The Journal of ***Public Affairs and Development***
Volume 1, Number 1, January - June 2012, pp. 59 – 87
ISSN 2244-3983

Lessons in Forging Sustainable Partnerships for Rice Self-Sufficiency in CALABARZON, MIMAROPA, and Bicol Regions

MAYO GRACE C. AMIT and
NELSON JOSE VINCENT B. QUERIJERO

Abstract. In an era of polyvocality and multi-stakeholder partnership, the authors trace the beginnings of an initiative of the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) and other program partners in addressing food security concern through a devolved agricultural extension service. Building on inter-organizational relations theory and partnership building, UPLB served as a partnership broker among the provincial governments, municipal governments, Department of Agriculture Regional Field Units, the local state universities and colleges, and civil society organizations. The paper documents the beginnings and nuances in brokering partnerships and cites the challenges associated with promoting transdisciplinarity in UPLB known to protect specialized domains.

Keywords: *partnership, organizations, organizational relations, partnership for rice self-sufficiency*

Correspondence address:
[1] *Assistant Professor, College of Public Affairs and Development, University of the Philippines Los Baños (CPAf-UPLB); Phone: (+63 49) 536-3382; Email: mcamit07@yahoo.com*
[2] *Associate Professor, CPAf-UPLB; Phone: (+63 49) 536-3382; Email: squerijero@yahoo.com*

I. Introduction

In an era of multidiversity and polyvocality, partnerships matter. While organizational domain claims are arenas for contestation, organizations having set their domain claims would inevitably link with other organizations, making robust not just the notion of specializations but also integration. Hence from a resource scarcity perspective, organizations desirous of other resources - from the more liberal interpretation of it, would link or partner with other organizations. Framed in an agricultural extension setting where multiple service providers exist, the possibilities of establishing and sustaining partnerships for service delivery is enormous. At one end of the spectrum, the public sector has its local government units (LGUs) tasked to do agricultural extension activities under the framework of a decentralized operation. Together with the LGUs are the state universities and colleges (SUCs), which are also mandated to provide support extension services, especially in the broad arena crafted by the Agricultural and Fisheries Modernization Act (AFMA). The private sector, on the other hand, has its multiple service providers driven inevitably by profit motives and to some, corporate citizenship. Last but not the least, are the civil society organizations, specifically the non-government developmental organizations and their locally based people's organizations.

With multiple agricultural extension service providers, what are the areas of complementation that can be pursued? How do organizations behave in such a context? These were some of the primary considerations associated with agricultural extension work seen especially in the light of the rice price crisis of 2008. At that time, market price of rice increased dramatically over a few months, triggered not only by domestic shortfalls in production but also by international scrambling for available surplus. Major rice producing nations were hit by weather variability resulting to a thin tradable

surplus. A question asked then was whether it was possible to pursue new forms of agricultural modernization under the prevailing environment where the Philippines was the largest rice importer of the world, and where domestic policy invoked food security and affirmed the imperative for rice self-sufficiency.

Among the options framed was to put in place mechanisms to reinvigorate Philippine agriculture. This could be done by modernizing the rice supply chain, particularly by making operational dormant mechanisms to improve the collaborative relationships among stakeholders, namely: the provincial government and the SUCs. Under the Local Government Code and the AFMA, possibilities of collaborative relations between the two sector actors are mapped out especially in conducting complementation activities in research, development, and extension.

It is in this policy context that this paper explores modes and practices of building collaborative partnership in an agricultural extension milieu between LGUs and SUCs. It uses the case study of the UPLB project entitled "Collaborative Research, Development, and Extension Services for Food Security (CRDES): The Case of Regions 4a, 4b, and 5". The paper is divided into four sections. The first section traces the conceptual frame of partnership and partnership building. The second section describes the key features of the CRDES project. The third section describes the anatomy and dynamics of the partnership within the CRDES project. Finally, the fourth section draws out opportunities and challenges for partnership modality in achieving rice self-sufficiency.

II. Partnerships and Brokers in Rice Research Development and Extension

The Local Government Code prescribes the responsibilities of local governments (barangay, cities/municipalities, and provinces) in delivering extension and on-site research services and

facilities. Functions include distributing planting materials, maintaining demonstration farms, utilizing and conserving water and soil resources, preventing and controlling plant pests and diseases, assisting in organizing farmers' cooperatives and other collective organizations, and transferring appropriate technologies. The AFMA, meanwhile, ensures a mechanism by which the SUCs' research and extension functions could supplement and complement the Provincial/Municipal/LGUs' on-site research and extension functions. The Department of Agriculture's regional field units (DA-RFU) are mandated to oversee and extend support to LGUs to ensure the bridging of national and local programs. Then, there is UPLB's expressed commitment to play a key role in agriculture and rural development activities being the country's national university and expert in these fields.

Yet, while the enabling policy and institutional framework is present, the primary actors have little interaction with one another. There may have been personal transactions and some inter-organizational relations (IOR) over the past years, but these probably have been intermittent and based on the personal affinity of actors from both organizational and institutional settings. So, the question is, how does one establish IOR? And, would it be possible to establish long-term, sustained, and beneficial relations with one another?

It all starts with the notion of partnering, aided with the notion of brokering. Tennyson (2005) and IBLF (n.d.) underscore the notion of an intermediary who functions as a go-between two or more actors so that they can work well together and that the partnership has maximum effectiveness. The broker who operates as a servant-leader and process manager has these attributes:

- Capacity to create clarity needed in an era with multiple claims and information impulses;

- Skill at convening and facilitating productive interaction among diverse groups of people with differing sets of agenda;
- Willingness to carry a level of risk in behalf of others;
- Ability to inspire others with a vision and passion for work in a cooperative future; and
- A measure of modesty in the brokering so that others become genuinely empowered.

