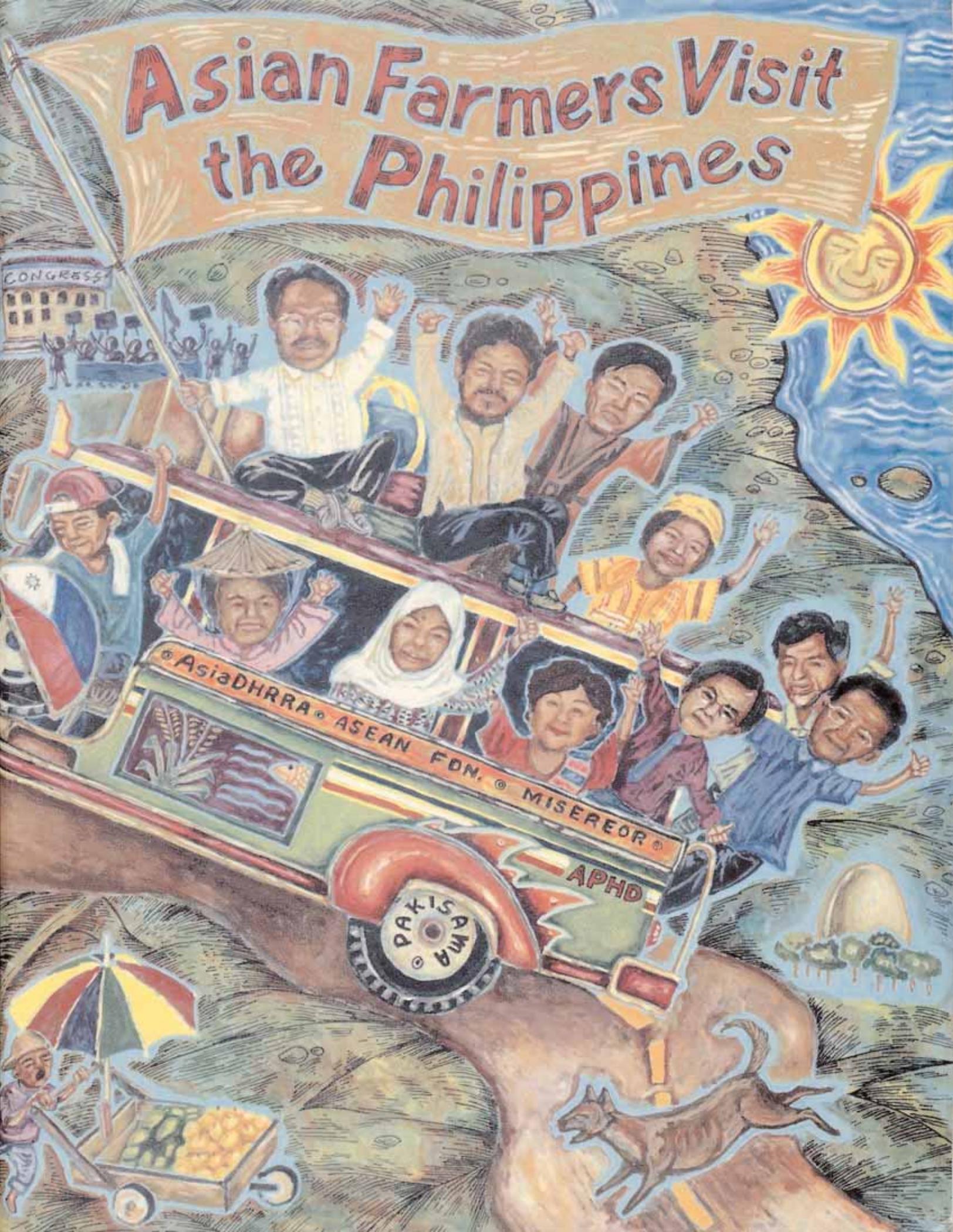


# Asian Farmers Visit the Philippines



This exchange visit and monograph was made possible with the support of the Asian Partnership for Human Development (APHD), MISEREOR and the ASEAN Foundation

# Asian Farmers Visit the Philippines

*A Chronicle of the Philippine Leg of  
the Asian Farmers Exchange Program*

*17~26 July 2000*



AsiaDHRRRA

Asian Partnership for the Development of Human Resources in Rural Asia  
MARCH 2001



### **The Asian Farmers' Exchange Program**

The Asian Farmers' Exchange Program is AsiaDHRRA's major initiative in sustaining the dialogue, sharing of knowledge, and building of linkages among farmers and NGO leaders in Asia.

Specifically, the project aims to:

1. Facilitate the sharing of experiences and insights on local productivity systems development, rural enterprise development, and farmers' network building and strengthening;
2. Establish linkages between and among farmers' organizations and cooperatives from Asian nations; and
3. Initiate preliminary discussion on future united regional advocacy efforts on issues such as food security, sustainable agriculture, and farmers' cooperation.

Ultimately, the program's main success criterion is the formation of a strategic Asian rural alliance for greater advocacy and for the benefit of the poor small Asian farmer.

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## Foreword

# bridging asian rural people together and making a difference



Bringing people together in Asia is not a new aspiration for AsiaDHERRA. This essentially guided the DHERRA spirit the past two decades. It all began with bringing people from rural Asia together to engage in dialogue and learn from each other. Since the early days of the DHERRAs, the socio-political and economic landscapes have drastically changed but our aspirations regarding bridging Asian rural communities remain. The realities of development work are currently complicated given globalization and its implications on Asian rural structures. As we face today changed development realities, we are continuously challenged to be steadfast and pursue Asian rural solidarity with vigor.

A supportive policy and institutional environment will not just happen. The allocation of critical resources by Asian governments will not just be directed to the poor without a strong leverage exerted by the marginalized sectors themselves. This is where coalition and network building among the farmers and rural-based community organizations will make a difference. There is a need for strong advocacy where forging strategic alliances within the ranks of rural organizations play a crucial role.

Both the South Korean and Philippine legs of the Asian Farmers' Exchange Visit Program of AsiaDHERRA facilitated the coming together of farmer-leaders and development workers from at least ten Asian countries. From these came about a consensus to come together at the regional level which is a concrete expression of solidarity among the Asian farmers. The DHERRA family lauds such effort in solidarity building. We believe that what the farmers have committed to is the initial step to strengthening its voice at the regional level while maintaining vigilance in its local development efforts.

This monograph covers the Philippine-leg of the exchange visit, which focused on the community organizing and network formation experiences and learnings of local and national NGOs and people's organizations. Among the key activities included staying with local communities in Maramag and Sumilao, both in Bukidnon province. The participants

met with the local farmers and heard and shared their stories of difficult struggles and of humble victories. Empathy strengthened their solidarity while understanding enhanced their knowledge and appreciation of farmers' unity.

Aside from the community integration, the participants unexpectedly experienced unique Philippine-mass mobilization in action when they encountered the crowds marching to the Philippine Congress to express disappointment over poor governance. They may have heard of people empowerment from the resource persons and the various community leaders they met, but actually witnessing it at work lent a more effective push to the learning process of the participants.

There are too many important events that unfolded during this particular exchange visit and to focus on one or two does injustice to these. This is the spirit behind the monograph *Asian Farmers Visit the Philippines*. Guided by the spirit of sharing and inspired by the relentless energy of the Asian farmers, we present the monograph as a documentation of the events that unfolded and the insights and solidarity borne of these. The exchange visit took ten days but the journey of the farmers towards a better society began long before. We share our humble effort in capturing a crucial and meaningful leg of that journey as the Asian farmer faces a crossroad of an unfolding challenging global society.

The exchange visit took ten days but the journey of the farmers towards a better society began long before.

Let this monograph be one of the expressions of AsiaDHRRRA'S efforts to bridge Asian rural people together and make a difference in the lives of the women and men farmers. It is in this dialogue of life that Asian rural farmers are given a face and hope. Let this be our way of thanking the communities who have unselfishly shared themselves in a journey with other Asian rural farmers. Let this be our way of thanking the people and organizations who have made the exchange possible. And let this be a recognition of the relentless energy of the Asian farmers as we humbly join them in facing the crossroads of an unfolding challenging global society.

GUILLERMO P. CUA  
*Chairperson - AsiaDHRRRA*



# touch down!

I was so delighted that morning in May when I read the e-mail from AsiaDHRRA. The next exchange program is pushing through from July 17-26, 2000 and I was again invited to participate. I could not help but remember the first exchange program that I joined in Suwon, South Korea in November 1999. The exchange was a beautiful experience of learning from other Asian farmers about their culture and agricultural practices, of sharing experiences in community organizing and cooperative development, and of building friendships with my co-participants. Now, I would have another chance to join the next exchange program in the Philippines!

## Touching down in Manila

Like me, most of the exchange program participants arrived in the Philippines in July 16, 2000. A couple of days before, a very strong typhoon has just hit the country. We were warned about the traffic situation in Manila but this did not dampen our spirits especially when our hosts, AsiaDHRRA, PhilDHRRA and PAKISAMA, warmly met us at the airport. Many of us arrived at daytime so we saw a bit of Manila on our way to the Innotech Training Center in Quezon City.

By dinnertime, almost all participants have arrived. The people from AsiaDHRRA graciously treated us to a meal in a Japanese restaurant. As expected, we had a noisy dinner as most of us tried to remember each other's names and the country where we came from. For a few of us, this activity was not our first as we were able to join the previous leg of the exchange program in South Korea. Thus, the dinner also became a time for renewing old friendships. Then, it was time for us to take a good night's rest, anticipating exciting days ahead of us.

## Philippines: Facts, Figures And More

<b>Total Land Area</b>	: 300,000 square kilometers composed of 7,107 islands
<b>Natural Resources</b>	: timber, petroleum, nickel, cobalt, silver, gold, salt, copper
<b>Total Agricultural Area</b>	: 12.5 million hectares
<b>Major Crops</b>	: rice, coconut and corn
<b>Total Population</b>	: 79 million with 44% found in the rural areas
<b>Population Growth Rate:</b>	2.04%
<b>Ethnic Groups</b>	: 91.5% Christian Malay, 4% Muslim Malay, 1.5% Chinese
<b>Religion</b>	: 83% Roman Catholics, 9% Protestant, 5% Muslim
<b>Languages</b>	: Filipino and English
<b>Literacy Rate</b>	: 94.6%
<b>1998 GDP Growth Rate</b>	: -0.6%
<b>1998 GDP Per Capita Income</b>	: US\$3,500
<b>1998 Labor Force</b>	: 31.3 million
<b>1998 Unemployment Rate</b>	: 9.6%
<b>Population Below Poverty Line</b>	: 32%

- In terms of annual family income, the richest 10% of the population became richer by 6% while the income of the poorest 10% was sharply reduced by 29%.
- In the rural areas where 70-80 % of poverty incidence exist, 25% of families continue to live at subsistence level, that is, earning just enough to meet daily food requirements.
- According to the 1980 Census of Agriculture, out of the 3.4 million farms in the country, almost two thirds are less than 3 hectares in size and cover only 30 % of total land area.
- Of the total 8.06 million hectares of lands targeted for distribution in 1987 under the 10-year Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP), only 66% or 5.34 million hectares have been moved as of June 2000.
- Estimates of the entire civil society sector vary from 60,000 to a high of almost 96,000, excluding the 35,000 cooperatives registered with the Cooperative Development Authority (CDA).



day 1: JULY 17

## Sharing Our Stories on Rural Community Organizing

**A**fter a simple breakfast, we assembled in the conference room of Innotech and there I met the rest of the participants of the 10-day exchange program. There were 36 of us farmers and NGO workers from ten Asian countries namely Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, South Korea, Vietnam, Thailand, Nepal, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Laos. I was heartened by the sincere welcome remarks of Marlene Ramirez, the Secretary General of AsiaDHRRA. She was right in saying that we left behind many of our important tasks, and our loved ones too, to be with our fellow Asian farmers for the next ten days. Marlene also acknowledged and thanked the sponsors of the whole activity-- APHD, The ASEAN Foundation and MISEREOR.

