

FEATURE ARTICLE

**Towards Sustainable Communities and
Human Security: Challenges of the College
of Public Affairs and Development
University of the Philippines Los Baños¹**

*Agnes C. Rola², Josefina T. Dizon³,
Maria Ana T. Quimbo⁴, and Wilfredo B. Carada⁵*

ABSTRACT

The College of Public Affairs (CPAf) in the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) evolved as a unit of the University with the mandate to raise the bar of applied social science scholarship by developing transdisciplinary methods in the resolution of public issues such as food security, land reform and land use, governance, population, and education. The creation of CPAf in 1998 was prompted “by the need to attune academic programs in the pursuit of UP’s mission to promote nationalism and development in the face of profound changes occurring in the global environment.” In 2011, it was renamed as the College of Public Affairs and Development.

This paper highlights the integrative framework that summarizes CPAf’s plans, innovations, and strategies in helping

¹ Paper to be presented in the 2012 National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) Annual Conference on Horizons in Public Affairs: Visions, Innovations, and Strategies, Hyatt Regency Austin Hotel, Austin, Texas, USA, Oct. 18-20, 2012.

² Professor, College of Public Affairs and Development, University of the Philippines Los Baños (CPAf-UPLB); Phone: (+63 49) 536-3455/536-3637; Email: agnesrola08@yahoo.com

³ Professor, CPAf-UPLB; Phone: (+63 49) 536-2484/536-3284; Email: josefina_dizon@yahoo.com

⁴ Associate Professor, CPAf-UPLB; Phone: (+63 49) 536-0407; Email: anaquimbo@yahoo.com

⁵ Professor, CPAf-UPLB; Phone: (+63 49) 536-3382; Email: wcarada@yahoo.com

build sustainable communities and attain human security. These targeted impacts are anchored on programs and services that operationalize the major functions of CPAf as an academic unit. Built into these functions are the theoretical foundations for communities of practice on institutional development, policy reform and development, and local governance and development.

In the final section, future challenges are presented. These center on the growing appreciation of students in agriculture in the Philippines and in Southeast Asia of Public Affairs as a discipline and the articulation of the rigor and relevance of transdisciplinary research in an otherwise disciplinary community.

Introduction

Global changes manifested by (1) urbanization, migration, and remittances; (2) trade integration; (3) information access; (4) food and energy prices and bio-fuels; and (5) climate change are significantly affecting agriculture and rural areas (Pingali 2009). Rural communities are now in transition, and the academics together with government, business, and civil society leaders are challenged to build liveable and sustainable communities and ultimately human security. Meanwhile, agriculture, which supports rural communities, is at the crossroad. Apart from its original function of assuring food security, agriculture is now also responsible for protecting biodiversity; generating rural employment and income opportunities; and producing herbal and medicinal plants for the pharmaceutical industry. It is also tasked to produce biofuels to help mitigate climate change and to respond to the continuing price escalation of fossil fuel energy.

Education has a vital role in meeting these changes and challenges. The world needs competent people to assume the

leadership roles in confronting these challenges. Towards this end, agricultural colleges and universities need to innovate and their capacities need to be strengthened, to respond to the requirements of a globalized world economy (Villareal 2009).

More than a decade ago, the University of the Philippines at Los Baños (UPLB) has risen to that challenge by instituting the College of Public Affairs (CPAf) in 1998. The CPAf was created to “attune academic programs of the UP Los Baños in the pursuit of its mission to promote nationalism and development in the face of profound changes occurring in the global environment.” Its focus was to establish scholarship that was problem-based to address the following concerns: food security, land reform and land use, governance, strategic planning, population, environment, education, agrarian and rural development, and cooperatives.

In 2007, CPAf had proposed academic program revisions and structural reforms to address newer realities/challenges, such as survival brought about by new/strengthened academic programs by other graduate schools and the external concern for national food security and development in the agriculture and rural sectors including communities in transition (Rola 2007). This new arrangement was aimed to align the structure of the CPAf to be able to achieve its vision to be center of excellence in governance and development studies. It was also renamed into the College of Public Affairs and Development in 2011.

