

## THE ROLE OF A SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH ORGANIZATION IN THE BICOL RIVER BASIN DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

FRANK LYNCH, S.J.

It is my intention to briefly discuss the Bicol region, and then the Bicol River Basin Development Program. After that I shall dwell at slightly greater length on the role of a social-science research organization in the design and implementation of the Program.

### *The Bicol Region*

The so-called Bicol region of the Philippines includes six provinces located on the great peninsula of southeast Luzon and on the islands adjacent to it. The total land mass is one-sixth the size of the entire Philippines, but supports only 1/13 the national population, or about 3.2 million people. The region's unity is mainly political: it has been and currently is a government administrative unit, and in times past its legislative representatives constituted the Bicol bloc. Naga City, which is called the "Heart of Bicol," is located in Camarines Sur, about 250 kilometers from Manila as the crow flies. As the bus and truck move, however, the distance is 450 kilometers long down the Manila South Road. In terms of time, the trip takes one hour by plane (there is a daily flight), 8-12 hours by train, or 8-10 hours by private car, bus, or truck.<sup>1</sup>

The six provinces that constitute the Bicol region are Camarines Norte, Camarines Sur, Albay, and Sorsogon — all on the peninsular mainland — and the island-provinces of Catanduanes and Masbate. While the region gets its name from the dominant mother tongue spoken there, the northern half of Camarines Norte is actually Tagalog speaking, the people of southern Sorsogon speak the language of Samar, which is 20 kilometers away, across the

San Bernardino Strait, and only the northern side of Masbate Island is Bikol speaking. The Bikol language area is, in other words, smaller in size than the Bicol political region.

The *Bicol River Basin* is defined strictly as the area drained by the Bicol River and its tributaries. The river originates in Lake Bato, on the border of Camarines Sur and Albay, meanders north through the flat Bicol Plain, and empties at last into San Miguel Bay, some 60 kilometers from its point of origin. Consideration of the river's tributaries (as well as certain economic and political facts) has both lengthened and widened the Basin's coverage, so that it now extends as far south as Legazpi City and includes in all some 312,000 hectares of land. Two-thirds of this area are in Camarines Sur; the remainder is in southern Camarines Norte and in Albay. Like the other six major river basins of the Philippines (the seven together account for one-half the nation's production of rice and corn), the Bicol River Basin is exceedingly fertile.<sup>2</sup> It has two major problems, however.

These problems, recognized as such by the people themselves, are land tenure and floods. More than half the rice and corn farmers in the area are share tenants, and flooding is both frequent and destructive. There are additional problems as well, but — more important — in the years beginning 1970 a determined and effective local effort was made to face up to the challenge presented by these difficulties. Because of the immense, but regularly aborted, potential of the Basin, and because of the initiative shown by individuals and institutions located there, the Bicol River Basin was in 1972

selected as the first of the government's river-basin programs.

#### *The Bicol River Basin Development Program*

Distinctive of these river-basin programs are their focus and their framework. The focus is *areal*, not sectoral; and the framework employed is that of the *systems* approach, in which contemplated changes are considered and weighed, not in isolation, but as interacting with one another. When a particular course of action is decided on, it is in light of the effects it will predictably have on *all* elements in the system. This is the basic strategy of the Bicol River Basin Development Program (or BRBDP).

The primary objective of the BRBDP is to raise the socioeconomic level of the poor majority in the River Basin and its influence areas. That this change is called for is glaringly evident: an SSRU large-sample household survey conducted in April 1974 indicates that the average annual family income (cash and noncash combined) is ₱3800, or ₱317 per month. This is only three-fourths the amount needed for food alone. It is estimated, in fact, that about four out of five River Basin families are below even this basic poverty threshold (Ilo and Lynch 1975: 25-26).

Among the supporting objectives — changes which should lead to increased income — are increased agricultural productivity, increased employment opportunities, land reform, and the development of agribusiness and industrial enterprises.

More concretely, the means to be taken are 10 major activities: land reform, compact farm development, agricultural credit and rural bank expansion, water resources development, road development, rural electrification, livestock development, fisheries development, program organization and management, and project support services.

#### *The Social Survey Research Unit (SSRU)*

Built into the Bicol River Basin Development Program from the very beginning (as one of the project support services) was explicit provision for the monitoring and evaluating of

Program activities. There would be funds available, in other words, not only to determine what specific projects should be undertaken and to see them through, but also to keep a running check on their progress and ultimately to score them for the level of success which they achieved. This so-called running check is a *monitoring* procedure, while the judgment of how well a project attained its goals is a form of *evaluation*.

Early in 1973 the Bicol River Basin Council formally invited the Institute of Philippine Culture, or IPC, to design and field a home-grown research organization that might fill this two fold function, and as well, assure the presence in the River Basin of a corps of professionally trained social scientists capable of continuing this kind of surveillance once the Program had ceased and operations were in other hands.