### Sunny Welcomes, Warm Smiles

More people from the host organizations welcomed us with smiles and speeches. Mr. Edgar Thomas Auxillian and Director Cayetano Paderanga of the ASEAN Foundation took turns in greeting us in Filipino *magandang umaga!* (good morning) *maligayang pagdating!* (welcome) and *mabuhay!* (long-live). According to Dr. Paderanga, the ASEAN Foundation seeks to support projects that encourage collaborative efforts in Southeast Asian countries so that we will learn to depend on each other, at the same time, enhance the expertise that we need to bring to the rural areas. As was also expressed by the other speakers, it was hoped that the activity would strengthen the partnership between and among Asian farmers. All of them cheered us to enjoy our stay in the Philippines.

### The What's and Why's of the Exchange Program

To start the formal sessions, Marlene gave us an orientation on the Asian Farmers' Exchange Program. She shared about AsiaDHRRA's aspiration of bringing people together in Asia, hence, the idea of the exchange program. She further explained the two-pronged major work of AsiaDHRRA-- strengthening the DHRRA members in different countries, and strengthening farmer's organizations in Asia including the formation of an Asian farmers network.

Dulce Carandang, the exchange visit's program coordinator, then shared with us the objectives and design of the 10-day activity. She explained that participants will have discussions with rural community leaders and NGO workers regarding their experiences on social development including farmers organizing and networking; community development frameworks and models; agrarian reform advocacy; and participation in local governance.

She also told us that speakers have been invited to facilitate discussions on the principles and practice of participatory leadership.

I was quite sure that we would have an interesting exchange visit because aside from the usual lectures and sharing, we would be spending one night in a rural community with some farming households. We would also conduct dialogues with national and local government leaders, and learn some home-based technologies from different countries. We then moved on to the more serious sessions of the day, first of which was the history of the peasant movement in the Philippines.

### Tracing the Filipino Peasants' Struggles for Agrarian Reform

In the whole of Asia, the Philippines has one of the highest degree of mass movement organizing. The peasant movement, in particular, has a very long, dynamic and rich history. It can be traced back to the mid-1500s during the time of the Spanish colonial rule. Historically, many Filipino farmers have been deprived of their land and experienced various forms of harassment and injustices from landlords. The highly skewed distribution of land in the Philippines and the deplorable situation of many small farmers were factors that pushed the sector to organize and fight for their rights.

Elisa Gusago, chairperson of LAKAMBINI, a national federation of women farmers in the country, explained that over the years, a number of peasant groups have been formed for various reasons and by different groups. Since the beginning of their struggle, peasant organizations have been in the forefront for the implementation of a genuine agrarian reform program in the country. For these groups, the guiding principle of the movement was people empowerment, meaning, ensuring that small farmers, rural women and fisherfolk were able to meaningfully



### Highlights in the Struggle Of Filipino Farmers

**Pre-Colonial Period.** Early Filipinos did not have a concept of private ownership. Communally cultivating the land, they only considered themselves as stewards of these resources

**The Revolution of 1898.** In the 1500s, the Spanish colonizers introduced private land ownership. Vast tracts of land were given to loyal subject as gifts. Packets of peasant rebellions erupted after cases of eviction, heavy taxation, and force labor escalated. In 1898, the peasant-dominated Katipunan defeated the Spaniards.

**The First Farmers' Organization.** In 1917, Jacinto Manahan founded the Unyon ng Magsasaka or Farmers' Union in the province of Bulacan against the injustices of users and to call for the abolition of tenancy in the country.

**World War II.** The farmers in the north and Central Philippines organized in the 1940s the HUKBALAHAP, an anti-Japanese guerilla army. They distributed land to the small farmers that were previously grabbed by scrupulous landowners.

**Abolition of Tenancy.** From 1950-60s, due to the sustained mass action by organized farmers groups, the Agricultural Land Reform Code and the Tenant Emancipation Decree were enacted into law paving for the start of land reform in the Philippines.

**Post People Power Period.** The Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law was passed in 1987 as the centerpiece program of President Corazon Aquino despite strong opposition from CPAR, the broadest coalition of peasants at that time.

**The Estrada Era.** Overly dismayed by the poor agrarian reform performance of the Estrada administration, major national peasant federations once again coalesced to call for reforms and ouster of the President under the banners of Peasant Voices and Kilos-Saka or Agri-Action.



*Asian farmers meet the heroic MAPALAD farmers*



*Dr. Cayetano Paderanga, Asean Fdn. Board member addresses the farmers during opening ceremonies*

participate in decision-making, in the formulation and implementation of policies and projects that affect their lives, and in partaking of the fruits of their labor.

Elisa further related that at one point in the history of the movement, the broadest coalition of major peasant organizations, the Congress for a People's Agrarian Reform (CPAR), was formed in 1986. It recorded big and small victories including the actual transfer of lands to farmers and the lobby for an alternative agrarian reform law. After its break-up in 1994, there were several attempts to create similar coalitions based on specific issues. None, however, was as successful in forming a more strategic coalition than CPAR.

One of our co-participants from Indonesia marveled how these coalitions were able to work together given the different ideologies and perspectives of the groups. As shared by our speaker, coalition work in CPAR was not 'heaven' and devoid of conflicts. The groups within the coalition, however, were one and united in the principle of 'land to the tiller' and were willing to work with other groups within certain consensus parameters.

However, later on, their ideological differences also led its fold-up in 1994. Rather than capitalize on this conflict, the peasant groups within CPAR parted on friendly terms, never discounting the possibility of coalescing again in the future for some common goals.

Another point shared by Budi from Indonesia was the fact that in his country, the implementation of agrarian reform has been a long and tedious struggle due to strong landowner resistance, aided by the military. But like in the case of Filipino farmers, he expressed that as long as there are strong POs and NGOs, the dream of the landless to own their land would not remain a dream.

There are several strategies that we Asian farmers can apply in our work for agrarian reform. Foremost is the building of strong people's organizations and forming alliances of POs and other sympathetic groups. I am also sure that every country can think of their own strategies given their own unique experiences and situations.

### **Organizing the Rural Poor in Asia**

After learning about the very colorful history of peasant struggle in the Philippines, we then went into a discussion of the current community development strategies operating in the country. For this session, we had as speaker Soc Banzuela, a seasoned community organizer and currently the executive director of the Philippine Agrarian Reform Foundation for National Development (PARFUND), a resource institution for agrarian reform advocacy. Before discoursing on the topic, we were asked for our reasons for organizing communities. Most of us replied that we do organizing work to solve problems whether social, political

#### **4 Asian Farmers' Exchange Visit in the Philippines**

or economic. We organize to gain strength as a sector, to build solidarity, unity and synergy, and to show power in order to build better societies. The organizing experiences in every country may be different because of certain peculiarities, but we all agreed that organizing involved a step-by-step process-- from community integration and problem identification, to core group building, planning, mobilization and evaluation.

Soc moved on to share the moving story of the Mapalad farmers in the province of Bukidnon, a story that deeply touched many of us. He used this case to show the various strategies employed and intricacies of grassroots organizing in the Philippines.

### The Case of Mapalad Farmers

The Mapalad farmers were a product of three decades of organizing work. It started in the 1970s when they were organized by their local parish following the Basic Christian Community (BCC) approach. It is a faith-based community organizing strategy which the Catholic Church promoted. In the light of church scriptures, community problems were addressed by members collectively. Then, in 1980s, the Mapalad farmers decided to form a cooperative and were assisted by an NGO in this endeavor. Following an economic-based organizing process, the community pooled their limited resources and used them to improve their livelihood through productive investments.

The issue-based organizing strategy was employed later on when the Mapalad farmers faced a land dispute against their landowner. It involved a 144 hectares tract of land eyed for distribution under the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) of the government. The landowner, however, was able to secure an exemption and skirt CARP coverage by converting the land to industrial use. The Mapalad farmers took this case to court and at the same time, lobbied for land distribution as originally mandated by law. The case of the Mapalad farmers showed that organizing work is a long process. Several forms of organizing had to be used to respond to the varying calls of the time. However it also highlighted that organizing the farmers at the local

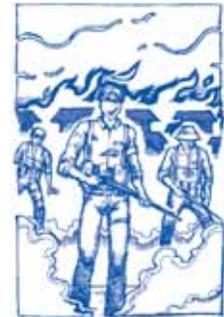
### The Story of the MAPALAD Farmers



In 1995, 137 poor seasonal farm workers belonging to the Higaonon tribe were granted ownership of 144 hectares of irrigated prime agricultural land under the Philippine government's agrarian reform program. Among them were 72 members of the Mapalad Multi-Purpose Cooperative in Barangay San Vicente, Sumilao in Bukidnon.

However, the landowner Norberto Quisumbing, Sr. filed a case to annul the farmers' title. Through a mere letter from the governor of the province, he was able to obtain an approval for land conversion from the office of the Philippine President in Manila through Executive Secretary Ruben Torres.

The petition filed by the farmers to dismiss the case was easily quashed. Fortified with the belief that they have the right to the land, the Mapalad farmers occupied the property on July 14, 1997.



Two days later, 60 armed guards set fire to the farmers' tents, confiscated their tools, and fired shots in the air while letting loose a hundred carabaos on a stampede. The morning after, the governor and the landowner came, further scaring the farmers away.

Fired by a thirst for justice, 18 determined farmers started a hunger strike on October 9, 1997 in front of the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) Office in Quezon City. They demanded the reversal of the Torres decision of land conversion. Their plight caught national attention as support from all sectors came in, including the archbishop of Manila.



Though without food, they were spiritually nourished by the many prayer meetings, education sessions, and solidarity visits held inside their tents.

On November 5, the 28th day of the hunger strike, President Ramos announced a win-win solution to the

*continuation...*

con't...

case --- 100 hectares will be allotted to the farmers while the remaining 44 hectares will be retained by the landowner.

The farmers' victory, however, was short-lived. Very quickly, the landowner put up barbed wires along the property's perimeter, placed armed guards, and filed an appeal to the Supreme Court contesting the decision.

