strength and power requires an act of faith by national leadership.

In these days of nationalism one easily forgets that organized local society existed long before the nation and persists through all the permutations of nationhood. Indeed the centralized state did not exist in the Philippines until forged through foreign, western incursions. Centralization essentially occurred, or was superimposed on local societies, as a means to exercise foreign power, alas too frequently for exploitive purposes. But before Spanish dominance took root in the 16th century, the people of the Philippines were organized into numerous, self-contained communities usually known as barangays -- a word traceable to the crafts which carried the great migration of Malay peoples to the archipelago before the dawn of the Christian era. Throughout the first fifteen centuries of the Christian era the efforts of external powers to exercise central control on certain areas was tenuous and largely unsuccessful. The Indo-Malayan Sri Vijayan empire on Sumatra somewhat erratically tried to extend its influence to the Philippines between the eighth and the fourteenth centuries. Islam, through its remarkable extension of trade, was unable to take firm root in the settled parts of the Philippines except in Mindanao and Sulu, and even here they failed to form a central political structure. In the early 15th century the Chinese Ming Emperor, Yungo Lo, appointed a governor for Luzon and exacted tribute, but the effort at establishing Chinese central control was abortive.[2]

Significantly, the success of the Spanish conquest of the latter half of the 16th century depended less on a policy of total armed force, as in the case of Mexico and Peru, than on a systematic courting of one local datu or chieftain after another and thus taking advantage of rivalries between communities. The transcending institution of the Spanish era was the Church, its chief instrument in local society was the missionary-priest, its prevailing physical form was the civic plaza dominated by the local chapel or church. Today these elements are still permanently rooted in the rural Philippines and constitute an important ingredient in the institutional "mix" for rural life. However, Spanish concepts of property rooted out the old barangay system of the communal use and ownership of land and introduced the large, privately-controlled landholding through local chiefs and nobility and through royal land grants to privileged families and religious orders. The introduction of a carefully controlled international trade system added to the centralization of wealth. Repression through these institutional overlays inevitably followed. That is past history now, but even today, nearly 70 years after

the conclusion of Spanish control, problems of land distribution and the inequities of the highly centralized control of wealth and power seriously impede the improvement of rural life.

Still a different set of dimensions was introduced by what has been called the United States' only fully avowed "adventure in imperialism," starting at the conclusion of the Spanish-American War in 1898. Whatever may have been the mixed motives of this "adventure," and for the accidents that led to it, the Americans did implant two new major institutions in the Philippines. One was modern government in that it was to be service-oriented, with a clear separation of powers and a responsiveness to the needs of people. U.S. Administrators developed bureaus of agriculture, forestry, fisheries, mining, science, and the customs service. The U.S. Army and its engineers, in response to the fearful toll exacted by cholera and other epidemics, dug wells, installed sewage systems and otherwise contributed to a conscious attack on public health problems. A second major institution was the public school system. The so-called "Thomasites," teachers selected by civil service examination and brought over from America in an army transport from which they got their name, are still remembered They introduced new values with a dedication reminiscent of the 16th century missionary-priests -- values of democracy, self-determination, progress, knowledge. As early as 1902 elective government was introduced into Philippine municipalities, and in 1907 an elected national lower house offered opportunities for a new kind of Filipino leadership.

Every Filipino, and many Americans, know what enormous strains and incredible sufferings had been experienced in the Islands during World War II. This time, and the period immediately following, was a major watershed in Philippine history. The war symbolized a conclusion to old systems and values and the awakening of new hopes and ideas. It also symbolized the will to be free. But when the war ended and the Philippines became a fully independent Republic on July 4, 1946, enormous problems of rehabilitation faced the new nation. Filipino expectations were high, and the new government had to face increasing demands. Land tenancy was very high in many of the best and most populous rural areas, credit was available only at usurious rates, agriculture suffered from low productivity, lack of transport for marketing, and other ills.

In addition to the massive problems of rehabilitation and redevelopment, there was little time to respond to the mounting expectations of people in the rural areas. The resultant dissatisfactions were captured by the Hukbalahap movement which became an instrument, forged by communist sources, to overthrow the new government. It became more important than ever for the government to sensitize itself to the rural areas and the seemingly hopeless poverty of those areas. It was this sensitization which generated a chain of responses to rural needs from many different sectors and in many different formats.

