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The Community Information And Planning System (CIPS)

By

Rachel V Polestico
THE COMMUNITY INFORMATION AND PLANNING SYSTEM (CIPS)*

by

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I. Introduction

The structure of Philippine society is often described as pyramidal with 10% belonging to the upper class, 20% to the middle class and the majority of 70% belonging to the lower class. The distribution of wealth, political influence and knowledge is concentrated in the upper class who in turn use this power to preserve themselves in this privileged position. With 70% living below the poverty line, the structure is less often described as pyramidal as it is perceived as a social volcano that is going to erupt anytime if the structure will not be changed substantially.

The main difference between the upper class and the lower class is that of power. The people from above can do whatever they want because of their power whereas the people from below can hardly even provide for themselves the basic needs such as food, shelter and clothing. It is the powerlessness of the majority that any development program should address because it is the empowerment of the people that will ultimately bring about the increase in their economic circumstances with more equitable distribution of benefits through the intelligent involvement and participation of the same.

The secret of empowerment can come from the analysis of how the 10% privileged few maintain their power. The salient characteristics of this group are that they have economic resources, political influences and access to information being very well educated individuals themselves. The other observable feature of this trinity of causes for power is that if one of this characteristics is acquired, the other two can follow and if two are acquired, the third is almost self-generating. One can start off with high educational background and can use that to get economic gain. Political influence almost always follows if these two components are already resident in a person or a group.

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Consequently, a program that aims to empower the poor must at least direct activities that can:

1) Provide training for the community so that the people can see better options for themselves.

2) Organize themselves so that they attain unity and cooperation and thus weld a political influence.

3) Improve the socio-economic condition of the community by facilitating the delivery of basic social services such as primary health care, water, roads, etc. and in increasing their sources of livelihood.

People in the rural areas can best understand this requirement for empowerment through an analogy of a tripod that is commonly used for cooking. A tripod has three legs by which it is able to stand on its own. The three legs of this self-reliance and independence are education, organization and better socio-economic circumstances. This can be illustrated thus:

![TRIPOD MODEL FOR EMPOWERMENT](image)

It can be noted from this model that if the three components be able to support one another, it must be attached to a ring serving as a system that hinges the educational, organizational or economic ingredients together towards the empowerment of the people. Most of the experiments on developmental approaches has been a search for this ring. Conclusions from several experiments carried out by the Philippine Partnership for the Development of Human Resources in the Rural Areas (PhilDHRRA) and reflections from the PhilDHRRA partners development experiences suggest that this ring may have already been found in an approach called the Community Information and Planning System (CIPS).

II. The Community Information and Planning System (CIPS)

In the development process, for it to be truly empowering, the community must be involved in making a decision based on what the community should do to change or improve its situation and planning out the details so that change can come about. In all these important steps, information is very necessary to arrive at a sound decision, design a workable plan and implement a viable project. If the community wishes to control its own progress, it must have access to the needed information by learning how to gather information through the Community Information and Planning
System or CIPS.

In the process of enabling the community to do research, to plan and to implement their plan, the community initially receives the necessary training to generate and use information. This is a process that in the long run enhances their educational capability in that they are now prepared to solve any kind of problem in the community. If the habit of research planning and doing be coupled with the evaluation-reflection components of the Paulo-Freire style of action-reflection nexus, the community is able to teach themselves from their own experiences. In the process, too, they refine their own skills as they face and surmount more difficult problems.

In activities where there are many elements interplaying such as people, resources, time and chance events, the people must learn to plan, to organize their activities and themselves so that they could achieve their ends. When a community engages in a problem-solving activity, it is necessary that they get organized and thus becomes organized by necessity if they want their goals to be achieved in a participatory manner. They themselves will seek to learn the skills of how to better organize themselves because they will realize its importance in trying to develop the community.

Through information, the community will look at the situation of their community and at the same time realize the aspects that are missing. The information which they gather through research acts like a mirror through which they could see themselves and at the same time show them what is lacking. If they realize this as a community, they decide together what they can do to improve the situation. These plans of action may be in terms of providing services to their community, a livelihood program to increase their income, or activities related to the exercise of their human right. These activities can redound to a better socio-economic circumstances of their community life.