In spite of the three motions for reconsideration and numerous creative actions, the Supreme Court ruled with finality on December 15, 1999 --- the land must be returned to the landowner. It based its decision largely on a technicality. DAR came late in filing a motion for reconsideration of the Torres decision back in 1996.

While the Mapalad farmers lost their own case, they won a big victory for the peasant sector. Agrarian reform became a national social concern not only to government but to other civil society organizations as well. The Mapalad farmers succeeded in uniting and mobilizing, once again, all sectors of society to respond to the cries of Filipino farmers.



level is not enough. Local groups must be federated up to the national and international level. The case also showed that the presence of support groups plays an important role in advocacy work. Without the support of NGOs, the church, students, the academe, and the media, the Mapalad case would not have become a national symbol for the Filipino farmers' aspiration to own a piece of land.

The sharing of Nur from Indonesia was full of insight. According to her, there are farmers in West Java who do land occupation and do not wait for the government to give them lands, thinking that the government is not sincere anyway. Our speaker acknowledged the point raised and mentioned that this was one of the failures of the Mapalad farmers and their supporters. They did not forcefully defend their rights. This lesson, however, has led other agrarian reform advocates to support the land occupation activities of farmers in other areas.

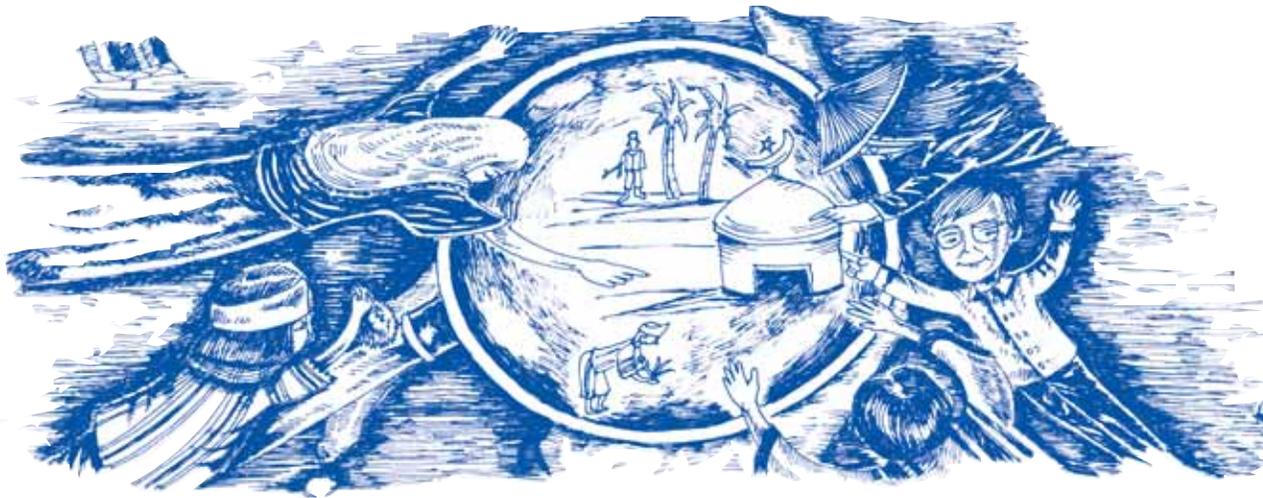
The story of the Mapalad farmers was indeed touching. I know there are other 'Mapalad farmers' in other Asian countries who are also struggling everyday to own a piece of land. Their story was a good source of learning and inspiration for all of us.

### Country Updates on Agricultural Situation

We ended the afternoon by sharing updates on the general agrarian situation in our own countries. We learned how most of the Asian countries have similar situations, that is, depending on agriculture for livelihood. Agriculture is characterized by low technology and low production although there are efforts to promote more sustainable agricultural practices. Land related problems like highly skewed land distribution and the conversion of agricultural areas to industrial use are also prevalent.

It was interesting to know that the agricultural sector in South Korea accounts for only less than five percent of the economy. Modern technology and high productivity characterize its agriculture. However, the country is facing steep and continuous decline in farming population because most farmers are already old and their children are no longer interested in farming. Like other Asian countries, South Korean farmers are also not spared from the problems brought about by globalization where cheap imported goods compete with local agricultural products.

The first day of the exchange visit was full of learning and sharing. I did not realize that the sessions for the day was about to end until dinner was called and we were reminded to wake up early the following day for our travel to Cagayan de Oro City. So, many of us went to our rooms and called it a long but enriching day.



day 2:  
july 18

## Learning About Development Initiatives in Mindanao

**W**e were up as early as 3:00 a.m. to catch our 5:30 a.m. flight to Cagayan de Oro City. Some of us slept away the one hour and 20 minutes plane ride while some engaged in small talk. Again, people from PhilDHRRA, PAKISAMA and PALAMBU met us at the airport. Excited to be in Cagayan de Oro, which is known as the City of Golden Friendship, we took souvenir photos at the entrance of the airport. The jeepney that took us to the venue was big enough to fit all 40 of us. We learned later on that it was longer than the normal jeepneys that ply the city's routes. Still quite groggy from the trip, we took our snacks at the MASS-SPECC training center, which was to be our venue for the day. MASS-SPECC is the largest federation of cooperatives in the Philippines with members in 20 provinces of Mindanao. We were impressed to know that the training center is owned and operated by MASS SPECC members and is one of the sources of income of the cooperative.

### A Warm Welcome from Two Chairpersons

At around 10:30 in the morning, Marlene gave a recap of what happened the previous day. Then it was the turn of Mr. Guillermo 'Gil' Cua, the chairperson of AsiaDHRRA to welcome us to the island region of Mindanao. Gil informed us about the ongoing war between the government forces and Muslim separatists in Mindanao. It was a relief when he assured us that the war zones were quite far from where we are and where we will be going in the coming days. Mr. Ignacio 'Dodong' Borja, chairperson of PhilDHRRA Mindanao, also welcomed us.



*Asiadhrna Chairperson, Mr. Guil cua, shares the Asian trends and perspectives*

### ANGOC Shares on their Agrarian Reform Work in Asia

In the afternoon, much as I wanted to take a longer nap, I had to get out of bed at around 2:00 and join the rest of the group in the session hall. Parvati's 'fruit salad' ice breaker helped a lot in keeping me awake and alert for the rest of the day. The first speaker for the afternoon was Mr. Roel Ravanera, the Executive Director of the Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ANGOC). ANGOC is a network of NGOs working for the strengthening of regional cooperation in Asia. It has been in existence for the past 21 years



### The Jeepneys

The jeepney was originally developed from discarded and left over US military vehicles. They were extended in length and have two bench seats facing each other. While their engines, transmissions and axles are imported from Japan, their bodies are Filipino-made. They have loud distinctive horns and their interiors and exteriors dressed folk art style according to the driver's taste. Jeepneys remain to be the most ubiquitous means of transportation, thereby, earning it the title "King of the Philippine Road".

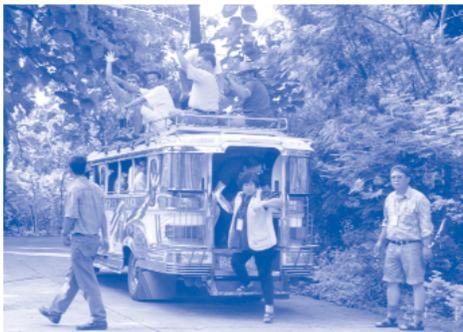
and has 23 member NGO networks with about 3,000 NGOs under them in nine Asian countries. It was my first time to hear about ANGOC and I was impressed to know that it works directly with rural communities with programs like food security. It also conducts research studies, the results of which are used as bases for dialogues with international institutions such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank.

### Another Tale of Agrarian Struggle

Later in his session, Roel showed us a touching video presentation of one of the agrarian reform victories in Mindanao-- the CARRUF case. It was the story of small farmers in the province of Bukidnon who struggled to own land despite strong resistance from their landowner. The small farmers triumphed in the end because of their unity and strong resolve to win. Various groups assisted them in negotiating with the concerned government agencies and the landowner. Continuous mobilization and lobbying by the farmers and their supporters made the issue known not just at the local but at the national level as well. After several years of hard work, the farmers were finally given the land they longed to own.

The video presentation, like the story of Mapalad farmers relayed to us earlier, truly moved us. This was evident in the rich sharing among my co-participants. Daisy of Myanmar shared that the stories of Filipino farmers she has heard so far has already inspired her and the other farmer participants of the exchange program to emulate. Parvati of Malaysia, on the other hand, voiced out the ironic situation that while the Philippines, like most of Asian countries, is an agricultural country, yet the government does not provide the 'all out' support necessary to develop the sector.

Roel explained that several obstacles hinder the implementation of the agrarian reform program in the Philippines. For one, the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law of the Philippines had many loopholes, hence, the law itself was a problem. The South Koreans, on the other hand, was more fortunate because as shared by Sung Lee, their government has implemented an agrarian reform program 40 years ago, which propelled the growth of their country's agricultural sector.



*Best seats in the house: participants enjoy the view from the top of the jeepney*

The Filipino participants likewise voiced out the problem with government's lack of will to implement the law. As I saw in the CARRUF video presentation, there were some government personnel who even worked with the landowners instead of the farmers. Likewise, the landowners would not

give up their land easily. They were very powerful and many of them were in the government. They had the resources, including money and goons, to preserve their interests even if it meant breaking the law.

As I reflected on the stories I have heard so far, I realized that the Filipino farmers, together with their NGO supporters, were able to withstand the seemingly gigantic obstacles that faced them because of their strong solidarity and belief in one single principle-- land to the tiller. Of course, there were stories of defeat and victories, yet they continued to strengthen their ranks by forming networks at different levels. These should be reasons enough for us, farmers and NGO workers from other countries, to learn from the experiences of the Philippines.

## Dissecting Global Trends in Asia

After a short break, four panel discussants in the persons of, Gil Cua, Butch Olano, Caloy Manlupig and Dodong Borja shared their views on the development context in Asia and Mindanao focusing on the unique challenges to peace and development efforts.

