

AN ANALYSIS OF INTERAGENCY COORDINATION AMONG GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS: A CASE STUDY OF THE NUTRITION PROGRAM IN LEYTE

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ABSTRACT

The study involved 14 respondents composed of five regional directors, four provincial heads/incharge, and five municipal level community workers.

Coordination among government organizations was maintained by interorganizational linkages (administrative and direct service linkages). These linkages were manifested through resource exchange/sharing, information exchange, joint activities/programs, written agreement, referrals, follow-up and outreach activities.

Coordination dynamics was further manifested by personal interaction during regular meetings, democratic decision-making process, mutual concern and continuous dialogue and involvement of private agencies.

Coordination was influenced by domain consensus, resource scarcity, lack of alternative resources, frequency of interaction, leadership of coordinator, and directives such as Executive Orders 121 and 285, and Presidential Decree 491 (National Nutrition Council).

Generally, the coordination machinery of the existing Nutrition Program Committee is weak and handicapped by the lack of control over the participating agencies. Formal authority is loosely exercised and each member is not under the authority of the lead agency.

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KEY WORDS: Interagency coordination. Nutrition program committee. Interorganizational linkages. Lead agency. Coordination dynamics.

INTRODUCTION

Community development efforts such as the Nutrition Program (NP) in Leyte are not a monopoly of any single entity, private or government controlled. The government through its various agencies initiates projects/programs in community health and nutrition to solve malnutrition. Likewise, the private sector through many social development agencies is engaged in programs/projects for similar reasons. However, each sector has its unique procedural and operational mechanisms in carrying out such purposes.

Consequently, the need for creating a coordinating machinery is imperative since these entities have similar goals and objectives. Reconciling differences in approaches, timing, effort or interest, and harmonizing agency and individual goals is the central purpose of the creation/organization of the Nutrition Program Committee (NPC) as a mechanism for interagency coordination.

This study was conceived out of a concern for institutional coordination as a factor in the development of a more effective strategy in the delivery of social and agricultural services. This concern was expressed in many studies in which coordination is a problem, especially when many agencies are involved and operating independently. On the other hand, the benefits of coordination have also been well discussed in various related literatures. However, there is very limited information on achievement of coordination, its actual operation process and the synchro-

nization of organizational efforts to maximize the use of scarce resources.

The case of the NP in Leyte offers an opportunity to explore patterns of interagency relationship which is extremely significant in filling the gaps in knowledge relevant to coordination among government organizations. Hence, this study was conducted.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Concept of Coordination

In interorganizational relation, coordination is the essential managerial function and an important factor in determining the effectiveness of organized work. In the study of administrative cohesion, Tead (1951) observed that coordination has to do with administrative effort to help formulate, adopt, transmit, give effect to, interpret and oversee policies of the organization. He further observed that the distinctive focus is upon successful understanding and agreement to propose new policies and ideas, and upon continuously unified interlocking efforts to carry out accepted aims and policies well.

Indicators of Interagency Coordination

Literatures on interorganizational relations indicate that successful interagency coordination has a work climate characterized by mutual support and resource sharing, and an open competition. This results in strong cohesiveness among participating organizations.

Jaiswal (1977) suggests that for effective coordination, team building is necessary to facilitate mutual agreement and identification of the organization goals, i.e., open communication and mutual help are encouraged.

Other manifestations of inter-agency coordination are: 1) a basis of interaction like a written agreement which clearly defines common goals, procedures of obtaining them, and the responsibilities of each participant (Klonglan, 1976); 2) a joint program carried between two or more agencies (Alken and Hage, 1968); 3) mutual referrals of members which involve client referrals or personal skills (Levine and White, 1960); 4) monthly meetings and special committee meetings (Sebring, 1977); and 5) resource sharing which involves renting/borrowing of facilities/equipment.

METHODS

The study was conducted in the province of Leyte, Philippines. The respondents were five regional directors, four provincial heads and five municipal development workers who are all members of the NPC.

The survey method, participant observation, and key informant interview were used. Existing records/documentary evidences on the activities of participating agencies in the NP were also utilized to substantiate verbal account.

