

# AR NOW!'s Keeping Agrarian Reform Advocacy Alive experience to intensify Multistakeholder involvement in Agrarian Reform

## I. Context

### ***The Value of Multistakeholder Partnerships in Agrarian Reform Advocacy***

Today, a multistakeholder partnership is being recognized as a more effective advocacy and networking mechanism, especially for bypassed issues like agrarian reform. Its wider representation from other groupings or sectors of divergent perspectives and approaches provides critical inputs or opinion to the discussion and analysis of issues or the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of projects. They are found effective for policy formulation at national and local levels or projects at local level.

These multistakeholder or multisectoral formations could create wider ownership and collective accountability for the issue or outputs of activities undertaken. They also help explore possibilities for future collaboration and mechanisms especially for issue resolution and implementation.

Mass support for agrarian reform in the Philippines has generally dwindled since the 1986 People Power Revolution. Politicians who formerly pushed for a genuine agrarian reform have either passed away or changed their view whether it is still a critical requirement for poverty eradication. Land is being treated more of a commodity for development rather than an instrument for equity especially for the landless poor.

Even civil society groups clamoring for agrarian reform have gone separately in the advocacy thus affecting the credibility and strength of their calls. The Congress for People's Agrarian Reform (CPAR), the broadest peasant coalition formed to call for the passage of a genuine land reform law, dispersed in 1992. Its former members have also reorganized themselves based on differing political directions or approaches.

The issue of agrarian reform itself has lost its momentum and is being given least priority by Philippine government especially in terms of resources. From its original target of completing implementation from 1988 to 1998, it remains unfinished till today with around 26% still undistributed. Most of these are privately owned agricultural lands which face heavy landowner resistance and are thus difficult to transfer to farmer beneficiaries.

The dwindling numbers of agrarian reform advocates and the growing indifference towards the issue of land for the landless have led those who remain in the struggle to invoke the support of other concerned sectors. These would include non-peasant groups or non-AR NGOs or civic organizations, such as the indigenous peoples, student/youth groups, church organizations, the urban poor, academe, among others. The experiences of the People's Campaign for Agrarian Reform or AR Now! in its past advocacy activities proved the effectiveness of these broader coalitions in pursuing genuine agrarian reform.

### ***Why persevere with Philippine Agrarian Reform?***

The Philippines has witnessed over 400 uprisings since the time of the Spanish occupation, many of them involving tenants who fought against their oppressive landlords.

These uprisings continue today, albeit on a smaller scale, emphasizing the intensity of agrarian conflict in the country. This is inevitable considering the highly skewed land ownership pattern where as much as 80 percent of the land is controlled by the richest 20 percent of the Philippine population.

Agrarian reform is thus necessary in the Philippines to redress the inequity of the past that led to landlessness and widespread peasant unrest and poverty. To this day, poverty in the Philippines is mostly seen in the rural areas where two thirds of the country's poor are found. Agrarian reform would seek to improve the socio-economic conditions of farmworkers and tenants through a more equitable distribution of land. It also aims to preserve ecology, promote food self-sufficiency for the country and usher in agricultural development.

Non-government organizations and people's organizations, thus, had very high hopes when President Corazon C. Aquino, who still basked in the afterglow of the successful People Power that toppled the Marcos dictatorship, signed the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law, Republic Act No. 6657 or CARL, which she dubbed her "centerpiece program", was enacted in 1988.

The CARL and its corresponding program was based on the "Land to the tiller" principle and targeted the transfer of 8.1 million hectares of arable land to landless farmers and farm workers, thus, fulfilling many a tiller's dream to have their own land and not be bound by their landlords. Around 3.8 million hectares were under the Department of Environment and Natural Resources while the Department of Agrarian Reform covered 4.3 million hectares.

Such high expectations and enthusiasm over the implementation of genuine agrarian reform quickly turned to apprehension and disappointment, however, as almost 10 years after the law was passed, the DAR and DENR were able to meet only half of their targets. Some 3.7 million hectares were left undistributed with just a year left to go before the law was to expire in 1998. A mere 2 percent of land in the 25-50 hectare category of private agricultural land under the DAR was placed under compulsory acquisition and only 2.78 percent of land with an area of 5 to 25 hectares was actually distributed.

Exacerbating the situation was the rapid depletion of the Agrarian Reform Fund, which was left with only P1.7 billion from P50 billion when the program was started. The DAR had projected that it would require some P101.1 billion for agrarian reform program to continue for another six years, but the bill calling for the additional funds had to go through a Congress that counted many landlords among its ranks.

Initially, the urgency to lobby for the extension of the agrarian reform program beyond 1998 and the replenishment of the ARF was the spark needed for multisectoral groups to work together - from non-government organizations to donors, financial institutions, religious groups and even government agencies.

The campaign was successful. In 1998, Congress amended R.A. 6657 extending the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) for another 10 years till 2008. The People's Campaign for Agrarian Reform Network or more popularly called AR Now! was at the forefront of this advocacy. It has since valued and drew on the strength of multisectoral alliances in its advocacy activities.

## II. Reviving Coalition Building for Agrarian Reform: The Birth of AR Now!

One of the groups that attempted to bring several of the organizations still working for agrarian reform was AR Now!. A small group of 14 like-minded institutions, they shared the same mandate for agrarian reform and the firm belief that CARP should continue beyond the 1998 deadline to its completion. This was despite formidable obstacles that threatened to stop the program dead in its tracks such as a powerful landlord bloc in all government branches and resistance against CARL coverage.

Farmers, on the other hand, continued to fall prey to legal and physical harassment even with the force of law behind them. This prompted these institutions to meet in January 1997 to discuss the possibility of establishing a wide campaign network to become the watchdog of national and local issues affecting the implementation of the agrarian reform program.