These attributes are tested in the challenge of partnerships, i.e., between the urgency of engagement with one another and the pace of partnership building and development. The partnering cycle has various phases, namely: scoping and building; managing and maintaining; reviewing and revising; and closing, renegotiation, and sustaining (Tennyson 2005). Yet, Franklin (2009) cautions that partnerships do not develop smoothly as envisaged. Partnerships do not merely mean working with one another or working on the same issue. It also means taking a risk by all those involved to work together, to help one another, to trust each other, and to create synergies. Partnership then reflects a dependence on each other.

However, why do organizations collaborate with one another? What makes organizations independent from each other, risk forging and maintaining inter-organizational relations? Bachmann and van Nittleoostuijn (2006) remind that IOR are formal arrangements that bring together assets – whether tangible or intangible – of two or more legally independent organizations with the aim to produce joint value-added. This contract, whether explicit or implicit, formal or informal, is the cornerstone of the relationship. Thus, when two organizations elect to establish a collaborative relationship, they specify the duties, responsibilities, and expectations of each party. Implicit in this is the notion of trust shown by the Global Corporate Citizenship Initiative (2005), Kearney and Sandy (2005), Bachmann & van Nitteloostuijn (2006), Estivalete et al. (2008), Harris (2008), Franklin (2009), and

Mommers & van Wessel (2009). Yet, as Kearney and Candy assert, partnering is being able to meld disparate interests. Trust is an inherent quality that enables people to work together. Aside from trust, reciprocity and a shared purpose are also important dimensions in partnerships. Ashman (n.d.) mentions social capital's role as an ingredient in partnership as well as mutual trust or confidence on the partner's ability and will to carry out the agreement. She further notes that a strategic fit among the following dimensions ensures a successful partnership:

- Project goals address needs and issues perceived to be significant by all of the important participants;
- Project methodology is based on a successful model for addressing social needs that is shared by partners;
- Project represents a meaningful value-added to the organizational portfolio of each partner, thus, together they are able to do the task; and
- Functional roles of the partners where each one contributes in a complementary manner – competencies, resources, assets and tasks; this should also prevent excessive competition and overlap.

Indeed as Estivalete et al. (2008) point out from a Larson et al. study in 1998, trust in IOR has two dimensions. First is the structural/calculative trust based on mutual assistance between partners as they rely on reputational mechanisms so that value-adding and complementation of resources may happen. Second is behavioral, which is based on the belief that organizations will avoid the adoption of opportunistic behaviors, thus, engagement will result in positive and well-intentioned interactions with partner organizations.

Yet for all of these, Bidwell & Ryan (2006), as well as Vlaar et al. (2006a) remind that collaboration is by design an emergent process. In this process, the structure and activities of collaborative

partnerships will vary based on unique participants, history, and other characteristics of the partner and the task. Harris (2008) notes that unequal power relations may emerge. Thus, these authors conclude that collaborative partnerships, in spite of the idiosyncrasies of partners, will find themselves nested within a complex hierarchy of governance mechanisms. Indeed, this is echoed by Estivalete et al. (2008) who opine that organizations in a network undergo a learning process of collaborative relations. These relations evolve over time, further citing Cohen and Levinthal's (1990) notion of absorptive capacity of the organization – in its ability to recognize the value of new knowledge, assimilate it, and apply the knowledge for common ends. On the other hand, Gow & Ross (n.d.) explore the role of social capital and the organizations' aspirations as governance and support mechanisms that ensure enforcement and maintenance of IOR during periods of shock/tension. Such social capital, they say, replaces financial capital in the short-term to indicate the partners' willingness to stay within the network over time.

Yet, Vlaar et al. (2006a,b) assert that a degree of formalization is important in maintaining IOR. Such formalization involves the process of codifying and enforcing inputs, outputs, and behavior attendant to the necessary outcomes signified by contracts, rules, and procedures. This sense-making through a formalized action enables partners to construct and apprehend the world, making them act collectively. This leads to understanding the partner's management system, culture, capabilities, and weaknesses. Hence, these organizations can better understand each other's intention, action, and behavior. Such understandings would eventually lead towards collective consciousness, common reality, and shared understandings of the phenomenon.

Having said these, the next question that needs to be answered is when organizations enter into relations with each other, what are the dimensions implicated in an IOR?

Intriligator (1983) notes three organizational characteristics and properties in IOR. These are existence of potential resources; general cooperative environments consisting of support, incentives, organizational reward system; and congruence between individual organizational goals and the IOR superordinate goal. She further clarifies that three structural characteristics of IOR are important, namely: the type of coordinating mechanisms present; the demographic conditions such as actors' homogeneity, location, and size; and contributions and resources brought into the partnership. Eventually, she asserts that when IOR happens, relational characteristics are important to distinguish individual or personal ties/roles that drive the networked organization or whether a complex, multiple tie at various levels among participating organizations happen. Then, IOR is explored using the process characteristics in reference to the degree of formality each partner brings into the partnerships; the exchange process between members of the network, whether these are reciprocal and voluntary in the sharing of resources; and the patterns of influence present in the relationship. Finally, she notes that organizational analysts of inter-organizational effectiveness should focus on two dimensions: indicators of improved service delivery to clients and indicators of strengthened ties among network partners.

Next, what makes a successful partnership? The Global Corporate Citizenship Initiative (2005) identifies seven success factors of effective partnerships. These are:

- Openness, transparency, and clear communication to build trust and mutual understanding;
- Clarity of roles, responsibilities, goals, and ground rules;
- Commitment of core organizational competencies;
- Application of the same professional rigor and discipline focused on achieving targets and deliverables that would be applied to governing, managing, and evaluating organizations;

- Respect for differences of approach, competence, time frames, and objectives of different partners;
- Focus on achieving mutual benefits in a manner that enables the partners to meet their own objectives as well as common goals; and,
- Understanding the needs of local partners and beneficiaries with a focus on building their own capacity and capability.

Finally, it is said that true partnerships are about shared agenda as well as combined resources, risks, and rewards. IOR is built on voluntary collaborations where respective strengths, core competencies, and assets of each partner are brought to a mutually satisfying result.