When the community, therefore, learns to do research, plan and implementing their plan, it also endows itself with the characteristics for its own empowerment through education, organization and socio-economic activities. It does this by setting up a community based information system that does not only allow them to generate information but also enables them to use information to solve its problems and thereby create new facts in the community. It is in this context that CIPS was described previously as the ring or the system that makes the educational, organizational and socio-economic programs yield personal, political and economic power in the community.

In the CIPS model, the Village Committee oversees the entire CIPS progress and the fieldworkers see to it that the decisions of the village committee gets communicated to the concerned bodies. It is also incorporated that when the research committee or the planning or project committee function, it follows unconsciously the logic of gathering information,
planning and coming out with a concrete result. The consultation is provided so that the entire community knows what the different committees are up to. It is supposed that this model can be improved as it gets tried and interpreted by different communities.

![Diagram of the Community Information and Planning System (CIPS) Model]

**Figure 1**

The Community Information and Planning System (CIPS) Model

This model can be operationalized when village members decide to:

1. Approve or agree that CIPS process can be applied in their community to solve a particular problem.

2. Form a village committee that will oversee the overall operation of CIPS and elect a fieldworker who shall be specifically trained on CIPS.

3. Train a local research group (maybe called a core group) who shall then conduct a study on the problems suggested by the community or agreed upon by the community regarding a specific problem each NGO wants to pursue.
4. Conduct a consultation with the community to report the results of the study and also validate the information upon which the community will suggest a general plan of action.

5. Organize a planning committee who shall refine or make the plan of action, practical and operational in terms of manpower, timetable and budget.

6. Call a consultation to submit the plan for acknowledgement and general approval of the community.

7. Form a project committee who may at first require technical training concerning the implementation of the project which the committee will be in charge of.

8. Periodically report to the community through consultation or a public display of records the progress of the project.

9. Monitor and evaluate the project with respect to the degree of participation of the people, equity in distribution of responsibilities and benefits and increase in the income of the community and its members.

10. Apply the CIPS cycle to a different or related problem or issue of the community.

The main objective in the village level is to institutionalize the process of solving a problem by creating in the village local experts in research, planning and project implementation and for the community to be active and participative in every step. The assisting NGOs are mostly involved in the initial training of the villages and facilitating the delivery of services to the community.

CIPS was first applied in Sumbaga, Vincenzo Sagun, Zamboanga del Sur as part of the pilot project of the Center for Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP), the Asian NGO Coalition for Asia and the Pacific (ANGOC), the National Council on Integrated Area Development (NACIAD), and PhilDHRRA. Sumbaga was one of the eighteen other villages in Asia that participated in the 1984 project on community participation in integrated rural development through the Community Information and Planning System.

The Sumbaga pilot study was also a continuation of the 1983 NGO Study of Selected Villages in Southeast Asia launched by the aforementioned agencies. In this village study, the basics of participatory research was applied to gather basic socio-economic information about these villages. One feature of this study was that the data was returned back to the community through a consultation and was then used by the community for their planning. But there was no provision to support whatever action the villages would undertake as a result of their research and planning.

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In the Sumbaga pilot study, there was a rough model for Community Information and Planning System that was suggested and logistical support for training and research activities as well as capital for village level projects. As a result Sumbaga learned the skills of research, planning and project implementation which they used in determining, planning, constructing and operating their community fishpond. In the process, PhilDHRRA was able to refine the CIPS model into what is currently being applied by many other villages in the Philippines.

III. Participatory Research for Community Education through CIPS

The CIPS model as it emerged from the Sumbaga pilot project was already a systematic, simplified and participatory method for development activities in the village level. It succeeded in Sumbaga because it operated in an environment where the community was relatively well organized with a strong leadership and commitment and enjoyed a good support system. The remoteness of the village and the unstable peace and order situation presented some obstacles but by and large caused only a slight delay in the CIPS cycle implementation. The CIPS model still needed to be tested under several conditions and in different communities.

In the early part of 1987, PhilDHRRA cooperated with the International Development Research Center in a project called Participatory Research in Community Education to further test and to subsequently refine the CIPS model. CIPS was used as a common participatory action research model by six NGOs operating in different parts of the Philippines in Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao and dealing with different kinds of communities such as farmers, trade unions, cooperatives, Muslim groups and rural communities.

