
TRAVEL AND TRANSPORT IN RURAL COMMUNITIES: PHILIPPINES CASE STUDY

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Objectives of the case study

This case study is a discussion of some practical lessons learned during the course of the implementation of the Integrated Rural Accessibility Planning (IRAP) project in the Philippines. The discussion attempts to illustrate how these learning experiences guided the successful transfer of the technology to the target implementers at local level.

1. BACKGROUND

The Integrated Rural Accessibility Planning (IRAP) is a simple, inexpensive data gathering and analysis procedure that considers the rural households' access to basic goods, services and facilities as a basis in determining development needs.

The ultimate beneficiaries of the IRAP procedure in the Philippines are the rural households which should benefit from an improved access to the facilities and services provided in the area. The direct beneficiaries of the technical assistance, or the target participants of the IRAP training programs, are the local planning and development co-ordinators in the municipalities and provinces who are tasked to provide technical inputs for planning deliberations in the local development councils.

2. THE PHILIPPINE EXPERIENCE

In the Philippines, what used to be a top-down type of planning has been decentralised with the emergence of local government units (LGUs). Provinces, cities, municipalities and barangays (villages) now have their respective local development councils which are tasked to prepare the LGUs' development and investment plans.

The Philippines recently enacted into law the Local Government Code which provided for decentralization, devolution and autonomy to the local government units (LGUs) of the country. The Code provides greater freedom to villages, municipalities, cities and provinces to plot their respective paths to development and progress by giving them functions that used to be vested in national government agencies, additional budget to cover the expenditures for functionaries that are now detailed to them, and by allowing greater flexibility to decide on issues and concerns regarding their respective areas. It was into the LGUs that the IRAP procedure was introduced.

The Code allows the LGUs to reject or disregard, theoretically, any planning procedure that may be prescribed by outside groups. Thus, in the current local development set-up, the LGU can totally ignore any procedure that may even be prescribed by central government or adopt one that may suit their needs.

The IRAP project was able to discern two types of decision-making that are commonly practised in the Philippines. In the first one, the barangay leaders write their priorities for submission to the municipal planning office. These are then submitted to the local chief executive for decision. The outcome is a list of development initiatives which the local administration will decide upon. The other type of development decision-making is to allot a certain amount of the budget for a specific sector and then let the barangays compete for the funds on a first-come-first-served basis. In both cases, the absence of a sound basis for decisions were pointed out by the planners. They also added that they are seldom consulted with respect to local development decisions, and will be consulted once the decisions have been made.

The IRAP project concluded that since the people were not involved in the decision making process, their goals were not achieved. It was decided that accessibility planning should address the dynamics of local politics in order to be an effective alternative tool for the local government units.

The IRAP project conducted a post evaluation in 13 provinces that it covered in 1993-1994. The objective was to determine how effective was the technical assistance delivery and document the changes that resulted due to its introduction in local government units. The study proved the following points:

- Any planning tool to be effective has to remain simple and very user-friendly;
- The local planners can determine what is best for their respective areas and if given the opportunity, they can express their recommendations authoritatively;
- Sound decisions can easily be reached if the arguments are based on a set of information that is clearly acceptable to everybody;
- Effective presentation of issues, needs and programs to stakeholders and major actors of decision-making is a critical activity in local level planning;
- Local government units need a system to optimize the use of their resources;
- The dynamics of local politics can be harnessed to be fully productive;
- There are a growing number of development-oriented local chief executives.

3. ISSUES ENCOUNTERED

- Based on experience, the limitation of the IRAP procedure as introduced in the Philippines is its lack or absence of resources to provide to LGUs other than the technology and its relevant information. This limitation is somehow offset when the target recipients realise the procedure's significance to their work. This realisation is achieved right in the first training program where the participants produce immediately a tangible output, such as the accessibility base map.
- IRAP, although applied in a limited number of provinces and municipalities was able to gain ground through its simplicity and straightforward approach and its ability to adjust and be adapted to different levels of decision-making.
- In the conduct of the training programs, the project was able to establish that most local planners are not consulted by their superiors in making development decisions.