III. Key Features of the CRDES Project

The CRDES was conceptualized to strengthen agricultural extension services for food security (rice as initial focus) with particular interest on the role of partnerships and collaboration of various research, development, and extension (RDE) stakeholders - the LGU and SUCs as frontline actors, the DA-RFU, and UPLB as technical support agents. The Program key result areas are: 1) improved seed system, 2) strengthened extension system, and 3) revised provincial rice action plan at the provincial level. Except for result area 3 where all 16 provinces of the three regions are covered, result areas 1 and 2 are dedicated to only five focus provinces. The venue for collaborative partnerships is through technical assistance, training, and governance reform activities as can be gleaned from Figure 1.

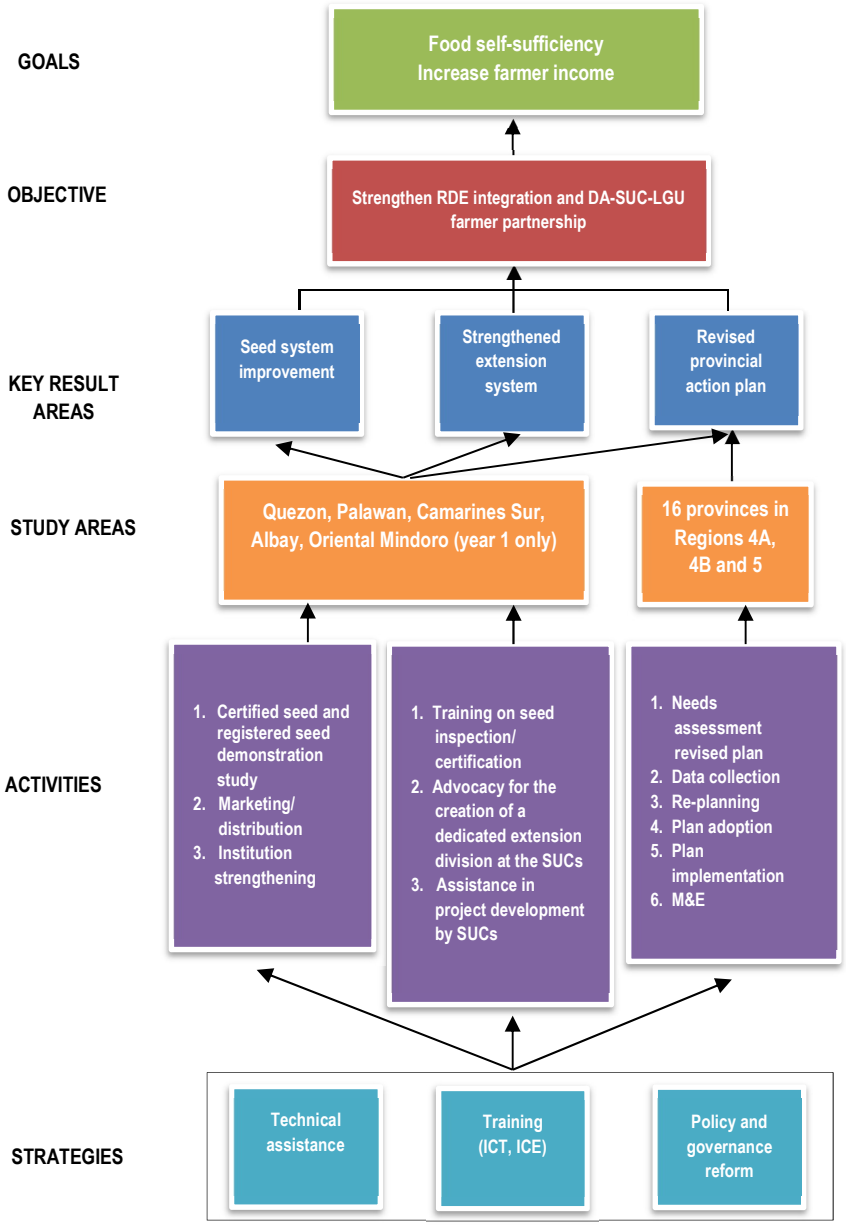

Figure 1. CRDES program framework (Rola et al. 2012)

Role of CRDES partners

Collaboration, partnership, and institutional development are the underlying principles behind the program's delivery strategy. As mentioned previously, the expected role and contribution of each stakeholder were generally guided by the provisions of the Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization Act (AFMA) and the Local Government Code of 1991 (LGC). These two laws provide the general framework for delivering agriculture services to farmers at sub-national levels of government. In particular, Rule V, Article 5 of the LGC and Title 3, Chapters 1 and 2 of the AFMA set a broad direction on LGUs' responsibility for agricultural extension and on-site research including technology transfer to farmers. For SUCs, the AFMA explicitly stipulates that:

> *"SUCs shall focus their extension activities such that their priority clients, aside from students, are the extension personnel of LGUs…by providing degree and non-degree training programs, technical assistance, extension and research activities, M&E of LGU extension projects, and information support services."*

Further, under Rule 92.1, it is stipulated that the RFU is to assume the functions of the Department of Agriculture in the development of regional agriculture (including the rice sector) and fisheries development strategy and program.

Given the prevailing institutional weaknesses in current coordinating mechanisms for agricultural RDE especially at the local level, UPLB was envisioned to identify avenues as well as to initiate and facilitate mechanisms for sustainable interactions among these key actors. These sustainable interactions would usher continuing arrangements for collaborative partnership to support provincial rice self-sufficiency. This affirms UPLB's commitment in contributing to national development especially since agriculture, particularly rice research, is recognized to be among its foundational niches.

Within UPLB, two Colleges – the College of Agriculture and the College of Public Affairs and Development – are at the forefront in responding to the call for promoting transdisciplinary initiatives within the University. They realize the greater potency brought about by combining expertise from the natural and social science disciplines.