In the process of implementing CIPS in the different communities, information is generated that is used by the community for their own purpose and is also passed on to the NGOs and in the PhilDHRRA level for local and nationwide dissemination. The mechanisms employed for smooth information flow are through field visits, periodic reports, bi-annual CIPS evaluation and through the CIPS UPDATE, the project newsletter.

The main activities in the village level by the NGOs are mostly those related to training, facilitating the delivery of services to the community and in doing research on whether CIPS is applicable to the community. The community on the other hand undertakes activities that enhance the cohesiveness of the organization, does research, planning and project implementation. The community members are always conducting meetings, small groups discussions and working groups, and at the same time recording or documenting their activities.

The structure of the CIPS implementation and information flow in this project is described in Figure 2.
From several consultations with NGOs and evaluation of ongoing CIPS projects, the CIPS model has been considerably improved with the different steps and elements being better identified. As new techniques are shared, better implementation procedures are also applied in the village level. As a result, the CIPS procedure being currently followed is a much more refined process than the one developed during the Sumbaga pilot study.

It was realized that in order for CIPS to be effective in the community level, the techniques of community organizing (CO) have to be applied. The NGO worker attempting to apply CIPS in the community must act as a community organizer with CIPS skills while endeavoring to pass on the CO and CIPS skills to different individuals in the community. The CO skills that are very important are those related to the COs ability to integrate well with the community at the same time be able to sense the social situation and identify major problems and issues. The CO is then able to mobilize the community to act on their problems preparing them for meetings and confrontations by role playing and being able to facilitate this activities so that the opinions and ideas
of the community can surface. The CO must also be able to point out lessons from the experiences of the community through constant evaluation and reflection so that the community does not only solve specific problems but also develop their visions of what their community should be. The community gets united by working together and by sharing the same ideas.

The community is then made to realize the importance of gathering information to solve their problems which they can do by doing research. Their research starts with identifying an important problem the community is confronted with. They then determine the kinds of information needed to shed light on that problem. These needed information are converted to questionnaires or tools they need to get that information. Then they actually gather the information from the community or from other sources as the questions demand. They are taught to summarize data in terms of averages, percentages or graphs. Each data item is subjected to analysis by asking the causes and effects relationship of the data. They then look at how the data and their analysis answer the general and specific problems of their research. From these exercises, they are able to see what is lacking or what they can do to improve the situation and articulate these in the form of recommendations. While in the process of going through these activities, they also write down the outputs of their exercises such that by the time they finish the research they also finish writing the report.

The data that the research committee of the community gathered is presented to the community through a consultation. Here the community as a whole verifies the data and offers their own analysis and recommendations. In order for this consultation to succeed, the CO skills previously mentioned become necessary. The community has to be motivated or mobilized to attend this consultation and the consultation to be well facilitated otherwise the community cannot make the most of their time. The research reporters have to be well trained by role playing and in the consultation itself there should be some ways to enliven the gathering. The data have to be presented in a clear concise way and thus the reporters must be prepared with effective audio-visual aids. Someone is also assigned to collect the remarks and statements coming from the community so that they can get incorporated in the report.

The important output from the research and the consultation activities is the list of recommendations because these recommendations will become bases for the plans that is going to be drafted by the planning committee. It has been found that in order for the community to plan well, additional information is needed and thus the planning committee may ask the research committee to look for the necessary information before the plan can be made. In village planning, planning tools can be introduced such as a Gantt chart, a budget and simple planner that incorporates objectives, activities, resources, budget, schedule of activities and expected outputs. The community may express this plan into a project proposal so that they can
solicit cooperation from other agencies that might be instrumental in making the plans materialize.

Again, this plan is submitted to the community for their critical appraisal and also so that the community can determine what resources they have already which they can harness in order to implement the plan. The community also nominate the people who will be responsible for each set of activities. This plan may also be presented to an agency by the community or its representative for support in some aspect of the plan’s implementation. Based on these reviews, the plan may have to undergo some revisions to improve its chances of success. These reviews can be regarded by the community also as a learning process. In its final form, the plan is displayed in public places of the community so that it could also serve as a monitoring tool for the progress of its implementation.

