

The Barangay Field Exercise: The Philippine Executive Academy (PEA) Experience

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The Philippine Executive Academy (PEA), aware of the importance of rural development to the overall national development strategy, has integrated a rural-based field exercise in its Senior Executive Development Program. The activity, known as the Barangay Field Exercise (BFX), has been developed to be the training method to convert executive participants from the government and the private sector to development managers. The BFX gives opportunities to the participants to interact with the people in the rural areas making them gain insights on the actual conditions prevailing in rural areas and making recommendations to improve those conditions. One tool being used by the BFX participants to solve rural poverty is the cluster approach resulting in the formulation of the Barangay Cluster Development Plan (BCDP). The BFX has its limitations and problems but it is a gain for the PEA in its drive to contribute to national development.

Introduction

The development of the rural areas has increasingly become a major concern for most developing countries. For countries with predominantly agricultural economies, the following statements are well-founded:

"Rural development . . . should be viewed as lying at the very core of any strategy for national development, and not merely as peripheral to a western-oriented, urban-biased elitist strategy pursued so far. Rural development becomes almost co-terminous with national development."¹

The sustained interest in rural development is therefore justified. This interest, despite unsuccessful experiences, is

envisioned to develop with greater intensity as long as rural poverty and backwardness exist. Institutions searching for social relevance have seen fit to make rural development a part of their concern. In the same light, PEA, aware of the imperatives of rural development and its role as a training institution, has integrated a rural-based field exercise in its Senior Executive Development Program (SEDP).

Objectives of the PEA and SEDP

The Academy is charged with the task of developing a pool of able and skilled top-level executives and, therefore, has a responsibility in development as emphasized in its charter (Republic Act No. 3534). Managers serve a vital leadership role that could be geared to provide optimum contributions to the total development effort. The decisions

¹Ram C. Malhotra, "Some Issues in the Management of Rural Development," A paper for a Workshop on Management of Rural Development, held under the auspices of the Eastern Regional Organization for Public Administration, 20-21 Feb. 1980, Manila.

they make affect the direction of the nation's socio-economic and political life. With this in view, the SEDP, which is the Academy's main activity in pursuit of its general organizational objectives, has been designed as a development management program. It seeks to develop the government and the private sector managers who are equipped with executive talent to meet current and future management needs and the requirements of managing development.

The SEDP course of studies consists of seven main parts, four of which deal with the theory and Practice of Development; the Environment of Development Management; Management Systems and Dynamics; and Integrative Exercises which put to test the validity of theories and principles learned against the real environment to which they will be ultimately subjected. The Barangay Field Exercise (BFX), a main feature of the program, is one such exercise.

The BFX was integrated into the program as a barrio-based exercise in its 10th session conducted from September 4 to November 27, 1970. Previous to this, or more specifically from Session 1 to Session 9, the focus of the field research exercise was a study of Maximizing Development of a Region, Development of a Province, and Enterprise Development and Administration. Although the exercise in a way touched on the barangays (barrios) in terms of the effects of development in the area or the province on the lives of the rural folks, it was not then as sharply focused on the barangays as it has been from Session 10 onwards.

The rising social consciousness and the persistent socioeconomic and polit-

ical problems that dominated society in the seventies brought to the fore the importance of the rural areas as the central stage for development activities. The Session 10 Field Research Exercise had for its subject title *Philippine Society at the Grassroots*. The "grassroots" refer mainly to the bottom-rung of the rural population, the majority of whom are landless peasants and agricultural workers.

From the primarily barrio exposure and research-oriented exercise, it evolved into a development-oriented undertaking. During the period between 1970 and 1980, the BFX underwent several revisions. The subject focus shifted among the different aspects of the rural problem but essentially remained as a research-oriented activity.

List of BFX Titles Session 10—Session 23

Session	Title	Year
10-13	Philippine Society at the Grassroots	1970-1973
14	The Barrio as Target of Development	1974
15	Development at the Grassroots	1975
16	Agricultural Production with Special Reference to Food Production	1976
17	Focus on Poverty and National Development	1976
18	Focus on Poverty, Underdevelopment and National Development	1977
19-22	Focus on the Integrated Rural Development Program	1977-1979
23	Cluster Approach to Planning and Implementation at the Grassroots Level	1980

In Session 20 (1978), the exercise evolved into its present form largely based on the Integrated Rural Development (IRD) program with a view to encouraging barangay people to directly participate in their own development.

