



# Philippines

ACDI/VOCA has worked in the Philippines for over 25 years, managing agriculture and health sector projects as well as organizing cooperatives in the fishery, coconut and vegetable farming sectors.

In 1988, when ACDI/VOCA's first cooperative development programs began in the Philippines, the country was just emerging from the 20-year reign of Ferdinand Marcos, a period of political repression, massive corruption and human rights violations. Since then, the country has experienced a series of economic booms and busts. The Philippine economy made a quick recovery from the recent global recession, but despite this unprecedented growth, poverty remains the nation's most critical social problem. 27.9 percent of Filipinos live below the poverty line. The poorest regions are the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), Western Mindanao, Bicol and Eastern Visayas—together these regions account for about one-third of the country's poor.

## Roots in Cooperative Development and Lending

ACDI/VOCA's early work in the Philippines targeted cooperatives and strengthened lending practices. Under the **Philippines Cooperative Marketing Project**, which ran from 1979-1983, ACDI/VOCA established the



Cooperative Finance Group (CFG), a network of farmer service cooperatives. CFG fostered sound financial and marketing systems for small farmers. The CFG was located in the Central Bank of the Philippines to facilitate lending to cooperatives and in 1982, total loan volume reached \$2.5 million.

## Managing Health at the Individual, Family and Community Level

In the past decade, ACDI/VOCA has made concerted efforts to boost access to health care resources across the country. From 2002-2007 ACDI/VOCA implemented the USAID-funded **Enhanced and Rapid Improvement of Community Health (ENRICH)** program, which increased the efficiency of government programs and traditional volunteer health networks with

systems and skills training. ENRICH worked with religious and community leaders to increase access to family planning services and also formed multi-stakeholder coalitions to improve community health.

ENRICH also included a strong educational component, reaching all residents of Tawi Tawi's 307 islands and the municipalities of Maguindanao with an innovative on-air learning program to bring family planning and health practices to residents of the far-reaching islands.

ACDI/VOCA collaborated with Helen Keller International during the recent **Sustainable Health Improvement for Empowerment and Local Development (SHIELD)** project from 2006-2011. This program focused on maternal and child well-being and community health-related activities. ACDI/VOCA partnered with local governments and communities of the ARMM region and provided training to existing and newly formed Community Health Action Teams. We were directly responsible for carrying out the project at the field level and providing technical advisors to support local governments. In 2010, ACDI/VOCA partnered with local governments to assist newly elected municipal mayors to be more responsive to the needs of their constituents. Our approach to building human resources and institutional capacity helped to ensure sustainability upon the project's conclusion.

ACDI/VOCA's work in the Filipino health sector has not gone unnoticed. In December 2011, Maguindanao Provincial Health Officer Dr. Tahir Sulaik presented ACDI/VOCA a

Plaque of Recognition for "its unwavering commitment and wholehearted support and assistance to achieve universal health care in partnership with the Integrated Provincial Health Office."

### **Developing Cocoa Production and Market Linkages**

ACDI/VOCA has also been active in the Philippines' cocoa sector, training local farmers to increase smallholder competitiveness in the global market. From 2002-2005, ACDI/VOCA worked with the Cocoa Foundation of the Philippines (CocoaPhil) to implement the **SUCCESS (Sustainable Cocoa Enterprise Solutions for Smallholders) Alliance** project. The SUCCESS Alliance promoted cocoa by addressing farm-level productivity and improving production and marketing linkages for smallholder farmers and microenterprises.

In a three-year follow-on program, **SUCCESS Alliance Phase II (SA II)**, funded by USDA's **Food for Progress**, brought together an expanding network of private and public sector partners including Mars Inc. and the World Cocoa Foundation. SA II covered six regions and helped cocoa farmers adopt environmentally sound cocoa farming and post-harvest practices to establish a regular source of income.

Using cocoa technology farmer field schools and extension services, SA II trained more than 15,000 farmers in 19 provinces in the Philippines. The program established 19 demo farms, rehabilitated 400,000 trees, installed 21 post-harvest facilities and strengthened local

interest in and access to cocoa development overall.

### **CoCoPal Program Empowers Farmers and Boosts Rural Incomes**

Building on the success of SA II, in 2009 ACDI/VOCA began the **CoCoPal Program**, which helps poor smallholders in the Mindanao region improve living conditions, food security and livelihoods. CoCoPal is named after cocoa, coconut and the Palayamanan concept of rice-based diversified farming. Throughout this program, we have collaborated with CocoaPhil, LandCare Philippines Foundation, Philippine Association of Small Coconut Farmers Organizations and Philippine Rice Research Institutes.

Using the Palayamanan approach, ACDI/VOCA and partners have emphasized value chain growth and integration across these important domestic agricultural sectors. Financial resources for CoCoPal have come from a USDA Food for Progress award as well as the monetization of 13,200 MT of soybean meal. Since its start, the program has targeted eight Mindanao provinces, a total of 114 municipalities and 583 villages.

After four years, CoCoPal beneficiaries have increased their agricultural productivity and incomes, and become empowered through greater participation in cocoa, coconut and rice value chains. As of 2013, CoCoPal has trained over 20,000 farmers with **Farmer Field School (FFS)** workshops. Among other results, the project has also set up 81 village-level technology and extension farms, which

have proven effective in farmer trainings, communicating best practices and promoting new technologies.

The strategies that ACDI/VOCA has employed in CoCoPal provide a glimpse of what our future in the Philippines may look like. We will continue to work with rural poor to empower them and increase their levels of participation with larger markets. At the same time, our programs will increasingly strive towards boosting sustainability and technical expertise in the years to come.

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