Information is again needed when the community implement their plans. The activities they decide on or the projects they desire to undertake may need technical and managerial information important for implementation. This can require another round of training for the community to be able to successfully run their projects. But if the community is already well trained on what and how to ask questions and where to ask them, they can supply themselves with these critical answers.

In the course of project implementation, the community must record constantly the progress of their project. Monitoring and evaluation in a small community can very well be easily made public and participatory and there is less chance of graft and corruption if there is an open accountability. Progress reports about how much has been done, how much still need be done, how much and where funds were spent if funds are involved, what problems are met and how they could be solved are guide questions that make progress reports substantial and worthwhile attending.

In all these steps in CIPS, the necessity for gathering information is very important either for the community to make a decision, to plan, or to act on something. These activities can also be done by the community more effectively if these activities are coupled with community organizing techniques.

Each step of the CIPS process is also questioned whether it empowers the community and whether it brings about the development effect and process into play. Is the community better now than before? Did everyone benefit from the changes that came about? Did the people participate in the process? Will the community be able to pursue their own interests by themselves? Are they trained and organized enough to solve their community problems? These are questions that are constantly asked to find out whether the process has made possible the empowerment and development of the community.
IV. CIPS in the Field

The Participatory Research for Community Education project with IDRC is almost over now and the effect of CIPS in the community level is already becoming apparent. From the field observations, from the written reports and from periodic evaluation of the project, certain trends are already detectable to warrant some general optimism that the CIPS method can really influence village activities in a very effective and efficient manner.

1. CIPS provided a framework by which effective development programs can be sequenced. The steps are simple enough and logical so that the community senses the practicality of proceeding from research, planning, before undertaking a project. This sequence checks whether something concrete really happens in the community was involved in the decision making and in the planning and not just following orders. In one of the field visits, IDRC's Dr. Somsak Boonyawiroj asked the community of Mapaso how they solve a problem? The community remarked that this was easy. First they make a study or research, then they plan how to solve the problem, and then they implement their plan.

2. The CIPS training received by the community was perceived as a tremendous asset. This training was not done in one stretch but rather scheduled and given when the need arose and when it was requested by the community. Whereas before the communities only considered funds or materials as forms of support, they realize that the new knowledge and skills they acquire through training are also forms of wealth. One community leader paraphrased a Chinese proverb by saying that "So the CIPS approach is actually like teaching us how to fish instead of giving us fish to eat."

3. The skills learned in CIPS gave the community members a sense of personal power. Before CIPS was introduced to the communities, one would always hear community members introduce themselves as mere farmers, or housewives, or unemployed, etc. But after a successful CIPS cycle, they described themselves as community organizer, or researcher, or local planner, or project manager. With that new description is a new sense of identity of how important he or she is to the community. After one of the CIPS consultations in Ulab, one researcher expressed her feeling that she did not realize that she could do research and that her neighbors would take her seriously. Viki Bamba, an Overseas Development Network (ODN) intern who observed CIPS remarked that CIPS trained local community development workers and thus solve the problem of NGOs dearth of local fieldworkers to be in the village always because these local CIPS workers are residents of the community.
4. The community cannot help but participate in the CIPS process. In the CIPS cycle, community participation is institutionalized mainly through the required consultations after every research, plan or project implementation. The training methodology prescribed for CIPS have been techniques drawn from the experiences in community organizing that utilize group discussions, workshops, practicum, action-reflection, meta plans or drawing out through good facilitation as opposed to the banking method of teaching, etc. Community members who do certain tasks either volunteer or are appointed by the community and make a little speech or promise to the community of his or her commitment to discharge her duties diligently as the community expects. Through the CIPS steps, they are able to participate more effectively because they are part of the decision and planning phases of the project.