Barangay Field Exercise: Cluster Approach to Planning and Implementation

The concept of development, particularly rural development, has undergone radical transitions. Development strategies have graduated from the piecemeal and fragmented sectoral approach to the integrated approach. In the same way, rural development philosophy has given birth to the integrated rural development concept. The IRD concept as a method or strategy is founded on a total systems approach to development.² It has four operational objectives expressed briefly as: (1) increased rural productivity; (2) equity and sufficient employment; (3) improved social services; and (4) improved political and administrative capability.

The BFX has been strongly based on the IRD concept since its 20th Session in 1978. It was specifically designed to contribute to the new demands of an integrated approach to rural development. The first three operational objectives of IRD have been implicitly, if not explicitly, integrated into the mechanics and methodology of the exercise. These objectives were expected to result from the development plans/projects that will be produced from the BFX activities.

The fourth operational objective, which includes people's participation, is explicit in the BFX. The exercise advocates the grassroots ("bottom-up") approach that calls for an integrated process of mass mobilization, development of people's initiative, participatory democracy, and decentralization of decision-making towards the attainment of self-reliance among people of rural communities. It is founded on the belief that for genuine rural development to succeed, collective action and participation must derive strength from the rural people themselves.

Rationale and Objectives of the BFX

The Philippine Executive Academy, being a training institution in the University of the Philippines, views the BFX primarily as an effective learning device for training executive participants to become development managers. Part of this training device is the exposure of the participants to the bare realities of the rural situation so they may fully comprehend the dynamics of rural life and subsequently rural development.

Through the BFX, management technologies, such as project planning and implementation, management of change as well as marketing management, are transmitted in their simplest and most basic terms possible on a micro (barangay) level. Additionally, these concepts are translated into projects that may help alleviate the living conditions of the rural people and in the context of the problems of the barangay folks. This process of application in the BFX is in itself intended to serve as an invaluable educational process to both

²Abelardo Samonte, "Integrated Rural Development: Concept, Approach and Objectives," A paper prepared for the Expert Consultation on Policies and Institutions for Integrated Rural Development.

the executive participants and the village people.

Since most of the executive participants of the Academy are involved in policy formulation, and these executives are urban-based, if not urban-biased, they need to be exposed to the rural areas. Their decisions and policies ultimately affect the lives of the rural populace. In this light, the BFX was specifically designed to provide the participants the opportunity to interact with the rural folks who are ultimately the end-users of policies evolved by the participants.

Objectives. Specifically, the exercise seeks to:

(1) provide an opportunity for the participants to interact with the people in the rural areas and, through such planned interaction, gain a better understanding of the country's conditions of underdevelopment.

(2) consider the nature and causes of rural poverty and recommend measures to eradicate or minimize it;

(3) appraise the problems and prospects of developing the people's potential for collective identity and self-reliance;

(4) consider the problems of mobilizing the rural poor through collective participation in productive endeavors;

(5) study how local government and private organizations can plan a more active role in promoting, facilitating and coordinating development inputs and, to this end, enhance their administrative and managerial capabilities; and finally,

(6) enable executive participants to transfer to the barangays the tech-

nology of project planning and implementation applicable to the microlevel, utilizing the barangay cluster approach.

Field of Study. To achieve the above objectives, the executive panels are asked to:

(1) help the barangay people appraise their existing resources which can be harnessed towards diversified productive activities that they themselves or the cluster of barangays may undertake;

(2) assess the collective self-reliance potential of the barangays to pursue development with a minimum of dependence on government or external resources;

(3) help reorient, organize, and mobilize the rural folks through mass meetings or other techniques of social change to arouse the cooperative spirit of the people themselves towards the conversion of indigenous resources and surplus labor into productive ventures;

(4) assist the barangay clusters in a selected municipality in preparing a Barangay Cluster Development Plan (BCDP) with linkages and support from the provincial and municipal development staffs and/or private organizations with a view to institutionalizing the planning process and the organizational machinery to implement these plans.