Jose Abueva noted seven conditions that helped awaken the Philippines to the existence, the critical importance, and the unhappy condition of its peasant communities, and brought about a "national introspection". These were (1) the spread of democratic values in a changing society, (2) renewed agrarian and political unrest, (3) the exodus of urban populations into the country during the Japanese occupation, (4) postwar socio-economic studies, (5) experiments in directed change in rural communities, (6) the influx of foreign ideas of "rural reconstruction" and later of "community development," and (7) the presidential campaign and victory of Ramon Magsaysay.[3]

Reconstruction required the primary attention of the newly independent Philippines between 1946 and 1950. But in the 1950-55 period various longer-range economic plans were developed, Bilateral aid was launched, and wage and tax measures were passed, while at the same time the government was beset by the Huk insurrection and many halting frustrations. It was in this period that a great renewal of interest in the fate of the rural sector took place. It is perhaps significant that one of the earliest indigenous expressions of this interest had religious origins. The Barangay Sang Virgen began in 1949, and although its primary goal was religious, it found its most useful expression in the development of home industries, the formation of cooperatives, and the mounting of other community improvement projects, and today there are Barangay centers in many rural areas in the Islands. Another private, Catholic lay organization, the Columbian Farmers Aid Association, was formed in 1951 to promote the welfare of tenant farmers and resist the incursions of communism among them by establishing welfare, recreational, study and cottage industry activities.

It was in 1951 also that the National Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL) began to prepare the way not only for a revitalization of political responsibility but also for the development of community life, of which the Committee for Philippine Action on Development, Reconstruction and Education (COMPADRE) was a significant expression. NAMFREL, founded at the initiative of the Philippine Veterans Legion, soon realized that free and honest elections could not be achieved in a vacuum. One of its most significant devices to "expand the economic, social and cultural horizons" of the Filipino was to develop community centers, to which the international CARE organization donated the equipment. The effort was imaginatively experimental, and though the centers did suffer managerial shortcomings, Kenneth Schneider assessed their results this way: "Almost a decade later the importance of the community centers can be seen in their effect on national policies and on community development thinking, rather than on the direct benefits of the centers themselves. However, these community centers did help stimulate the construction of roads, fishponds, sanitation improvements, and helped increase local crop production and cooperative marketing."[4]

Once beyond the most pressing demands of war reconstruction, the Philippine government itself turned to the job of strengthening the fabric of rural life. In 1951 the Economic Development Corporation (EDCOR) was formed under Ramon Magsaysay, then Secretary of National Defense, to provide opportunities for ex-servicemen and former dissidents of the Huk movement to resettle on Government lands. The Bureau of Agricultural Extension was formed in 1952 to extend the application of the agricultural sciences into the countryside and stimulate home improvement and youth activities in rural communities. The same year saw the formation of the Agricultural Credit and Cooperative Financing Administration (ACCFA)[5] to promote Farmers Cooperative and Marketing Associations (FaCoMas) to help extend credit to the farmer. In retrospect the ACCFA program gave more emphasis to organization than to proper control, to rapid extension of loans than to careful estimates of their potential. This plus the diversion of ACCFA and the FaCoMas into other speculative government programs unfortunately climaxed about 1960 and undermined the operation. But the principle of rural credit assistance by government was at least established. The establishment of the Agricultural Credit and Cooperative Institute (ACCI) in 1960, a combination of both academic and government agencies, finally faced up to the essential problem -- adequate training of personnel for service in cooperatives, rural credit and banking.

Rural banks were initiated in 1952 when the Philippine Congress passed one of its more far-reaching pieces of legislation.[6] This authorized the creation of small private banks to cope with short term production needs of small farmers and small merchants at more realistic interest rates than those charged by the traditional rural money-lender. Happily, the Rural Banks Department of the Central Bank of the Philippines provides both supervision and technical assistance to the rural banks. Government extended still another dimension of rural development in these years when in 1953 it inaugurated a system of Rural Health Units under the Bureau of Health Services. Since then the RHUs have been extended to virtually all municipalities in the country and have had a significant impact on public understanding of and attitudes toward health.

Yet throughout this critical period the efforts of private voluntary groups in the Philippines kept pace with government in reaching a helping hand to the peasant and the rural community. The Federation of Free Farmers of the Philippines (FFFP) was formally inaugurated in 1953 as an agrarian feform movement motivated by Christian and democratic principles. It aims to develop farmer leadership and undergird the farmer's consciousness of dignity, to increase his share in the fruits of his own labor, and to extend his technical capability. Among its distinguishing marks is the fact that it is an organization of farmers with a moral mandate for stimulating self-help.

The Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement (PRRM) is the oldest continuously operated community development program in the Philippines and the largest private, voluntary CD effort in the country. It helped to generate much of the idealism that later took root in official channels for the development of community life. Its Rural Reconstruction Workers each serve a single barrio. The program of PRRM is a comprehensive attack on four of the most prevalent problems of barrio life -- poverty, disease, ignorance, and civic inertia. This comprehensive program takes shape through what is termed the Model Farm Family, whereby a specified family helps to spark individual participation in barrio development and the growth of vigorous local organization. All in all, the program is quite specific in its phasing of the plan of action, exacting in its agricultural, public health, educational and other technical inputs, and an important contribution to Philippine local development.

As a result of this broad sweep of voluntary concern for the conditions of barrio life, a host of coluntary associations, domestic as well as imported, adopted the implicit idealism of community development. One might almost call it a Philippine "religion". At any rate, the participation of religious and secular voluntary organizations steadily mounted. The YMCA Work Camps for college students on summer vacations may be cited as an example. In this program students donate their labor to help carry through barrio projects. An even more notable example of voluntary service to the rural community -- this one going beyond national boundaries of service -- is Operational Brotherhood, initiated in 1954 by the Philippine Junior Chambers of Commerce. Utilizing preventive medicine as the central means to help introduce change, OB teams began operations in Vietnam in 1954, and teams have been operating in Laos since 1957. It is indeed one of the modern world's more noteworthy private efforts by one developing country to respond to the rural needs of another. Still another example of voluntary effort principally focussed on the conditions of the rural community is the work of World Neighbors, a world-wide movement which formally started in the Philippines in 1956. Its field workers "assist, encourage, and stimulate" barrio people in relation to improvement in agricultural practices, village industries, health and citizenship by means of a family-centered "friendly neighbor" approach. It too has contributed to international interest in community development.

Toward the end of this earlier period, a period essentially experimental in its efforts to improve the conditions of rural community life, government activity was principally focussed on resettlement, land distribution, and rural credit. President Magsaysay's "land for the landless" program prompted the organization of the National Resettlement and Rehabilitation Administration (NARRA) which in 1954 became the principal agency for planning and settling Filipinos on undeveloped public lands, a program based in part on earlier precedents.

A complete range of services to settlers was made available but their costs were charged to him. In addition, roads, schools, community and health centers, irrigation works and other "infrastructure" were also planned. The Land Tenure Administration (LTA) was made responsible for carrying out the provisions of the Land Reform Act of 1955. However, according to at least one authority, effective land redistribution proceeded slowly because of defects and loopholes in the Act, inadequate financial outlays, lack of provisions for credit to tenants, and tax policies that still favored the large landholder.[7] At about this period also a Cooperatives Administration Office was formed to redevelop confidence in rural cooperatives of a non-agricultural character. Its work stimulated the development of credit unions, consumer cooperatives and, to a small degree, cooperatives for small-scale industry.

Starting in about 1956 we seem to approach what might be referred to the "classic" as distinct from the "experimental" period of rural development in the Philippines -- at least in so far as broader, more fully institutionalized efforts began to evolve. The general character of what happened then was that nation-building in terms of the revitalization of local community life was officially legitimized. Community development became a national policy -- perhaps a national creed. Three important national elements were involved: (a) the central government through the establishment of the office of Presidential Assistant on Community Development (PACD), (b) the university community, and finally (c) the nation's local governments as strengthened and revitalized through the Barrio Charter.

The office of Presidential Assistant on Community Development (PACD) was created in January 1956 in response to the now general recognition, particularly on the part of President Magsaysay and his associates, that true nation-building, if it is to have permanence in the life of its people, must start at the bottom of the pyramid.[8] It is significant that the Executive Order creating PACD defined community development as "a process designed to create conditions of economic and social progress for the whole community with the active participation and largely upon the initiative of the community." (Italics supplied). In short, the creating instrument officially recognized the organic, interrelated and holistic nature of the community and that community self-help focussed on its own internal needs was the essential working principle to be followed.

Historically, this was of considerable importance -- not only to the Philippines but also to the general theory of development. Moreover, the early experience of PACD soon proved the need for a new kind of development professional -- what was referred to earlier in this paper as the integrative agent of change, an imaginative stimulator of progressive courses of action in direct service to community leaders. To find these people PACD recruited almost solely from the ranks of college graduates who demonstrated some of the same kind of dynamism which, parenthetically

was illustrated later in the U.S. Peace Corps. There were good reasons for limiting recruitment to graduates -- there were more of them than could usefully be absorbed by the job market, they had been exposed to the various fields of knowledge applicable to the development process, they were young and dedicated and hopeful, and the further training process could usually overcome any negative residues of academic and urban sophistication.