The IPC accepted the Council's invitation and a contract was signed to this effect August 14, 1973. By the end of September more than 30 full-time workers carried ID cards naming them employees of the Social Survey Research Unit of the Bicol River Basin Development Program, or BRBDP. With only two exceptions (myself and the chief driver-mechanic) these newly hired research and clerical personnel were natives of Camarines Sur or Albay who had survived a rigorous screening procedure that eliminated the other 650 applicants who had been tested.

During the balance of Fiscal Year 1974, that is, between October 1973 and June 30, 1974, and in the first six months of the next fiscal year, the SSRU undertook and completed 17 research activities in support of the Plans and Programs department of the BRBDP. For the most part, these projects were either baseline studies or inquiries into the preferences and perceptions expressed by residents of the River Basin.

Meanwhile the graduate training program had also gotten underway. It was offered by the department of sociology and anthropology, Ateneo de Manila, but through an extension arrangement approved by the Department of

Education and Culture, classes were held at the Ateneo de Naga, Naga City. Teachers traveled to Naga to meet their students. Subsidized by the Ateneo de Manila, the SSRU, and the Asia Foundation, the training program promises ultimately to graduate about 8-10 working students with the M.S. in applied sociology and anthropology.

### *Functions of the SSRU*

To summarize, as redefined by one-and-a-half years' experience, the formal functions of the SSRU are five; namely, (1) to conduct *exploratory and feasibility studies* in the Bicol River Basin area; (2) to *assess the impact* of the Program's activities on the lives of people living in the target area; (3) to serve as the "*people's voice*" as they react to Program plans or activities and suggest their own alternatives; (4) to *feed back* these findings and others to the Plans and Programs department of the Program; and (5) to sponsor a *graduate training program* in sociology and anthropology at the Ateneo de Naga.

But to speak of formal functions is to invite speculation about *informal* functions. And I do believe that, aside from providing an accurate data base, the SSRU makes several other less conspicuous, but no less significant, contributions to the Bicol River Basin Development Program. I shall mention and illustrate just *two* of them.

The *first* is this. The SSRU *broadens the Program's alternatives*; that is, on grounds of its studies, it suggests to the BRBDP additional activities which might be considered along with those already being weighed for possible implementation. To give one example, when about to inquire from rice farmers of Camarines Sur what they wanted from the Philippine government, the SSRU added to the list of nine possible projects prepared by the BRBDP another two which we thought might appeal strongly to the respondents. When the farmers' expressed preferences had been analyzed, the SSRU items (nonfarm employment opportunities and free high schools) were found to occupy the third and fourth place, respectively,

among the 11 activities presented for ranking. While the Program's plans for water management and land reform were endorsed by the people as having the highest priority, daily-wage jobs and free high schools – to which the Program had not yet given explicit attention – rated higher among farmers than the other seven projects the Program had in mind, including expanded credit facilities, compact farms, better roads and transportation, and even rural electrification (Lynch 1973). Other examples of the SSRU's broadening function are the suggestions it made for an alternative to the present production technician corps, and for a new view of credit for farmers working rainfed riceland (Lynch and Barrameda 1974; Lynch 1974).

The *second* informal function of the SSRU is continually to *help humanize the River Basin Program*, that is, to keep it concerned about people.<sup>3</sup> For while the Plans and Programs department accepts in principle the primacy of "people development" (Lynch 1973: 1-3), and would be unhappy to find they had ignored this priority in some way, they need and welcome reminders in this regard. One exercise of the SSRU's humanizing function was its offering evidence that the Masagana 99 rice program, as conducted in Camarines Sur, was widening the very income gap which the government (in its Four-Year Development Plan 1974-77) had vowed to close (Lynch 1974: 34-37). Other examples of this kind would include our explaining the people's apprehensions about a proposed fishpond estate (Barrameda *et al.* 1974) and our discovery that whereas jobs, housing, and travel are of great concern to residents of the River Basin, they are relatively less concerned about participation in formal organizations, or available health services.<sup>4</sup>

### *The Importance of Freedom*

Research findings such as these are fed back to the Program Office as soon as they are available, and in the sequence specified in the formal research request.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, since no SSRU research is classified, the findings are also published, as soon as

possible, in the *SSRU Research Report Series*. Funds are provided for this purpose, and a clause in the IPC's contract with the Bicol River Basin Council guarantees the freedom to publish, even where the Council or the Program Office may disagree with what the SSRU wishes to say.<sup>6</sup> This freedom to differ is essential if the SSRU is to fulfill its formal and informal functions in a satisfactory manner.

### Conclusion

To conclude, then, social science's essential contribution to the development enterprise is that of "telling it like it is" — from the social scientist's viewpoint and from the people's. Further, this reporting should be done not only following the completion of the project or program, or during its course, but even before — preferably before — agreement has been reached on what problems are to be addressed. For to exclude any informed opinion from the first step of the development process is wasteful and unwise, but to bar the people at that point is to deny them in effect a meaningful stake in all that follows.