They were unanimous in their observation that a vacuum existed in agrarian reform advocacy and they formed a new group to fill this void, thus, was born AR Now!, which sought to harness the individual strengths of the different organizations to better lobby for common goals.

The first item on its campaign agenda was the lobbying for an increase in the budget for the ARF to continue the program, but other primary goals included:

- drum up public support for faster distribution of private agricultural land and completion of the agrarian reform program
- ensure Congress increases and sustains financial support for the program
- document and popularize the impact of agrarian reform, and
- conduct policy research and advocacy in support of the agrarian reform campaign.

The new coalition also aimed to achieve peasant empowerment, agrarian and aquatic reform and rural development, sustainable agriculture/fisheries and food security, gender sensitivity and appropriate and adequate support services.

### ***Past coalition building efforts (boxed article)***

AR Now! draws from the experiences of other broad coalitions that fought for the agrarian reform program.

One of the first of these coalitions was the Congress for People's Agrarian Reform (CPAR), which was credited for pressuring Congress and then President Corazon Aquino to enact the long-awaited law on agrarian reform.

CPAR is one of the best examples of a coalition of NGO, PO and individual agrarian reform advocates that worked successfully to realize its goal based on social justice and equity. It was the broadest coalition of peasant groups in Philippine history and became a model as well as an inspiration for future coalition work and networking efforts. It was composed of farmers' organizations and NGOs from a very wide political spectrum – national democrats, democratic left, center and others with no clear political leanings.

Its mandate was to work for a pro-farmer agrarian reform law, but despite its best efforts to pressure both the executive and legislative branches of government, it was not able to meet all its expectations and what came out was what it refers to as a "watered-down" version of an agrarian reform law called CARL – "a law that was a victim of compromises."

The disappointment proved too great, thus, CPAR came up with the People's Agrarian Reform Code, or PARCODE, that aimed to gather a million signatures to repeal CARL and adopt its own code as a new law. But the PARCODE campaign was hindered by limited logistics, unfamiliarity with the people's legislative mechanism and the division within CPAR about what approach to take to meet its goals.

Some groups within CPAR rejected CARL while others decided they would try to work within the limits of the law. The presidential elections in 1992, and the question of who among the presidential candidates the coalition will support, worsened the already deepening divisions within CPAR, eventually leading to the disbandment of the coalition in 1993. Despite this, CPAR has left behind a firm legacy in coalition building.

A long-term consequence of the CPAR project was, among others, the primacy of reaching out to various forces to work out common issues. Ideological differences had to be set aside for the sake of higher principles.

Another was the importance of gathering support at the national level if mechanisms to resolve local issues at the local level were inadequate. CPAR also articulated the need for NGOs and POs to work with the government to resolve issues of national interest.

Whatever bitterness there was that divided the broad coalition, CPAR had made its mark in history such that up to this day, many agrarian reform advocates wish for a repeat of such unity.

After the demise of CPAR came the Philippine Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development or PhilCARRD, which was, unfortunately, unable to move ahead with its goals. The coalition evolved into the Partnership for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development or PARRDS.

PARRDS attempted to revive the agrarian reform advocacy campaign at the policy and field levels. PAKISAMA and PhilDHRRA initially participated in some activities of the PARRDS coalition, but left the coalition due to policy differences.

In early 1995, yet another coalition was formed among organized peasantry called the Movement to Oppose and Resist Exemptions to Agrarian Reform (MORE-AR), which included the FFF, DKMP, KASAMA-FPO, PAKISAMA and other groups to lobby against the exclusion of commercial farms, fish ponds and prawn farms from CARL coverage. PAKISAMA later decided to stop participating in MORE-AR to avoid conflicts affecting the advocacy of AR issues. Meanwhile, other AR coalitions outside these circles also existed.

AR Now!, thus, became the closest to achieving that unity when it was formed in 1997. It also had the benefit of hindsight, as it tried to avoid confronting the same deep ideological divides and differences in opinion that eventually led to the demise of CPAR.

### ***Membership***

The initial convenors of AR Now! were the Pambansang Kilusan ng mga Samahang Magsasaka (National Movement of Peasant Organizations or PAKISAMA), People's Alternative Study Center for Research and Education in Social Development (PASCRES), Center for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (CARRD), the Philippine Partnership

for the Development of Human Resources in Rural Areas (PhilDHRRA), Philippine Development Assistance Program (PDAP), Sentro ng Alternatibong Lingap Panligal (Saligan), the Institute for Church and Social Concerns (ICSI) and Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform for Rural Development (ANGOC).

Other organizations followed: Asian Partnership for the Development of Human Resources in Rural Areas (ASIADHRRA), Upland NGO Assistance Council (UNAC) and Women's Action Network for Development (WAND). Mindanao-based members include Balay Mindanao Foundation Inc. (BMFI), the Agri-Aqua Development Coalition (AADC) and the Center for Alternative Rural Technologies (CART). PAKISAMA and AADC are peasant coalitions.

These diverse members were able to work together in a way that the other coalitions failed because many of the AR Now! Members have been involved in the advocacy and implementation of agrarian reform and rural development since the regime of the late Ferdinand Marcos and in the post-EDSA agrarian campaign under CPAR.

Except for three groups in Mindanao, all members are based in Manila including some operating as regional offices. Among its members are two peasant federations and six national coalition/network type organizations with membership spread out in almost all Philippine provinces.

In terms of personnel, most of the organizations have 10-20 staff each and except for PAKISAMA and AADC, all the members are NGOs providing services to Filipino peasants – farmers, fisherfolk, rural women, youth and indigenous peoples.

### ***Ties that Bind***

#### **1. Agrarian Reform --- a strong common agenda**

Because of the common agenda for genuine agrarian reform, AR Now! was able to bring together institutions that offer diverse skills and expertise useful to an ambitious advocacy campaign. This unity was achieved inspite the groups' differences in their respective approach to promote social equity.