The Cluster Approach

The cluster approach is viewed as a solution to rural poverty. The people in developing countries can no longer live and depend mainly on the fruits of the land alone. There is simply not enough land for the growing population of the Third World. Land for agricultural production is becoming scarcer. Such a

situation results in low productivity, urban migration, unemployment, and an endless search for more income and a better life to live. What is therefore needed are more jobs and better employment opportunities that can only be created by industry and other diversified economic activities for the rural populace.

Rationale. In this regard, experts in rural development have recognized the weaknesses and non-viability of single barangays to pursue development because of inadequate resources. The resources which one barangay may have are simply not enough to permit economic diversification or expansion of agriculture-based activities that may eventually lead to better income and quality of life in the rural areas. For this reason, development can be effectively pursued through the combined efforts of a number of contiguous barangays that have varying resources and common potentials for development. Taken together, these combined resources and potentials could provide more and better opportunities for economic diversification and, consequently, enhance symbiotic relationships among barangays in achieving self-reliant rural communities through the harnessing of collective initiative and the liberation of creative energies among the intended recipients of development. Thus, the *cluster approach* became an acceptable strategy.

Guidelines. As guidelines in the selection of clusters, the Academy adopts the following criteria for purposes of the BFX.

(1) the barangays to be clustered should be more or less depressed where

the majority of the population can be considered as poor;

(2) presence of potential economic resources other than agriculture for diversification to give more employment and economic returns;

(3) availability of indigenous/local resources (human and material) which could be tapped or harness for productive endeavors;

(4) absence of any major national projects/programs to avoid duplication; and lastly

(5) the barangays should be contiguous to each other.

Objectives. In addition, the guidelines for the formulation of such clusters include a suggestion that the cluster should not be so large as to lose the village people's sense of identification with the community nor should it be so small as to prevent new economic opportunities for the people of the barangays, as a critical component of the cluster plans. Moreover, the cluster approach has the following operational objectives:

(1) to diversify economic activities and production other than agriculture;

(2) to widen the community base for collective action and people's participation;

(3) to promote greater economic, social and political interaction among villages; and

(4) to develop the people's initiative towards cooperative efforts and self-reliance.

Process of Preparing the Barangay Cluster Development Plans (BCDP)

Planning at the barangay cluster level implies participation in the decision-making process by the rural poor through the bottom-up process wherein the barangay clusters themselves become the foci for development.

This process at the micro-level emphasizes *iterative* planning which involves a continuous and repetitive participation of the masses in decision-making in both the planning and implementation process. Whether this process is done through a series of workshops, mass meetings, or any other activity, it permits the identification of "the positive assets the community possesses, the constraints which limit the use of these assets and general factors which are felt to be important to the community *vis-à-vis* its future development."³ More so, it allows decentralization of decision-making and involves people's participation in all the stages of the planning process: from planning proper itself to implementation and later evaluation. Participation in all the three stages is made possible through the conduct of mass meetings (people's assemblies). This is an effective means of raising mass consciousness and activating cooperative values in addition to the seminar-workshop which the executive participants conduct to transmit the necessary adaptive technology and skills that would assist the village leaders in evolving their own BCDPs for the community.

³Socrates Litsios, "A System of Planning for Small Farmers," *Rural Development: An Integrated Approach* (Bangkok, June 1977), p. 41.

The planning committees of the clusters play a vital role at this stage of the exercise, since objective and priority setting and project evaluation are done by them and not by external agents and technical workers. These activities are facilitated through mass assemblies and seminar-workshops where mass consciousness unfolds through interaction among the village people; thus, they progressively evolve and improve upon their own plans through collective decision-making, action, and experience.

The activities, therefore, engaged in by these assemblies take into consideration the priorities and potential resources capable of being implemented by the people themselves and are reflective of their felt needs and problems.

Methodology/Mechanics

The methodology/mechanics of BFX may be divided into three phases: (1) the preparatory phase; (2) the exercise proper, and (3) the presentation of reports and concluding conference.