It also flies in the face of three self-evident truths: (1) that "every human being is in possession of a world of his own, and that nobody can interpret this world better (or more 'expertly') than he can himself" (Berger 1974: 60), (2) that those at whom development is aimed should, as human beings, participate in whatever important decisions will be made, and (3) that it would be "a very limited notion of participation to let an elite" — be they capitalist experts or a Marxist vanguard — "define a situation in complete disregard of the way in which this situation is already defined by those who live in it — and then allow the latter a voice in the decisions to be made on the basis of the preordained definition" (*ibid.*, p. 130).

An acceptable (and admittedly difficult) strategy will be to let the people lead and the experts, social scientists included, follow along in a helping role (see Lynch *et al.* 1976). Only thus will genuinely human development be achieved.

### Notes

This is the revised version of a paper read at the second meeting of the Public Lecture Series entitled "Strategies for Development" sponsored by the Philippine Sociological Society and held at the San Miguel Auditorium, Makati, on January 23, 1975. The author directs the Social Survey Research Unit of the Bicol River Basin Development Program.

1. Until October 1976, or so, when the highway segment between Daet, Camarines Norte, and Sipocot, Camarines Sur, was completed, the travel time by road was considerably longer — about 16 hours. As of this writing (March 1977), the Philippine-Japan Friendship Highway has also made travel from Naga to Legazpi City, in Albay, a much more enjoyable and expeditious enterprise than it was several years ago.

2. The seven river basins are the Cagayan, Agno, Pampanga, and Bicol watersheds in Luzon, the Ilog-Hilabangan in Negros Occidental, and the Agusan and Cotabato in Mindanao.

3. This concern about the people's perceptions and felt needs resulted later in a paper outlining a socially sound approach to the design of an assistance program (Lynch *et al.* 1976). In it will be found elements essential to the development ethics proposed by Peter Berger in his *Pyramids of Sacrifice* (1974), a book brought to my attention in March 1977.

4. This finding is based on perceived-quality-of-life data gathered in April 1974 (Salazar and Lynch 1974).

5. Requests for research must be in writing, following the categories found in the so-called Research Activity Request form, or RAR. This RAR is in effect a contract between the SSRU and its client, generally the Plans and Programs department of the BRBDP.

6. The contract clause also provides that the dissenting opinion of the Council or the Program should also be published in the SSRU's report, should the Council or Program representatives desire this.

### References

- Barrameda, Jose V., Jr., S. S. Roco, Jr.,  
and F. Lynch  
1974 The proposed Balongay fishpond estate:  
How do the taga-Balongay feel about it?  
SSRU Research Report Series, No. 4  
(March). Naga City, Social Survey Re-  
search Unit, Ateneo de Naga.
- Berger, Peter L.  
1974 *Pyramids of sacrifice: Political ethics and  
social change*. Garden City, N.Y.,  
Doubleday.

Illo, Jeanne F. I., and F. Lynch

- 1975 Patterns of income distribution and household spending in the Bicol River Basin. SSRU Research Report Series, No. 13 (January). Naga City, SSRU, Ateneo de Naga.

Lynch, Frank

- 1973 What rice farmers of Camarines Sur say they want from the Philippine government. SSRU Research Report Series, No. 1 (December). Naga City, SSRU, Ateneo de Naga.
- 1974 Rice-farm harvests and practices in Camarines Sur: Do compact farms, Masagana 99, and the Samahang Nayon make a difference? SSRU Research Report Series, No. 2 (January). Naga City, SSRU, Ateneo de Naga.

Lynch, Frank, and J. V. Barrameda, Jr.

- 1974 The M99 delivery system: How well does it work in Camarines Sur? SSRU Research Report Series, No. 3 (February). Naga City, SSRU, Ateneo de Naga.

Lynch, Frank, J. F. I. Illo, and J. V. Barrameda, Jr.

- 1976 Let my people lead: Rationale and outline of a people-centered assistance program for the Bicol River Basin. Quezon City, SSRU, Institute of Philippine Culture, Ateneo de Manila University.

Salazar, Robert C., and F. Lynch

- 1974 Happiness starts with a good job and a good home – so say the people of the Bicol River Basin. SSRU Research Report Series, No. 12 (December). Naga City, SSRU, Ateneo de Naga.

**PHILIPPINE JOURNAL OF PSYCHOLOGY**

Volumes 7 and 8 1974-1975

*Dina Lavoie, f.m.a.*

*Emily Miao*

*Basilio Iledan*

*Josefina B. Jayme*

*Harry R. Day*

The Phenomenological Transformation of the  
Self-Concept Towards Self-Actualization  
Through Sensitivity Training Laboratory

An Exploratory Intervention Experiment on  
Development of Class Inclusion Concept Among  
Some Filipino Preschoolers

Some Cross Validity Studies Involving the  
College Entrance Test

Demographic and Socio-Psychological Deter-  
minants of High-Level Migration from the  
Philippines to the United States

The Resource Comparison Model of Coalition  
Formation

Annual subscription rates: ₱14/US\$5

Mail orders to the PSSC Central Subscription Service, P.O. Box 655, Greenhills, Metro  
Manila 3113, Philippines.