Under the CRDES program framework, all key actors share a common aspiration to achieve rice self-sufficiency but with differentiated roles. The LGUs possess the governance machinery that will usher local policy, planning, regulatory framework, and implementation strategy to support self-sufficiency goals. The SUCs hold the distinction of having the primacy over locally-relevant RDE knowledge. The RFUs provide the critical oversight and augmentation support that will ensure coherence of the local and national rice program. And UPLB serves as a facilitator and knowledge builder by understanding inter-organizational dynamics brought about by the science-policy continuum for rice self-sufficiency.

Implementation strategy

Guided by these premises, the CRDES rolled out an implementation strategy in which UPLB mentored its DA-RFU counterparts in effecting sustainable collaborative partnerships between the LGU and SUCs in various activities that contributed to rice self-sufficiency. Covering a period of 30 months, the project activities were strategically clustered in three phases: pre-implementation, implementation, and handover/exit.

The *pre-implementation* phase essentially covered levelling-off activities on the roles and responsibilities of the key actors - LGUs, SUCs, DA-RFUs, and UPLB.

The *implementation phase* included the conduct of baseline studies in four provinces to ascertain the level of agricultural performance of farmers in the study sites and to formulate interventions for the key result areas, especially on seeds. Most importantly, the baseline surveys established data on the farmers' sources of information and the role of extension. An institutional survey was also administered to clarify institutional arrangements that may facilitate or hinder the delivery of services of the national rice program. Through focused group and roundtable discussions (FGDs/RTDs), partner institutions were identified for involvement in the collaborative work.

Solicited from the stakeholders were implications on the nature of partnerships that needed to be formed at their level to improve the delivery system and mechanisms. In short, these information formed part of the planning exercise. Technical demonstration and quick response teams were dispatched to assist farmers with pest and water problems. Various field services to support local seeds adoption, production, and entrepreneurship were undertaken. Seed diagnostic laboratories, other diagnostic kits, and trainings on seed quality testing were provided to four SUCs to improve the quality of instruction as well as to strengthen their capacity to analyze the quality of farmers' seeds. Sixteen provincial representatives from the SUCs and LGUs were also trained on Geographic Information System (GIS)-based soil analysis so they could assess the soil fertility in their respective areas.

Along the result area of governance, the project initiated the results-oriented methodology of planning for rice self-sufficiency. This methodology consists of a two-stage planning process that is goal-oriented, evidence/science-centered, and broad-based in participation. A compendium of summary matrices to capture information requisites for a comprehensive rice sector assessment and planning (the province had an initial plan) have been compiled

by the UPLB team. These information served as guide in the replanning activities.

The planning process also provided the venue for identifying researchable areas unique to the localities for funding. Central to all these processes was the organization of the planning team hosted by the provincial LGU. To assume the lead role in the planning exercise, the team should ideally have representation from the local SUCs, DA-RFUs, and other private sector organizations.

Finally, the *handover/exit* phase included the consolidation and sharing of project findings, outputs, agreements, and the recommendations to sustain the partnership arrangements. In particular, areas for future partnerships were affirmed to include, among others, validation (with sub-provincial and regional/national units), funding, implementation of the rice action plans and the research proposals, and exploration of the possibility of clustering and trading among the regions to achieve sufficiency requirement at the provincial level.

Management strategy

The management structure adopted by UPLB for the CRDES consisted of a core project management unit under the overall direction of a Project Manager and Co-Manager, representing the natural (College of Agriculture or CA) and social science (College of Public Affairs and Development or CPAf) disciplines. A research team assisted the Project Managers in general administration, coordination, and reporting functions. A pool of experts/specialists from various colleges was organized into teams to provide technical support in various project activities. In rolling-out activities with local partners, UPLB directly coordinated with the DA-RFUs that, in turn, served as the coordinating body for the LGUs, SUCs, and other key stakeholder groups in the region.

The partnership arrangement under the CRDES was covered by a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between UPLB and each of the partner RFU, LGU, and SUC stipulating the expected contribution of each party. These MOUs were duly signed by the UPLB Chancellor, Heads of Office, or a high ranking official representative of the partner organization, specifically the presidents of the 16 SUCs and 16 provincial governors in the three regions of CALABARZON (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal and Quezon), MIMAROPA (Oriental Mindoro, Occidental Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon, and Palawan) and Bicol (Albay, Camarines Sur, Camarines Norte, Sorsogon, Catanduanes, and Masbate).

IV. Anatomy and Dynamics of Partnerships

On actors and roles

Central to any partnership engagement are the actors involved, the resources and principles they carry (individual and organizational) that influence their actions, and the roles they assume in playing their part as member of a team in a partnership framework. In the CRDES, the conception of the 'team' consisting of agricultural and social scientists emanated from the initiative of the President of the National Academy of Sciences and Technology (NAST), with assistance from the UPLB Chancellor, to find a way out of the rice price crisis in 2008. A collaborative project was to be the venue for this "team" to consolidate and pull their acts together. The elder senior team members from both camps had histories of working relationships also in the field of rice research. For other members of the team, this was probably the first time to work together.

The actor configuration of the core UPLB team was a mix of "elder senior" members and "younger senior" members based on academic positions held. It was an interesting and exciting mix, given the disciplines, principles held, and historicities of each working

member. Thus, when the proposal was being threshed out, competing claims for component and resource allocation became a product of a negotiated exercise managed by the Team Leader. It was a tug-of-war between two poles: Would the project be a technical/demonstration project or an extension/partnership building? This went on for some time given also the conditionalities and expectations set by external stakeholders. With the backing coming from the Office of the Chancellor, the CPAf was identified as the lead unit together with CA. Eventually, CRDES as originally crafted, was established as a modality for extension/partnership building.

Meanwhile, actor configuration at the local level involved several interest groups. Two are the focus in this paper: the LGU and the SUC. The LGU is generally a catch-all label referring to three levels of administration – provincial, municipal/city, and barangay. Each level involves a wide array of offices, which may directly or peripherally, and differentially be predisposed in contributing to food/rice self-sufficiency goals. At the forefront are the offices representing agriculture, planning, and budgeting. These offices consist of staff with diverse backgrounds and inclinations whose actions are heavily influenced by the interplay of personal, professional, and political motivations.