Preparatory Phase. To facilitate the accomplishment of the objectives of the field exercise, several steps are taken: First, the Research Staff of the Academy prepares an initial research study of the BFX site. On this basis, the barangays are grouped into clusters for the purpose of the exercise. A report of this study is included in the subject folder to apprise the executive participants of the basic socioeconomic, political and other characteristics concerning the area. The participants are also provided with a training manual to be used as a guide in the conduct of the BFX proper. Basic reading materials on integrated rural development, rural problem and sociology are also issued.

Second, the barangay officials and inhabitants are informed of the objectives of the BFX. Necessary administrative arrangements are made for the participants' living quarters, usually with host families, and coordinative linkages with local officials established. The host families are given the equivalent of per diems and daily allowances of the executive participants for their sustenance throughout the duration of the BFX.

Third, the participants are briefed on the overall rationale, requirements and mechanics of the BFX. The three panel groupings are further subdivided into teams or sub-panels of two or three members to cover one barangay each.

Exercise Proper. The three executive panels are fielded to three separate barangay clusters, one panel being assigned to one cluster of barangays.

For the first two or three days, the participants interact informally with the barangay people. They observe and assess the conditions in the area. They try to rally support for the BFX objectives by explaining to the people the concept of planning and the advantages of getting together and participating in the planning process for the improvement of their communities under the cluster approach.

Together with the local leaders, the participants hold a series of mass meetings to discuss the concept of IRD, to explain the rationale and need for a development plan and to choose representatives from each barangay in the cluster to participate in the seminar-workshop.

On the second week, a seminar-workshop on project planning and

implementation is held for three or four days attended by the elected barangay representatives and other observers. The seminar-workshop is the formal channel through which the IRD strategy and project planning and implementation tools and techniques are imparted to the people's representatives. The desired end-product of the seminar-workshop is a Barangay Cluster Development Plan (BCDP). From among the seminar-workshop participants are drawn the members of cluster planning committees who ultimately provide the leadership in implementing and monitoring the BCDPs.

The role of the executive panels in the workshop is to organize and serve as resource persons providing assistance to the barangay representatives in the planning process. The panels have been previously briefed to keep in mind the following considerations in designing the cluster development plan:

- (1) Identification of diversifiable economic activities;
- (2) Mobilization of people towards economic/productive activities;
- (3) Alleviation of unemployment;
- (4) Promotion of self-reliance;
- (5) Contribution to the achievement of equitable distribution of income and wealth.

Representatives from the Provincial Development Staff (PDS) and the Municipal Development Staff (MDS) are invited to the seminar-workshop to act as consultants or resource persons in the formulation of the BCDPs.

Once the seminar-workshop has been concluded, a Plenary Session is held, with the chairmen of the cluster plan-

ning committees, representatives from government line agencies and the private sector, and the PDS and MDS in attendance. The head of the MDS presides over the said meeting. The primary objective of this gathering is to establish linkages among the projects identified by the barrio people and, consequently, to integrate those which can be undertaken by the PDS and MDS and by the line agencies through their own resources. In this way, overlapping and duplication of development activities are avoided.

Lastly, the finalized BCDPs are presented to the members of the *Sangguniang Bayan* in a Special Session called for the purpose of informing the municipal government about the plans and seeking the inclusion of the same in the broad municipal development plans. In the same light, the municipal government could identify the cluster plan for which they could extend assistance during the implementation stage. Copies of the plans are distributed to the municipal and barangay leaders prior to the departure of the executive participants from the locality.

Presentation of Reports/Concluding Conference. After the 15-day BFX, the executive panels are required by the Academy to prepare a written report on what transpired during the exercise. Copies of the reports are distributed to all members of the Session a few days before the conference. Similarly, copies are furnished the Provincial Governor, Vice-Governor, Municipal Mayor, and the cluster leaders who are invited by the Academy to react on the panel reports during the conference.

On the date set for this purpose, the chairmen of the panels are asked to make a 10-minute presentation of their

reports highlighting mainly the substantive problems encountered during the BFX, their findings, and accomplishments. After this activity, each panel is afforded an opportunity to raise questions on the reports of the other panels, thus, lively discussions follow.