These include community organizing, community enterprise development, sustainable agriculture, appropriate technology, documentation and research, networking, legal assistance, policy advocacy, gender development, participation in local governance, training and fund raising.

#### **2. A long advocacy history and personal chemistry**

Another factor going for AR Now! was the chemistry among the individuals that made up the organizations involved and land reform and peasant issues for more than a decade. Some have been good friends and allies in social development work for a long time. They were involved in the same campaigns, joined the same rallies and worked on common programs or projects. A number of these individuals were even classmates or members of the same school organizations or political parties.

This “web of ties” cultivated over the years produced the familiarity, trust and confidence among AR Now! members that later proved invaluable to the network's survival.

New individual staff members later joined the AR Now! circle as the advocacy work

progressed. Though coming from groups of different perspectives and focus, these individuals shared the commitment to landless farmers and their quest for their own piece of land. Diversity of opinion and ideas was, thus, common in the discussions, which somehow even strengthened the foundation of campaigns and forms of action.

It cannot be overemphasized that the common goal to bring about reform held the diverse coalition together and strengthened working ties and friendships gained from campaigns with different farmers' groups through the years. Again, this setting aside of individual concerns for the benefit of a bigger program such as agrarian reform made it easier to strengthen the AR Now! coalition and work with multisectoral groups, especially for agrarian issues of national importance.

### ***Organizational structure***

AR Now! initially had no formal structure and rules. It had no elected officers nor was it registered as a separate organization with accredited agencies. PAKISAMA acted as the campaign secretariat then, being the only peasant federation in the initial list of members, thus, should naturally be at the forefront of campaign activities.

Eventually, AR Now! assumed a fixed but flexible campaign structure with an executive committee composed of key leaders, a lean secretariat and task clusters to divide the work. The institution supporting the problematic area took on most of the campaign work for field cases, with help from AR Now! Secretariat and the group's clusters.

The coalition decided to set-up these ad hoc clusters to support campaign activities for local cases. The first clusters were formed during the CARRUF campaign in April 1997 and became more permanent after the MAPALAD campaign in October 1997.

These clusters are as follows:

1. Local struggle - assists problematic areas identified by AR Now! as strategic for launching agrarian reform campaigns at the local or national level
2. Media - in charge of media liaison, especially in the agrarian reform and agriculture beats; writing press releases and statements on key issues of campaigns; organizing press conferences and media briefings
3. Research - conducts studies that provide in-depth analysis of current issues affecting the peasant sector and agrarian reform advocacy
4. Legal - lawyers from alternative legal groups provide technical analysis and legal support, and represent farmers groups in court when necessary
5. Public education - produces information materials for public circulation and organizes activities that would popularize issues being advocated
6. Networking - engages other sectors such as youth, church, urban poor and labor and forges tactical alliances with other advocacy formations to push for specific issues with concerned agencies
7. Finance - raises funds through project proposals to external funding agencies and creates public philanthropy programs

Each AR Now! member is part of one to three clusters according to the members' expertise as well as the skills of their individual representatives to the network.

In 1999, the networking cluster was dissolved since the function was already part of all other clusters as they deal with various groups and sectors to meet their objectives. Generally, AR

Now! members move from one cluster to another depending on their skills and preference. As for external projection during campaigns, NGOs almost always took a low-key stance in favor of PAKISAMA leaders.

There was a conscious effort to let the national officers of PAKISAMA to take center stage during the advocacy campaigns, for they are, after all, the peasant leaders.

In 1998, AR Now! formed a separate secretariat but still used the PAKISAMA office since it was the project's legal holder. The secretariat coordinated the implementation of plans and provided technical assistance to committees or local campaign efforts.

It was composed of three people --- the AR Now! coordinator, a media liaison officer and an administrative/finance person detailed from the PAKISAMA staff. Initially, the AR Now! coordinator was also the Policy and Advocacy Officer of PAKISAMA. But a new person was later hired as AR Now! coordinator who continued to work closely with the PAKISAMA advocacy officer.

The AR Now! media officer had years of experience in dealing with NGOs and media and had worked for both peasant and urban poor groups. Organizing mobilizations was added to her functions given her experience. In 2000, a different Information Officer was hired to speed up the circulation of information within the coalition and other groups.

For the group's finances, AR Now! members mainly pooled organizational contributions for the coalition. According to the executive committee, 80 percent of AR Now!'s funds came from institutions while 20 percent came from external sources. These contributions, however, were also project funds accessed from external donors. Public donations in cash and kind were likewise solicited especially during public education campaigns in schools and churches for the communities in conflict. One of AR Now!'s members acted as project proponent for funding proposals.

Although the executive committee provided the directions and strategies, the campaign structure was democratic and peasant led, primarily by PAKISAMA. Decisions have always been based on consensus among AR Now! members.

AR Now! usually involves itself in tactical alliances and working relations with other agrarian reform advocacy groups. However, the experience has been that strategic debates slowed down decision-making, thus, these alliances were forged only when the issue is of great national significance, and the approach to address the issue is more or less the same across these groups.

Nevertheless, no policy bound one institution exclusively to AR now! Each institution remained independent and could join other advocacy campaigns and formations.

### III. AR Now's Advocacy Campaigns

It has always been AR Now!'s policy from the start to base national campaigns on local issues to stress that AR Now! has a mass base and the issues raised are legitimate and have adverse effects on real farmers. It has so far put into action its advocacy campaigns by assisting local agrarian reform cases or joining several national policy campaigns that called for immediate land distribution or installation. As it undertook each campaign, various alliances with other

sectors were forged from other NGOs, political groups, other coalitions and even the private sector.