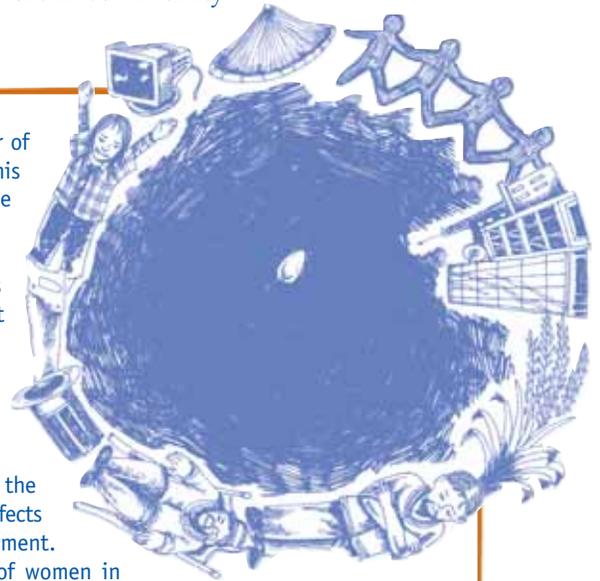
Kicking off the session, Gil shared his insights on the global trends affecting development efforts in the Asia region, foremost of which was the growing number of mergers among companies and other financial institutions. According to him, for industrial countries like Malaysia, the impact of such consolidation would be the emergence of large-scale businesses and joint venture companies leading to a consolidated economy. For the agricultural sector, the farmers would be organizing themselves while for developing economies, the trend would also be growth and expansion, but more on numerical growth. He added that government, NGOs and the private sector would be involved more in community

### Asian Trends and Challenges

1. **Shift from West to East.** Asia is going to be the new economic center of the world. The Asian people will become the center of world market. In this new millennium, 50 percent of the products and services that will be produced in the world will come from Asia.
2. **Shift from Nation States to Networks.** There will be a lot of competition among governments for private sector investment. Thus, new networks similar to ASEAN and APEC will emerge to effect a stronger position, not only among governments but also within civil society.
3. **Shift from Government Controlled to Market Driven Economy.** Asian governments are expected not to have money and will be forced to save by cutting on social services. They will have to seek for private sector investments to perk up the economy.
4. **Shift from Farms to Supercities.** More cities will develop in Asia and the world. There will be massive rural to urban migration bringing in its social effects including housing problems, sanitation, and increase in urban unemployment.
5. **Shift from Male Dominance to Emergence of Women.** Emergence of women in business, politics and other sectors will continue. In Asia, the savings rate will increase because of women participation.
6. **Shift from Labor Intensive to High Technology.** The new economy is called information economy. It will be a wired and digitalized network economy. It will also be one-sided because only those who are better off would be able to get and use the technology.

#### WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES FOR US?

1. Improving governance, accountability, and quality of management in our development work.
2. Developing leaders that will make things happen.
3. Securing favorable public policy framework by influencing our ASEAN governments and putting ourselves in parallel with them.
4. Accessing alternative financing and developing our capacities to build our own resources.
5. Gender equity, participation, and political networking will be important challenges for us.



## Getting Acquainted with Mindanao

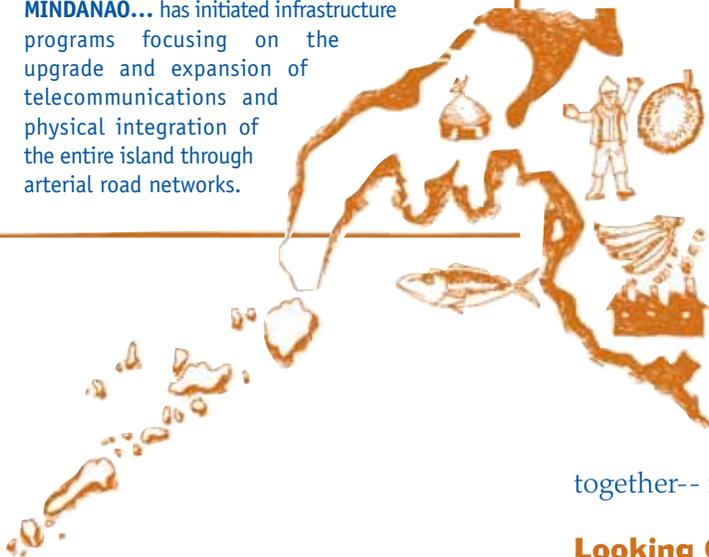
**MINDANAO...** has 102,000 square kilometers of land, comprising one-third of the Philippines' total land area. Centrally located in the Asia-Pacific region, it has become a "gateway to opportunity" with vast natural and human resource base advantageous for agribusiness, industry, and tourism.

**MINDANAO...** is blessed with favorable climate year-round and is located in the country's relatively typhoon-free zone. Mindanao leads the country in production and export of banana, pineapple, corn, coconut, durian, raw rubber, palm oil, cotton, cut flowers, seaweed, and high value tuna.

**MINDANAO...** has an agriculture-based and export-oriented economy and has been home to many successful national and multinational agribusiness firms for decades. The agriculture, fishery and forestry sectors accounted for about 41% of total Mindanao output in 1995, with industry contributing 25% and service 34%.

**MINDANAO...** is home to a quarter of the Philippines' total population, having over 16 million people. Half of the population is of working age and its labor force is well educated, trainable, highly skilled, and conversant in English.

**MINDANAO...** has initiated infrastructure programs focusing on the upgrade and expansion of telecommunications and physical integration of the entire island through arterial road networks.



development. While civil society participation gets stronger, it would also create tensions in the different countries of Asia because governments would tend to withdraw from providing more services. Government would favor big corporate farms and there would be less support for agrarian reform. Ideological debates would shift to issues such as money or health, economics versus social.

So I asked, what are the challenges facing us? According to Gil, among many others, there is a need to for the agricultural sector in Asia to also come together because the farmers would be in the disadvantaged position on account of globalization.

To this, Butch Olano, executive director of the Philippine Development Assistance Program, Inc. (PDAP) also shared his views. According to him, in this world of globalization, we should do what the other players are doing. For instance, there are a lot of mergers and networking going on in the banking sector because they want to become bigger. These can also be done within civil society. In the Philippines, it was done with PAKISAMA. Several provincial and municipal organizations of farmers formed a national federation of farmers' groups. This can also be done at the regional level-- by forming a network.

Butch further stressed that if we want to promote a technology, we need to have the resources and the best way to have this is to consolidate. Consolidation does not mean we have to give up our autonomy. We could be integrated and one in the services but we can continue to have individual decision-making processes for every organization. While globalization promotes the idea of consolidation and merger, we can promote a new model of working together-- integration and networking.

## Looking Closely at Mindanao

After the very insightful and thought provoking sharing by Gil and Butch on Asian realities, it was time for us to know more about Mindanao. Caloy Manlupig, executive director of Balay Mindanaw Foundation Inc.

(BMFI), pictured Mindanao as an island with vast tracts of land. However, according to Caloy, very few farmers own the land that they till and very few fisherfolk have access to portions of the seas and oceans with good fish. The agrarian reform program in Mindanao is yet to be fully implemented and only big fishers have the necessary resources to exploit the seas. In Bukidnon, for instance, big plantations were planted to pineapple-- one of the three major products of Mindanao which also include banana and rubber. During the sharing, Butch explained the unbalanced development between the capital of the Philippines, which is Manila, and Mindanao. In terms of economic manifestations, Mindanao receives a small budget from Manila although most of the resources come from them. Politically, the situation does not allow autonomy, and genuine and adequate representation from Mindanao. Within Mindanao itself, there is also poor representation of the Moro people.

### Cooperative Efforts for Peace and Development in Mindanao

On this note, Butch shared PDAP's efforts in Mindanao despite the ongoing war between the MILF and the Philippine government. One them is the Program for Peace and Development in the SZOPAD (Special Zone for Peace and Development) Areas which covered 14 provinces and 10 cities. PDAP worked with former Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) combatants and provided them with livelihood and capacity building support including training programs. What was truly inspiring was the case of Amro Silongan, a former MNLF combatant, who availed livelihood assistance from PDAP and managed to increase his income. He did not finish his primary school but according to him, he feels like he is a college graduate because of all the knowledge and skills he has learned from the seminars he attended. Philippine NGO and PO efforts at developing their capacities towards poverty alleviation are very commendable and worth imitating.

Only two days have passed but my head was already overflowing with ideas I would want to try out in my own organization. Tomorrow would be the start of our community integration and I am very sure that I would be learning more from the daily lives of Bukidnon farmers.

### Getting Acquainted with Mindanao

**BUT IN MINDANAO...** the people are mostly lowly paid agricultural workers, landless tillers who are mostly tenants to coconut plantations owned by local politicians, farmers-turned-workers for export-oriented banana and pineapple plantations, indigenous people driven farther into the wilds due to logging and mining encroachments, and Moro people continually dislocated because of armed conflicts.

**BUT IN MINDANAO...** despite the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP), many agricultural lands are still occupied by export-oriented cash crop plantations, fishponds, and cattle ranches.

**BUT IN MINDANAO...** at least 80% of the total population live below poverty line. Fourteen of the country's 20 poorest provinces are found in Mindanao and there is an estimated 208,000 child workers in the island region.

**BUT IN MINDANAO...** half of the 7.1 million labor force working in agriculture, fishery and forestry receive nominal wages as low as \$3.5 or a real wage value of \$2.4 a day. Only nine percent of the labor force are industrial workers, an indication that Mindanao, as well as the Philippines, is still far from being an industrial zone.

**BUT IN MINDANAO...** social services is very poor. The Moro areas have the lowest literacy rate in the country. Although home to the gigantic Maria Christina hydroelectric power and Mt. Apo geothermal power serving the entire country's power needs, only five out of 10 households outside urban centers have electricity. One in every 10 families are without shelter, while up to 40 % rely on rain, streams and springs for water supply.





## Living the Lives of the Sumilao and Maramag Farmers of Bukidnon

**T**oday is the first day of our field visit. From Cagayan de Oro, we traveled to the adjoining province of Bukidnon. Our trip to Sumilao was relatively comfortable. To our right, towering over the crops, was Mt. Kitanglad. On both sides of the highway were vast agricultural lands planted to pineapple. Our first stop was to make a courtesy call at the office of the Sumilao Mayor. Then, we proceeded to the office of Kaanib Foundation, Inc. (KFI) in the province's capital, Malaybalay. There we were oriented on the works of KFI and PALAMBU, the provincial federation of farmers organization in Bukidnon and a member of PAKISAMA.

### Exploring the Community Organizing Approaches of KFI

KFI has been working in Bukidnon for 20 years now. According to Paul Paraguya, executive director of KFI, their organization was instrumental in the formation of PALAMBU as a provincial federation. Members of the latter used to be the communities organized and assisted by KFI.



*Sharing sugarcanes on a visit to a Mindanao farmer's farm*

Paul elaborated that in the beginning, KFI's organizing strategy was geared towards the economic side of community development. Hence, it started by providing technical assistance for production and marketing of crops and the provision of production inputs such as seed and fertilizers. Building up on their learning and the changing situation in the province, KFI's strategy later on took on a more comprehensive approach. It instituted programs such as advocacy focusing on agrarian reform, sustainable integrated area development, and reproductive health.

Paul pointed out that working with the farmers is a slow process because many of the farmers have low education and low income. PO empowerment, according to him, is a factor of PO members' capability, interest and

resources. However, as much as there were obstacles, there were also contributing factors in their organizing work such as the enthusiasm of their community organizers, their strong alliance with the local church and the homogeneity of the communities. These made the organizing work easier.

### **The Importance of Building Farmers' Federations**

PALAMBU or the Panaghiusa sa Lalawigang Mag-uuma sa Bukidnon, is the only provincial federation of farmers in Bukidnon. With about 1,234 members, Elmer Cardona, president of the federation, cited that there are still many farmers in the area who remain unorganized.

