

# **Participation of Farmer Leaders in Local and National Governance Structures: Will it Work? -**

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*This paper aims to present the outcomes of participation of farmer leaders elected to local and national government positions. At the local levels, these positions include being chiefs of villages, members of the local village council, mayor, and municipal councilor; while at the national level, being representative of a party list in Congress. This research looks into the outcomes on four aspects: on the individual leader, specifically on their views regarding the parliamentary struggle and its contribution to advancing their development agenda; on the benefits that accrue to the people's organization; on the services that were rendered to the community; and how the leaders achieved and promoted their sectoral development agenda as elected officials. The study also intends to surface lessons and implications to community development theory and practice in terms of leadership development, community organizing, community governance and empowerment.*

*The case studies provide rich insights on the role of farmer leaders in local and national governance. The cases show the importance of practicing the values of being persistent, consultative, participatory, and selfless service, which the leaders have learned from their respective organizations and carried with them even when they are now in government positions. Their experiences demonstrate that people's organizations are good training ground for future leaders in government. Moreover, the leaders have shown that if elected officials have the welfare of people in mind, remote areas will not be neglected and will be provided with basic infrastructure and social services which people have aspired for over the years.*

Keywords: community governance, leadership development, community development

### **Introduction**

People's organizations (POs) have for a long time been involved in leadership development, advocacy and community development (Manalili, 1984). Farmers' organizations in particular have been engaged in struggles for agrarian reform in the Philippines for decades (Banzuela, 2010; CCS, 1994; KMP, n.d.; Vallejos & Vallejos, 2010). Over the years, capacities of farmer leaders in organizing, networking, negotiation and advocacy were strengthened as they brought their development agenda, policy proposals and other concerns to various government agencies, at the local, national and even international levels. They also experienced organizing coalitions with other farmer organizations such as Congress for a People's Agrarian Reform (CPAR), from which a lot of lessons have been generated specially since this was one of the first broad coalitions that launched a national campaign for the People's Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Code or PARCODE (Razon-Abad, 1996). Farmers' organizations also established alliances with other sectoral organizations, such as when they got involved in national protest actions against the Marcos dictatorship and oil price hikes. As organizing work progresses, e.g. organizing from village level to municipal, regional, and national levels, new leaders always have to be developed from the ranks of the members of the people's organizations to take the place of those who have been elected to higher levels.

The 1987 Philippine Constitution and the 1991 Local Government Code opened new doors for people's organizations to fully participate in governance structures, such as through the party list system in Congress. Armed with their varied skills and experiences, the leaders resolved to venture into this new field and joined the electoral process at the local and national levels. They realized that this is an option open to them to bring forward their development agenda to a wider scale, despite the fact that they still had to learn the ropes of the parliamentary struggle. A few ran in the national level through the party list

system. Some ran and won seats at the local levels, such as *barangay* captains (village chiefs) and *kagawads* (village councilors), while others were nominated to local development councils, as mandated by the Local Government Code of 1991. They participated in community governance, bringing with them a style of leadership they learned in their organization, leadership which adheres to transparency and accountability.

While literature abound on the outcomes of establishing farmers organizations, there is scant material available on gains made from the participation of farmer leaders in the electoral arena. This research aims to identify the outcomes of the engagement of PO leaders in local and national governance structures on four aspects: on the individual leader, specifically on their views regarding the parliamentary struggle and its contribution to advancing their development agenda; on the benefits that accrue to the people's organization; on the services that were rendered to the community; and how they promoted their sectoral development agenda as elected officials. The unintended effects or negative consequences will likewise be identified. Moreover, lessons and insights that will be useful for community development education will be generated from the case studies.

This research used the case study approach as it interviewed selected PO leaders. Purposive sampling was done in the selection of study areas and of PO leaders. At the national level, one representative from a party list, representing farmer-leaders, was interviewed. At the local level, six farmer leaders in local elective and appointive positions were interviewed. The research is limited to those who were elected since the 2001 elections. This was the year when national POs like Bayan Muna started to participate in the partylist elections.

This paper contains the following sections: context of the study; conceptual framework; brief description of the PO leaders; engagement in electoral process; research findings; lessons for community organizing and community development.

