

Third Party Evaluator's Opinion on Pampanga Delta Development Project, Flood Control Component (1)

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Relevance

The Philippines is perennially visited by tropical storms. Torrential rains during the wet season inevitably results in flooding and landslides. The lowland areas around the Pampanga River, in Central Luzon are particularly threatened because they sit below sea level (Municipalities of Macabebe and Masantol). The eruption of Mt Pinatubo in 1992 exacerbated the situation further by raising the riverbeds in the some of the tributaries leading to the Pampanga River.

The provinces of Pampanga and Bulacan are the two provinces with closest access to Metro Manila. With its agricultural land and aquaculture industries, as well as livestock and meat processing operations, they have the greatest potential to supply the food requirements of Metro Manila, home to over 10 million Filipinos. Damage to crops and produce due to flooding, or the closure of roads greatly impact on the cost and availability of basic food requirements for the urban dwellers.

The Pampanga Delta Development Project (PDDP) specifically the flood control component is most urgent and relevant to the lives of millions of Filipinos, for the 6.1 million who live around the affected areas, and those who depend on that region for food supply. Mitigating natural disasters is a priority of the national government and is mandated in the current 5-year Medium - Term Philippines Development Plan. Floods still continue to occur in the area, but both the offices of the Municipal Engineer of Macabebe as well as the Project Officer of Pampanga River Control System attest to the fact that the situation has been greatly mitigated with the implementation of Phase 1 of the PDDP. The general consensus though among the Pampanga officials is that the maximum effects of the project would be felt with the full implementation of the project as initially envisioned with Phase 2. This sentiment is still not shared by the residents on the Bulacan side.

Impact

The relocated community at the Base Mound of Masantol is a thriving community. There are schools, a beautiful church, permanent homes and prolific business activity. Aquaculture seems to be rewarding to many: the area is now known for the culture of prawns, crabs and tilapia. Flood control during the wet months has kept the industry going. During the dry season, irrigation has helped the traditional rice and corn farmers.

However, as stated in the report, the government mandates that high water channels should be used only for aquaculture. Upon ocular visit, proliferation of concrete homes was observed there. The fishponds which arose out of a MOA between the DPWH and the municipal government seem to be providing many with lucrative sources of income. However, it appears that only those with sufficient capital can take advantage of this opportunity. The marginalized can only hope to be laborers or caretakers. Due to the significant change in the topography of the land, aquaculture has become more viable compared to the traditional rice crop. It is not evident whether the dislocated rice farmers made a successful transition to aquaculture. It appears improbable given that aquaculture requires a significant amount of capital, particularly the high value crops of prawns and crabs.

Resettlement of families expected to be affected by infrastructure development will always be contentious. The issues of land values, relocation sites, access to services and livelihood opportunities are difficult to address to everyone's satisfaction. People will always be threatened by moves that tend to dislocate their homes and their sources of income. However, sometimes small sacrifices have to be made for long term gains. It would be ideal if in future development projects greater attention is given to those marginalized families disadvantaged by any dislocation. The interventions may have to be stratified and specialized. The wealthy fishpond

operators have no need for the small plots in the Base Mound; but the farmer may not even have enough to build a decent home.

Although sustainability is another issue altogether, it was observed that some the sluice gates have began to rust, some inoperative. Upon completion of Phase 1, the remaining personnel of the project were absorbed by the Pampanga River Control System. While they appear to be technically competent to perform their job, the lack of budget for maintenance prevents them from doing it more efficiently.