



## Campaigning for agrarian reform in the Bondoc Peninsula

A new generation of strategies for government accountability is needed, one that fully considers entrenched, institutional obstacles to change. Vertical integration of coordinated civil society policy monitoring and advocacy is one such strategy. Engaging each stage and level of public sector actions in an integrated way can locate the causes of accountability failures, show their interconnected nature, and leverage the local, national and transnational power shifts necessary to produce sustainable institutional change (Fox 2001). This case study summary is one of seven that reflect on civil society monitoring and advocacy initiatives in the Philippines – all of which aim to improve government accountability in different sectors – through the lens of vertical integration.



## Campaigning for agrarian reform in the Bondoc Peninsula

Bondoc Peninsula is a narrow strip of land located in the southern portion of Quezon province, approximately eight hours away from Manila. It is composed of twelve low-income municipalities. Largely dependent on the production of coconut, Bondoc Peninsula has a skewed system of land tenure under which ownership of large tracts is concentrated in the hands of a few elite families. The story of the agrarian reform campaign in the Bondoc Peninsula concerns the role of CSOs in enabling poor farmers to gain control of land. The campaign utilised various actions at different levels that enabled the rural poor to gain control of land. Such actions can be broadly categorised as constituency-building and interfacing with the state.

### Agrarian reform in the Philippines

In the Philippines, land ownership and control has been concentrated in the hands of a wealthy minority since colonial times, creating an impoverished class of landless peasants. Today's campaigns for peasant rights are rooted in an enduring social movement with a long history of struggle and resistance.

The first post-independence land reform policy, in 1972, delivered little change and triggered the emergence of several agrarian reform networks. In 1988, following the fall of President Marcos and years of campaigning, the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) was passed, with the aim of reforming the ownership of 10.3 million hectares of farmland in favour of around 3.9 million peasant households. Originally, CARP gave the government ten years to complete its

land redistribution efforts, which was later extended for another ten years, resetting the deadline to 2008. But when the law finally expired in December of that year, more than 1.2 million hectares of agricultural land was still waiting to be redistributed. Campaigning for the further extension of CARP had begun as early as 2006, and following countless protest actions and mass mobilisations, the CARP Extension with Reforms (CARPER) was signed in 2009, extending the reforms until 2014.

### Civil society actors and the Bondoc Peninsula campaign

The Quezon Association for Rural Development and Democratisation Services (QUARRDS) is an NGO in the Bondoc Peninsula which provides technical assistance to the *Kilusang Magbubukid ng Bondoc Peninsula* (KMBP, Peasant Movement of Bondoc Peninsula), a district-wide peasant federation. From the late 1990s, the organising efforts of QUARRDS and KMBP meant that large tracts of land in Bondoc Peninsula were distributed to thousands of CARP beneficiaries, despite bureaucratic inefficiency and stiff landlord resistance. The first major breakthrough occurred in September 1998, when a 174-hectare property belonging to the powerful Reyes family was redistributed to fifty-six peasant beneficiaries. And this was just the beginning.

Over a span of thirteen years, from 1996 to 2009, more than 10,000 hectares were placed under the effective control of more than 3,800 farmers. Some was re-distributed by government and some controlled through peasant initiatives. These efforts took the form of consistent social pressure from below and initiatives to build alliances with reformists in the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) and agrarian reform advocates. They also included

a variety of extra-legal actions – such as land occupation, boycott of tenancy sharing schemes and padlocking of government offices, among others – in order to compel the state to implement its own agrarian reform law.

Because of the partnership between QUARRDS and KMBP, rural citizens were able to assert their rights at the village and municipal levels, where actual land contestation occurs. QUARRDS also enabled farmers to engage state agencies like DAR at the both municipal and provincial levels as they pursued their land cases. It also facilitated coalition-building efforts at the provincial level in order to gain the support of other vital institutions such as the Church.

Since the late 2000s, QUARRDS has been the local non-governmental organisation (NGO) partner of two national agrarian reform networks, the Rural Poor Institute for Land and Human Rights Services (known as Rights Network) and Katarungan (Movement for Agrarian Reform and Social Justice), a peasant federation, of which KMBP is also a member. Rights Network, established in 2008, is a network of eleven grassroots NGOs working on agrarian reform. Katarungan was formed a year earlier by several provincial peasant formations to push for the extension of the CARP, and initiated many of the protest actions that contributed to the passage of CARPER in 2009.

Katarungan enabled KMBP farmers to interact, to share experiences and to forge common strategies with rural citizens from other regions and provinces of the Philippines. Rights Network, for its part, provided technical support to KMBP farmers, as well as working with QUARRDS to deploy community organisers to catalyse action at the local level. It also helped in the pursuit of their cases at

the national level, facilitating dialogues with pertinent government agencies, doing media work, forming alliances with important groups and institutions such as churches and political parties, and facilitating international fact-finding missions.

KMBP, QUARRDS, Katarungan and Rights Network also monitor DAR's implementation of CARPER from the municipal to the national level to inform their advocacy, and run public education campaigns using radio and newspapers.

## Lessons for vertically integrated campaigning

- Coalition-building was scaled up from the grassroots as organised peasant groups, reacting to the strength of landlord power, first established relationships with other groups in their municipality, then formed provincial, regional and eventually national federations.
- Many CSOs involved in the coalition also engaged in cross-sectoral coalition-building, establishing strong relationships – especially with the church and media – that delivered important gains for the campaign.
- The peasant movement's engagement with the state has mostly taken the form of protest actions and pressure politics at multiple levels, and it has had only limited engagement in spaces where the government has invited people to participate.

## References

Fox, J. (2001) 'Vertically Integrated Policy Monitoring: A Tool for Civil Society Policy Advocacy', *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 30.3: 616-627

## Background to this summary

This summary is based on a case study by Francis Isaac and Danilo Carranza. Further reflections on this material will be published later in 2016 as part of a report on the theory and practice of vertically integrated civil society activism, edited by Joy Acheron, and including a contribution by Jonathan Fox. Please visit the Making All Voices Count website ([www.makingallvoicescount.org](http://www.makingallvoicescount.org)) for the latest information about the publication of this report, and to find the other six case study summaries in this series.

## About Making All Voices Count

Making All Voices Count is a programme working towards a world in which open, effective and participatory governance is the norm and not the exception. It focuses global attention on creative and cutting-edge solutions to transform the relationship between citizens and their governments. The programme is inspired by and supports the goals of the Open Government Partnership.

Making All Voices Count is supported by the UK Department for International Development (DFID), the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and the Omidyar Network, and is implemented by a consortium consisting of Hivos, IDS and Ushahidi.

## Research, Evidence and Learning component

The programme's research, evidence and learning component, managed by IDS, contributes to improving performance and practice, and builds an evidence base in the field of citizen voice, government responsiveness, transparency and accountability (T&A) and technology for T&A (Tech4T&A).

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Disclaimer: This document has been produced with the financial support of the Omidyar Network, SIDA, DFID and USAID. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the official policies of our funders.

IDS requests due acknowledgement and quotes from this publication to be referenced as: G-Watch (2016) *Campaigning for Agrarian Reform in the Bondoc Peninsula*, Brighton: IDS © The Institute of Development Studies 2016



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