### ***A. Supporting Local Struggles***

Several of the local cases involved the CARRUF estate (Valencia, Bukidnon), Quisumbing estate (Sumilao, Bukidnon), Starke and Zabala estates (Negros Occidental), Hacienda Carmencita (Roxas City, Capiz) Potenciano estate (Calamba, Laguna), Ekleong estate (Catanauan, Quezon), Locsin estate (Pres. Roxas, Capiz) and portions of the Cojuangco estates and other land monopolies in Negros Occidental and Iloilo. Recounted below are AR Now's experiences with the CARRUF and MAPALAD campaigns.

#### ***1. CARRUF***

The CARRUF estate covering 147 hectares with 111 farmer beneficiaries put AR Now! through its first major test, preparing it for more trying cases ahead.

In April 1997, AR Now!, with CART and ANGOC at the helm, provided media assistance and coordinated with government agencies to push for the immediate distribution of land to the farmer-beneficiaries in Valencia, Bukidnon.

The Carpio-Rufino Estate (CARRUF) spans 147 hectares where 111 farmer-beneficiaries have been tilling the land since 1974. It used to be public land that was given to the influential Floirendo family as concession under the Pasture Land Agreement. The newly installed Aquino government took over the estate in 1986 as the Floirendos were known to be cronies of the Marcos dictatorship.

Upon the passage of the CARL in 1988, the area was placed under CARP and was up for compulsory acquisition (C.A.). The Carpio-Rufino Agricultural Corp., however, suddenly appeared and claimed ownership over the land. It pleaded its case before the DAR but lost.

The company, however, did not give up and solicited the support of the local government units, which were willing to convert the land into non-agricultural use, particularly for the construction of an airport.

Finally, in February 1997, the farmers were issued their CLOAs but they could not enter the estate as CARRUF hired armed guards to keep the farmers off the land. Sensing that they would not get justice in Bukidnon where the landowners found allies in the local government to resist agrarian reform, the farmers decided to bring their case to Manila through the help of AR Now! members. CART assisted the farmers' group in the area.

The farmers brought their case to the DAR central office and the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) by holding protest rallies, press conferences and a media campaign. Because of these protests, the farmers gained an audience with the DAR Secretary and the chief of the Philippine National Police (PNP). The farmers, thus, were finally able to enter the estate with the assistance of the PNP.

## **2. The MAPALAD Hunger Strike Campaign**

On Oct. 9, 1997, a group of 20 farmers set out to reclaim their land through a hunger strike in Manila and Cagayan de Oro in Mindanao. They went on strike to fight for their ownership of the 144-hectare Quisumbing estate in Sumilao, Bukidnon in Mindanao. The DAR awarded the estate to 137 farmers of Sumilao in 1995 after twice denying the Quisumbings' application for land conversion.

Ironically, *Mapalad* is the Filipino word for blessed, and also the name of the farmers' cooperative claiming ownership of the Quisumbing property.

The Quisumbings had earlier forged an agreement with the local government to develop the sprawling estate into non-agricultural projects such as a golf course, estate homes and other commercial uses.

A Presidential order, however, prohibited prime agricultural lands like the Quisumbing estate from being converted for non-agricultural use. The Quisumbings still won their appeal at the Office of the President due to an alleged technical lapse in procedure by DAR.

To bolster its case, Bukidnon Governor Carlos Fortich even wrote a letter requesting the reversal of the DAR decision and supporting the development plans for the land. Ownership, thus, was reverted from the farmers to the Quisumbings. The farmers, with their NGO counterparts, attempted to occupy the land but were corralled and forced out by the Quisumbings' hired guns. The Quisumbing family and Governor Fortich were even present to make sure that the farmers were kept out. In tears, the farmers and their families left the land.

With all legal options exhausted and negotiations with the landowners out of the question, the farmers, who belonged to the ethnic Higaonon tribe, resorted to their traditional form of protest, which was to fast to death.

The hunger strike drew prominent media attention and the appeal to reverse the OP decision made by then Executive Secretary Ruben Torres was brought to the attention of former President Fidel V. Ramos. When Pres. Ramos arrived from a 10-day official trip, he invited the strikers to a dialog in Malacanang and proposed to set up a fact-finding team to study the issue, a move that gave the farmers hope that they could get back the land.

In the meantime, the farmers agreed to scale down their hunger strike into fasting while the investigation was ongoing, but they again went back on hunger strike after the government, failed to issue its decision at the agreed date.

But just two days after, on Nov. 5, 1997, Pres. Ramos reversed the Torres decision upon the recommendation of the high-level team. The team came up with a so-called "win-win" solution that gave the farmers 100 hectares of land and the Quisumbings the remaining 44 hectares.

It was the decision that broke the farmers' month-long fast, and the farmers declared victory.

### ***B. Makings of a victory***

A confluence of factors led to the success of the MAPALAD hunger strike.

#### **1. Farmers' Determination for Self Sacrifice**

First was the great sacrifice of the farmers who were ready to die to get the land that was rightfully theirs. Their fight immediately caught public attention and the sympathy toward the plight of these poor and hungry farmers.

Here was a group of indigenous, poor farmers who traveled all the way to Manila, willing to die in order to get justice. It was a picture that appealed to the Filipino's propensity to root for the underdog. It was the typical David versus Goliath story and it boded well for the farmers.

For AR Now!, the farmers were heroes - determined, resolute and single-minded in the pursuit of their goal. They were oppressed people in the right, who were caught in a high profile battle with powerful government officials and landlords.

## **2. The flooding of multistakeholder support**

Almost immediately after the hunger strike commenced when support groups started coming in. They came from all over - religious congregations, political parties, sectoral groups and anonymous, concerned individuals.