### **Context of the Study**

Aside from the re-establishment of democracy in the country, one of the gains in the EDSA People Power Revolution (EDSA 1) against the Marcos Dictatorship is the acceptance of the various roles of the people in shaping democracy, which produced significant changes in our political arena. The concepts 'people power,' 'people empowerment,' and 'people's participation' inspired the individuals who crafted the new Constitution. In 2012, the Philippines marked the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1987 Constitution. This constitution is different from its predecessor since it highlights the roles of non-government and people's organizations in national development, as cited in the following sections:

*Art 2, Sec.23: The State shall encourage non-governmental, community-based, or sectoral organizations that promote the welfare of the nation;*

*Art 13, Sec. 15: The State shall respect the role of independent people's organizations to enable the people to pursue and protect, within the democratic framework, their legitimate and collective interests and aspirations through peaceful and lawful means. People's organizations are bona fide associations of citizens with demonstrated capacity to promote the public interest and with identifiable leadership, membership, and structure; and,*

*Art 13, Sec. 16: The right of the people and their organizations to effective and reasonable participation at all levels of social, political, and economic decision-making shall not be abridged. The State shall, by law, facilitate the establishment of adequate consultation mechanisms.*

The 1987 Constitution also introduced the concept of the Partylist System, through which marginalized sectors of our society may be elected to Congress. They were allotted seats in the House of Representatives provided that they earned the required votes.

Article VI Section 5(2) of the 1987 Constitution states:

*The party-list representatives shall constitute twenty-percentum of the total number of representatives including those under the party-*

*list. For three consecutive terms after the ratification of this Constitution, one half of the seats allocated to the party-list representatives shall be filled as provided by law, by selection or election from the labor, peasant, urban poor, indigenous cultural communities, women, youth, and such other sectors as maybe provided by law except the religious sector.*

The system was fully implemented in 1998 when the enabling law for the Party List representation was enacted in 1995, eight years after the enactment of the 1987 Constitution. The first party-list election was held in 1998, and since then, poor and underrepresented sectors have been given the opportunity to elect a representative and bring their concerns and advocacies in the halls of the House of Representatives (CenPEG, 2007, p. 47).

Increasing and strengthening the role of the citizens and their People's Organizations (POs) and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) in political, social and economic decision making paved the way for other laws from 1987 up to the present time.

Local Autonomy through Decentralization and Devolution of the power of the National Government, implemented as Republic Act 7160, otherwise known as the Local Government Code (LGC) of 1991, also enabled the participation of the people as individuals or as members of their POs and NGOs in various affairs of the local government as explicitly stated in Sec. 34:

*Section 34. Role of People's and Non-governmental Organization – Local government units shall promote the establishment and operation of people's and non-governmental organizations to become active partners in the pursuit of local autonomy.*

The enactment of the Local Government Code of 1991 institutionalized People's Participation at the local level through the establishment of participative mechanisms that will provide a venue for the active involvement of people and their communities in decision making processes within the local government, thus paving the way for decentralized decision making structures that gave importance to the concept of "*participatory democracy*" (Legaspi, 2001, p. 9).

The LGC further describes the relations and the roles of POs and NGOs in local governance. They are recognized as partners of local government units for community development, through joint ventures and cooperative arrangements, such as delivery of basic services and capability building. This can be achieved through the involvement of NGOs and POs in local development councils.

The 1987 Constitution and the Local Government Code of 1991, among other laws enacted in the country, solidified and strengthened the importance of participation and partnership of POs and NGOs in the affairs of government, whether local or national.

RA 7160 provides certain avenues whereby people can participate in crafting laws, allowing them to become active advocates in the discussions of public policies that will affect their lives. The law also provided the following principles for partnership (Villarin, 1996, pp. 34-37):

1. Mutual Trust and Respect;
2. Autonomy and Independence;
3. Complementarity; and,
4. Transparency and Accountability.

Under the LGC, POs/NGOs should become effective partners of LGUs in delivering services for the people. In the Philippines where poverty is very rampant, it is important that representatives of POs/NGOs should be placed in the various committees and bodies in the Local Government Units. They can also be part of advisory councils to the Local Chief Executive (LCE). Local Special bodies are also a venue for POs/NGOs' participation in governance, such as the Health Board, Local School Board, Peace and Order Council, and People's Law and Enforcement Board. POs/NGOs can also be part of the Local Development Councils (LDC) of LGUs as well as Pre-qualification, Bids and Awards Committees provided that they are accredited by the LGU (Liporada, 1996, p. 30).