The program asked a great deal from its personnel, for there existed no well-tested set of solutions to the overall problem of integrating specialized government services with local needs and resources to provide the community with an orchestrated forward movement. Heretofore the development process focussed primarily on the improvement of central government services in separate categories of specialized fields. PACD in effect offered a dramatic alternative -- bringing the development process direct to the community in a comprehensive, integrated pattern. But two problems loomed on the horizon.

The first was the problem of adapting program objectives with sufficient flexibility to respond to unique and special local circumstances and conditions, and to develop an effective field staff capable of integrating specialized resources. The second problem had to do less with local integration but more fundamentally with involving central ministries and departments in full and direct participation in the massive crusade for the development of rural community life. The dilemna -- local integration vs. central specialization -- is a central issue of development theory; many governments, both rich and poor, have not resolved that dilemna. If therefore the PACD program proceeded more slowly than expected or hoped, if it did not through the years gain the financial support it needed, it should nevertheless be recognized that its task was both monumental and historically significant.

One of the more profound aspects of President Magsaysay's executive order establishing PACD was the provision for creating provincial and municipal community development counsils. The PACD program, because of its localized focus, required a structure through which it could function. The councils supplied that missing element, and in effect prepared the way for the significant changes in local government that were to follow.

Before proceeding with that subject, however, the support and interest of the university community in the Philippines is worth both praise and comment. Perhaps by now the Philippines has a cadre of several thousand people especially trained as barrio development workers, in addition to many others who have received special training as local officers at provincial, municipal and barrio levels. That is no mean accomplishment. Most PACD training of barrio workers has taken place at the Community Development Center at Los Baños on the campus of the College of Agriculture of the University of the Philippines. It is not without significance that the Center was developed by a forward-looking exercise of cooperation between government and university. Its practical curriculum -- emphasizing principles and processes of community development, the role of government at the grassroots, group work and group dynamics, rural sociology and agricultural economics, and familiarization with technical services, skills and resources -- has not been without influence in programs and institutions of other countries.

Still another significant evidence of university-government cooperation resulted the same year (1957) in the formation of the *Community Development Research Council at the University of the Philippines. Its principal purpose is to undertake interdisciplinary research useful to community development programs and to evaluate, with objectivity, the effects of such programs. Availability of a professional research service to provide guidance and depth to these programs not only has the obvious advantage of program enrichment but also the very useful effect of stimulating the interest of the community of social science scholars.

Another, independent, and quite remarkable experimental program of community development through the resources of a university also took shape in 1957. The Silliman University Community Development Program involved both students and faculty in community studies and extension of educational services to barrio people. The First Report[10] of the program announced a desire to "test experimentally in the field five approaches to community development" -- identified as the modern farmer's approach, the farmer's friend approach, the community group study, the community school, and the church community service approach. The program encompassed radio programming for local development stimulation, the formation of credit unions, stimulation of community arts, community school assemblies, and a variety of other activities in child welfare, chicken raising, clinical services, and small industry development.

Since mention of radio for rural development education has been made, special mention should be made of the Nateonal Special Radio Committee, established by President Garcia in 1958. Its objective was to locate radios donated principally by the International CARE organization in isolated barrios and develop useful programs for them to establish links of communication to sections of the country remote from its mainstream. Nearly 70 percent of the CARE radios were placed in barrios without a connecting road. While the local use of these radios may not have fulfilled all the high educational objectives originally conceived for them, the program has nevertheless been praised as an imaginative and bold effort that helped hundreds of thousands visualize a wider world and, perhaps, an emergent sense of nationhood.

In many respects the crown to all of these efforts to strengthen the rural community was the Barrio Charter that took effect the first day of 1960.[11] Accompanying it were laws which strengthened the financial procedures and independence of provinces, cities and municipalities and for making elective the principal officers of chartered cities. Altogether this constituted an historic vote of confidence in the capacities of local units to govern themselves, to work out their own destinies as communities. It was in a sense the climax to the revolutionary implications of the many efforts previously noted to build nationhood at the local level.

This is not the place to review the legislation or its effect thus far. That there are still shortfalls in the conduct of local government with its enlarged responsibilities, that there is continued restiveness with the lack of financial authority currently available to local governments, that property assessments for tax purposes and the collection of taxes are at too low a rate -- such shortfalls may have inhibited the full flowering of local autonomy. But at least a firm juridical structure for local self-help and self-determination has been established.