*PAKISAMA's founding President, Oscar Castillo, shares the federations learning and insights in PO autonomy*

According to Elmer, PALAMBU has long been the voice and the vehicle of the poor for change in the province. He stressed that it is imperative that small farmers are organized and federated in the municipal, provincial, regional, national and even international levels to access support in whatever form from their umbrella organization. Organizing and federating the small farmers at all levels provide stronger voice in advocating their causes.



In the case of PALAMBU, it was able to extended full support to the Mapalad farmers at the local and provincial level. PAKISAMA, its national umbrella organization, provided the necessary support at the national level.

### **Preparing for Our Integration with Filipino Farmers**

After spending the morning with KFI and PALAMBU leaders, we then prepared for the highlight of the exchange visit, the community integration. The participants were divided into two groups, one leaving for the town of Sumilao and the other to Maramag.



*Korean farmers and staff with their adoptive Filipino Family*

I was a bit scared at first, worrying about cultural differences, not to mention language barriers. However, when Dulce explained to us that we would be spending the rest of the day and night with a family in groups of twos and threes, a big load was taken off my chest. That the families were members of PALAMBU further erased my nervousness, anticipation slowly engulfing my heart.

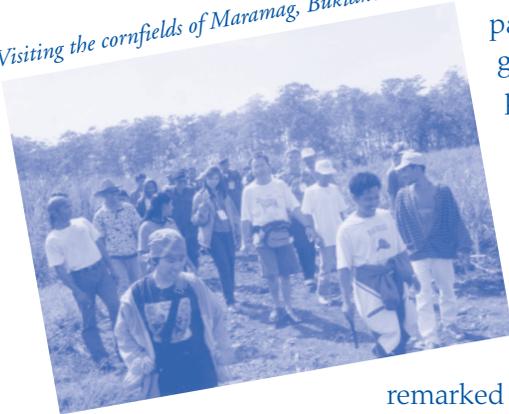
### **Living with our Host Families: The Sumilao Group**

After the first group has left for Maramag, my group which was assigned to go to Sumilao also started to move. Again, our first stop was for the indispensable courtesy call to the Mayor's office. We then proceeded to meet with our host families. It was a bit of a surprise for me when I learned that our host families would be the famous Mapalad farmers. I was very expectant for I know that we would be having more enriching stories to hear, specially from the hunger strikers themselves.



There were 15 of us assigned to live with the Sumilao farmers in Barangay San Vicente in Bukidnon. For one day and one night, we experienced first hand how the impoverished Filipino farmers live. Many of the houses in the community used old wood or bamboo slats for walls and flooring. Local dried cogon grasses were bundled together for roofing. Their sizes were no more than 20 square meters big.

*Visiting the cornfields of Maramag, Bukidnon*



The particular house I stayed in was very small with only one partition dividing the bedroom, which was built on higher ground, and the kitchen cum dining room, which was on the pebbly ground itself. No electric appliances was in sight. My foster family explained that many of the houses in the area do not use electricity. That night, we ate our dinner illuminated by a single kerosene lamp. But despite the darkness, our conversations that night with our foster family revealed more about the life of farmers in the area - the struggles of the farmers and how they want to improve their lives. I was particularly moved when one of the women members

remarked that living is useless if they do not own a piece of land to till.

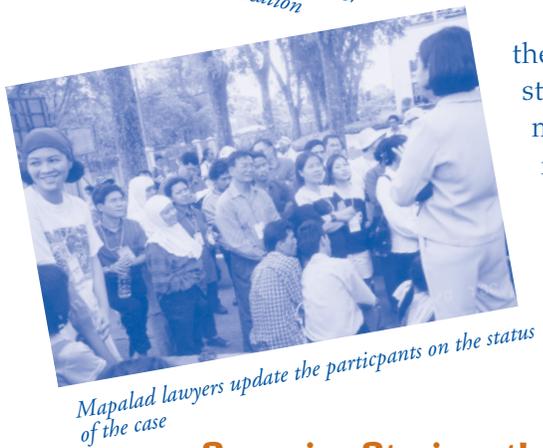


The following morning, I took a bath out in the open air. I had to do this while dawn could still shield me from by-passers. Breakfast consisted of rice, egg and dried fish, which was considered a feast for the family, since they had visitors. Oftentimes, farmers would make do with just a cup of coffee before going to work.



*Bukidnon farmers listen to a Thai farmer sharing effects of trade liberalization*

After eating and helping clear the table, I went to meet the rest of our co-participants in front of their cooperative store. More wealthy discussions ensued with some members of Mapalad. They related that since most of the farmers in the area were landless, they only get seasonal work. During lean seasons, they had to find other alternative means of livelihood. Through the assistance of one NGO, Mapalad farmers now earn money out of making brooms and selling them for a dollar each. According to the farmers, they do not earn much out of it but it helps them earn money for daily sustenance.



*Mapalad lawyers update the participants on the status of the case*

### **Swapping Stories: the Maramag Group**

When the other group arrived later in the morning, we learned from them that they had to travel for another two hours from where we left them the previous day to get to Maramag.

Along the way, they were escorted by military men in going to the site because there was a recent military ambush just 20 kilometers away.

According to the group, they arrived in Maramag at dinner time. In the morning, after a short visit to the fields where they helped tend to the corn and sugarcane, they had a very interesting dialogue with PALAMBU and other local farmers' group in the area. The exchange participants shared to their hosts about the situation in their respective countries, of how they have similarities but also distinct differences.

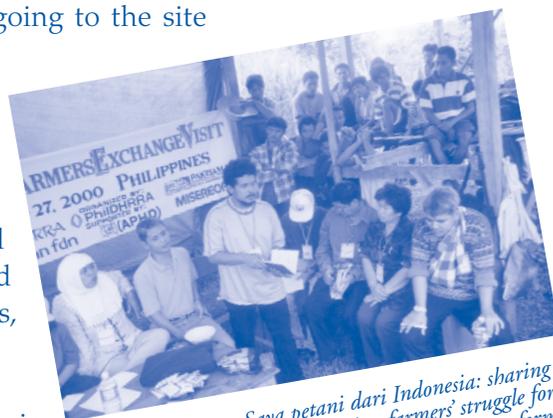
The Laos participant explained to the locals that in their country, farmers were also still weak and powerless. Most were subsistence farmers although there were limited efforts to organize them. The other participants shared their impressions about the works of NGOs and POs in the Philippines as well as their realizations about the role of NGOs in educating, organizing and mobilizing the farmers. They also shared their insights on how farmers should be supported to uplift their lives. Some of the participants even resolved to devote more of their time in organizing farmers' groups when they get back home.

### **Throwing Support to the Court Hearing of Mapalad Farmers**

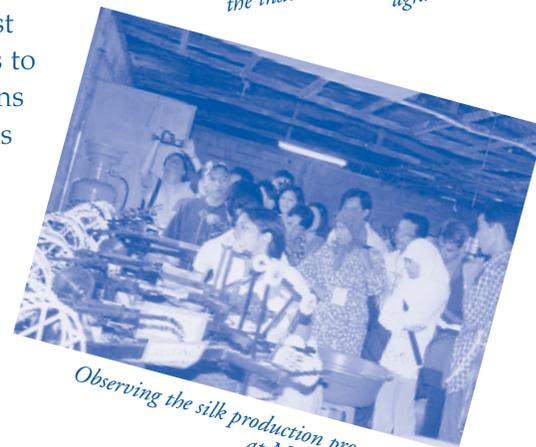
In the afternoon, we all assembled at the municipal court of Impasug-ong, Bukidnon to attend the hearing of the court case of the MAPALAD farmers. Lawyers Kaka Bagao and Azon Gaito of BMFI explained to us that Mayor Baula of Sumilao filed a case of grave coercion supposedly because of the rally staged by the farmers last September 20, 1999. The lawyers expressed that the case was only meant to harass and intimidate the farmers.

That day, the judge dismissed the case for lack of merit. My impression was that the judge got surprised when he saw us and the extent of support the Mapalad farmers have, and this time, including Asian farmers! I felt at that time that even in this very little way, we were able to help them. We were glad that the MAPALAD farmers won the case because we think they have already suffered so much.

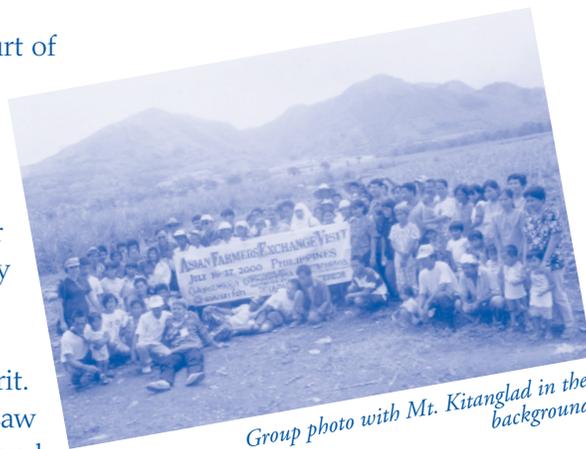
After saying farewell and giving our warm thanks to the Mapalad farmers, we traveled back to Cagayan de Oro City. This time, we went to a new venue - the Malasag Gardens Mountain Resort. The following morning, we proceeded to the breeding station for silkworm and mulberry farm of the Mindanao Cooperatives of Farmers for Enterprise Development and Community Outreach (MCFEDCO). The visit gave us insights on the production and processing of silk.



*Saya petani dari Indonesia: sharing the Indonesian farmers' struggle for agrarian reform*



*Observing the silk production process at MCFEDCO*



*Group photo with Mt. Kitanglad in the background*



day 6,7&8: JULY 22 24

## Days of Reflection and Discussion on Participatory Leadership

**T**he past days have been full of action. Now, it was time for us to stop, digest and reflect on what we have seen, heard and experienced. We were asked about our most significant experiences during the past five days and how these affected us especially in terms of provoking learning and insights. We were also made to reflect on the applications of such learning in our own lives.

### Pondering on the Sophistication of Civil Society Movement in The Philippines

A lot of us mentioned the stark poverty situation in Mindanao as our most significant observation. This was especially felt during our stay in the farming communities. Most of the houses we stayed in were made of poor quality materials and there were very few agricultural infrastructures. We felt the need to improve the sanitation, public health, and water systems in the communities of Sumilao and Maramag. On the other hand, the seemingly endless traffic jams and pollution in the city made everyone wish they were back in the rural areas.



Another striking observation of the group was the complex problem of agrarian reform in the Philippines. As pointed out by Budi, while there was an existing agrarian reform law in the country, the government's will and support mechanisms were very weak. This was also stressed by the speakers and concretely observed in the stories of the Mapalad and CARRUF farmers. Small farmers had to struggle against landlord's resistance to own the land. The group agreed that noteworthy in all the cases they have heard so far was the strong civil society movement for agrarian reform and the strong solidarity formations including the federations, coalitions, alliances and networks built at the local and national levels.