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- They are consulted when decisions have been made and they are asked to justify said decisions. IRAP is presented as an opportunity for their valuable inputs to be considered in local planning deliberations.
 - Being a locally-applied project identification and prioritization procedure, the IRAP helps LGUs conceptualize on small infrastructure projects at village level such as a well, communal faucet, footpath, foot bridge, trails, road upgrading and/or maintenance, etc; yet if the project is to implement such interventions, not all the villages will receive one.
 - The project conducted a post-evaluation to determine how effective was the technical assistance given to the target LGUs during Phase 1. In the said exercise, aside from establishing that the delivery was effective, the project was able to determine the appropriate follow-through actions to take. It was learned that the local government units implement IRAP-identified projects using their own funds but seldom tap other sources of funds. Thus, the project developed a module on Proposal Packaging and Fund Sourcing to empower the LGUs to access outside sources of financial assistance. It should be noted that the said module does not encourage them to act like beggars asking for financial assistance but also urges them to explore ways of generating internal revenues, such as user charges or the Grameen bank system.
 - The project believes that the dole-out approach is not sustainable and that it encourages the people to be dependent upon government to look after their needs. There is a legacy of a feudalistic system of landholding in the country. The rich landowners utilize the people in his territory to meet his end. In exchange, he provides for all their basic needs. Under such a set-up, the rich landowners are usually elected into public office - thus continuing the dole-out system of governance.
 - It has been stated repeatedly that a policy pronouncement from government will facilitate institutionalization of the IRAP procedure. It is said that this will provide for the participation and co-operation of other government agencies involved in local level planning as it will allow the allocation of funds that will enjoin the concerned parties to utilize the procedure and the information that will be produced.
 - When the project was being implemented, central government endorsed another local level planning tool, which focused on developing bench data on minimum basic needs. It is said that the said approach will identify communities which do not meet their minimum basic needs and thus provide a rich source of project ideas.
 - A policy pronouncement from central government can facilitate institutionalization. However, since the IRAP application was done parallel with a data gathering procedure that enjoys a mandate from government, the project opted to prove first that the procedure works at local level and later focus on getting a mandate from central government. In the post evaluation conducted in 13 provinces covered in 1993-1994, the project was able to prove that the IRAP procedure indeed helped the LGUs plot their development directions.

- The IRAP documents present no visible complementation to the NGO popular framework, i.e., participatory development, consensus building, people empowerment, sustainable development, etc.
- The project feels that local level planning participation can not be equated with representation, but rather with the conscious involvement in the deliberations towards achieving a common development objective. To achieve this, the project compels the local planners to share their IRAP-based findings and recommendations with those responsible to make development planning decisions, including local NGO's. This is envisioned to provide a common basis for discussions and debates among the people's representatives.
- The project contends that effective sharing of information as a strategy is enough to address participatory development, consensus building, people empowerment, sustainable development, etc. It has been the project's position that in the spirit of autonomy and decentralization, the people should be left to decide what is best for them through a planning process that will evolve from a clear understanding of relevant information and the comprehension of the active forces and factors at play in local level planning.

4. LESSONS LEARNED

The IRAP procedure evolved from its crude beginnings and established its usefulness in local level planning in the local government units where it was applied. Other provinces have expressed interest in learning the technology and agreed to provide counterpart funds for the implementation in their areas. It is now recognized by central government and included as one of the planning tools being recommended to LGUs.

The following are some of the project's learning experiences:

1) It pays to be sensitive

The essence of IRAP is its simplicity that it can be easily understood and applied by anybody even without technical training or background. After fully understanding the policy environment and how this will affect the application of the procedure, one has to determine the effective entry points in the local government unit. This would mean recognition of existing leadership structures, levels or types of local decision-making as well as the degree of people's involvement and participation. One should be conscious of the indigenous development planning-related practices in any area and distinguish this as a given factor that may not need to be changed. It is easier to adopt IRAP into existing modes, rather than change existing practices to suit the approach.

Experience in the IRAP application in the Philippines revealed that we are not in any better position to decide what is best for a local government unit than the people who have a keen understanding of the forces and factors at play affecting their development. Although we can say that we perceive things from an objective point of view and at macro level, there is always the chance that significant details can be missed or even ignored.

2) Confidence in the people is a must

The confidence that we can show to the participants to easily learn and acquire the technology is easily reflected in the confidence and enthusiasm they exhibit in doing the prescribed activities of the technical assistance. This confidence in themselves makes them effective implementers of the procedure.

3) Let people argue on common grounds

Significant local level decision-making is vested upon the local chief executives in the Philippines. The project found that people's participation was a myth and that local planners who are tasked to provide technical inputs are not even consulted on planning-related issues and concerns.

The project tends to believe that this practice is prevalent in most rural communities in the Philippines where people are still reeling from the hangover of feudalistic form of landholdings.

5. CONCLUSION

The IRAP project prescribes that development planning decisions should be based upon a commonly-accepted set of information that is easily understood and people can easily relate with. The main task is how to harmonize the technical inputs provided by the local planners with the political agenda of the elected officials, and the genuine concern for the beneficiaries. This task is addressed by compelling the local planners who generated accessibility information to present their findings and recommendations to the association of village leaders, the local legislators and the members of the local development councils. Such activity ensures people's participation, as they will have a clear appreciation of their interests in the development council deliberations.

Source: Palarca, N. (1997). The Philippine Experience: Integrated Rural Accessibility Planning. *Innovations*, 1997.