### ***Political support***

The hunger strike became a unifying and healing force for the country's fractured social movement. It became the prime symbol of the age-old fight between peasants and landlords. Since the hunger strike was launched just a few months before a general election, it also easily the attention of political candidates who either genuinely sympathized with them or were just craving for the media mileage.

Among the presidential candidates who visited the strikers were Raul Roco, Renato de Villa, and Jose de Venecia. There were also a number of senatorial and congressional candidates who came along.

### ***Continuous Media attention***

Another crucial factor in the success of the hunger strike was sustained media coverage of the plight of the farmers and the progress of the negotiations. For several weeks, the hunger strike was front-page material for many national dailies. The MAPALAD campaign revived discussion on agrarian reform. The sustained media coverage was partly attributed to the vigilant and hardworking media team in AR NOW! composed of two PhilDHRRRA representatives and the PDAP-FARMS group.

Their tasks involved reporting developments at the campsite through regular press releases, which were furnished the many media visitors, holding press conferences and trying to convince reporters to slant the news in favor of the farmers.

In Manila, AR NOW! proved in the campaign that sustained media coverage of peasant issues was instrumental in forming public opinion in favor of peasant rights and putting pressure on landowners as well as the government.

The media practitioners, in an assessment after the campaign, said they truly felt that they were instrumental in helping the farmers win their fight. They shared ownership of the farmers' victory in the long and difficult campaign. AR Now!'s media advocacy helped create a groundswell of support to persuade influential and powerful institutions as well as individuals to support the hunger strike and turn public opinion in favor of the MAPALAD farmers.

### ***Strong support from Manila to Mindanao***

Support for the hunger strike was led in Mindanao by PALAMBU -Pakisama, the provincial federation of MAPALAD farmers, BMFI, PhilDHRRA-Mindanao and other Task Force Mapalad members in Mindanao.

Familiarity with and establishing good relations with these groups during earlier campaigns paid a huge dividend when the MAPALAD hunger strike was launched. Vic Fabe of PAKISAMA and other leaders of AR Now! also believed that the Church's support was also invaluable in the campaign of the indigenous farmers.

Support came from other groups such as peasant organizations from Rizal, Bataan, Bulacan and Cavite who claimed to be victims of similar Torres decisions, and coalitions such as Sagip Saka Sagip Buhay, PNPC, COIR, TF-AFC, women's groups, labor groups, students, indigenous networks, professionals and other community-based groups.

### **3. Well-oiled internal campaign machinery**

Strong intra-personal relationships among AR Now!'s members grew and proved an advantage as the hunger strike progressed. Critical aspects of the campaign like operational decisions, relating with other support groups, funding, division of work were handled smoothly.

The experienced members of the network planned the strategies, raised funds and linked with the other groups while the younger ones did the spadework for the hunger strike, wrote press releases and statements and entertained visitors at the campsite.

AR Now! members virtually gave their all for they believed there was so much more at stake in the struggle than just the MAPALAD farmers getting their due. It was, for all intents and purposes, a fight for the success of the agrarian reform program itself. Without the trust and familiarity among the members developed through years of struggle together, AR Now! might not have withstood the pressures of the campaign.

The usual irritants common in coalition work like decision-making processes, funding, and projection were minimized largely due to the close relations among AR Now!'s key players. Nevertheless, the success of the hunger strike had both positive and negative impacts on other networks and these were felt during the campaign.

### ***C. Expansion of Issues and Increased Sensitivities with multistakeholder partnerships***

Because of the success in bringing the MAPALAD farmers' plight to the attention of the government and the public, other groups took advantage and used the campaign to launch their own crusade against land conversion.

Other farmers went to the DAR not only to support the MAPALAD farmers but also to present their own concerns. They and other groups were counting on the popular sentiment against land conversion to carry their individual crusades forward. Also, since the issues being discussed expanded beyond the plight of the MAPALAD farmers, the campaign drew other forces and players.

The campaign, thus, expanded to cover other issues, which required broader action and participation of more groups. This inevitably caused the sensitive and often touchy issue of

dealing with many groups of varied political and ideological persuasions came to the fore once more. Essential questions on whether to form a tactical alliance, partnership or united front with other groups became a pressing concern for AR Now!.

AR Now! overcame charges of being "exclusivist" by the other groups, particularly those united under Sagip Saka-Sagip Buhay through continuous dialogue albeit heated. While it was acknowledged that Sagip-Saka's cases have to be included in any resolution, AR Now! felt that the campaign should be centered on Mapalad to make the issue clearer and make it harder for the government to delay any action. Once the Mapalad case is resolved, AR Now! felt that this would set a precedent for all other cases. The other POs, however, felt that they were not being accorded proper attention and support, and were merely being used for the Mapalad campaign. After numerous dialogs between the concerns groups, the general strategy of focusing first on Mapalad was finally accepted.

AR Now! also promised to be more conscious in projecting the other cases as well. It also clarified that once the President acted on the Mapalad case, AR Now! would shift its focus to the actual entry of the Mapalad farmers to the site. This is not as simple as it sounds since the landowners were expected to appeal any decision favorable to the farmers, and maintain the guards to prevent entry into the land.

Sagip-Saka, on the other hand, would take the lead role in the campaign for the four other cases. AR Now! would continue to support the other cases through the active participation of its members, particularly PAKISAMA, PhilDHERRA and SALIGAN in Sagip-Saka. The quick decision making proved to be crucial in the success and the MAPALAD campaign, in effect, became AR Now!'s litmus test.

#### ***D. National Gains from a Local Case***

The campaign brought the issue of agrarian reform to a level never before seen in the country's history. It became the focal point of land conversion campaigns, with the MAPALAD farmers becoming the symbol of the oppressed and impoverished. It took two Philippine Presidents to personally intervene in the hope of resolving the issue - one to offer a compromise solution, the other to break bread with the hunger strikers.