On the other hand, the SUCs serve as the local repository of scientific resources that should underpin self-sufficiency actions carried out by the LGUs and farmers. Through the research-extension continuum, SUCs enable the translation of scientific research outputs to practical usage. The management structure for this continuum may be found under one or separate offices, involving actors and offices of different resource endowments and disciplinal inclinations, which could bear impact on partnering arrangements.

Finally, the RFUs act as the go-between linking the DA Central Office with its local constituency – LGUs and farmer groups.

The linkage is through nationally-initiated projects that augment local resources or provide incentives for agriculture development (rice self-sufficiency included) to achieve national goals. The RFUs, consisting of technical staff, are caught in the challenging role of balancing local and national realities. However, their role is largely to see through the effective roll-out of national programs and to give feedback on the local nuances of implementation.

All these actors share aspirations for rice self-sufficiency carried out through differentiated roles, in varying forms and degree. They stand unique in terms of their organizational history, culture, and resource base, which they bring into the arena of partnership creation, facilitating or possibly constraining collaborative action.

On tiers of engagement

Two levels of collaborative partnership are defined under the CRDES. In one level, UPLB is a focal organization, given the different colleges as sub-system components. CRDES became the venue where a multidisciplinary team of agricultural and natural science-based faculty and researchers partnered with social science researchers. The CRDES UPLB team came from disparate disciplines with different assets/resources/competencies (Figure 2). Aside from individual attributes, each one also came from an organizational level with its own goal, resources, sources of influence, and outputs. Melding the team, while bringing in new collaborators aside from the core group, was a significantly new job. This new job entailed brokering skills (not only from the social scientists but also from the agricultural/natural scientists) while going through the phases of intra- and later on inter-organizational relationships.

The second level was seen from a macro perspective with UPLB as the broker through the RFU, to prime collaborative linkages with the different levels of LGUs and SUCs in the focal provinces. The premise was that there were at present weak links as well as

collaborative and partnership activities (Figure 3). Thus, it was UPLB's task to broker this relationship to happen, to engage the partners, and to ensure that a higher level goal – i.e., rice self-sufficiency and its latent function of priming agricultural modernization - was reached. It was through shared aspirations, resource exchange, a responsive governance structure, clear roles, and an emergent collaborative culture forged by a trusting relationship with each other that service delivery could be improved.