One concern however regarding these provisions of the Local Government Code is the apprehension of Local Government Units in working with POs and NGOs and vice versa. Both sides hold negative perceptions against the other, especially regarding their presence, motives and roles in local government. POs and NGOs sometimes see local government officials as a hindrance to genuine development because of their traditional politician or 'trapo' attitudes, while some local government officials vilify the interventionist attitude of POs and NGOs and sneer at the 'messianic' approaches and solutions they propose to the people (Villarin, 1996, p. 3).

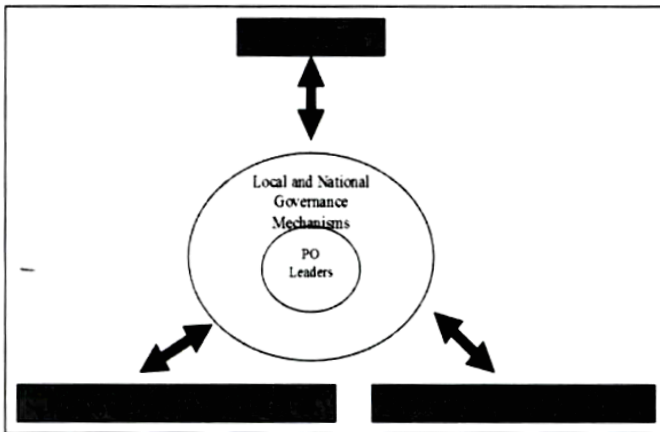
Despite these perceptions, members of the people's organizations took advantage of the opportunities offered by the new Constitution and the Local Government Code of 1991. The many years of involvement in managing people's organizations and advocating their development agenda have given them sufficient capacities and networks that can help them in the electoral process. Others were also nominated to local development councils in recognition of their work in their locality.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Community development (CD) has three main fields – community organizing, community education and community resource management – anchored on the principles of people's participation, gender responsiveness and sustainable well-being (Luna, Ferrer, Tan, Dela Cruz, Bawagan, Magcuro & Torres, 2009). Community organizing remains central to the whole CD implementation. People's organizations, where members are able to analyze their concrete situation, formulate their development vision, and implement projects that aim to improve their condition, are formed. The officers and members of the POs engage in continuing capability building to enhance their skills in leadership, project development and management, advocacy, and negotiation. They advocate their development agenda to various legislative and executive government units through actions such as dialogues, signature campaign, and legislative lobby. Through the years, PO leaders are trained as good speakers, managers, negotiators, policy analysts, and lobbyists.

On the other hand, governance, defined as “working and dealing with citizens who comprise the local constituency and coordinating the more effective use of resources for the common good” (Batario & Sevilla-Alvarez, 2004, p. 20), has always been the domain of politicians. However, with the 1987 Constitution and Local Government Code of 1991, POs engaged in the electoral field for advocacy of their development agenda. They were able to be involved in major governance areas, e.g., planning, policy making, budgeting, implementing, and monitoring. Community and people’s participation then became a major element of community governance, aside from community leadership, community empowerment, and community ownership (Ferrer, 2006).

With the involvement of POs in local and national levels of governance and the continuing advocacy of their development agenda, they bring with them certain values which they have learned in their community organizing work, e.g. transparency, accountability and people’s participation. This research posits that the experiences of POs in advocacy using these values create an impact on local and national levels of governance. Consequently, this also brings forth positive and negative outcomes to the people’s organization, community and their sectoral development agenda. The conceptual framework is illustrated in Fig. 1.



**Fig. 1 Conceptual Framework**



Data generated from the case studies were analyzed through the following aspects: family background of the leader; positions of the leader in the farmer's organization prior to running for an electoral seat; experiences in the electoral process; outcomes achieved after being elected to office, specifically benefits gained by the community and by the farmer's organization; how they have advocated for their sectoral development agenda; and their reflections on the whole experience, specifically lessons learned and the relationship between community development and community governance.

### Profile of Farmer-Leaders

The research has case studies of seven leaders of farmers and fishers people's organizations all based in Luzon. One leader was appointed to his position while six of the seven leaders were elected to different government positions. Only the experiences and views of the six elected leaders will be included in this article to focus on common concerns of elected officials. All of the leaders granted the research team permission to divulge their identity. The name, gender, age, their PO, elective position and locality are shown on Table 1.