5. The different NGOs have no problem incorporating their forte's into the general CIPS cycle. The different NGOs participating in the CIPS program have developed good developmental approaches. These techniques proved to be very useful in CIPS work. ACES is very good in using analogies or stories for teaching and maximizes the use of consultation for decision-making. CCS introduced historical mapping as a way of analyzing trends in an organization or union's life. IPHC has illustrated the use and method of process documentation whereas VICTO found their planning tools very acceptable, MUCARD has been able to adjust the CIPS method to Muslim culture and ATC has used CIPS as an effective approach for technology transfer. Because of the CIPS network the expertise of each NGO is shared by the others and thus find application in the CIPS villages also.

6. Despite the scientific discipline recommended in CIPS, the community manages to blend their own mode of thinking and practices in CIPS. In the community organizing steps, the community is able to express their song, their dances and their local practices to make meetings or gatherings very lively. PhilDHRRA now has a collection of "action songs" normally used to enliven a gathering in Philippine villages. In research, they are able to express their analysis and understanding of the data by way of analogies that drive home their point. For instance, they'll say that it is important for them to stand on their feet and be not like babies forever being nursed and never grows up or that they are like birds that must have strong wings, or trees that must have deep roots.

In project implementation, they value that they have a contribution to the project otherwise the project is not theirs. There was a case in Kasambagan, Cebu where the community did not accept the city government's offer to install a drainage unless they be allowed to contribute labor or kind to the project.
7. The incorporation of action-reflection step in each of the CIPS activity makes the community define their visions more clearly. Using the CO techniques, each of the CIPS step is undertaken with the idea of ultimately strengthening the organization. Projects are done also to strengthen the organization. But more important than the organization is the vision of the community. What do they like their community to be? Somehow the decisions that they make depend as this vision. In some villages, this action-reflection session is made to coincide with their community worship and so the vision that they see has something akin to ideas of an ideal society. In the Christian faith for instance, this is a society where everyone is sisters and brothers being children of one God. Each has a human dignity that must be respected and one must share with one another their gifts, etc. This is the kind of community then that they approach in all their activities.

8. The community learns after every CIPS cycle. In the first cycle of CIPS, the community’s concern maybe an income-generating project or provision of basic social service. In the second cycle, very often it is about how to strengthen their organization and several cycles later, their concern are more on human rights and human values, issues in which they are able to link with other communities who are facing the same issues. There are tendencies for instance among the CIPS communities in Nueva Ecija to form federation with other farmers and the cooperatives of Cebu to join together in a bigger federation. As the communities face more problems, they learn more CIPS skills and are then better able to cope with community problems.

9. There are of course problems faced in CIPS implementation. One of these problems being that when CIPS is introduced to the village, they would accept it with the idea that it will bring them material benefits. It then becomes difficult sometimes to make people realize that they have to work for these benefits and that what CIPS brings to them are not all totally material benefits but "empowerment". Sometimes also it is frustrating even for NGOs when the community has worked for research and planning, and project proposals and when their proposals are submitted to agencies, it takes a long time for positive response to come. But this situation also forces the people to use their own resources for their projects. The success of CIPS really also depend on the quality of the training and organization. Unless the quality of the CIPS training is kept high, it could not be used for the empowerment of the people but could be abused as a means of extracting benefits without actually making the people learn the process.

10. CIPS has been very much in demand by many NGOs. There is a vast market for the CIPS technology. The NGOs who are not part of this initial CIPS network has requested CIPS training and have tried applying CIPS in their own work. The CIPS steps is eyed as somehow a way of systematizing development work in the village level and may serve as a beginning step for the professionalization of development work. The CIPS steps have
been recommended to the Women and Appropriate Food Technology project in Tanzania and from reports, it appears to be quite successful. There are requests from several local government of Cebu and of Cotabato to apply CIPS in their local and regional planning. It is also being tried in the Northern part of Samar to complement the community organizing projects of the area.

These are only a few of the positive indications observed of the potential of CIPS in village level development. Caution is however put forward for enthusiasm in this approach this optimism might invite. CIPS does not work miracles by itself, it is only a guide as to how the people can program their own development. The heart of CIPS is that through information which the community itself generates, it is able through a scientific inquiry see the situation of the community and could suggest ways to improve it. They are then taught to make this suggestion real through planning and effective project management. They harness resources from within and without to make their dream come true. The people seems to be eager to go through the process because it is their decision, their design, and their own benefit that they are working for. They do this together through their own organization.