Many of us were impressed by the apparent solidarity among Filipinos, the commendable leadership qualities within organizations, and the strong participatory and democratic processes practiced by the POs, and even NGOs. The POs we have come to know have highly respected genuine farmer-leaders inside and outside their organizations. More often, they follow the participatory kind of leadership as opposed to traditionally run organizations that were being dominated by one person. These organizations have also installed



democratic systems in their organizations such as regular election of officers and meetings. They regard the training program for their leaders and members an important tool in strengthening their organization. Bob of Laos pointed out that he was impressed by the presence of community-based income generating projects in organizations like PALAMBU and MCFEDCO. It was also noted, however, that there is a need to strengthen the participation of women in organizations.

The experiences we had during the last five days made us realize that the Philippine realities such as the widespread poverty, the low agricultural productivity and the continuing struggle of small farmers to own a land were not isolated cases nor different from the situations in the rest of the Asian countries. We also came to know that in our own countries, there are still a lot we can improve on particularly on aspects such as government support, strengthening of NGOs and POs, federation and networking building, and community organizing. In these undertakings, we have the Philippine experience to build on.

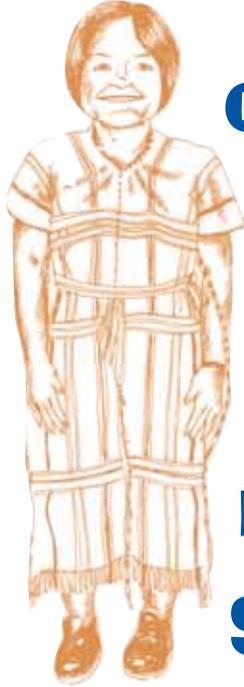
### Delving on Rural Participatory Leadership Processes

After seeing it in practice in the past days of the visit, the whole afternoon of day six was devoted to a discussion on the concepts and principles of participatory leadership. Our facilitators were Chona Echavez and Estrella Borja of SEARSOLIN. What I particularly enjoyed about the sessions were the structured learning activities or 'games' we played to learn about various topics. Truly, even the training methodologies were participatory!

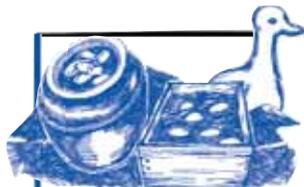
In this part of the exchange visit, we had a very wealthy discussion and sharing about the intricacies of rural participatory leadership. We had some input on group centered facilitating as well as some sharing on conflict management.

According to Estrella, when we are able to harness the participation of people, then we are acting as leaders. Leadership emphasizes harnessing the participation of people through democratic processes. As a leader, one is bound to influence the decisions of the community. More often than not, one is already 'biased' towards some ideas that one wants the community to agree with. As a facilitator and a participatory type of leader, one must try to be neutral. The objective of the leader is to get everybody to agree to the decision and for the participants to 'own' the decision or idea. While many of us have already experienced facilitating or handling meetings, it is always good to remember what Dodong told us-- that participation is considered part of the whole process of empowerment,

**Values of a Participatory Leader ....**



- C**ommitment
- H**onesty
- I**ntegrity
- C**apability
- K**nowledge
- S**ervice & Sharing



## Salted Egg Making

There are two ways to salt duck eggs: the brine solution and the salt-clay method. Select eggs that are fresh and without cracks in the shell. Clean them by straining in a piece of nylon cloth to another container.

### Brine Solution Method

1. Prepare the brine solution by dissolving 1.5 cups of salt for every 4 cups of boiling water. You may put the salt while the water is boiling in a kettle.
2. Put the eggs in the container with brine solution. You may use glass or earthen jars as containers.
3. After ten days, sample one egg to test its salt level. You have to clean and boil it first. You may extend the salting period according to your taste. Salting period should not exceed 15 days.

### Salt-Clay Method

1. Mix one part of salt and two parts of clay in a plastic, wooden or earthen container. Add water and mix until it becomes sticky.
2. Put the egg in the container.
3. Sample an egg on the tenth day to test its salt taste level. Extend the salting period according to your taste.

## Fermented Cassava

### Ingredients:

- 1 Kilogram of cassava,
- 1/2 portion of a small round traditional yeast, sun dried and powdered
- Banana Leaves



### Process:

1. Peel the cassava
2. Scour the epidermis of the peeled cassava to remove the muscus
3. Wash the cassava until it is extremely clean
4. Using a steamer, steam the cassava until it is 3/4 done (not well done). Then, let it cool at room temperature.
6. When the cassava has cooled down, pour the powdered yeast around every cassava. Make sure that the powder is evenly distributed.
7. Cover the powdered cassava with banana leaves and put it inside a covered bowl.
8. The bowl should be tightly closed in order to ferment the cassava. Do not put any salt or otherwise, it will fail.
9. The fermentation process will take at least 30 hours. So do not open the bowl until 30 hours to get the sweet and tasty fermented cassava. Then, your cassava is ready to eat! It will be more tasty if you put it in the refrigerator.

community involvement, organizing, and development. In order to harness the sense of ownership among members, they need to participate. To draw participation among the members, we have to facilitate.

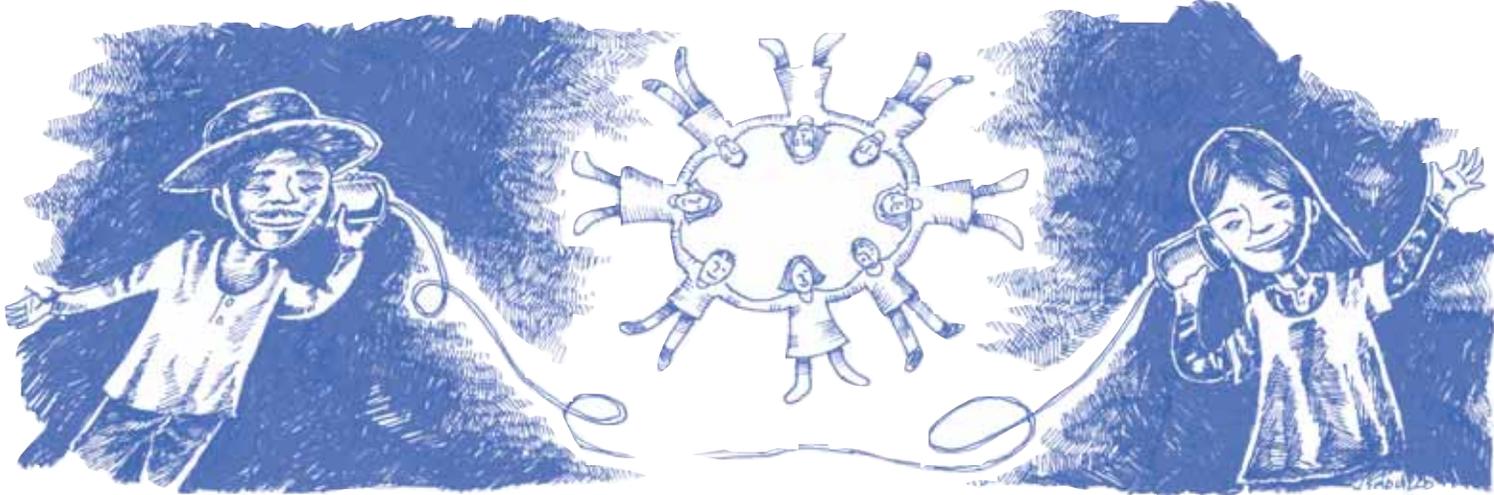
## Learning some Home-Based Technology

In the afternoon of day 7, July 23, our friends from the Philippines, Indonesia and Vietnam taught us some home-based technologies featuring local and easy to prepare food products such as balut and salted eggs from the Philippines. Uyen of Vietnam shared how they make rice noodles and Aci of Indonesia presented how they prepare fermented cassava. According to the presenters, poor people cook and sell these products as additional source of income because of the low capitalization needed to start the business.

## Witnessing Civil Society in Action

In July 24, after spending six days in Mindanao, we traveled back to Manila. We were supposed to have a city tour but this was cancelled when we got caught in a massive traffic jam along the Quezon Memorial Circle. Dulce and Ka Aning took turns in explaining to us that the traffic congestion was due to the mass rallies being conducted by several NGOs and POs on the occasion of the State of the Nation Address (SONA) of President Joseph Estrada.

The SONA is delivered by the President annually when the Philippine Congress opens its session for the season. We saw hundreds of people marching and converging in different parts of the vicinity, placard in tow and waving their flags and banners of different colors. The rallyists were publicly expressing their disdain over the poor performance of the government and voicing out their demands. Later in the evening, we learned from the news that most of the protesters were dispersed using water canons and were not able to go near the Congress building.



## Tackling the Issue of National Federation Building and Regional PO Networking

day 9: JULY 25

**B**ack at Innotech, we started the ninth day of the exchange program with the usual prayers, recap and some energizing activities. On our schedule was another sharing session on national federation building. The national peasant groups participating in this exchange namely PAKISAMA of the Philippines, FSPI of Indonesia, FAD of Thailand, VNFU of Vietnam and NFO of South Korea were to tell the story of how their organizations developed and became independent.

### Issues and Challenges in the Organizational Development of PAKISAMA

To start off the discussion, three generations of PAKISAMA leaders were assembled in a panel discussion to elaborate on the story of PAKISAMA. They included Oscar 'Oca' Castillo, the founding president, Vicente Fabe who succeeded Ka Oca, and Lisah Gusago, the current chairperson of LAKAMBINI, the peasant women's federation within PAKISAMA.

Ka Oca related to us that PAKISAMA was organized in 1986 right after the People's Power Revolution as a result of a series of consultations on agrarian reform and rural development spearheaded by PhilDHRRRA. From 1986 to 1990, PAKISAMA was only considered as one of the programs of PhilDHRRRA, which nurtured and supported the federation in all those years. According to Ka Oca, when the peasant leadership felt that it was time for the organization to go on their own, it became independent in 1991 but never severing their ties with PhilDHRRRA. After spinning off, the relationship between PhilDHRRRA and PAKISAMA transformed to a partnership between equals.

The process that PAKISAMA underwent to become autonomous, Ka Oca stressed, was not devoid of conflict. In fact, he said that it was a difficult process because there were several tension points along the way. One of the tension points pointed out by Ka Oca was on projection. Since both organizations wanted to be known and become popular as civil society organizations, PAKISAMA leaders and staff would sometimes complain that PhilDHRRRA



*Sharing the exchange program's rationale with the farmer-members of the MAPALAD Cooperative*

## PAKISAMA's Insights on the PO Autonomy Process

### On the Pre-Autonomy Stage:

- ❁ The partner NGO should assist in sourcing seed funds for the PO to be able to continue its work.
- ❁ The supporting NGO should assist in building the skills, capabilities and knowledge of the PO leaders and staff.
- ❁ There is need for committed core of leaders and staff.
- ❁ NGOs should avoid recruiting leaders of the POs (but can work as part time) so as not to 'uproot' the leaders



### On the Transition Process to Autonomy:

- ❁ There should be frequent dialogue, both formal and informal, and leveling of expectations between the NGO and the PO.
- ❁ The 'old timers' who have been out of the NGO and PO should be asked to sit during discussions because they know the history of the organization.
- ❁ The formal 'turn over' should be marked with a celebration.