**Table 1: Research Respondents**

Name / Gender / Age	People's Organization	Position	Locality
Rafael 'Ka Paeng' Mariano / M / 56	Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP)	Anak Pawis Representative to Congress	National level (party list)
Herberto "Konsehal Bet" Holgado / M / 49	Samahan ng Magsasaka sa Batangas (SAMBAT)	Municipal Councilor	Lemery, Batangas
"Kap Jimmy" Caabay / M / 36	Imbo Multi-sectoral Barangay Organization (IMBO)	Barangay Kapitan	Anda, Pangasinan
"Nanay Miriam" Villanueva / F / 40	Kalipunan ng mga Samahang Magsasaka sa Timog Katagalugan (KASAMA-TK)	Barangay Kagawad	Bgy. Langkaan, Dasmariñas, Cavite
Ronnel Arambulo / M / 32	Anakpawis – Binangonan	Barangay Kagawad	Binangonan, Rizal
"Kagawad Paul" Mallari / M / 41	Alyansa ng Manggagawang Bukid sa Asyenda Luisita (AMBALA)	Barangay Kagawad	Bgy. Balete, Tarlac City

Out of six research respondents, five are males and only one is female. Their ages range from 32 to 56 years. All of them experienced economic hardships while growing up in farming and fishing families. As young boys and girls, they

helped in household chores and farm work. Their parents valued education and supported their children to school. The six leaders attained at least high school education. *Kagawad Paul* was not able to graduate from 4<sup>th</sup> year high school while *Konsehal Bet* finished civil engineering from Far Eastern University (FEU). Three reached college level of education. *Ka Paeng* took Bachelor of Science in Agriculture and Agri-cooperatives, *Nanay-Miriam* took BS Industrial Engineering and *Kagawad Ronnel* took up Criminology. For *Konsehal Bet*, other family members, e.g. his aunt,, helped support him through his college years, while some of the other leaders applied for scholarships when they entered college. However, *Kagawad Paul* and *Ka Paeng* both had to stop schooling when their fathers became ill.

As young men and women, the leaders were inspired by their parents from whom they learned of selfless service to the needy members of their community. *Konsehal Bet* saw how his father who was a carpenter helped their neighbors build their houses. *Ka Paeng* remembers that his mother was always approached by their *kababayans* for various concerns. *Nanay Miriam* also appreciated very much her mother's hard work for the survival of their family and at the same for being part of a movement for farmer's rights.

All the leaders were already active in community work even at a young age. They were involved in school organizations and activities. Other leaders were influenced by their involvement in Church programs. *Nanay Miriam*, at 15 years, became the secretary of *Damayang Adhikain Tungo sa Umaga*, a support group for farmers. Later, she volunteered her services with the Social Action Center of the Catholic Church in Cavite. One of the programs of the center that she remembers was animal dispersal among farming communities. *Konsehal Bet* became a member of the League of Filipino Students (LFS) and was very active in the campaign for student issues. *Ka Paeng* joined *Bisig ng Kabataan*, a local youth organization advocating for farmer's rights. *Kap Jimmy* was already the SK Chairperson at 20 years old.

Through these exposures and involvements in organizations, they became more aware of the concerns of their sector. *Ka Paeng* said, "*Nakita ko kung gaano*

*pinagsasamantalahan ang mga magsasaka. Labis kaming nagpapakahirap sa pagsasaka ngunit sa halip na kaunlaran ay sinuklian pa ito ng labis na kahirapan. Unti-unti kong nakita ang ugat ng pagsasamantala at pang-aapi at kung ano ang bulok sa sistema".* (I saw how farmers were abused. We are hard-working farmers who did not experience development, only poverty. I learned of the roots of oppression and the corrupt system.)

### **Leadership Development**

As they joined different organizations, their leadership skills were developed, either through formal or on-the-job trainings. Nanay Miriam remembers a training on community organizing held in the University of the Philippines with Prof. Angelito G. Manalili as the resource person. Konsehal Bet learned the skills through his active involvement in LFS while Ka Paeng honed his knowledge and skills with farmer's organizations.

Before they became leaders of people's organizations, they were first regular members of POs or community organizers. Kagawad Ronnel was a union organizer in a garments factory in Rizal. Kagawad Paul was also a member of the union of Luisita Golf and Country Club. Nanay Miriam, Ka Paeng and Konsehal Bet were organizers and trainers in farming communities in Central and Southern Luzon.