Guiding the direction of the scholarship of the College are its vision and mission. Its vision is *“to be an academic institution with distinctive excellence in development studies and governance in support of national development goals in the agriculture and rural sector and communities in transition.”* Its mission states that *“by means of transdisciplinary approaches, it shall develop human and institutional capacities in the areas of local development policy, governance, and community development consistent with our values*

and traditions while taking into account the demands of globalization”.

CPAf Framework

CPAf is building its core staff and human resources based on the basic sciences and expertise that will craft development studies and governance as an area of discipline. The core disciplines of the faculty and researchers will be in the basic sciences such as economics, sociology, psychology, political science, statistics, and anthropology. Meanwhile, the fields of expertise of the faculty members and staff are in law, community development, education, management science, information science, public administration, agricultural sciences, global studies, policy, and development and governance studies.

Programs and services of CPAf help create “communities of practice,” where faculty, researchers, students, alumni, partners, and other stakeholders, continually share information and experiences with the aim of building expertise in institutional and policy development, and in local governance and development. “Communities of practice” essentially contribute not only to the field of development and governance as a disciplinal area, but also to the development of individuals, institutions, and institutional performance towards sustainable communities.

The “communities of practice” support its one-faculty, one-college structure where all faculty members are housed in one academic teaching unit. This way, they can have a greater opportunity to engage in joint activities, share mutual interests, and collaborate in various professional engagements. This new organizational structure aims to promote synergy as well as more interdisciplinary, multi-disciplinary, transdisciplinary, and time-bound work.

Human security is placed at the top of the framework, indicating a current paradigm shift from sustainable communities to a higher goal, which is human security or rights-based development. CPAf, along with other UPLB colleges, can focus on this goal. The elements of the framework suggest academic excellence. This has to be complemented with operational excellence, such as administrative efficiency and financial sustainability.

CPAf Programs

The integrative framework of CPAf shows its plans, innovations, and strategies in helping build sustainable communities and attain human security. These targeted impacts are anchored on programs and services that operationalize the major functions of CPAf as an academic unit. Built into these functions are the theoretical foundations for communities of practice on institutional development, policy reform and development, and local governance and development.

Academic Programs

While various colleges or schools of public affairs elsewhere look at public affairs primarily in the context of the government's role to meet societal needs, UPLB CPAf was created with the vision to provide a holistic perspective of public affairs reflective of societal concerns. This holistic perspective necessarily requires partnership of the government, private sector, non-government organizations, and civil society groups. It is also reflected in the nature and type of the target clients of its academic degree programs. These clients primarily possess mid-level managerial skills that include, but are not limited to, development workers and planners, policy analysts,