### On the Autonomous Stage:

- ❁ Coordinating mechanisms involving the structure of the organization and the supporting NGO must be maintained.
- ❁ There should be regular informal get together activities.
- ❁ New leaders and staff of both parties should be oriented on the history and working relationship of the organizations.
- ❁ PO representative should be invited to sit as a board member of the partner NGO.



failed to 'project' PAKISAMA in its publications and other activities. Similarly, there was a time when there was lack of communication between the two parties, especially when the pioneering staff and leaders of both groups have left the organizations.

Another tension point highlighted in the presentation of Ka Oca was on the recruitment of personnel. PAKISAMA-trained farmer-leaders were being recruited as NGO staff by some members of PhilDHRRA, thus, the federation was continuously losing their best leaders. However, both PAKISAMA and PHILDHRRA were able to ease the tension after going back to the essence of their being as organizations and clarifying each other's role as agents of social change. The constant dialogue and fellowship between PhilDHRRA and PAKISAMA further cleared the communication line and fortified their partnership.

I was quite impressed by the fact that PAKISAMA succeeded in becoming an autonomous, independent and credible peasant organization despite the tension points it experienced, both internally and externally. I also found remarkable PAKISAMA's efforts in projecting itself and operating as a democratic and peasant-led federation. Their being democratic and peasant led meant that farmer-leaders were active agents, not just beneficiaries of projects, they actually lead the organization particularly in decision making process, and their leaders have fixed terms of office and got regularly elected under stringent qualifications as indicated in their constitution. While they recognize the crucial role of the secretariat specially in day to day management of the organization and in providing information during discussions, the farmer leaders remain to be the one making the final decisions.

After PAKISAMA's presentation, representatives from the other four farmers organizations, the Federasi Serikat Petani Indonesia or Federation of Indonesian Peasant Unions (FSPI), the Vietnam National Farmers Union (VNFU), the Thailand Farmers' Federation Association for Development (FAD), and the New Farmers' Organization of South Korea, also shared the stories. After the session, I thought that perhaps, the greatest challenge to us from other Asian countries, is to strengthen our own organizations, become autonomous and independent, and create systems within our own contexts that would effect a peasant-led and democratic organization. I also realized, however, that this aspiration would be more challenging in countries where there are few, weak, or worse, no existing farmers' organizations.

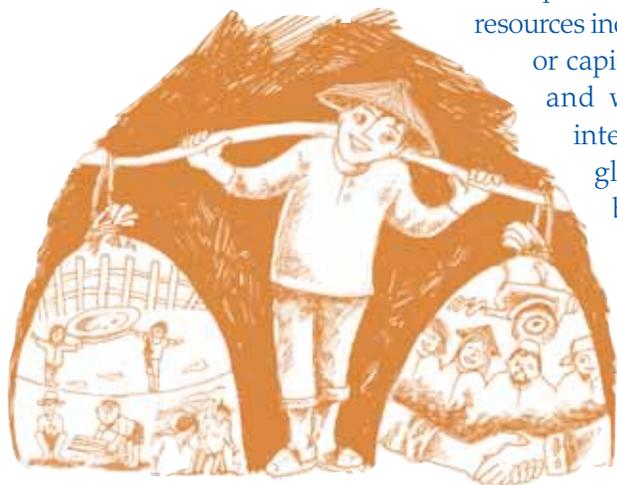
# Comparing Peasant Organizations

Organization	Description
<b>Federasi Serikat Petani Indonesia (FSPI) or Federation of Indonesian Peasant Unions</b>	FSPI is a national peasant organization formed in July 8, 1998. Although the group is a relatively young organization, its members are the pioneers of the peasant movement in Indonesia. The emergence of FSPI is part of a long history of Indonesian peasant struggle to gain freedom of speech and assembly, which was trampled during ex-President Suharto's regime that lasted for more than three decades. FSPI has 13 member-organizations in the different provinces of Indonesia. It implements various activities such as research, formation of cadres, networking, policy advocacy, recruitment of members, etc. FSPI, at present is continuously working on strengthening its advocacy work while at the same time working for stronger organizations at different levels.
<b>Vietnam National Farmers Union (VNFU)</b>	The VNFU is the national farmers organization in Vietnam, established in October 1930. Practically all farmers in Vietnam are members of VNFU, which is estimated to be more than 10 million. VNFU was basically controlled by the government until 1998. Although VNFU is now operating on its own, it still gets substantial support from the government. VNFU is also a member of the network of NGOs and POs in Vietnam, VietDHRRA. VNFU conducts pre-membership seminars on the vision, mission, and goals of the organization, provides services for the agricultural activities of farmers, supervises the implementation of government policies, takes care of the spiritual and material needs of members, and finally, strengthens and broadens their linkages with POs, NGOs, and other sectors of the community including foreign groups.
<b>Thailand Farmers' Federation Association for Development (FAD)</b>	FAD is one of the largest national organizations of farmers in Thailand. It has members in 76 provinces covering six regions. The groups under FAD include occupational groups, cooperatives, individual farmers, and NGOs in the agricultural areas. The groups are organized at the village level, sub-district and district levels, provincial, regional and national levels. The activities of FAD include organizing and strengthening farmers groups, strengthening of the participation of farmers in decision-making, developing knowledge and skills of farmers through education and transfer of technologies, lobbying with government for policies favorable to the farmers, and networking with other groups including local and international.
<b>New Farmers' Organization of South Korea</b>	NFO is a national federation organized in 1962 and is a symbol and model of successful farmers. It has about 1,400 members spread out in nine provinces. Each provincial organization has about 100-150 members. There are also individual members in key cities. The activities of NFO include exchange of information and technology on agriculture, consultation and agricultural extension, and mass education of farmers. Members of NFO enjoy many benefits from the organization such as field trips to advanced countries like Japan, USA and the Netherlands, special financial support up to US\$ 200,000 for farm production with minimal interest.

## Challenges and Opportunities for Asia-wide Concerted Action

In the farmers exchange program in South Korea, we were exposed to the realities and challenges facing the Asian agricultural sector. Here in the Philippine leg of the exchange visit, the commonalities in situation and aspirations of farmers in Asia were further fortified by our first hand experiences of these realities, by the numerous formal and informal discussions that we had, and from the sharing of our speakers and us, the participants.

I distinctly recall three recurring points in the two exchanges and in all major discussions: first, the persistence of poverty caused by the inequitable access to resources including land; second, the weakness in social infrastructure or capital investment resulting to weak people's organizations and weak networks at the local, national, regional and international levels; and third, the continuing challenge of globalization and westernization, which was viewed basically as capitalism leading to the destruction of Asian culture.



These three points aptly reflected our analysis of the Asian situation. In the ensuing discussion, we came up with a three-pronged response to these challenges. First and foremost, we felt the need for economic capability building done through co-trading, co-production and exchange, farmer-to-farmer exchange

for trade, information, and technology, and exploration or establishment of 'mutual' markets at the Asian regional level.

Another response we saw was on organizational and network strengthening. This would mean strengthening of POs and NGOs, formalization of the structure of POs at the Asian regional level, building and strengthening of cooperation among the DHRRAs, lobbying with government and business, building information and communication networks, conducting exchange studies of technicians, regional discussions on agricultural issues, and linking with European counterparts.

A final aspect that we felt we needed to work on was advocacy and lobbying. This would mean negotiations with governments and companies, continuous advocacy addressed to governments, strengthening the participation of women at various levels, reproductive health campaign and peace and conflict resolution.

Towards the end of the discussion, we agreed on the relevance of these issues and challenges. We further agreed for these points to be contained in a joint declaration which we committed to pursue within our selves, our local communities, our organizations, and among us participants of the Asian farmers exchange program.

# Asian Realities as Farmers See Them

Just like any get-together, the Philippine-leg of the Asian Farmers' Exchange Program provided farmer-leaders and rural development workers a venue to share and discuss their current concerns about unfolding local and global events and policy trends. Three important areas of concern were identified as urgent and in need of adequate and relevant responses not only from Asian governments but also civil society as a whole.

## 1. Rural Poverty in Asia

Being a predominantly agricultural region, it is not a strain on one's imagination to claim that most of these impoverished Asians live in the rural areas. It is therefore not surprising that one of the urgent concerns identified by the participating farmer-leaders and civil society members during the exchange visit referred to the escalating level of rural poverty aggravated by inequitable access to land, absence of appropriate modern agricultural technologies and the lack of much needed rural physical and social infrastructures.



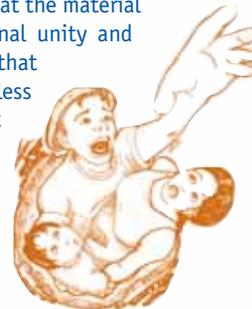
## 2. Of Gender, Ethnicity and Creed



Another major concern identified by the exchange visit participants refer to the inadequacy of most Asian governments in protecting the agricultural sector from the damaging elite-influenced political and economic policies and programs that hinder the availability of equitable opportunities for all farmers regardless of gender, race and creed. Furthermore, it was noted that there exist a renewed sectarian and ethnic violence in the region that is spawned by many of Asian governments' inattention and lack of effective responses to historically rooted issues on social justice, human rights and equitable access to resources.

## 3. Peasant Voicelessness and Depravity

In general, small farmers, especially rural women, experience deprivation not only at the material level but also in terms of power and autonomy. In this day and age of regional unity and conglomerations (such as the European Union and the ASEAN), it is unfortunate that one of global society's most basic sectors remains fragmented, voiceless, and powerless from the local to international levels. In spite of vigorous organizing processes at the village level and networking efforts at the country level, it is noted that there is a notable absence of a genuine farmers' network in Asia that will adequately represent the sector's opinions on Asian and global development concerns, advocate for the implementation of pro-farmer policies and viable programs, and carry-out effective exchange and dialogue between and among countries. Hunger therefore is not limited to physical deprivation but covers yearning for an equal voice and opportunities to be listened to with respect and dignity.



## Committing to a Dignified Way of Life



During the culminating activity of the exchange visit in the Philippines, the farmer-leaders together with their partner civil society members resolved to be in solidarity with one another at the Asian level. Commitments were made to heighten existing efforts to organize from the local to national to regional levels and thereby creating a formidable force that can actively and effectively advocate for small farmers' rights to a decent life and dignified way of living. There was a further resolve that with each other's organized strength demands for social justice, equality and sustainable livelihood will be pursued until landlessness and powerlessness become but a distant memory. For Asia's poor rural men and women, this is truly something to look forward to.



## Asian Farmers' Joint Declaration On Rural Solidarity

**W**e, the farmer-leaders representing ten countries in rural Asia, in solidarity with our development partners from Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines, South Korea, Thailand, and Vietnam, participating in the Asian Farmers' Exchange visit held in Manila, Philippines on the 16th to 27th of July 2000, hereby jointly issue this declaration and commitments.