Data on the extent of participation in NP, NPC's role in the coordination process, indicators of interagency coordination and problems in the imple-

mentation of the NP were described and analyzed using frequency counting and percentage. The Z-score test was used to determine the significant difference(s) between and/or among proportions on variables which contributed to coordination among participating agencies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Organizational Structure of Coordination (External Coordination)

Organizational set-up. The NPC (Fig. 1) is the take-off point of the social services development programs to improve the quality of life of the population in the area. The organizational set-up is the framework which administratively defines and guides the interactions of the sub-units at all levels. The NPC is responsible for major policy matters, coordination and personnel guidelines of the Area Nutrition Program.

For each region, a Regional Nutrition Committee (RNC) is created. The RNC coordinates the implementation of the Regional Nutrition Plan and resolves problems using available resources in the area. In Eastern Visayas (Region VIII), the RNC was created within the framework of the Regional Development Council (RDC) with a chairman elected by and from among the members. The Ministry of Health (MOH) Director was elected chairman of the committee.

A Provincial Nutrition Committee (PNC) was created in the province within the framework of the Provincial

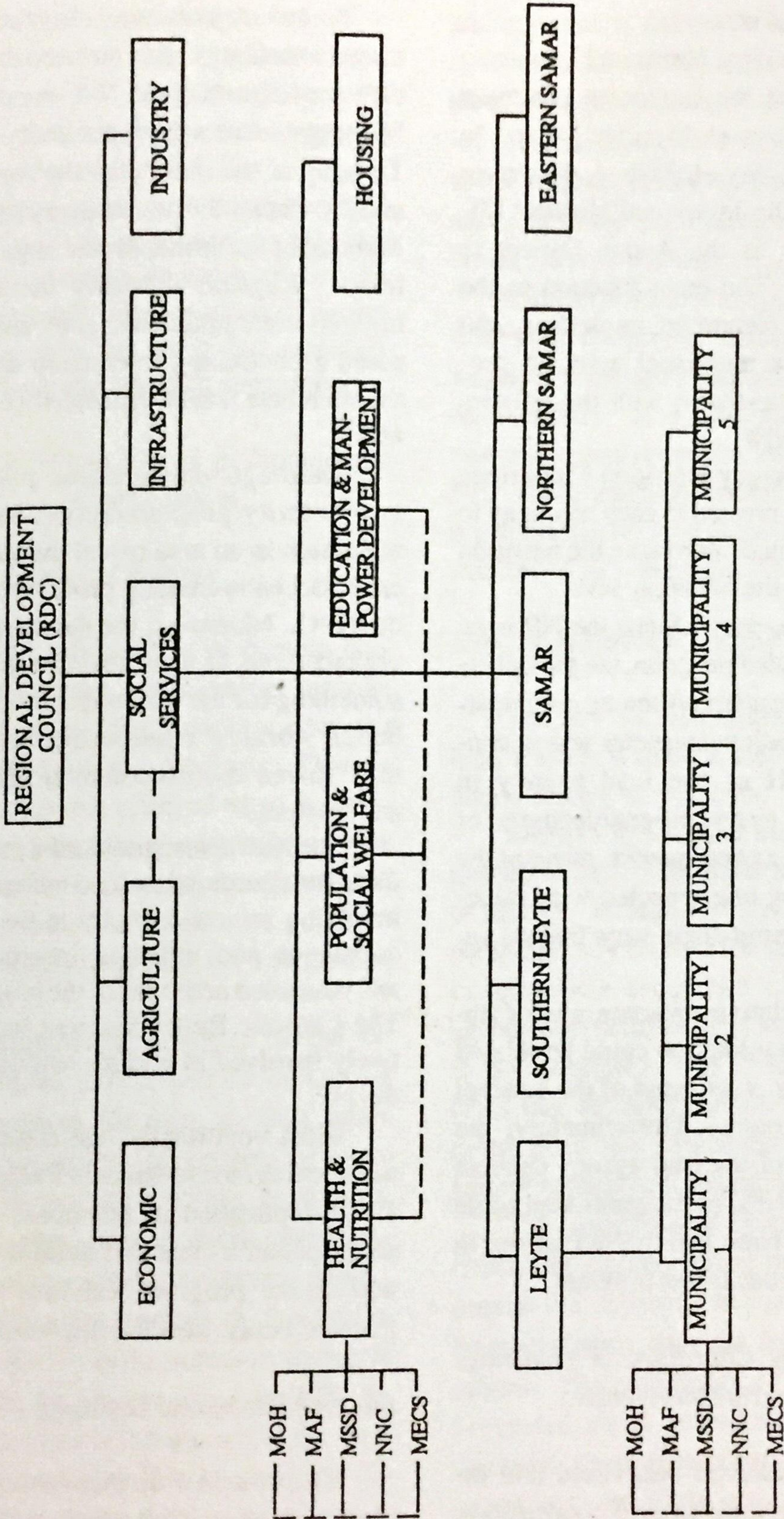


Figure 1. The organizational set-up of the Nutrition Program Committee (Regional to Municipal level)

Development Council headed by the provincial governor.

A Municipal Nutrition Committee (MNC) with the mayor as chairman was created in each municipality. In the municipality of Baybay, the mayor appointed the Municipal Health Officer (MHO) as the Action Officer to assist him. The main function of the MNC is to formulate, implement, and evaluate the municipal nutrition program in accordance with the policies set by the NNC.

A Barangay Nutrition Committee (BNC) was created in each barangay to implement and coordinate the nutrition program at the barangay level.

Lead agency. Since the NP is an MOH-initiated program, the prevailing notion in the area and among participating organizations/agencies was to consider MOH as the lead agency in practically every program/activity of the NP. As a consequence, many of the participating line agencies were reluctant to commit their very limited resources.

The relative presence and/or absence of coordination could be related to clarity or vagueness of the concept of lead agency. Unfortunately, the vagueness of the lead agency concept among the NPC participants kept some agencies from full participation in some activities of the program.

Interagency Coordination Dynamics Among Government Agencies

The observed behavioral and organizational dynamics of coordination among members of the NPC consisted