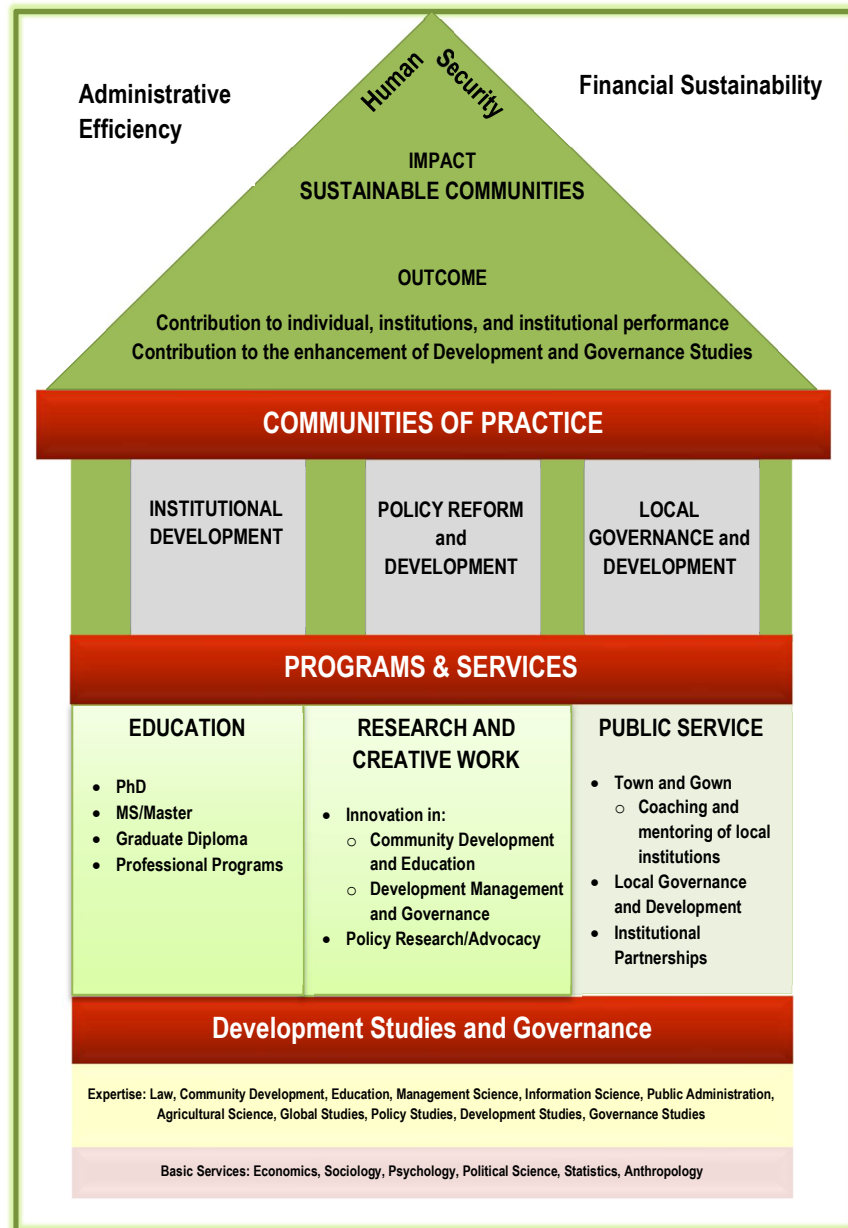


Figure 1. CPAf framework, 2012

local government executives, educators and education managers, researchers, and extension workers and specialists.

For instance, CPAf's banner program instituted in 1996, the Master in Public Affairs, was intended to train both practitioners serving government and non-government institutions as well as scholars dedicated to the analysis of public issues, particularly on the improvement of public welfare. This non-thesis program has three areas of specialization, namely: Agrarian and Rurban Development Studies, Education Management, and Strategic Planning and Public Policy. The MPAf's program promotes a strong bias to ethical values and integrity in the public service. One core course is Ethics in Public Affairs, which discusses theories, issues, problems, and their implications to ethical behavior in the public service.

Three traditional degree programs offered by CPAf have been drawn from other academic units and were instituted as early as the 1930s. These are the Master of Science/Doctor of Philosophy in Agricultural Education, Master of Science/Doctor of Philosophy in Community Development, and Master of Science/Doctor of Philosophy in Extension Education. Specifically, the Agricultural Education curriculum is a teacher education in agriculture program aimed to prepare teachers of agricultural academic institutions and education development practitioners. The Community Development program prepares individuals to take on the challenge of empowering local communities to develop effective strategies for identifying community goals and maximizing their assets to achieve these goals. Extension Education provides students with grounding on extension science, leadership, adult education strategies, psychology, and participatory tools and techniques required in ensuring stakeholder participation and engagement.

The Master in Development Management and Governance (non-thesis track) and Master of Science in Development Management and Governance (thesis track) programs seek to develop competencies and proficiencies required for new managers

and leaders for governance and development. This multi-entry, multi-exit program features four streams of specialization, namely: Organizational and Institutional Development, Program Management, Governance of Microfinance and Microinsurance Institutions, and Local Governance and Development. The institution of these programs in 2011 was a result of the merging of the Master of Management major in Development Management and Master in Public Affairs major in Local Governance and Development. The merging allows synergistic learning among actors in the development and governance process and promotes transdisciplinary mechanisms that CPAf advocates and promotes.