That as advocates for genuine people-centered rural development, we are concerned about:

- ❖ the escalating level of rural poverty aggravated by inequitable access to land, absence of appropriate modern agricultural technology and the lack of much needed rural physical and social infrastructures;
- ❖ the negative implications of globalization and trade liberalization in the form of unfair western-dictated trade policies and practices, destruction of local indigenous ways of life and knowledge systems and of the natural environment;
- ❖ the inadequacy of most Asian governments in protecting the agricultural sector from the damaging elite-influenced political and economic policies and programs that hinder the availability of equitable opportunities for all farmers regardless of gender, race and creed;
- ❖ the renewed sectarian and ethnic violence plaguing the region spawned by many of Asian governments' inattention and lack of effective responses to historically-rooted issues on social justice, human rights and equitable access to resources; and
- ❖ the absence of a genuine farmers' network at the Asian level that will adequately represent our opinions on Asian and global development concerns, advocate for and implementation of pro-farmer policies and viable programs, and carry-out effective exchange and dialogue between and among Asian countries.

Given these, we commit ourselves to work for the following:

- ❖ heighten the level of farmers' organizing and network formation from local to national to Asian regional level with the belief that through unity and cooperation we will be able to ensure that our governments become sensitive and responsive to our concerns;
- ❖ pursue the goal of farmers' network strengthening, with emphasis on rural women networking, through people-centered institutional and economic capability building programs both at the country and Asian regional levels;
- ❖ continuously lobby from the concerned governments for the implementation of agrarian reform and other pro-farmer development programs that will not only resolve issues on landlessness but also equitable access to social and physical infrastructure necessary for genuine sustainable development in the rural areas; and
- ❖ strengthen our work on the promotion of genuine peace, unity and development in most Asian rural areas in the light of gender, race and ethnic demands for social justice, equality and sustainable livelihood.

As a gesture of unity and with resolve to pursue our commitments, we declare ourselves as belonging to and united under an Asian rural forum of national farmers organizations dedicated to seeing through the process of rural development to be spearheaded by our ranks and pursued in solidarity with agricultural and rural development advocates from the government and civil society.

We declare further that in order to attain all of these, we hereby set-up an ad hoc committee made up of men and women from our ranks who will act as our reference group tasked to guide the development of plans and programs from this point until we are formally organized. The creation of this committee will be but the first step towards a more formal Asian farmers' network.

Through these we hope to achieve our dreams and finally realize our rights to own and nurture the land we till and attain a decent and dignified way of life.

*July 26, 2000 Manila, Philippines*

The Asian Farmers' Exchange Program is an undertaking of the Asian Partnership for the Development of Human Resources in Rural Asia (AsiaDHRRA) in line with its strategic objective of promoting Asian rural solidarity among small-organized farmers and rural communities. The exchange visit in the Philippines was participated in by farmer-leaders and NGO representatives from Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines, South Korea, Thailand, and Vietnam, with support from the Asian Partnership for Human Development (APHD), Misereor, and the ASEAN Foundation.



day 10: JULY 26

## Forging of Commitments and Planning

**I**n the morning of the last day of the exchange visit, the draft declaration was presented to us and we fine-tuned it some more before finally approving the draft. One of the highlights of the document was the consensus to come together as a regional body albeit still quite on an informal level. To facilitate the process of our solidarity formation, we chose from among our ranks a core of leaders we called the Ad Hoc committee.

### Ad Hoc Committee Formation and Planning

After a short discussion on who will form and how the committee will be formed, we decided that the five participating countries with strong and advanced national level farmers federation would compose the Ad Hoc Committee. These included Vietnam, South Korea, Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines. To ensure women participation given that representatives of these organizations were mostly men, a women farmer participant from Malaysia was asked to join the committee.

### A Visit to the Philippine Congress

The afternoon of the final day of the exchange visit was spent visiting the Philippine Congress, the legislative branch of government. We were divided into two groups with one group meeting with Congressman Leonardo Montemayor, a party list

#### Members of the AdHoc Council

##### Vietnam Farmers Union (VNFU)

Mr. Ky Hun Minh  
Vietnam

##### New Farmers' Organization

Mr. Sang Jun Yoon  
South Korea

##### Northern Federation of Farmers' Association for Development (NFAD)

Mr. Phomma Keng Khla  
Thailand

##### National Confederation of Peasant Organizations (PAKISAMA)

Mr. Ananias Loza  
Philippines

##### Federation of Indonesian Peasant Unions (FSPI)

Mr. Budi Agostono  
Indonesia

##### Women Representative

Ms. Maragatham Ramaiah  
Malaysia

representative for the farmer sector. The other group met with the chief of staff of Congressman Cresente Paez, a party list representative for the cooperative sector. After the meeting, we went to visit the main session hall of the Congress where we witnessed the deliberation of a proposed legislation. We were surprised when our presence in the hall was acknowledged by the lawmaking body. For most of us, given our countries' challenging political landscapes, we have never even stepped foot in a legislative building much more meet with and talk to members of Congress.

### **A Final Night of Fun, Laughter and Solidarity**

After that memorable visit in the Philippine Congress, we had our solidarity night. Proudly wearing our national costumes, we spent the night singing and dancing, sharing our rich and diverse cultures with each other and with the guests who came to celebrate with us.

It was a delight watching Sung and Sang Jun dance the Arirang and the Burmese participants Daisy, Lucrecia and Brother Alexi present a native dance in their colorful costumes. When the distribution of certificates of participation came, everyone was happy being part of this significant event. However, we were also a bit sad because we would now be parting with the friends we made both in the Philippines and among our co- participants

For ten days, we have established bonds among ourselves and it was quite sad that we had to bid goodbye for now to each other. We all had an enriching time during the exchange and we learned a lot from this experience of sharing and discussion. With beautiful happy memories to bring back home and share with our families, friends and colleagues at work, we bid each other farewell hoping to see each other again in the next leg of the exchange program.



# Overheard...

quotable quotes heard during the exchange visit

"We followed the case of the Mapalad farmers from Korea. We want you to provide support to the farmers in their fight for the land which is rightfully theirs." **Mr. Seok Youn Hong** (to local government official in Sumilao, Bukidnon)

"Non-Malay farmers are even poorer. They do not, cannot own lands." **Ms. Parvathi Letchumanan**

"We are an agricultural country but investment is focused more on tourism." **Ms. Lucretia Naw Kyu Khin**

"I miss my family. This is my first time to go outside of my small community. And today is my birthday!" **Ms. Bui Thi Dung** (crying)

"She is homesick! It is difficult for me, a man, to know how our women companions are feeling. Mai Chi should have been here." **Mr. Bui Tien Huynh**

"Are you okay?" **Mr. Sahakorn Songrat**

"I will learn English so next time, I can talk to you." **Mr. Phomma Keng Khla**

"People nod during long lectures to keep themselves awake. Right? Nod if yes." **Mr. Carlos Manlupig** (Resource Person)

"Indonesia and the Philippines have, more or less, the same political experiences. In Indonesia, farmers are still waiting to own the land they till." **Mr. Budi Agustono**

"Arghhh! The saleslady said this santol fruit is sweet!" **Mr. Sung Lee** (eating a very sour santol)

"I am happy to gain many new friends!" **Mr. Sengpaseuth Simmanivong** (surrounded by young admiring girls)

"We have gained more ideas on how to help the rural poor in uplifting their present situation of poverty and powerlessness." **Mr. Phang Chanda**

"How many triangles do you see?" **Ms. Chona Echavez** (Resource Person)

"Farmers in West Java do land occupation and not wait for the government since they think it (the government) is not sincere anyway." **Ms. Nur Hafsa**

The story of the farmers fighting for their land presents a source of inspiration for farmers' groups in other countries who wish to own land to till." **Ms. Rosylina Daisy Khaing**

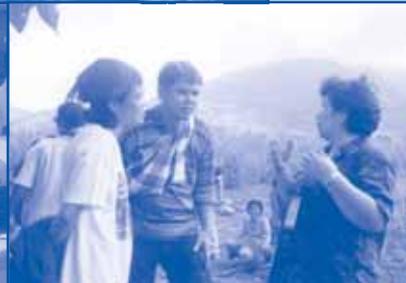
"Engaging the government means there is trust, respect, and capacity to engage." **Mr. Paul Paraguyo** (Resource Person)

"It is important that small farmers are organized at the local level. These local organizations should also be federated at the municipal, provincial, national, and even international levels." **Mr. Elmer Cardona** (Farmer-leader, Resource Person)

"I went to swim in the pool after the carabaos had theirs." **Mr. Puen Siong Gah** (after the community integration)

"We want to show that PAKISAMA is a peasant-led organization. This means we, the farmer-leaders, are active in leading the organization and decision-making remains to be our responsibility." **Mr. Vicente Fabe** (Resource Person)

"We come from a listening culture." **Mr. Yonzon Tamang**



# List of Participants



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*Socio-Economic Development  
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Mr. Budi Agustono  
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Ms. Marsinem  
*Perhimpunan Masyarakat Tani  
Aceh or Aceh Peasant Community  
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*Serikat Petani Pasundan (SPP)*  
Ms. Dyah Sarastri  
*Bina Desa - InDHARRA*

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*Quaker Service Laos (QSL)*

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Ms. Maragatham Ramaiah  
Mr. Puen Siong Gah  
ERA Consumer  
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DHARRA Network Malaysia

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## **South Korea**

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Mr. Seok Youn Hong

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*KoDHARRA*

## **Thailand**

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Ms. Amornrat Thong Phala  
*Northern Federation of Farmers'  
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Mr. Phachern Sing Pra Phan  
Mr. Sahakorn Songrat  
*Farmer's Federation Association for  
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## **Vietnam**

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Ms. H'Ne E Ban  
*Vietnam Farmers' Union (VNFU)*  
Ms. Bui Thi Dung  
*Vietnam Women's Union*  
Mr. Nguyen Trong Uyen  
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**AsiaDHRRA is a regional network of 11 development organizations from 10 Asian countries working in the rural areas.**

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**Credits**

p.5 The Story of the Mapalad Farmers. Lifted from the MAPALAD Christmas Card Case Brief, PARFUND 2000.  
p.9 Asian Trends and Challenges. Summarized from the presentation of Guil Cua, Chairperson, AsiaDHRRA.

**Acknowledgement:**

The Philippine leg of the Asian Farmers' Exchange Visit and the production of this documentation and report were made possible with the support of the Asian Partnership for the Development (APHD), MISEREOR and the ASEAN Foundation. We would also like to extend our deepest gratitude to the members and staff of PhiDHRRA, PAKISAMA and PALAMBU for hosting the exchange visit.

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Jeanette Actub, Rolly Asuncion, Nenen Banza, Ating Echavez, Josel Gonzales, Jet Hermida, Sam Maduro, Loida Ortiz, Menchie Vicencio, Nonoy Villas and Jun Virola

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# Asian Farmers Visit the Philippines