The guests from the province are also given the chance to criticize and appreciate the reports depending on their reactions. It is also through this conference that the guests from the province more clearly understand the ramifications and complexities of the exercise as it unfolds itself during the discussions. Through a deeper understanding of the concept utilized by the Academy, the guests, hopefully, are able to internalize and jell all the ideas presented before them so that they may not only be guided particularly during the implementation stage of the BCDPs but even encouraged to institutionalize the concept not only in the clusters covered but in all the other barangays in the province as well.

Issues and Problems of BFX

Time Required to Effect (Behavioral) Change

The Academy acknowledges the fact that the fifteen-day duration of the BFX is too short a period of time for any attempt at effecting behavioral change to yield significant results. A considerable amount of time is definitely needed for the people to be able to internalize any of the innovations being introduced. The most that the participants can actually do within the allotted time is to make the people aware of these new development concepts; to transfer to the barangay leaders

basic project planning and implementation skills; and to assist them in the identification of and planning for income generating projects.

In introducing change in a rural community, it is important that the members of the community perceive the relative advantages of the innovations and their compatibility with the prevailing value system and the existing socioeconomic and political structures in the community. The degree to which they can observe and experience how the innovations being introduced can directly benefit them individually and collectively also influence their decision to accept or reject the innovations. Since it is not possible to provide the people the opportunity to observe and experience how these development concepts can directly benefit them within the duration of the exercise, linkages with the Provincial Development Staff, the Municipal Development Staff, the barangay councils, heads of branch offices of national agencies, as well as socio-civic and business organizations are strengthened so that even after the exercise, the process of change and development will continue.

The main output at the end of the BFX is the BCDPs which the elected representatives of the people have formulated with the assistance of the executive participants. The BCDPs contain proposals for income-generating projects in which the people can engage. At the end of the exercise, this plan is presented to the people for further discussion in order to inform the people of these plans and to secure their commitments to support the implementation of the plans. Later on, it is submitted to the *Sangguniang Bayan* for inclusion

in the municipal development plan. The effective implementation of the BCDPs would, however, require the strong support of existing socioeconomic and political institutions in the community.

Relevance of BFX to the Needs of the Rural People

While the BFX has been primarily designed to achieve certain training objectives, the activity-content,⁴ however, is aimed at directly contributing to community development needs by attempting to improve administrative capability available for its management through the transfer of technology or project planning and implementation. Since the success of an IRD program largely depends on the administrative capability availability for its management, it is assumed that the training of a group of village people on project management technology is a contribution to the overall improvement of IRD management.

At the outset, the seminar-workshop output may be logically perceived to be relevant to the people's needs. This group of local leaders who have been trained for the specific technology is expected to perform critical roles in putting to reality the BCDPs which in turn are expected to result in immense benefits to or substantial improvements in the rural people's quality of life. But before any conclusive statement can be made on the actual relevance of the exercise, there is a need to conduct a systematic follow-up study and evaluation of the results of the exercise—

⁴The Seminar-Workshop on Project Planning and Implementation.

the actual benefits derived by the people.

It has been observed that the management technologies, such as PERT-CPM, tools and techniques of feasibility studies and utility value analysis, appear to be too technical for the particular target group in the barangays. There is therefore a need to use a simple or more appropriate technology that the local people can readily internalize, adopt, and/or adapt to their development needs. As one U.N. publication states: "Technicalization at the local level should be built up with emphasis on the people's understanding, acquiring and even innovating on the technology which then becomes their own."⁵

Such "technicalization" to be desirable must manifest its advantages in concrete terms: meaningful and visible progress in the level of development of the subject areas, i.e., improvement in the quality of life and increased economic benefits. Should the evaluative study of project results prove otherwise then several questions should be raised. For instance, are there other technologies more appropriate to the needs of the community? Is technology transfer really one of their development needs? Are there other needs to which the BFX must address itself to in order to be relevant?

Moral and Ethical Aspect of BFX

This aspect of the BFX is intertwined with the preceding issue, that of relevance to rural people's needs. From the view-

point of the Academy, the exercise is not exploitative in nature solely to attain training objectives. Rather, the process is mutually beneficial in that through the BFX, tools and techniques of planning and implementation that may aid the barangay people in their own development are imparted in the same way that the exercise enhances the executive participants' self-development. Such a give-and-take process, therefore, is expected to generate mutual benefits between the giver and the receiver.