More recently, CPAf instituted the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Development Studies program. The PhD in Development Studies program prepares graduates for careers in the academe, government and non-government agencies, international agencies and the private sector as development specialists, researchers, or managers. The program combines the analytical rigor required of social science and technical fields to be able to address development issues. These development issues include food security, natural resource management, population, gender and development, and agrarian and rural development. Other issues include the distinctive excellence of UPLB such as agriculture, forestry, and the environment. Graduates of this course have the ability to: articulate systems thinking and apply this to development issues; integrate basic and applied sciences and the technical and social dimensions of development issues; and generate practice-informed theories on development issues, focusing on development pathways of Asian countries.

Apart from these graduate degree programs, CPAf also offers undergraduate foundation service courses in education and agrarian reform to serve its traditional niche. Likewise, the College has expanded its service reach by providing professional programs for those who are already in the workplace. Many of the target clients

for this continuing education for professionals come from the local and national governments as well as from educational institutions, both public and private. In addition, the expertise of CPAf faculty is commonly tapped by the government, private institutions, and people's organizations for coaching and mentoring, capacity building, and institutional development.

In academic programs, in particular, team teaching and relay teaching as modes of teaching are featured in many of its course offerings. Previous discipline boundaries are expected to gradually diminish as more faculty members cross discipline borders. For instance, they teach courses and serve as members of students' guidance and advisory committees, formerly from other disciplines of CPAf. This is likewise strengthened as collaborations of faculty members in interdisciplinary research activities gain popularity. In its off-campus offerings, resource persons with expertise in specific fields of specialization are likewise invited to enrich and provide more vigor to various courses.

Clearly, CPAf academic programs seek to provide public service education and produce graduates equipped with knowledge, skills, and values. These competencies will prepare them to critically examine development from various perspectives with deliberate resolve to provide services and address the needs of target communities. Indeed, the role of CPAf as an academic institution is to provide a learning environment that does not only capacitate its clients as individuals and as groups, but more so to empower them and harness their full capacity. Capacitating would enable CPAf faculty and staff to better understand "who they are" and "what they have" so they can serve and continue the advocacy for public service.

All these are driven by development issues, hence CPAf needs to continue to innovate and respond to emerging trends and changing opportunities. While part of the long-established niche of CPAf has a slant towards agricultural development, the College has

diversified its program offerings with the institution of broader programs in public affairs, development management, social policy, and local governance. This is likewise anchored on the new challenges faced by CPAf in addressing development in the Philippine context. The new challenges are brought about by broader issues such as understanding the pathways of communities in transition and the need for institutions to support climate change adaptation strategies in agriculture and the rural sector.

Research, Development and Extension (RDE) Programs

In general, CPAf aims to generate science-based information in support of policy formulation; institutional reforms and good governance mechanisms in food and nutrition security and safety; integrated natural resource management; and climate change and human aggravated natural disasters.

Specifically, CPAf RDE aims to 1) conduct research and advocacy on agricultural policy and sustainability, science and technology policy, and social and institutional policy; 2) undertake research and development on innovative institutional reforms in communities in transition; and 3) engage the various actors in developing participatory and adaptive collaborative governance mechanisms for rural development.

Among the current research interests of CPAf are water governance, water security under climate risks, building partnership for food security, biotechnology policy, extension strategies, and climate change adaptation strategies. In partnership with professional organizations based at the College and other partners, CPAf has implemented a conference-workshop and symposium on climate change and related concerns like the role of educators and extension workers in climate change.