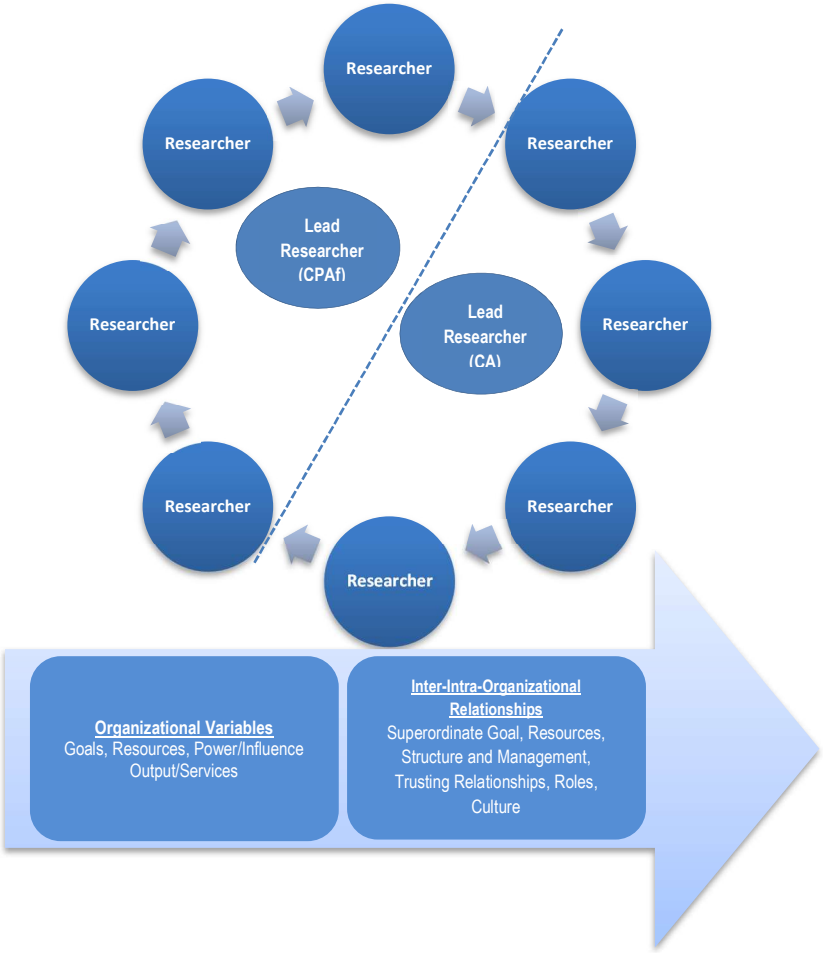

Figure 2. Level 1 Partnership: *UPLB* project team

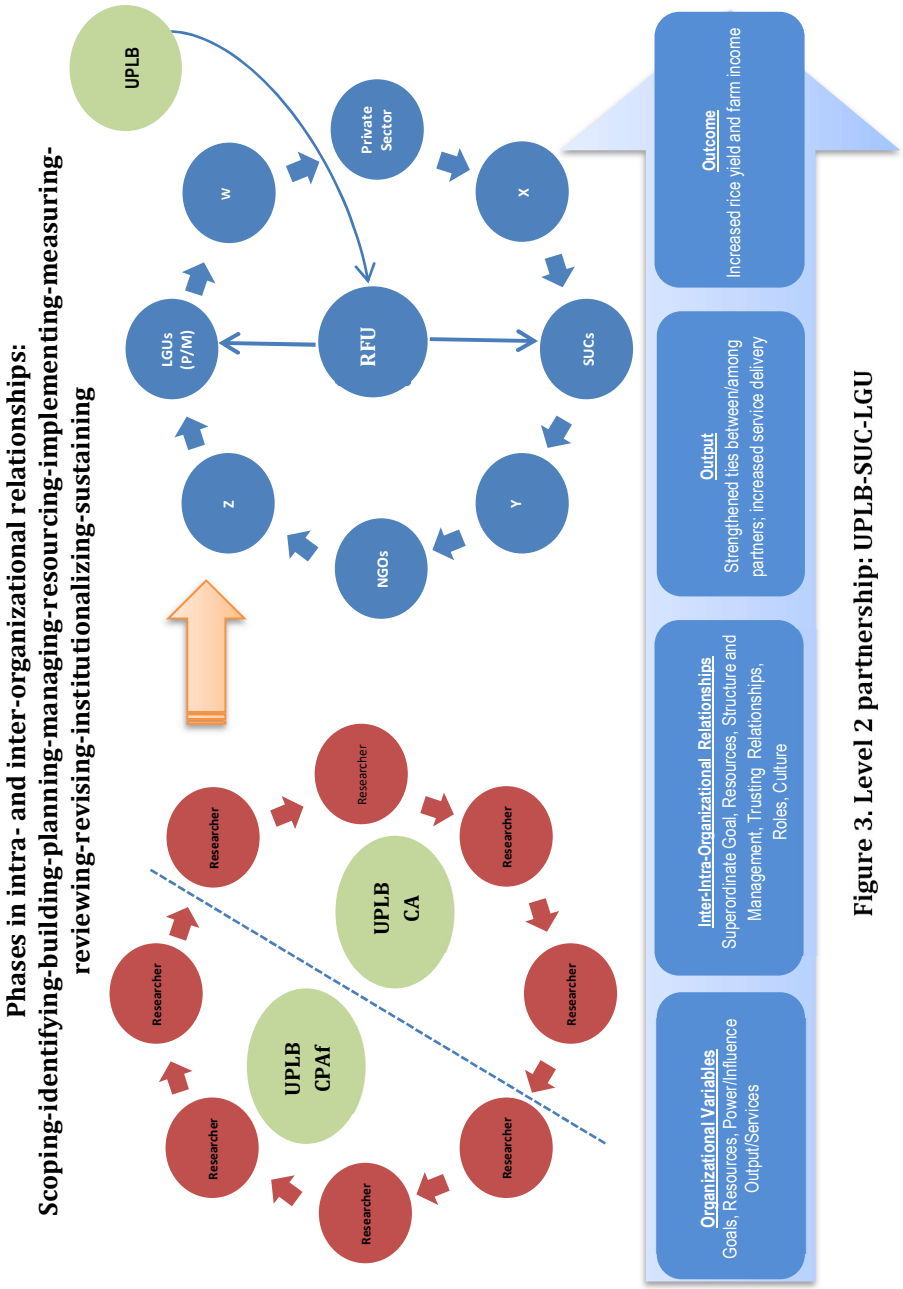

Figure 3. Level 2 partnership: UPLB-SUC-LGU

Multi-actor-goal alignment and consistency

As partnership progresses, frameworks may be revised. Bonifacio (2010), an avid observer in agricultural and institutional development, noted this during the mid-year planning meeting of the CRDES. For one, the rationale for collaboration – i.e., for rice self-sufficiency – was clearly emphasized. In a highly volatile environment, local actors are pressed to harmonize and unify various action agenda amidst the challenges of a globalized agriculture production and distribution system.

While acknowledging individual competencies, Bonifacio called for building a new agricultural knowledge system. This system is performance-based and driven by information-knowledge seeking agents who are able to translate such into an innovative culture of production that is collaborative in nature. The management of such endeavor rests on the kind or nature of the task at hand based on mutually agreed problems and shared solutions or objectives. Suspended are traditionally held idiosyncrasies of experts aiming for self-glory to a commitment and accountability for responsible action. Such shift involves a new framework of action that engenders a community of practice operating on a trusting ethic to achieve rice self- sufficiency.

Managing such collaborative work entails ensuring a results-based resource management to enhance performance effectiveness supported by an enabling environment. Such collaborative activities of local actors aim to overhaul the orientation of agricultural management system from small-scale production to agribusiness. Such reorientation should muster collaborative action based on a revitalized structure and relations of work/roles that are more fluid, networked, and accountable in the end. Thus, Bonifacio saw the movement away from independent domains and ways based on attaining an ordinate goal towards attaining a shared, mutually agreed superordinate goal.

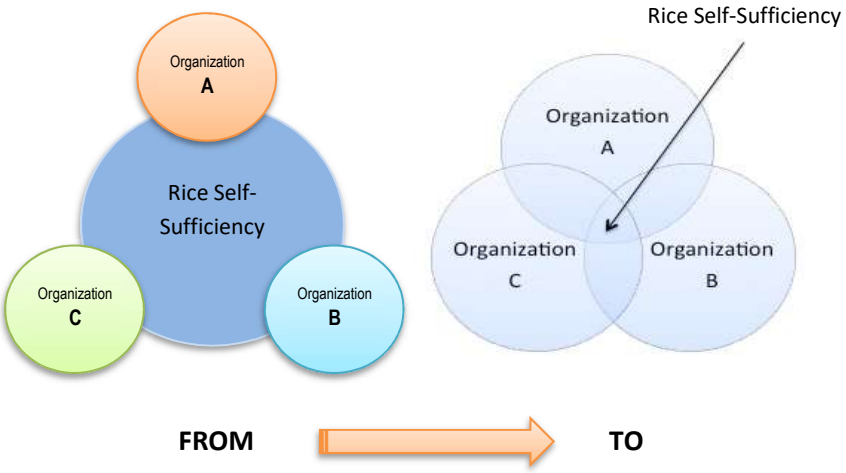

Figure 4. Bonifacio's interpretation of collaborative rice self-sufficiency

As the project was implemented, linking and brokering with the provincial partners, i.e., provincial LGUs and SUCs, was another terrain altogether different from the intra-organizational (i.e., UPLB) milieu. To a certain extent, the parties in the past had very little formal links with one another. Each was doing separate things at the provincial level, and there was very little history of collaborative working arrangements. Also, expectations by the SUCs at the time had to be managed. They asserted during one forum that they were more attuned to what was happening at the provincial level. With intercession from the members of the Senior Technical Advisory Group of the Department of Agriculture and with the "old boys club" culture, the SUCs were convinced to move on into the relationships.

