

Green Forum - June '91 White Paper Comments

General

As it stands this paper is not likely to be particularly effective and convincing except to the already convinced nor is it entirely adequate as a foundation for further progress.

1. The strength of the approach and experience is micro (community). This is assumed not spelled out in the present paper. What could usefully be inserted are:
 - a. a one page analysis of micro praxis
 - b. two summary case studies illustrating successes and obstacles - say 1½ page each
 - c. two fuller Annexes of same cases.
2. The macro model is not spelled out nor are its assumptions. This should be done:
 - a. in summary in the text
 - b. at greater length in an Annex.
3. The results of the model suggest:
 - a. some assumptions require rethinking (e.g. that 1.3% a year government expenditure growth is in any way consistent with the proposed strategy)
 - b. some apparent gaps (e.g. costs of infrastructure investment and supporting services endogenous to large enterprise but exogenous to small/medium scale)
 - c. a base and/or set of relationships requiring rechecking (e.g. trend GDP growth rate as of base year was at most 3% not the 6% used)
4. As a result the modelling is not very convincing as a demonstration a macro superstructure is possible and the numbers are - and can be seen

to be - hopelessly optimistic. (I can see the problem - it was desired to "outperform" the NEDA projections. But these by 1991 were obviously unattainable themselves!)

5. The definition of a community needs more attention in two senses:
 - a. who/what is excluded, e.g. is a large local landlord or locally owned hacienda in or out? Why? Under what circumstances?
 - b. how treat an organic community which is in fact a mine, an hacienda, an agro-business? (Given that these will not soon disappear and that gains for most members at low cost to owners/managers may be attainable while better organisation by workers could shift balance intra-community benefits to outflows, there is some point to this exercise for centralised enterprise dominated communities even if it is a second best)

Certainly these power problems are not caused by the community analytical focus. But neither are they cured by it. They need to be set out squarely and the process implications examined.

6. The danger of a community (like a corporation) falling into being a servant of its professional managers only nominally accountable to its civil society base (shareholders) needs to be faced. Unless it is and means to avert that result set out, the danger of its happening is increased. Good intentions do not, by themselves, guarantee accountability or participation nor do they create sustainable structures.
7. Intra-community trade-offs are real and - especially if more than two communities involved - complex, e.g. re North Mindanao:
 - a. Lake Marawi dependent agrarian communities (restoring low season inflow levels, maintaining lake levels)
 - b. Lanao de Norte communities (dependable year round power flow, downstream water for household, irrigation use)
 - c. Hill communities above Lake Marawi (reforestation and better soil use/conservation)

- d. Rest of Mindanao power using communities (dependable power flow from Agus system).

The problem is partly one of numbers involved and partly that initially "a"- "b"- "d" will need to make payments toward reforestation/soil conservation by "c" before action to control and spread runoff can yield results.

This type of issue is real whatever model is used. In the present Agus debate it does appear to be worsened by non-involvement of "c" and by "a"/"b"/"d" (and especially "c") not seeing clearly that unless deforestation/poor land use practice is reversed both Lake Marawi levels and power availability will fall. A broader multi-community approach might help clarify the parameters. But how is it to lead to a negotiating process?

8. The data requirements of central (macro) system are stated as perfect (and implicitly instant) data. If so, the macro level is unworkable and also unintelligible to community members. Rapid participatory rural appraisal can be (and I am informed is) used at small rural community level. What analogues are practicable regionally, nationally? And in urban neighbourhoods?

How are community and inter community processes to relate to political and government processes:

- a. local government
- b. provincial government
- c. national government

especially where existing organic communities are multiple within "a" and/or cross "a" lines?

Model

Some attention should be given to time lags. To build up community member and manager capacity will take time once the community has accepted approach and defined self. The feasibility of provincial/national operational process depends on large majority of functioning community planning/operating exercises at community and (for national) provincial levels.

