

Infrastructure and Support Services for Philippine Agriculture 2020

ROADS, PORTS, IRRIGATION AND MECHANIZATION

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Let me focus on the important infrastructure and support services of roads, irrigation and ports.

Regarding roads, the block allocation formula should be revised to reflect the priority trusts. Block allocation means that certain specific percentages of the budget are allocated to various road activities, for maintenance, rehabilitation, construction of new roads etc. Besides considering population and infrastructure density, accessibility to agro-industrial centers and tourist destinations should be improved. Traditional factors such as rehabilitation of damaged road sections and widening of heavily traveled roads should, of course, be retained.

In addition to the National Irrigation Administration (NIA), there are other agencies such as the Department of Public Works and Highways which receive sizable funds to construct and maintain farm-to-market roads. NIA has constructed irrigation canals and irrigation facilities which have about 12,000 km of farm-to-market roads that serve about 1 million individual farmer beneficiaries. Our study should give some emphasis on the farm-to-market roads for the interest and benefit of our farmer beneficiaries. In addition to roads which service the more highly populated areas, roads that lead to tourist area which are usually not well maintained should be improved to stimulate the tourism industry.

Regarding ports, I agree that to push agro-industrial development, there will be a need to upgrade existing ports and build ports in those without ports. This will enhance inter-island and inter-municipal trade and commerce that will accelerate rural development. This will also create opportunity for the expanded role and business of small shipping lines that the big players

have marginalized. Whenever we go around the country, we see small ports that need maintenance and improvement to better serve our countrymen.

Next is irrigation. We need to accelerate our irrigation development. A shift from medium-to-large gravity systems to low lift pumping systems may not work. The potential distribution considering the service area of low lift pumping system outweighs that of medium-to-large gravity system in development strategy. The pumping system is very necessary but the initial cost is very high to small farmers. Our individual farmers have an average area of 1.8 ha and not all of them maybe able to afford the initial cost of the pump. Moreover, fuel and oil are very expensive, nowadays. The life span of pumps may only be five years or so and the pumps may need some repair and large maintenance cost. However, the goal to attain rice self-sufficiency besides investment cost and buying capability should be factored in. I still think that the small reservoir, irrigation projects that have minimum capacity with proper maintenance of about 80 years will be more economical in the long run and will serve more people in many years. I think that in the Philippines, there is a need for medium to large gravity system of irrigation

About mechanization, to expand the agricultural mechanization level, mere promotion of the advantages of mechanized farming operations will not work. Low mechanization is attributed to low ownership among farmers caused by high acquisition, maintenance, and fuel cost. Farmers will endeavor to obtain equipment, if they could use the time they save for off-farm part-time job. If there are equipment, the farmer may have more time. However, some of them have nothing to do after planting. I would like to suggest that aside from mechanization, what is really important is to encourage farmers to raise animals, for example, carabao, cows, the cattle, not only for farming but also for other livelihood activities.

Next for some minor corrections, on roads, in the PA 2020 document, it was mentioned that there are about 201,000 km of roads but this figure not include farm-to-market roads that serve our individual farmers or farmers nationwide. And as I said, we have about 12,000 km of farm to market roads. And on irrigation, NIA data says 65% irrigated area during the dry season and not 52%.

And lastly, may I point out some minor corrections in the rice and white corn industry strategic plan which says that the NIA budget is PhP 7 billion. Unfortunately, NIA has an actual budget of only PhP 4.1 billion which is

lower than what is needed by NIA for its operations. NIA needs more financial assistance from the government so that it can serve the people better. Presently, it relies only on irrigation service fees as major source of income. Thank you.