The writer is very conscious of the fact that a number of institutional as well as governmental efforts to fulfill the "promise to the peasant" have gone unmentioned in this paper. This is perhaps most glaringly true in regard to Philippin efforts in land reform. The Land Reform Program was described by President Macapagal in 1965 as "a revolution in itself, part of the peaceful, ambitious unfinished revolution which we are now waging to win for our people an adequate measure of prosperity and well being.[12]

Despite divisions imposed by nature, languages, ethnic groupings, poverty and wealth, political sensitiveness, the overall record referred to in this paper seems to demonstrate a national will to seek unity through the diversity of its local components. The Philippine revolution, which may be said to have started as far back as 1896, has deepened its meaning in proportion to the efforts made to bring dignity, economic viability, and political identity to the peasant. It is interesting to note that the term "peasant" itself is changing its character. He is no longer the wretched, "historyless" nonentity portrayed in former times; he is a human being, capable of self-determination, to whom a promise has been made.

Deep-delving, peaceful revolutions do not take place overnight. Methods and approaches vary from year to year, agencies with different points of departure overlap or fail to work together, definitions change, legislation requires time and a subtle balancing of political concerns, institutions proliferate their activities, experimentation with different forms and intensities continues. Pilot programs, like those currently undertaken in the provinces of Tarlac and Laguna with the active assistance of the U. S. AID mission, deepen the reservoir of experience for the development tasks ahead.

But the great framework for developing the rural sector where 80 percent of the Philippine people live and have their being has been constructed. No doubt parts of the picture are still out of focus; by no means all of the promises have been fulfilled. But it is significant that President Marcos' Executive Order No. 1 raised the office of the Presidential Assistant on Community Development, the central mechanism for this national task, to cabinet level. This was done on the occasion of the Tenth Anniversary of PACD, January 6, 1966. In doing so President Marcos had this to say: "I will utilize whatever resources and facilities are within my command and influence, to enable a more effective and vigorous implementation of this program directed to bring social justice and a more meaningful life to all -- the best way to make 'this nation great again'".[13]

## NOTES

1. For general background to the contents of this paper the following principal sources may be cited:

   (a) An unpublished Study of Resources and Opportunities for Philippine Rural Development, by Kenneth Schneider -- an assignment sponsored by the international CARE organization and supervised by the author (New York: CARE, 1961, 273 pages plus several volumes of field reports). Many references to specific institutions and activities cited in the paper referred to information gleaned from the Schneider manuscript.

   (b) "Living in a Barrio: A Complete Report on Community Development in the Philippines," by Senator Pacita Madrigal-Gonzales, serialized in The Manila Chronicle in 26 parts starting June 12, 1958.

   (c) Local Government in Developing Countries by H. F. Alderfer (New York: McGraw-Hill Series on International Development, 1964, 251 pages). Other materials were also supplied to the author by Dr. Alderfer collected at the time he served as a consultant to the Philippines for the drafting of the Barrio Charter.

   (d) "Local Government in the Philippines, 1963", prepared by the Public Administration Division, U.S. Operations Mission (29 pages mimeo.).

   (e) "A Brief Statement of The Philippines Community Development Program" (Manila: PACD, 1965, 29 pages mimeo.).

   (f) The Dynamics of Power in a Philippine Municipality by Mary R. Hollnsteiner (University of the Philippines: Community Development Research Council, 1963, 227 pages).

   (g) Social Foundations of Community Development: Readings on the Philippines by Socorro C. Espiritu & Chester L. Hunt (Manila: R. M. Garcia Publishing House, 1964, 684 pages).

2. Albert Ravenholt, The Philippines, a Young Republic on the Move (Princeton: Van Nostrand Company, The Asia Library, 1962), see pages 31-36. The same work served as a point of reference for other historical aspects of the paper.

3. Jose V. Abueva, Focus on the Barrio (University of the Philippines: Institute of Public Administration, 1959), pages 11-12.

4. Schneider, op. cit., page 99.

5. Republic Act No. 821 (August 1952).

6. Republic Act No. 720 (1952).

7. Isidro S. Macaspac, "Land Reform Aspects of the Agricultural Development Program" (National Economic Council, 1961, mimeo.).

8. Executive Order No. 156 (January 1956).

9. See "Your University's Community Development Research Project," published by the Council (n.d.).

10. Silliman University's Community Development Program: First Report (Dumaguete City: Silliman University, 1959, 142 pages).

11. Republic Act No. 2370, "An Act Granting Autonomy to Barrios of the Philippines," approved 20 June 1959.

12. "Basic Facts about the Land Reform Program" (Manila: National Land Reform Council, 1965, pamphlet). The land reform legislation is Republic Act No. 3844, "Agricultural Land Reform Code," 1963.

13. Quoted in The Manila Times, January 6, 1966.