V. CIPS as a Village-Level Information System

CIPS has been endorsed as a development approach but the core of CIPS really is that it is a village level information system. The main feature of this information system is that through participatory research the community generates the information that they need for decision-making, planning and plan-implementation. It trusts some members of the community (committees) to gather this information and make preliminary analysis and recommendations but through the consultations provide the mechanisms for the community to clean the data. The real test of the information gathered is whether it works, whether the decisions, plans and action taken bring the community nearer to their objectives of developing their community. The process also requires the community to be organized. If every step taken is coupled with community organizing methodologies, the community organization is strengthened and becomes a better vehicle for information generation, dissemination and utilization.

The quality of the information gathered in this primary level is kept high through built-in requirement in the system that encourages the community members to treat this information scientifically, creatively, and critically.

The participatory research aspect of CIPS is drawn from the simplified application of scientific inquiry made easier by making it participatory and action-oriented. The community, in several steps of sophistication, is introduced to the community by teaching them how to define a problem, break the problem into general and specific objectives, design the research tool needed for the information, gather the information as done in the social
sciences and analyzing it rigorously using the cause-effect relationship framework. From this data and analysis they answer their original problems and make recommendations therefrom.

The community does not only rely on the existing data and its analysis of the causes and effects of such information but delve into their creative imagination to articulate what facts are needed in the community that they can make. When they start making recommendations, they are imagining what is lacking in their community, seeing what is not there that should be there and proceed to detail the steps in which they can make their recommendations and plans existent.

In this exercise they no longer play with the existing facts but get suggestions from the realm of possibilities and alternatives. From the assessment of their capability, they make choices of the options that best fit their circumstances. Information gathered this way, to quote one village researcher, is like a light bulb that has been switched on through participatory research and lights up their minds to reveal that the walls of limitations that imprison them are only due to the darkness in their minds. Once lit, there are thousands of possibilities open for them.

The veracity and reliability of the information gathered by the community members unschooled in the higher statistics of learning are always questioned. CIPS gets around this by making sure that the community follows the scientific process and subject their data to numerous consultations and criticisms of the community. Criticisms are no longer regarded as assaults to the local researchers personality but as a learning opportunity. From experience, it was found that since the community members are still beginning, they are very open to criticisms and learn from there. In some communities where there are college graduates who got involved with the local research team, the criticisms become grounds for arguments. Although the consultation steps are recurrent in CIPS, this was dictated by the need of the community to check the reliability of their data. The community does not worry if their local research team is not a professional group because they will have an opportunity to correct the data.

Built-in in CIPS also is that the community documents their experiences. They are taught to write a research report, to display their data on bulletin boards or flip charts. People who visit at CIPS villages are introduced to the community through graphs and charts of the community situation. Their plans are also on exhibit for the community to see and project progress reports are open to everyone. Through the Phi1DHRRA-CIPS Network, this information are gathered in the national level, summarized and shared with other NGOs. Mr. Romeo Tiongco, when he was appointed mayor of Damulog, made his municipal plans based on village level CIPS-gathered data. Progress in his town was quite fast which made the governor notice his approach and would have wanted it applied to the entire province where it not for
the results of the following elections that removed both Mr. Tiongco and the governor from the seat of power. It can be done, if a good coordination is set-up, that the plans made in the higher level be made to come from the villages through CIPS.

But in order for CIPS to be effective, it was found that it is necessary that the training be of good quality. The people in the villages deserve the same quality of teaching paid to first class universities. Support must also be given to the organizational formation of the community. These inputs may be considered expensive but the alternative to this is ignorance and fragmentation in the community that in the short and long runs will be more costly. The community will also request for external support for things they need for their project which they themselves can no longer provide. Delivery of these resources should be facilitated, because when the people requests that means that they will use this resources to the full benefit of the community. For agencies or organizations planning to use CIPS, they must be prepared to support training, organization and project seed capital expenses in the community.

In this paper, an attempt was made to trace the evolution of the CIPS model from the various PhilDHRA studies. In its present form, the CIPS model can still accommodate refinements. The experiences in the field of life have influenced this model. It is hoped that through this account it can show that given a chance, CIPS can be a very strong influence to life, too.
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