Further lags will result from fact that the approach logically includes more education, health (especially primary), drinking water, small scale irrigation, agricultural-rural extension (and analogous artisanal/small business extension services for commerce, transport, manufacturing, services) which will take time not only to design and implement but to get government decisions to give them priority.

Gaps

Do agricultural technology packages capable of getting the results posited at a bearable cost exist? Japanese and Korean agriculture is very high cost (up to 3 times world market costs) which is not on as Philippines does not have resources for heavy subsidies to either producers or net food consumers (who include most of poorest rural as well as urban poor/lower middle class households).

Certainly gains - in output and in share to low/lower middle income households - are practicable. But not as high nor as fast as posited (at least not at macro level).

And how are additions to technology packages to be called for, generated, tested, popularised? Ties to extra-community bodies, e.g. Government, UP-Los Banas, IRRI are needed. How are these to be secured on a basis other than community "clientelism"?

Ecology

This appears in social and asset matrix and in passing elsewhere but not very systematically. Possibly damage from ecologist's perspective is largely by outsiders (mining, logging, fishing) but positive measures would need to be by community and would have costs not distributed in same way as benefits either intra or inter community.

One interesting possibility is the 15 million odd ha (or is it acres?) of cut over scrub listed as forest. This isn't being replanted. Homesteading on it has a long record of failure. Non-legal (thus non-secure) chena cultivation is ecologically disastrous. Could community allocation with partial reforestation and overall use regulations be a way forward? It is after all more than total cultivated area (albeit of lower quality on average) and at this point a disaster continuing to worsen.

Data

The approximation/community participation methods need to be made clearer. Without that the reader has to doubt the community could control its hired expert managers or that rapid results were possible.

Similarly, how these approaches could be adapted to intra-community, provincial, national levels needs attention. (Indeed if there is an urban analogue to Rapid Participatory Rural Appraisal in use this should be highlighted. In general rural community based approaches have proven much less difficult to launch and deepen as well as to keep going than low income neighbourhood urban ones.) This is especially true on the economic front because the livelihood base of - e.g. - Tondo is largely outside Tondo whereas for a rural organic community most livelihoods are in the same geographic area.

Conflict of Interest

The community approach neither causes nor cures this. It may make it easier to identify and - therefore - perhaps to resolve/accommodate. But to do so requires spelling out where conflicts arise and how they can be negotiated within, among communities and at national levels.

The approach of treating all natural resources as community property has drawbacks for major ones, e.g. large scale mining or power sites. An equity problem nationally and vis-à-vis other communities and another of present vis-à-vis incoming members of site community are built in. Certainly at present such natural resources are frequently a curse to a community as it has little or no say over their use or its impact on pre-existing community. But to give them total ownership seems to go too far the other way.

These questions turn in part on definition of community: all people in organic relationship (which includes key landlords, merchants, etc. and defines at least larger haciendas and agro-businesses as communities) or those people who are in middle, lower middle, lower income-status-power positions. The former definition creates evident problems as to how majority in community can take control over it, while the second has an inherent problem unless very major alterations to property right law are carried out very early in community empowerment process.

The national level poses the most intractable (in principle, the worst rural areas in terms of power and income distribution may be worst in terms of room for action) problems:

- a. major programme and infrastructure project choices do affect communities. A no losers solution is nominally possible compared to present but not compared to alternative priority/resource allocation decisions;
- b. some policies, e.g. interest rate, exchange rate, government borrowing requirement are not readily handled at all except at macro (or conceivably provincial) levels and are not readily applied differently to different communities even if impact of a uniform policy is very uneven by community. That can be handled in a policy package but to do so requires substantial central cost/benefit and trade-off balancing which cannot originate with communities and is hard to dialogue with them ex ante.

In the first case I grant data on community pluses/minuses could help inform all decision taking. In the second I doubt getting such data in enough detail, fast enough is wholly feasible. In neither do I see a practicable way for a NEDA or a legislature to negotiate with communities, at least ex ante albeit and ex post review dialogue to inform policy revision might be more practicable.