CPAf also trains various local government personnel for policy and strategic planning. Some of its more recent training programs were on provincial rice action planning; municipal agricultural development planning; and local climate change action planning as off-shoot activities of the program on Collaborative Research Development and Extension Services (CRDES). Modules on policy analysis for watershed management planning are available. One of its successful action-researches is the Community-based Participatory Planning and Extension Management (CBPEM), an extension approach or methodology that refers to the styles of action within an extension system. It is founded on the philosophy that local people, such as farmers and fisherfolks, are teachable. And given the opportunity to help themselves, they could lead more progressive and self-reliant communities. CBPEM is guided by the principles enshrined under Republic Act 8435, otherwise known as the Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization Act (AFMA) of 1997, which include relevance, people's participation, capacity building, and collaboration.

With its RDE activities, CPAf hopes to contribute to individual and institutional performance; the enhancement of development and governance studies; and the development of sustainable communities. These can be achieved through the attainment of food and nutrition security as well as improved capacities for natural resource management and climate risk and disaster management.

Public Services: Town and Gown Activities

The public service commitment of CPAf is expressed in different 'town and gown' modalities. One modality in offering the Master/Master of Science in Development Management and Governance is a graduate program in the workplace of the learners. Under this scheme, the program can be offered in the office of a

government agency; government-owned and controlled corporation; civil society organizations; or corporate social/community relations office. In so doing, the program provides a direct application of the theories and concepts discussed to the very context of the host organizations.

The other modality is *student service learning in the communities*. In this modality, students and/or classes from the Extension Program, Education Program, Community Development Program and Development Management and Governance Program become involved in empowering communities to solve household problems requiring community solutions. Classroom learning is tested or applied in the communities. Problems may relate to poor functional literacy, improper waste management, poor local government planning or fiscal management, low adoption of production technology, etc.

Other “town and gown” modalities are action research and extension services provided by the two centers of the College. A major activity is an extension program that forges partnership of the various actors to achieve food security in three regions of the country. The actors include SUCs, LGUs, the DA Regional Offices, and non-government organizations. All these institutions and organizations have agreed to work together to design adaptation by the agriculture sector to climate changes and insecure markets.

Challenges

Higher education, especially in agriculture and natural resource management, plays a critical role both in preparing and in providing the necessary leadership to innovate for sustainable development. However, the capacity of agricultural tertiary education, especially in Asia, is relatively low. Most of them are modelled from the Western context, heavily focusing on

specialization and less on generalization, diversification, and integration. Furthermore, the EARTH-Salzburg Seminar Series on Sustainability, Education, and the Management of Change in the Tropics (SEMCIT) project as cited by Villareal (2009) noted that the educational system in Asia should address the needs of agricultural development within the Asian context. The educational system, according to Villareal, should also produce leaders of change: high quality, relevant, employable, and innovative graduates. These graduates should also have appropriate knowledge, skills, and attitudes to meet the stakeholders' needs and preferences. The attributes of the new agricultural leaders produced by the higher education system include: 1) social consciousness, 2) high standard of values and ethics, 3) entrepreneurial skills, 4) concern for the environment, 5) solid technical and scientific principles, 6) holistic approach, 7) life-long learners, 8) strong leadership and team building skills; and 9) communication skills.

CPAf graduates are trained to be transformational leaders or leaders of change. Hence, they are expected to possess competent leadership ability (especially in local governance), holistic perspective (in approaches to policy development and reform), social consciousness, and values and ethics (for institutional development). Higher education in agriculture and natural resource management are likewise called to transform/innovate and strengthen science and society interface in promoting sustainable development.

Research and education in agriculture have strongly focused on discipline-oriented as well as on natural science-based approaches to increasing production. This is reflected in how colleges of agriculture are structured: animal and dairy sciences, agricultural system, crop protection, crop science, and food science.

So what are the challenges?

First, the current discipline-oriented focus should be complemented with a holistic, ecological, and transdisciplinary strategy for education and research in the agriculture and food sector. One alternative approach (to the conventional division of research into specialized disciplines) that provides an integrative or holistic view is the integration of agriculture-applied social science (Carada 2009). This approach provides the necessary perspective to deal with the complexity and uncertainty of the agriculture sector and rural communities. Applied social science can prepare students to deal with change; embrace multiple dimensions of the food challenge; and establish participatory interactions with clients, communities, and organizations.