AR Now! gained a lot of experience from the MAPALAD experience, which was in many ways, its baptism of fire. But it passed the test with flying colors and became respected as a network because of the success of the campaign, which can also be credit to more than its fair share of luck.

The campaign, for instance, was helped by "right timing" as the religious and cause-oriented groups had just united in the victorious struggle against Charter Change when the hunger strike started.

Strong links were established between these multi-sectoral groups and the general mood was upbeat. Politicians were also starting to jockey for position in preparation for the following year's national and local elections.

The campaign may have been a success in itself, however, the farmers are still unable to enter the land awarded to them. They waited for their amended Certificate of Land Ownership Award (CLOA) until 2002.

The four other conversion cases also still have to be acted upon by the President. It is clear then that the struggle for genuine agrarian reform, sustainable agriculture and rural development is far from over. But the successful campaign to help the poor Mapalad farmers from Bukidnon provides the high ground from which to engage the government in the continuing struggle for social reform.

### ***E. Other Campaigns with Alliances***

AR Now! has been involved with quite a number of national policy campaigns for agrarian reform and rural development since 1997.

Lobbying work for AR Now! usually involves mobilizations, paid advertisements in daily broadsheets, intensive media work, fax/e-mail barrage to concerned legislators and information dissemination through e-mail and the media.

Funds are raised from contributions within the group and from generous donors. Through all these activities, peasant leaders are empowered in running and strategizing campaigns, as well as in articulating positions on critical issues.

### **AR Augmentation Fund (ARF)**

In 1997, AR Now! lobbied actively for the enactment of the AR Augmentation Fund that will increase the Agrarian Reform Fund, allowing the government to continue implementing CARP beyond its supposed expiry in 1998.

Together with other groups, the coalition presented their position papers to Congress and held mobilizations to lobby for this legislation. The campaign was the primary reason why AR Now!'s members decided to form the coalition.

By early 1998, Republic Act No. 8532, or the AR Augmentation Fund, was successfully enacted, allocating as much as P50 billion for the continued implementation of agrarian reform and expanding the sources of its financing.

### **Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization Act (AFMA)**

Since then, AR Now! has been consistent in its advocacy against land conversion and for food security especially for the rural poor. It has been involved in lobbying for a pro-peasant position in the proposed Agricultural Modernization Law with the Agricultural Committee of the Philippine Congress, attending seven regional and two national consultations for the bill.

It particularly opposed anti-food security provisions in the draft that would further land conversions and reclassification of lands to non-agricultural uses. The campaign eventually resulted in the passage of the Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization Act or RA 8435.

### **Indigenous People's Rights Act (IPRA)**

Cultivation of ties with specific Congress representatives was also done to ensure support for these pro-peasant calls. The coalition members also gave their position papers relating to RA 8371 or the Indigenous People's Rights Act led by PAKISAMA and UNAC for AR in the uplands.

### **New Fisheries Code**

PAKISAMA and PhilDHERRA were also active in lobbying for pro-small fisherfolk provisions or RA 8550 or the New Fisheries Code and its implementing rules and regulations. The group also took part in drafting the AR, Agriculture and Environment chapters of the Medium Term Development Plan of President Joseph Estrada's administration.

### **Critique of Joint Venture schemes**

It also came up with a critique of the Joint Economic Enterprise Program promoting joint venture schemes between farmer beneficiaries under CARP and landowners.

### **Increase in the LAD budget allocation**

AR Now! in 1999 also worked for the restoration of the budget allocation of P600 million for Land Acquisition and Distribution, which was slashed by Congress from P1.2 billion.

### **Recovery of the Cocolevy**

Another major advocacy of the network is the campaign to recover the coconut levy, which it considers as public funds, together with the Multisectoral task Force formed with business groups, the Church and other peasant coalitions. A pro-small coconut farmer/farm worker Executive Order was drafted by the task force, which was pitted against other proposals for the EO on the coconut levy.

### **Jubilee 2000 Campaign**

AR Now! was also active in other national campaigns on land reform and social justice issues, such as the "Jubilee 2000: Break the Chains of Debt" campaign for the ADB's 32nd Annual Board of Governors' Meeting, Kampanya Kontra Kumbersyon (KKK) Campaign Against Land Conversion, KALAGAN, a broader coalition of three peasant federations calling for Food Security and Land Reform (Oct. 1999).

### **Recent Campaigns**

From Nov. 2002 to June 2003, AR Now! has undertaken the following activities involving policy advocacy for agrarian reform and rural development in the Philippines:

#### **Anti-Farmland as Collateral Bill Campaign**

AR Now! has been busiest since December last year with the campaign to block the "Farmland as Collateral" bill, which is primarily being pushed by Senator Sergio Osmeña III. The bill, particularly the Senate version, seeks to amend the CARL to lift the 10-year prohibition on the sale, mortgage and transfer of Emancipation Patents and the CLOAS as well as the five-hectare limit on land ownership.

Major peasant groups and AR advocates contest that the bill, if enacted, would result in massive foreclosures of EPs and CLOAs and the reconsolidation of agricultural lands in the hands of a few.

In effect, the end and reversal of the 70-year-old agrarian reform struggle in the country. AR Now! joined other organizations in negotiating with key Secretaries to convince President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo to withdraw support for the bill and instead adopt an alternative credit program for the farmers, which would not require the use of farmlands as collateral.

### **Peasant Budget Advocacy Group**

AR Now! joined the group in mobilizing farmers to attend public hearings regarding the 2003 DAR and DA budgets. A mobilization was conducted last Nov. 12, 2002 at the House of Representatives to demand increases in the DA and DAR's budgets for 2003.

### **NAPC Joint-Farmers and NGO Councils Inter-Agency Preparatory Committee**

From Nov. 2002 to Jan. 2003, AR Now! was tapped by the National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC) Joint-Peasant and NGO Councils Inter-Agency Preparatory Committee for technical inputs in the sectoral agenda to be presented in the NAPC's en banc session chaired by President Arroyo herself.