Members of the people's organizations saw their leadership potentials and elected them as officers of their organization. Konsehal Bet became secretary general of SAMBAT (Samahan ng Magsasaka sa Batangas) in 1984 when he was just 21 years old. Kagawad Ronnel was elected as Chairperson of Anakpawis Binangonan when he was only 27 years old. At 28, Ka Paeng was elected as 2<sup>nd</sup> Regional Vice Chairperson of Alyansa ng mga Magbubukid sa Gitnang Luzon (AMGL) in 1984. In the succeeding year, Ka Paeng was elected as one of the national leaders of Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP), a national federation of farmer organizations. They became forerunners in mobilizations on sectoral and national concerns in their provinces and in the national level. At least four of these leaders were present during the Mendiola Massacre in 1987.

As leaders of various organizations, they learned the skills of organizing, networking, alliance work, negotiation and conflict resolution. They also promoted solidarity with other sectoral organizations, such as labor sector, professionals and religious sector. They highly valued principles of social justice, democracy, people's participation and empowerment. Through their active involvement in people's organizations, five out of the seven leaders experienced harassment during rallies, such as being hosed with strong bursts of water from a fire truck. These did not however intimidate them from continuing with their struggles.

### **Engagement in the Electoral Process**

A common desire to have substantial changes in the local and national levels pushed the leaders to decide to engage in the electoral process. Kap Jimmy has noted since his childhood the lack of roads going to their village, thereby affecting flow of products and services from the town center. Nanay Miriam shared that ever since she was a child, she always had to cross the river whenever she went to school. There was no bridge that connected *Sitio* (sub-unit of a village) Lupaing Ramos to the main road that led to their school. She did not want other children to experience the same. Konsehal Bet wanted to make use of a government position to advance the interests of the farmers. Kagawad Ronnel was asked by politicians in their area to run when they learned of his many projects with marginalized sectors, specially after typhoon Ondoy.

Ka Paeng's foray into the electoral process was brought about by the decision of Anakpawis partylist to run in the 2004 elections. In 2001, Bayan Muna had a convention where the participants assessed the party-list system as a chance, though a limited one, for the marginalized and under-represented to have a voice in government decision-making (Bayan Muna, n.d.). With the victory of Bayan Muna partylist in 2001 where they won three seats in Congress, the other member organizations of Bayan Muna, specifically Anakpawis and Gabriela, decided to field their own candidates in the 2004 elections. Their decision to do so was primarily aimed to bring forward to the national level the advocacies of their sectors.

All of the research respondents sought the approval of their respective people's organizations before they ran. The POs became the primary machinery in launching their candidacy; their families, relatives and friends provided moral, technical and financial support. The leaders used simple campaign materials, such as used sacks, posters or tarpaulins where they painted their campaign slogans. Konsehal Bet used the letters of his name for his slogan, i.e. "*Bahay, Edukasyon, Trabaho*" (Home, Education, Work). This slogan was painted on sacks placed in tricycles which plied the barangays of Lemery. Nanay Miriam's slogan was "*Tinig ng Kababaihan, Tinig ng Mamamayan*" (Voice of Women, Voice of Community) while Kagawad Ronnel's was "*Magsuri, Kumilos at Manindigan*" (Analyze, Mobilize, Take a stand).

They did not have a difficult time with the physical requisites of the campaign since they were used to the tasks of organizing and training, which are also physically strenuous. They went house-to-house to explain to the people their platform of action. They did not mind going to remote areas of the villages to reach the people who lived far from the center. Konsehal Bet shares that during the 'miting de avance' in each barangay, he would expound on the specific concerns of the barangay and his proposals to respond to these. His speeches were tailor-made for the specific barangay situation. The villagers appreciated this, compared to other candidates who seemed to only have one speech prepared wherever they go. Kap Jimmy, on the other hand, encouraged other independent candidates to join forces to save on campaign expenses.

Five of the leaders ran as independent candidates. Ka Paeng of course ran under the Anakpawis party. Konsehal Bet on the other hand was invited to join Lakas-Kampi party. Through this, he got to know other people who likewise helped in his candidacy.

Five of the six leaders won the first time they run for the position. Konsehal Bet however experienced losing first in 2001, contesting the election results in 2007 but finally won in 2010.

## **Outcomes of Participation**

This section will present the outcomes of participation of farmer leaders in local and national government structures, specifically outcomes to the community, the people's organization, to the sectoral development agenda and on the personal level.