Second, in preparing an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary graduate program and course syllabi, the following should be considered:

a) *Relation to the disciplines.* The course is issue-based and issue-focused; the issue being appropriate for interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary inquiry. The contribution of various disciplines and schools of thought are necessary to frame the issue/problem and to solve it.

b) *Course structure should provide issues that motivate them to learn.* The syllabus promotes deeper understanding of the issue; the instructor is able to promote the real educational agenda that uphold integration throughout the course. Pedagogical and interdisciplinary integration are also provided in the course.

c) *The level of integration* provided in the program or the course should be identified or differentiated as multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, or transdisciplinary.

Third, the structure and divisions of the units of the University should be considered. Agriculture-applied social science is being integrated, albeit slowly, in most universities of agriculture

and natural resource management, Brewer (1999) noted that “The world has problems, but universities have departments.”

Conclusion

As the dynamism and expansion of the meanings and domains of sustainable communities and human security are happening globally and in different polity, coping with the magnitude of challenges becomes relatively difficult for any institute or graduate program in public affairs. Thus, one has to be strategic in finding its niche. Situated in a campus (UPLB) with an overarching distinctive excellence in agriculture and natural resource sciences, public affairs at the UPLB has to provide a development and governance framework. This framework must transcend academic disciplines and translate and converge these disciplinary strengths into public affairs institutions, instruments, and processes that will effect sustainable communities and promote the highest level of human security (now rights-based approach).

Specifically, global economic change and local political change interface with the increasing demands for agriculture functions and sustainable natural resource management. Hence, there is pressure to innovate in higher education for an agriculture-based university. UPLB, for instance, needs to adapt and adopt integrative and transdisciplinary research inquiry and education (Carada 2009) to address contemporary issues. Graduates should have a holistic view of the world and should be transformational leaders. Approaches such as participatory, integrated, integrative, collaborative, cross-disciplinary, interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and transdisciplinary should be learned and applied in various interventions, researches, and programs/projects in different arenas or settings, such as communities in transition.

CPAf must be inspired to rise up to all these challenges by constantly innovating in its academic programs and research approaches. The University must also provide an enabling environment for this transdisciplinary scholarship to flourish.

References:

- Brewer G.D. (1999). The Challenges of Interdisciplinarity. *Pol. Sci.* 32, pp. 327-337.
- Carada, W. (2009). 'Integrative and transdisciplinary studies: Agriculture and the applied social science' pp.345-373 in Rola, A.C., Peñalba, L.M., Carada, W.B. & Paunlagui, M.M. (eds.) *The Social Sciences in Agriculture and Community Development: A Changing Paradigm*, Proceedings of a Symposium on "The Changing Role of the Applied Social Sciences in Agriculture and Community Development", January 29-30, 2008, Los Baños, Laguna, Philippines: University of the Philippines Los Baños, 385 pp.
- Pingali, P.L. (2009). 'Global change and rural communities: Is sustainable development still possible?' pp.25-36 in Rola, A.C., Peñalba, L. M., Carada, W.B. & Paunlagui, M.M. (eds) *The Social Sciences in Agriculture and Community Development: A Changing Paradigm*, Proceedings of a Symposium on "The Changing Role of the Applied Social Sciences in Agriculture and Community Development", January 29-30, 2008, Los Baños, Laguna, Philippines: University of the Philippines Los Baños, 385 pp.
- Rola, A.C. Peñalba, L.M. Carada, W.B. and Paunlagui, M.M. (eds) (2009). *The Social Sciences in Agriculture and Community Development: A Changing Paradigm*, Proceedings of a Symposium on "The Changing Role of the Applied Social Sciences in Agriculture and Community Development", January 29-30, 2008, Los Baños, Laguna, Philippines: University of the Philippines Los Baños, 385 pp.