### **Rice Safety Net Act**

In the last quarter of 2002, AR Now! also took part in the broad campaign against the planned liberalization of the rice industry before 2004 through HB No. 3339, otherwise known as the "Rice Safety Net Act", as per commitment to the provisions under the World Trade Organization. The bill proposed the replacement of quantitative restrictions on rice with tariffs.

AR Now! issued press statements and attended and submitted position papers in the public hearings on the bill. These efforts helped block the bill at the House committee on agrarian reform.

### **Coconut Levy Recovery Campaign**

Last Dec. 2002, AR Now! and PAKISAMA held a series of fora and mobilizations on the recovery of the coconut levy funds. These were held in Davao City and Gumaca, Quezon. Another was held in front of the Sandiganbayan to urge the court to immediately declare the coco levy fund as public fund. The mobilizations in Davao City and Quezon were major news items in major dailies and AR Now! also became part of the secretariat of the Liga Magniniyog's National Eco Summit held last Dec. 2002.

### **Untitled Privately-owned Agricultural Lands (UPALs) campaign**

AR Now! conducted mobilizations, meetings and dialogs with the DENR and DAR officials last year for the issuance of a policy that would facilitate the processing of untitled privately-owned agricultural lands. In March 17, 2003, then DAR Secretary Roberto Pagdanganan and DENR Secretary Gozun signed joint DAR-DENR Memo-Circular No. 2003-01 on UPALs.

### **National Land Use Act Lobby**

As a member of the People's ALARM coalition, AR Now! participated in the coalition's lobbying at the House for the issuance of the committee on the report on the NLUA bill. The report was finally issued in early June this year.

### **"Up the Ante" for AR movement**

AR Now! is also currently co-convenor of a broadgroup of POs and AR advocates dedicated in conducting a campaign to "up the ante" for agrarian reform. The group's objective is to bring back agrarian reform in the national agenda and consciousness by drum beating the agrarian issue and by increasing pressure on government to fast-track and effectively implement CARP.

The group conducted a mobilization last April 29, 2003 to pressure DAR Secretary Pagdanganan to focus on DAR concerns. To his credit, Pagdanganan has shown some

sympathy for peasant causes when he responded to a number of demands of peasant groups and NGOs, but it is on the broader issues of policy and operational direction and thrust of the DAR that Pagdanganan still needed to improve, particularly in showing "preferential option" for farmer-beneficiaries over the interests of landlords.

Because of this and other concerns, AR Now! has converged with other groups to address other AR issues to form a united front for farmers' rights.

### **Peasant Unity Movement**

AR Now! has also taken a major role in the formation of a unity movement for AR. Its first major activity included the unity mob in the Senate in May 19, 2003 against the farmland as collateral bill and the June 9 mob in commemoration of 15th year anniversary of CARP. The mobilization, where over 3,000 people took part in, was held in front of the DAR and in Malacanang.

### **Consultation on the New Leasehold Administrative Order**

AR Now! also drafted a position paper on the DAR's proposed new Administrative Order (AO) on leasehold. The position paper was presented during the DAR's consultation in May 9, 2003.

### **Assessment of GMA's performance in AR and Agriculture for 2002**

The papers were commissioned by CODE-NGO and were presented to the public a week before the President's 3rd State of the Nation Address on July 28, 2003. AR Now!'s basic message was that Arroyo's agrarian reform program was found wanting as it stuck to its low implementation target that further contributed to the alarming slowdown in the implementation of agrarian reform in the Philippines.

## III. Learning from its Strengths and Weaknesses

AR Now!'s experiences with local and national campaigns strengthened the network's ability to undertake advocacy activities. AR Now! members attribute this growth to several factors.

First, the organizations within AR Now! have years of experience in community organizing focused on socio-economic projects and activities. But they also believed in the need for strong grassroots advocacy with government through mobilizations, dialogues and persistent follow-up for the release of farmers' land titles and farm support services.

Thus, a holistic approach was used to respond to the needs of poor landless and farming families. The network has no acknowledged figurehead who claims leadership, but it tended to draw attention to farmer-leaders from PAKISAMA. AR Now! members stress that decisions are a product of intense discussions and consensus-building among members.

Another strength of AR Now! is its ability to network with different sectors to support peasant issues.

The Mapalad campaign, for example, was able to build a vast support network for AR Now! and the Mapalad farmers composed of the youth, church, politicians and other NGOs from the urban poor, environment and indigenous people's groups.

International linkages were likewise forged and maintained with resource institutions and international advocacy groups such as TROCARE, which does counterpart solicitation for the farmers in the United Kingdom. These links generated both financial and letters of support for the Mapalad farmers' cause and welfare.

On the other hand, AR Now! acknowledges areas where it must improve to continue with its advocacy efforts. AR Now!, for instance, still lacks appropriate strategies for judicial and even legislative advocacy. Although it is quite well exposed to advocacy with the executive branch of government, it needs to sharpen its skills in dealing with the judiciary, a lesson bitterly learned in the second phase of the Mapalad campaign with the Supreme Court, when the High Tribunal granted the landowner's appeal, giving ownership of the land back to the Quisumbing.

The network also still has a lot to learn about legislative lobbying for the passage of pro-poor bills like the National Land Use Act led by its partner KAISAHAN. Although many are willing to lend a hand, legal resources are also scarce, presenting another problem for the network. Very few lawyers take up alternative law as a long-term profession, much less dedicate their lives and expertise to peasant causes.

To do a good job of representing peasants, a lawyer is required to do research, write critiques on flawed laws, handle case documentation and litigation. These take up a lot of time. Overstretched and underpaid, lawyers often move on to other less taxing and more lucrative fields of law. This of course applies not only to lawyers but also to other people involved in development work.