### **Outcomes to the Community**

A major accomplishment for all of them was providing basic social and infrastructure services for the villagers. One of the first projects that Nanay Miriam spearheaded was the concrete bridge that connected the sitio to the main road. Now, the children do not have to get their feet wet when they go to school. She also helped build a water tank which made it easier for the people to fetch water. Kap Jimmy on the other hand prioritized repairing bridges and building a concrete road to Imbo. This paved the way for transportation services to conveniently enter the village, bringing goods and services. He also facilitated connection of electric services to more homes and improvement of the management of the Barangay Water System Association of Imbo. Kagawad Paul allocated funds for a water pump for irrigation purposes. Kagawad Ronnel launched livelihood programs and medical missions in their barangay.

Konsehal Bet was able to organize the public market of Lemery and mediate conflicts between big and small meat shop owners. He also established the OFW center to provide services to many OFW families in their municipality. Konsehal Bet also referred the villagers to appropriate government and private agencies to respond to their needs. There were instances when poor people were not aware and were not confident to approach government offices. Nanay Miriam even accompanies them to these offices, e.g. electric and water firms, and spends part of her honorarium for their transportation expenses.

Ka Paeng, through the Anakpawis partylist, was able to facilitate the construction of infrastructure projects which are needed by farming communities, such as solar dryers, flood control and water systems. He also utilized funds to

build multi-purpose halls and schools buildings, as well as conduct relief operations and medical and dental missions. He also supported a scholarship programs for deserving students from farming communities. Farmers and other marginalized sectors may also access medical services from government hospitals which receive allocations from Ka Paeng's funds.

Most of the outcomes refer to basic infrastructure and social services that are needed by the people, specially those who do not have access since they live in remote sitios of the barangay. The people appreciated these services and are grateful to the farmer leader who made these services possible.

### **Outcomes on the People's Organizations**

All leaders mentioned positive outcomes for their respective people's organizations. Primary among these was an increase of membership. More people became aware of the PO and their efforts to address community and sectoral concerns. Aside from an increase in membership, they were also able to expand their outreach to new areas. They also gained additional alliances and networks.

Nanay Miriam said that she experienced "*mas madulas at malawak na pagmumulat, pag-oorganisa at pagpapakilos sa mga tao*" (broader consciousness – raising, organizing and mobilization of community members). The farmers were able to organize and strengthen SUMAMAKA-LR (Samahan Ugnayan ng mga Manggagawang Bukid at Magsasakang Kababaihan sa Lupaing Ramos or Organization of farm workers and women in Lupaing Ramos) and KASAMA-LR (Kalipunan ng mga Samahan ng Magsasaka or Alliance of Farmer Organizations – Lupaing Ramos chapter). Both are people's organizations working towards genuine agrarian reform.

Konsehal Bet added that the organization implemented new projects such as organic farming and production of organic fertilizer. They also held art workshops for children of farmers. Opportunities were given to the youth to get hired through the networks established by Konsehal Bet with other institutions. The konsehal's presence in the municipal council protects the PO against harassment due to their continuing organizing and protest actions.

Kagawad Paul shares that the members of AMBALA are more motivated to pursue their land claims since they know they have an ally and a voice in the local barangay council. Aside from Kagawad Paul, two other kagawads are also supportive of their cause. However, his position in the barangay council was not sufficient deterrent against being charged by Rizal Commercial and Banking Corporation (RCBC) of “grave coercion and occupation of real property”, together with 22 other AMBALA members.

In Barangay Imbo, Kap Jimmy said that the PO has developed closer relations and partnership with the local government unit. There are instances when the LGU consults their PO regarding projects with the fisheries sector since they are the only fisherfolk organization in Imbo. Moreover, this PO has long been engaged in community-based coastal resources management such as mangrove reforestation and hence, has established a good track record.

### **Outcomes related to the Sectoral Development Agenda**

All leaders mentioned that primary in their agenda while they are in government positions is to promote and advocate for the concerns of the marginalized sectors, such as the farmers, fishers, urban poor, and women.

In Bgy. Imbo, Kap Jimmy was able to access financial support for the Imbo Multi-sectoral Barangay Organization (IMBO), specially for their Mangrove Reforestation and Marine Protected Area projects. A Congress Representative awarded them P500,000.00 as he was impressed with the mangrove reforestation project in their area. The fund was able to support expenses of the *bantay dagai* (sea patrols) who protect the coastal resources. The LGU also implements the ordinance against illegal fishing, with the able support of the Anda Municipal Fisheries Council.

Even as a kagawad, Nanay Miriam is still very supportive of the establishment of SUMAMA KA in Lupaing Ramos. The farmers have been able



to continue farming on the land despite the threats of eviction. With the support that the PO has gained from students and professionals who regularly hold exposure visits in Lupaing Ramos, the members have been encouraged to till the land and make it productive.