However, some participants have noted one possible problem, namely, the psychological impact of the BFX on the local people, such as, for instance, the raising of their expectations. Considering their depressed conditions and paternalistic attitudes, the local populace are very susceptible and inclined to depend on any external support and assistance. Failure to receive such assistance could mean frustration on their part. On this basis, the Academy sees the importance of incorporating precautionary measures in the BFX to avoid unnecessarily raising the people's expectations. This is precisely the reason for the extreme care taken by the Academy in making the people understand the concept of self-reliance through cooperative economic ventures and participative planning and implementation.

Absence or Inadequacy of Follow-up on Projects Identified

The Academy recognizes the importance of control mechanisms as a necessary tool for determining loopholes or gaps in the implementation process. It is constrained, however, by organi-

⁵United Nations, Asian Development Institute, "Towards a Theory of Rural Development," December 1975, pp. 66-101.

zational factors to perform such function with ease and flexibility, i.e., manpower, time, funding, and the like. Nevertheless, whatever plans are formulated or projects evolved by the people, these are coordinated by the planning committees which oversee and make sure that such projects are properly implemented. Spot visits by those who spearhead the initial activities are also of immense importance to successful project implementation. In cognizance of this, attempts have been made by the executive participants to revisit their BFX sites, as was exemplified by Session 20 (May-July 1978) participants who went back to Palauig, Candelaria, and Masinloc, Zambales on a two-day visit and follow-up of the projects instituted by the different clusters in the three municipalities. Lack of time, however, enabled them to go to only one barangay per municipality. A "balik-barangay" plan is also envisioned by Session 23 participants to Cabangan, Zambales. The availability of the participants for the time required, however, is crucial in making this plan a reality.

Necessary linkages are established and coordinated with line agencies and private sector groups which may lend support through the MDS and PDS. Such arrangements are facilitated through a plenary session where projects are prioritized according to those which can be implemented by the barangay people and those which can be undertaken by line agencies through their own resources.

Problems and Limitations of the BFX

The issues discussed above provide a preview of the problems and limitations

of the BFX. The main problems and limitations are within the substantive aspect: the BFX objectives and mechanics, the rationality and validity of these objectives against the overall objectives of the program, and the institution conducting it; for example, lessening the period of the exercise could improve or strengthen its effectiveness. Considering, however, the general management training objectives of, and the resources available to the SEDP, the PEA is constrained to effect such change. The same predicament applies to the need for evaluation and follow-up activities to insure the attainment of BFX objectives. The Academy is extremely conscious of its responsibilities in this regard but can only act as far as the authority and other resources available to it as a training institution will permit.

The Academy continuously strives to keep the exercise responsive to the training needs of its executive clientele and, more importantly, the needs of development. The impact of the BFX on the developmental behavior or attitudes of the participants are not readily measurable. There have been attempts to evaluate the impact of the SEDP and, as previously mentioned, there have also been attempts to follow-up on the results of the BFX in some subject areas. In this connection, a case study has been prepared on the BFX in Atimonan, Quezon. On the whole, however, these attempts lack conclusive information on the developmental impact of the BFX.

Lastly, the increasing administrative difficulties and costs of conducting the whole SEDP cause a major problem and limitation to the BFX. Together

with the continuing question of relevance and practicability of including a barangay-based exercise in a management training program like the SEDP, this problem poses a big challenge on the BFX objectives. There are many administrative problems and difficulties but for the purpose of this paper it is sufficient to say that these problems are of no consequence as long as the rationale for holding the BFX exists.

Concluding Remarks

The Academy recognizes the limitations of the BFX which is the principal reason for the ongoing revisions and

improvements on the mechanics of the exercise. Maintaining this module as a panel subject in the SEDP has at some point been criticized as too exacting particularly by some of those who have gone through the BFX.

With a measure of confidence, it can be said that the BFX has added immeasurable gains to the Academy in its objective of contributing to total national development efforts. Presently, these gains may only be perceived through the Academy's increasing commitment to the attainment of SEDP goals along with those of IRD.