AR Now! also realizes that it is not consistent in its analysis of certain issues it advocates. AR Now! agrees to some extent with criticisms that it takes a myopic view of strategies, but it is largely due to inability to access critical information that could help it form a clearer and more accurate analysis of the situation, thus, come up with better strategies.

There is a need to beef up its research base and ability to generate good critiques and studies on emerging trends and issues in agrarian reform advocacy. These shortcomings can be attributed to lack of resources, especially of personal, to focus on priority research issues of the campaign coalition.

On hindsight, AR Now! is a coalition that is destined to be formed. Though it is small and does not project a broad group of peasant networks, it was better able to come up with a consensus and work cohesively as a group. And because its composition was more homogenous compared to earlier coalitions or alliances, it proved to be a faster vehicle for agrarian reform advocacy.

AR Now! has contributed significantly in putting agrarian reform back on the national agenda through the promotion of local issues at the national level and with the general public.

It has also successfully pooled together key actors who worked together to fight for a common cause.

### ***Looking Ahead***

The coalition vows to pursue people's advocacy of local agrarian cases and elevate policy questions through lobbying at the national level. Its main concern is to assist local communities, especially those that still face physical, legal and policy threats to their right over land under the government's ambitious agrarian reform program.

There is a demand for campaign-type advocacy to implement agrarian reform due to pressures to stop farmers from taking over the land that they till. But AR Now! is aware that it can not help in all areas given its lack of financial and human resources. The coalition, thus, needs to build the capacity of its members and local partners to address shortcomings and fight for as many causes as it can.

AR Now! plans to work on enhancing skills in adopting strategies for local to national campaigns, especially judicial advocacy and legislative lobbying. It can also develop its second liners at the national level to sustain the coalition's activities in areas with land tenure conflict.

Research and analysis need to be strengthened within the network for clearer campaign direction and management. As to financial sustainability, projects aimed at building a central fund for those interested in supporting the activities of farmers struggling to reclaim their land are now underway.

AR Now! is also aware of the need to integrate a fund-raising strategy in future campaigns to continue its advocacy work and support affected farmers. Creative and effective strategies are all the more necessary to get donations for agrarian reform activities. And there are many.

### **IV. Challenges**

AR Now, with the help of other sympathetic institutions from both inside and outside government, wants to reverse the trend but the challenges along the way are considerable and not for the faint-hearted to even consider surmounting.

The government's budget for agrarian reform, for instance, has continued to decline as years pass. For 2003, the budget was slashed at the Bicameral conference committee by P1.8 billion, with landowner compensation getting the bulk of the budget cut. From a proposed P2.8 billion budget for landowner compensation to cover 95,562 hectares of compensable lands, the budget was reduced to P516 million.

A special provision, however, included in the 2003 GAA, which authorized the Land Bank of the Philippines to disburse up to P1 billion charged against land amortization collections from farmer-beneficiaries. This brings the funds available for landowner compensation to only P1.5 billion, which the LBP said could only cover the acquisition of 53,806 hectares of new lands.

The almost P2-billion cut in the budget shows how low agrarian reform is in the priority list of the current government. The only bright spot in the area of AR financing is the recent ruling by the Supreme Court that the P36-billion Marcos Swiss accounts were ill gotten, and therefore, should be made available for agrarian reform as provided under Sec. 63 of the CARL.

Another challenge is the emergence of a bolder and more organized landowner resistance to agrarian reform. Aside from the filing of the usual harassment cases against ARBs, landowner resistance has become bolder and more violent due to the increasing use of blue guards/goons and/or "loyal" tenants/farmworkers to drive away farmer-beneficiaries.

These have already resulted in several deaths, forced eviction, arrests and detention of ARBs. In Negros Occidental, which is home to many haciendas, the provincial government has even proposed the formation of a provincial council to oversee CARP implementation in the province.

AR advocates also have to contend with the perceived weakening of the AR movement in the country. AR movers are not only dwindling in numbers, but have also become divided. Initially, the division had been on an ideological level, but later these groups splintered into even more groups. Recent realizations by different peasant groups and AR advocates of their limitations, however, combined with the growing strength of anti-AR forces may push them into tactical alliances and AR Now! is able and willing to be part of these alliances.

There is really no choice for AR groups but to unite if they want to have a ghost of a chance of succeeding in the campaign to give land to the tiller.

For its part, AR Now! has set its sights on ensuring that the CARP be completed by 2008 as provided under the law. It also wants to enact pro-agrarian reform policies and programs in the legislative, executive and judicial branches of the government and adopt pro-ARRD perspectives in various negotiations and summits regarding globalization policies.

For many of AR Now!'s members, the current challenges are just a continuation of their long-term struggle for agrarian reform at the ground level. Each institution has worked for almost two decades to build a strong mass base for agrarian reform rooted in sound political and socio-economic activities at the field level.

Focus on productivity and socio-economic activities have been given greater emphasis in organizing and developing partner communities. Yet, these organizations still recognize the need and value of advocating for concrete land claims to strengthen national advocacy of agrarian reform.

Hence, AR Now! maintains that it will continue to operate and adhere to a "grounded advocacy" framework. A common thread running through AR Now!'s member organizations is the mandate to pursue agrarian reform, from land tenure to sustainable productivity and community empowerment.

For as long as this dream is shared, AR Now! will continue supporting landless farmers in their struggle for land they can call their own.

Case Study for the International LAND Coalition, Maricel Almojuela-Tolentino and Ma. Cristina Arceo-Dumlao, ANGOC, 2004. Based on data from the Department of Agrarian Reform as of July 2004.

Since 2003, AADC resigned from AR Now!

RT officially became an AR Now! member in 2002.