At the national level, Ka Paeng authored and co-authored several House Bills which contain the development agenda of the farmers. Among these are: Genuine Agrarian Reform Bill; P125 across the board wage increase; Rice Industry Development Act of 2010; Act regulating the rescada system in the coconut industry; and, Act providing security of tenure for farmers. Other pro-people and pro-poor Representatives in Congress support these bills despite the situation that these bills go against the interests of other members of the House of Representatives. They know that it will be a challenge to have these bills passed but they are not daunted, knowing that these are what the people need to improve their lives. Ka Paeng still finds it an advantage to have a seat in Congress for advocacy of pro-poor development agenda. He adds, "*Nasusubok at naisasakongkreto natin sa pamamagitan ng pagsusulong ng mga panukalang batas ang mga alternatibong solusyon sa problema ng mamamayan. Nagiging tungtungan ng mga isinusulong nating panukalang batas ang mga lehitimo at makatwirang panawagan ng mga mamamayan*". (We are able to test and concretize alternative solutions to problems through advocacy of proposed laws. Through these proposed laws, legitimate and just demands of the people are advanced.)

The other leaders always bring their sectoral development agenda in whatever committee they are assigned. Kagawad Paul presides over the Committee on Agriculture. He is also the President of Nagkakaisang Kagawad sa Hacienda Luisita, where 33 out of 49 kagawads are members.

Nanay Miriam was first assigned to the Committee on Education. She initiated the Alternative Learning Systems program of Department of Education to cater to out-of-school youth and the illiterate elderly. She also joined the meetings of the parents and teachers in Langkaan Elementary School to voice her suggestions for the improvement of education. Later, she was re-assigned to the Committee on

Human Rights, the concerns of which are close to her heart. She initiated a forum on Human Rights attended by many people from the barangay. They learned of their basic rights and what they should do when these rights get violated.

Through his privilege speech, Konsehal Bet conveyed to his colleagues in the municipal council his stand on various issues such as agrarian reform and human rights, for which he gathered support from other konsehals. There were instances when demolitions of urban poor communities were discontinued when he advocated for it in the council.

### **Outcomes on the Personal Level**

The leaders were satisfied with how they performed in their elective positions despite the many challenges they faced. They said it was not easy, specially for most of them who were first timers in government positions. They had to learn the ropes of being a Congress representative, konsehal, kapitan and kagawad, specially the legislative process of proposing house bills or local ordinances and resolutions. Some were not spared of red-tagging. They had conflicts with other members of the local councils, specially when the discussions veered towards controversial topics such as agrarian reform and fund allocation. However, the principles they embraced as leaders of POs guided them as they went on with their work. They knew their role was to continue serving the people humbly; and to be swell-headed with power and be waylaid was against this principle. At times, they were able to get allies from other members of the local council.

Konsehal Bet said that he had a regular income for the family from being konsehal. Nanay Miriam shared this income with other PO members. Sometimes, she would spend for transportation expenses when she accompanies other villagers to government or private offices to air their grievances or inquiries. Even now that Nanay Miriam is no longer a kagawad, people continue to consult her for some of their concerns. She willingly shares whatever knowledge she has on these matters.

It is worthy to note that no one among them became wealthier while in office. Ka Paeng remains to be among the top 10 poorest after almost nine years as a Congress Representative. As for the local officials, if they are not in the municipal or barangay hall, they can be found in their farms tilling their land. They have not turned their backs on their productive work. Ka Paeng even shared that when he is not very busy, he still goes to their small farm in Nueva Ecija. Nanay Miriam shared that when she is not in the barangay hall or in her small farm, she is in her village having discussions with her constituents to brainstorm on barangay development projects.

Their constant coordination and communication with their respective organizations kept them grounded. They also knew that the members of the organization had high expectations from them. These were reminders that they are in a position not to enrich themselves but to serve the people who voted for them.

The leaders also realized the extent of corruption that happens in government. If they were in position for personal reasons, they knew that they can easily be tempted. However, they had an unwritten pact with those who elected them to office and with the people's organizations. They did not sever ties with the people's organizations that helped guide them on what should be done.