of the following:

Regular personal interaction through meetings reinvigorated the coordinated efforts of the NPC members. Meetings were scheduled every first Tuesday of the month for the regional and provincial levels and every second Monday of the month for the municipal level. Regular monthly meetings bridged communication gaps and ensured a continuing interaction among the members which enhanced coordination.

Thorough deliberations prior to any activity/program/action implementation in an area reveal the democratic decision-making process within the NPC. Moreover, the decisions for organizations to work together and do something for the committee enhanced better working relationship because they shared mutual/common concern and trustees.

The lead agency devised a mechanism for coordination by continuously involving private agencies in the food assistance and nutrition information and education activities of the program. The Catholic Relief Services was actively involved in various activities of the NP.

Most importantly, the committee members agreed to unite their efforts to avoid duplication of functions. Each member had a clear and definite function in the program activities which fostered better working relationship.

Interorganizational Linkages

The varied interagency exchanges/administrative linkages among NPC members which facilitated

coordination were resource exchange/sharing, joint activities, information exchange and written agreement(s). These linkages required formal authority from participating organizations of the NPC.

There were also linkages which were basically core services provided directly to clients on voluntary or compulsory basis. Field workers of participating agencies provided referrals, follow-up and outreach approaches.

Factors Contributing to Interagency Coordination

Organizational Factors

The achievement of domain consensus among participating agencies involved a long process after the launching of the program. Domain consensus was achieved when the functions of interacting organizations were diffused and constantly readjusted and compromised to work with other organizations from July 1974 to the present.

Apparently, majority of the organizations did not have enough access to resources for them to fully attain their objectives. Moreover, the agencies lacked alternative resources. Thus, they pooled their scarce resources to attain their program goals.

The Government of the Philippines (GOP) is the common source of funding for implementing the NP. Although there is foreign aid in the form of commodities, this is often too delayed for timely delivery of the goods and services to the clients. However,

despite the funding situation, participating agencies did not feel threatened by their relationship as described in their interagency coordination dynamics. Mutual dependence which elicited social exchange among participating agencies in the implementation of the NP in the area was also present.