Identifying partner provinces was a balancing act. The UPLB CRDES was pressured to move near Regions 4a, 4b, and 5 as immediate influence areas. The team also knew that they would be working with LGUs whose rice productivity was below the national average of 3.8 mt/ha. Still, selecting the final partner LGUs was a

product of both technical and political considerations. It helped that members of the UPLB team had prior work and personal relationships with potential local partners.

At both the intra- and inter-organizational levels, each organization enrolling into the project had distinct mandates, resources (human, institutional) at their disposal, definite power and influence, and outputs/services. Under the project framework, partners were mobilized and enrolled into the superordinate goal of aiming for rice self-sufficiency. Cognizant of its political and technical ramifications, rice self-sufficiency was possible at a certain level. Partners were serious in making this happen given current enabling factors. This was a desired goal tempered with the scientific and technical capabilities of the stakeholders. The key was ensuring rice sufficiency through a spirited engagement with one another, especially with the farmers and their people's organization. To do this, the Department of Agriculture through the Bureau of Agricultural Research (DA-BAR) provided the CRDES project a sizeable amount of budget. This fund became an issue among the groups. It took about five rounds of consultations spread over three months that the team members finally agreed on the components and resource allocation. The initial structure was more of accommodation of the different partners. It was an extremely inclusive project set-up.

On structure and coordination

A pressing challenge of a multi-actor inter-organizational structure in a partnership framework is the handling of individual and organizational adaptation in areas where shared practices and values need to evolve. The arena of control critically rests on having a clear delineation of tasks and roles within a well-articulated structure and system of coordination and decision-making channels where individual actions are transformed into shared

meanings. Without this, tasking and role delineation can raise perception of unfounded asymmetry. This asymmetry may confuse and undermine quality of action (and consequently, feedback) and compromise trust, leading to disincentives to engage in the partnership.

For example, some project partners both at the intra- and inter-organizational levels - were surprised about the multiple actor configuration, especially when the Quick Response (QR) study team was fielded. These QR teams followed the FIELDS (Fertilizer, Irrigation and Infrastructure, Extension and Education, Loans, Dryers and Postharvest Infrastructure and Seeds) framework of the Department of Agriculture. These had at most technical and social scientists cooperating to understand program implementation at the provincial level. The Provincial LGU partners were swamped with the number of scientists converging in their area at the same time. Initially, there was goodwill among the team members, but the provincial partners later felt deluged by the request for data and interviews from many UPLB-based partners converging all at once in the provinces.

Eventually, role dissonance happened, especially with the research assistants. As implementation of activities peaked, dispatched UPLB teams had to compete for attention in the field. The direct line of authority through the provincial team leader was often broken or bypassed just to accomplish the designated tasks. The research assistants simply accommodated the demands of the senior project staff.

During the rice replanning phase of the project, the LGUs and SUCs had more interaction activities. Plans were also afoot on engaging both partners in building their research base capacities, particularly the SUCs, to support location-specific technologies needed by the farmers. These activities were thought to provide continuing engagement of both partners in the long run.

Early in the project implementation, during the conduct of initial techno-demonstration, socio-economic survey and QR studies with the local partners, the DA-RFU, reminded the project team to adopt a protocol for partnership. This protocol would govern their formative and future interactions with stakeholders. However, there was no documented protocol on partnership building in the CRDES. Time and time again, the project team had to explain its collective faux pas whenever the provincial partners (LGU, SUC, civil society organizations) reminded them that there seemed to be too many uncoordinated activities going on in their areas. The teams for techno-demonstration, baseline surveys, and QR studies were in a sense simultaneously converging in the provinces. Thus, it would have been prudent on CRDES' part to have observed and followed protocols. In fact, the DA-RFU 4 had a working template designed for a different project, but it was hardly given attention.

On hindsight, having a partnership protocol is important. First, it forces partners to observe social and formal courtesies in a multi-player extension system. Second, it enables appreciation of the important roles of each partner, further valuing relationships and cementing social capital. Third, it highlights its instrumental value.

On the brokering role

During the early stages of project implementation, the SUCs reminded UPLB to be cautious in assuming a "big brother" role in the relationship. They asserted that their presence in the province entitled them to assume leadership roles in the partnership instead of UPLB. Past engagements with UPLB had also received mixed responses. Thus, the UPLB team had to be modest in its capacity as a broker. It had to assume the tasks of managing expectations, competing claims to authority (technical or political-administration), joint planning, and brokering.

At the intra-organizational level, CPAF was expected as the lead partner to enjoin the other colleges to join the partnership. The colleges were expected to plan the activities and ensure that even at the sub-system level, partnerships could be enabled, managed, and strengthened following the mantra of the UPLB Chancellor: "TEAM – together everyone achieves more." It was also a way by which transdisciplinary approach could be seen in action.

V. Opportunities and Challenges Toward Rice Self-Sufficiency in a Partnership Modality

Primordial in any inter-organizational relationship is defining a superordinate goal that everyone in the partnership would believe in. This goal becomes the image or icon that will symbolically link everyone in the process as they try to achieve it. Attaining rice self-sufficiency had to be a valid reason for engagement. One, the national rice self-sufficiency plan had incentives for the provinces. Two, the provinces and SUCs would inevitably gain something from the experience. Thus, from both the intra- and inter-organizational system perspectives, a superordinate goal was vital.

Attaining the goal through partnership modality was another matter altogether. How does one broker and manage the relationship so that provincial actors sustain the relations? It was fortunate that there were incentives for joining, i.e., financial fund transfers and capacity building (personnel, farm inputs, and possible mobile seed laboratories). However, a question was also raised on what other instrumental value did partners perceive in the relationships?