Power

The approach - as put in paper - abstracts from power questions. For the community to act as posited (beyond first steps) needs legal and political powers vested in it. Some articulation of minimum powers needed and implicit legislative changes would be desirable.

Further, even if power is at community/local government level, it may well be monopolised by a small elite whose own benefits/costs may differ widely from those of community as a whole, let alone its poorer members. How is such a situation to be overcome? Since worst cases of this kind are likely to be local or provincial, what need for central intervention powers is implied?

How are managers to be held accountable? Unless they are, power is shifted to technocrats (if community functions) and results will depend largely on

which are Platonic (not self seeking, public spirited) and which are concerned with maximising their own gains (which may help community if they take a long term community support/noblesse oblige view, e.g. like many aspects of Osmena Regime's 60 years of rule in Cebu - but is not a community empowerment result in sense I believe Forum seeks).

The use of the model to mobilise is important. First it demonstrates possible gains (and to whom). Second, when progress is blocked it allows mobilisation against the blockers by showing who loses and what the blockers' self interests really are (as they are likely to couch their opposition in different terms).

How Get There From Here?

The approach seeks revolutionary (even if non-violent) change in economic and accountability processes and distribution of costs/benefits. No national institution as presently composed would accept it; probably no province; very few local governmental areas.

There is in most communities some room for manoeuvre on the margins (sometimes rather little as Negros experience suggests). But how is the power context to be changed? Will initial actions coming up against limits lead to effective political and/or 'industrial' (in worker/peasant sense not just manufacturing or trade unions) mobilisation or will further progress be smashed by Gold (cooptation), Goons (intimidation), Guns (armed repression)? How are these processes to be averted?

Certainly this question is not unique to community approach. But it is one any approach seeking basic economic, socio-economic, political, political economic change needs to address directly if it is to convince and to succeed.

Tentative Suggestions

1. The present strength of approach is at community/local government level. Most resources and efforts should be focused there to broaden the bases of experience and of functioning communities.
2. At the same time the needed knowledge, technical, personnel and resource needs from outside the community should be identified in detail. That is first step to seeing how they can be secured. Some

support NGOs and some government (all levels) programmes can and will (if approached skilfully) provide some of them.

3. From "1" , when adjacent communities are organised, a base of experience in multi-community appraisal and bargaining can be built up.
4. At the same time serious dialogue should be entered into with bodies with more macro approaches and more articulated national policies which are - in principle at least - not unsympathetic to community approach. Examples include "Mixed Economy" Group, Freedom from Debt Coalition, Congress on Peoples Agrarian Reform (COPAR).
5. And discussions/dialogue would also be appropriate with politicians, senior government professionals, academic political science/government administration persons who are potentially sympathetic as to how communities could relate to local-provincial-national government processes and resource allocations and what legislative empowerment would be needed.
6. From "1-5" - plus specific dialogue at all levels - a strategy for expansion of number (and depth/areas of activity) of communities and of penetration of larger unit political/decision taking/programming processes could be devised and tested.
7. An articulated model - and more particularly one with numbers - does not seem to me to be a high priority at this stage. (Adam Smith had no formal model; David Ricardo's was not at all articulated). It may make foreign intellectuals and international NGOs happy but how important is that? In any event "4" seems a more likely route to devising a credible, holistic approach than straight extrapolation from the basic community level. It is also one more likely to win Philippine allies and to convince applied economists or political economists (Philippine or foreign).
8. The mobilising side of the model (initially especially at community level) should be developed. Identifying concrete gains and about how much, for whom and how is the key to getting support. But equally, when progress is blocked, the same model can be used to show who is blocking, why and who is bearing what costs as a result. That type of

quantification could be useful to a number of NGO/cause/people's groups in, e.g. agrarian reform/land reform and health fields.

Postlude

For the avoidance of doubt I should stress that I am sympathetic to the approach but feel White Paper doesn't serve it well and leads from weakness not strength. I wouldn't have written this much had I not felt basic approach had a good deal in it and was worth studying for potential problems/ways forward as a means to strengthening it.

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