In their coordination dynamics, interaction frequency enhanced the working relationship among committee members. It minimized conflicts and easily resolved problems related to NP. These meetings ensured continuing interaction among the members and resulted to increased coordination.

Interorganizational Factors

The NPC had the following structural features which influenced coordination among its members:

Member agencies of the NPC are not administratively under any officer or agency. Its administrative arrangement can only request for support and cooperation from the concerned agency but cannot compel any member to do something. This situation indicates that the administrative arrangement does not affect coordination among government organizations.

The coordinator perceived the committee membership as manageable despite the expertise and positions of members since they are all heads of offices. The complexity of the set-up promoted more interaction among members, encouraged open communication, and enhanced coordination in program activities.

NPC activities included meetings, planning of workshops, and interpersonal dynamics among members. This suggests that communication is the factor which evokes a high degree of cooperation. Coordination is also reflected in the frequency of communication exchanges among members through formal and informal letters filed in their respective offices.

The leadership of the coordinator seemed to be the key variable to inter-agency coordination. NPC members claimed that MOH is most qualified to lead the nutrition activities. They were unanimous in saying that MOH has the necessary facilities, equipment, and competent personnel to marshal nutrition activities.

External Factors

Executive Orders 121 and 285 and Presidential Decree 491 empowered the establishment of a multi-agency network for nutrition which allowed coordination of many member agencies on vertical and horizontal planes.

Although no formal memorandum of agreement was signed by the local members, cooperation was developed in the light of the requirements and directive of NPC from the national government which had the power to give the resources, direction and support to the committee's activities.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

Coordination is the process of synchronizing activities for social and eco-

nomie development of the area served by the NPC from the municipal to the regional level. Structurally, the coordination provided by the committee is generally weak due to the lack of a solid mantle of formal hierarchy. This makes the system of power/authority more informal and dependent on each participating agency. Formal authority is loosely exercised and each member agency is not under the authority of the lead agency. Furthermore, each member agency is not obligated to any other participating agency in the Nutrition Program.

Functionally, coordination is handicapped by the existing development planning and implementation model in the Philippines which shows that coordination and integration of rural development are still wanting (Nuñez and Manalili, 1982). The weakness of NPC is its lack of control over some fundamental matters such as authority and funds needed to effectively and efficiently carry out its own programs and projects.

Interagency coordination is affected by intraorganizational, interorganizational and external facilitating or determining factors. Specifically, coordination is influenced by the member agencies' domain consensus, resource scarcity, lack of alternative resources, interaction frequency, communication pattern, leadership of coordinator, and implementing guidelines such as Executive Orders 121 and 285, and Presidential Decree 491.

A major direction to improve the nation's Nutrition Program is to

strengthen the NPC. This could be done by vesting adequate authority in the NPC, particularly in the lead agency, so that it can command the respect and obtain the cooperation of the participating agencies. This can be attained through an Executive Order from the Office of the President that will give full authority to the lead agency in terms of control and allocation of certain significant NPC funds to strengthen the existing coordination machinery. Specifically, the NPC should be authorized to allocate funds for certain NP projects/activities in the region as determined and prioritized by NPC. Moreover, policies agreed upon by the members should be binding and the lead agency should be sanctioned to enforce such policies. Furthermore, lead responsibility should be rotated among member agencies.

In choosing the lead agency, logistics in terms of available facilities and

competent qualified staff should be considered. The NPC should also have its own staff who are competent in the field/implementation level.

The NPC is a legally created mechanism and can not escape the reality of politics. As observed, priorities for the Nutrition Program in the area are based on political considerations rather than rational criteria. Thus, the agencies involved in the program are earnestly negotiating for power, money and boundary maintenance to survive and pursue development goals without losing each other's identity. Evidently, the problem of resources is immensely critical, and power dynamics in the region may deter the ways to distribute scarce resources among member agencies. Hence, power-resource dependency equation prevails.

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