Other constant challenges were the process of taking roles and enhancing trust in the partnership. Role-taking was fluid in the project implementation. The project leaders of CRDES had to resort

to this because of the processual nature of the engagement. Admittedly, this resulted to some confusion, and at times, it became a concern among the team members. Trust was also needed to accept unpredictable responses and surprises in field implementation. For instance, the other partner had to take a step back, suspend judgment, and rely on the decisions reached by the actor at that particular point in time. Thus, partnerships engendered a sense of appreciating field-level particularities because one could not always be present in the field.

Another challenge at the intra- and inter-organizational levels was ensuring that the partnership among the LGUs and SUCs remained robust, not only in the rice sector but also in other engagements. While each partner may perceive some gains in the current relationship, scaling up and becoming more inclusive in agricultural governance is a must. Projects are temporary in nature. However, if we are to expect a more institutionalized partnership, the engagement should move beyond a project-based activity and more into problem-solving modality that recognizes individual specializations while fostering synergy through collaborative relations.

As a final note, the paper attempted to appreciate the dynamics of partnership in rice self-sufficiency within the framework of an agriculture service delivery mechanism. This bias necessarily carried significant generalizations with respect to actor interest and motivations on rice self-sufficiency. Other nuances may emerge when viewed from the lens of partnership within specific issues in rice self-sufficiency, i.e. RDE, irrigation, credit, and marketing. There is a wide scope for further study on partnerships within these specific contexts to deepen and enrich the analysis. In addition, processes and behavioral feedbacks on the level of maturity or satisfaction gained from the engagement must be documented. In the CRDES experience, much of the project indicators were on the outputs and activities. While these are

important, projects that highlight partnership as an explicit outcome must necessarily show performance evidence to show progress. Better still, indicators for success must be developed for this purpose to capture, among others, individual actor and institutional awareness and appreciation for sustained partnership engagement.

References:

Ashman, D. (n.d.). 'Closing the gap between promise and practice: A framework for planning, monitoring and evaluating', *Social Development Frameworks*, http://www.impactalliance.org/ev_en.php?ID=9173_201&ID2=DO_TOPIC (Accessed on 23 December 2009).

Bachmann, R. and van Nitteloostuijn, A. (2006). 'Analyzing inter-organizational relationships in the context of their business systems. A conceptual framework for comparative research', *Sociological Series*, 78, Institute for Advanced Studies, http://www.ihs.ac.at/publications/soc/rs78.pdf (Accessed on 23 December 2009).

Bidwell, R.D and Ryan, C.M. (2006). 'Collaborative partnership design: The implications of organizational affiliation for watershed partnerships', *Society & Natural Resources* 19:9, pp. 827-843.

Bonifacio, M. F. (2010). Personal notes to Dr. Agnes C. Rola after the mid-term review. April 2010.

Estivalete, V.F.B., Pedrozo, E.A. & Cruz, L.B. (2008). The learning process in inter-organizational relationships, http://www.anpad.org.br/bar (Accessed on 9 September 2009).

Franklin, T. (2009). How partnerships work', *Development in Practice*, 19:6, pp. 789-792.

Global Corporate Citizenship Initiative in World Economic Forum. (2005). 'Partnering for success', *Business Perspectives on*

Multistakeholder Partnerships, http://www.members.weforum.org/pdf/ppp_summary.pdf (Accessed on 8 September 2009).

Gow, H. & Ross, B. (n.d.). 'Ensuring intra and inter-organizational relationship. Survival under exogenous and endogenous shocks and distress: The role of social capital and agent aspirational level', http://www.eoq.hu/iama/conf/1102_paper.pdf (Accessed on 23 December 2009).

Harris, V. (2008). 'Mediators or partners? Practitioner perspectives on partnerships', *Development in Practice,* 18:6, pp. 701-712.

International Business Leaders' Forum. (n.d.). 'Developing the Art and Science of Cross-Sector Partnership', University of Cambridge Program for Industry, http://www.thepartneringinitiative.org (Accessed on 9 September 2009).

Intriligator, B.A. (1983). 'Evaluating inter-organizational relationships', Paper presented at the Annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Quebec, 11-15 April 1983, http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED237553.pdf (Accessed on 9 September 2009).

Kearney, J. & Sandy, D.M. (2005). 'Partnerships and processes of engagement', *Journal of Community Practice,* 12:3, pp. 181-201.

Mommers, C. & Wessel, M. van. (2009). 'Structures, values and interaction in field level partnerships. The case of UNHCR and NGOs', *Development in Practice,* 19:2, pp. 160-172.

Rola, A.C., Hernandez, J.E., Medina, J.R., Paunlagui, M.M. & Velasco, L.R.I. (2012). 'Partnership for food security: An overview' in Rola, A.C., Hernandez, J.E., Medina, J.R., Paunlagui, M.M. & Velasco, L.R.I. (eds.). *Partnership for Food Security*. Diliman, Quezon City: DA-BAR and College, Laguna: UPLB, pp. 3-21.

Tennyson, R. (2005). *The Brokering Guidebook: Navigating Effective Sustainable Development Partnerships*. Cambridge: The Partnering Initiative.

Vlaar, P.W.L, van den Bosch, F.A.J & Volberda, H.W. (2006a). 'On the evolution of trust, distrust, and formal coordination and control' in *Inter-organizational Relationship: Towards an Integrative*

Framework. Erasmus Research Institute of Management. Report Series Research in Management. ERS2006-035-STR. http://www.papers.ssrn.com/Sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id =920230 (Accessed on 9 September 2009).

Vlaar, P.W.L, van den Bosch, F. A.J. & Volberda, H.W. (2006b). 'Coping with problems of understanding' in *Inter-organizational Relationships. Using Formalization as a Means to Make Sense.* Erasmus Research Institute of Management. Report Series Research in Management. ERS2006-034-STR. http://www. papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=920229 (Accessed on 9 September 2009).