On the other hand, there are some unintended effects of being in an elected position. Konsehal Bet observes that people come to him to ask for donations for their activities, such as a sportsfest. He said, "*Maraming sobre akong natatanggap, naghihingi ng donasyon*" (We receive envelopes soliciting for donations). Nanay Miriam said that when she became kagawad, there were more people who asked her to be a wedding sponsor. She also had to attend parties, like debuts, something she is not used to do. Moreover, her being tagged as leftist affected her family members. She admits being demoralized at times, but reflected that, "*Kapag pumasok ka sa pulitika, dapat ay bukas ka sa anumang bagay na maaring mangyari at dapat ay matatag na matatag ang iyong kalooban*". (When you join politics, you should be open to whatever may happen and you should be strong-willed.)

Challenges also abound at the national level. Ka Paeng shares this reflection on his current role: *“Hindi pa rin naman tinitingnan na mapapalitan ng elektoral na pakikibaka ang kabuuan ng pakikibakang masa para sa pagbabago. Isang dagdag lamang ito na arena kung saan naipapatampok natin sa mas malawak na bilang ng mamamayan kasama na ang mga nasa pamahalaan maging ng mga burgesya kumprador at naghaharing uri sa loob ng kongreso ang isyu at usapin ng masang anakpawis”*. (I do not think that the electoral struggle will take dominance over mass struggle for change. This is just one additional arena where we can advocate to a greater number of people, including those in the upper echelons of society who are in Congress, the concerns and demands of the marginalized.)

The leaders did not mention if they resigned from the organization when they were elected to government position. The PO, however, did not see this as a conflict of interest since the leaders could continue their advocacy work on a different arena.

### **Lessons for Community Organizing and Community Development**

The six case studies show that participation of farmer leaders in local and national governance structures can indeed work for the community and for the people’s organization in the advancement of their sectoral development agenda. The cases provide lessons regarding the role of the PO leaders in local or national governance, as follows:

1. The experiences of the PO leaders who were elected to government positions demonstrate that the people’s organizations are good training ground for future leaders in government. As PO leaders, they learn skills in community organizing, community education, advocacy, negotiation, alliance building, and project development and management which are important when they get elected to government positions.
2. The case studies also show that PO leaders cum government officials who continue to be pro-poor can truly help alleviate the people’s

impoverished condition, even through basic social services. The PO leaders knew their agenda even before they were voted into office, both strategic concerns such as securing lands to the tillers and simple social and infrastructure projects such as bridges and water tanks. They also knew that one of their main tasks is to advocate for the development agenda of the marginalized sectors at all times and expand their networks and allies, despite adversity from various forces. The leaders were not easily cowed by intimidation from other members of the local council or the House of Representatives. They have the tenacity to debate and struggle on issues that concern their sectors.

3. PO leaders had very practical expectations when they won government positions. They did not have the illusion that these will instantly solve age-old problems of agrarian reform and poverty. They did not receive any formal training on how to perform as government officials. Yet, they knew what people needed and they likewise knew that people disliked some attitudes of traditional politicians or 'trapos'. In the process of working in their positions, they brought with them knowledge, skills and attitudes which they have learned from their long years of experience with their people's organizations such as people's participation, transparency, accountability, and genuine service. Because of these, they earned respect and admiration from the community.
4. The leaders were not able to gain the confidence of all members of the local councils or Congress. However, the leaders still managed to do alliance work with other members who were supportive of their agenda. Their experience of alliance work in the past came in very handy in their government positions.
5. However, a pre-requisite to being effective is the close coordination between the PO and the leader who was elected to government position. One should not abandon the other, lest the lure of personal benefits that lurk in government offices take prominence over service to the people. The

PO provides check and balance. The leaders continue to be present in general assembly gatherings of their organization to report on what they have accomplished in their positions. This is also an opportunity to consult their constituents on other possible projects and resolutions that can be promoted by the leaders.

6. The PO members have to be very careful in selecting the leader to be thrust into politics. Not everyone who is a PO member is eligible. The leaders in these case studies have years of experience in advancing their sectoral development agenda, have sufficient organizational and negotiation skills, joined and led various organizational mobilizations on agrarian issues, and possess the right attitude to the new task ahead. Hence, while people's organizations are aware that the electoral struggle is an option that they can take, still it should be handled with utmost care and caution.

The lessons and experiences highlighted in this research is a rich ground for theory building on community organizing and community governance. In the course of doing this research, the research team learned that other sectors have also engaged in the electoral process and have won seats in both local and national governance mechanisms. Among these are organizations of urban poor, indigenous peoples and women. For knowledge production and promotion, it is a continuing challenge to document more experiences and produce learning materials so that stakeholders and other concerned entities can gain insight and follow suit.

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