1.0 Introduction

This paper presents a discussion of issues and lessons learnt in institutionalizing IRAP in the Philippines.

IRAP is a planning tool designed for use at local level. It covers several sectors and helps identify interventions to improve the rural households’ access situation through the provision of rural infrastructures, better distribution/siting of services or enhancing the people’s mobility for them to reach and utilize the basic goods and service facilities.

The IRAP procedure is a simple and relatively inexpensive tool which allows “LGUs to effectively utilize the limited resources that are available to them for the maximum benefit of the local population”1. This statement is best illustrated by the results of the post-evaluation of the technical assistance conducted in 1997 in about 50% of the provinces that applied the procedure. The following were validated by the said evaluation:

1. IRAP process is a simple, inexpensive and easy to apply local level planning tool;
2. IRAP is useful and relevant to the target end-users, the local government units (LGUs);
3. Local planners are the appropriate recipients of the training program;
4. The accessibility information generated by the application has proven to be of value to the LGUs as well as to national agencies involved in rural development;
5. Academic and training institutions can adequately address future training requirements on IRAP; and
6. Both financial and technical support are crucial

The results articulate the need to develop a sustainable framework that will address expressed demands for the use of the IRAP process and ensure that the policy environment provides not only the resources but also ensure that the needed institutional mechanisms are in place.
2.0 Application in the Philippines

The application in the country started in 1989 through “a set of action research studies on rural household travel patterns”\(^1\). The initial activity was under the Department of Agriculture, with funding from the European Union. The team covered three provinces and worked with the planning offices of the said provinces.

The positive results of the initial application led to the pilot activity, implemented in 1990-92 in selected provinces, with the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) and support from the USAID. A Rural Transport Unit (RTU) was created at the Bureau of Local Government Development (BLGD) to work with the ILO Technical Team.

The initial pilot project was extended to cover an additional four provinces in 1992-94 with financial support from the Dutch. The ILO Technical Team and counterpart staff from government remained at the BLGD. Phase 1 aimed “to ensure that IRAP is adopted as a planning tool, establish training capacity on the procedure and initiate a plan to develop sustainable competence to apply IRAP as a standard planning instrument.”\(^2\)

The Dutch approved a second extension (1995-99) to continue the gains of the previous activities, expand the project’s coverage area, ensure that local government units (LGUs) implement access projects identified through the IRAP method, install training capacity in academic and training institutions, and develop an accessibility database. At this stage, the IRAP unit moved to the Local Government Academy (LGA), the training arm of the DILG. This was upon the recommendation of the tripartite evaluation team, citing that the technical assistance delivery of the project was mainly through capacity-building and that “the LGA has a broad mandate to carry out or arrange all training and technical assistance for LGUs which it frequently performs as a hands-on, in-field approach”\(^3\). The transfer included the staff and budget for operations.

The final phase (2000-2002), still under Dutch funding, aimed “to institutionalize the use of IRAP in all local government units (LGUs), improve the procedure, and establish an operational accessibility database.”\(^2\). This project phase was expected to solidify the gains of the previous phases and formulate a sustainable framework for continuous use of the methodology, with adequate information generated to guide community and private investments. The host unit in the LGA was relocated to the Office of Project Development Service (OPDS) of the DILG. The transfer however, did not include the trained staff at LGA as well as the national counterpart budget. The host unit in OPDS did not last long enough to recruit the counterpart staff that was to be paid by the ILO and work with the technical assistance team. Sometime in 2001, the host unit was transferred to BLGD again, going back to where it started in Phase 1. From there, the recruitment of the government counterpart staff was completed. When the project ended in December 2002, a new set of recruits from the permanent staff of the BLGD comprised the IRAP unit under the original project management officer.
Throughout the three project phases, the counterpart agency was the Department of the Interior and Local Government, the government agency mandated to work with LGUs. The application of IRAP in the country took almost twelve years, long enough to have built technical and institutional capacities at various levels.

In 2000, the Department of Agriculture (DA), another national agency executing a foreign-assisted loan project from the Asian Development Bank (ADB), expressed interest on the use of the IRAP procedure and accessibility information. Today, the ILO is working directly with the DA providing a technical team composed of one (1) full time staff and three (3) technical experts from Bangkok. The team provides technical backstopping, conducts periodic missions and stays at the DA project office.

3.0 Current status

After IRAP Phase III ended in December 2002, DILG assumed responsibility for the continuous application of the procedure. The tasks, as provided for in the Memorandum of Agreement between the ILO and DILG in 2000, include advocacy, promotions and operations and maintenance of the developed accessibility database.

The Department of Agriculture, another national government agency that earlier showed interest on the results of the IRAP application, identified the procedure as a technology of choice during the preparation stage of the Infrastructure for Rural Productivity Enhancement Sector (InfRES) Project. The role of IRAP is to assist LGUs identify sub-projects, such as potable water supply, irrigation and rural roads, to be submitted for funding in the ADB-DA initiative.

At the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG)

An IRAP Unit, housed at the Bureau of Local Government Development (BLGD) and assigned with four permanent staff, was formed last November 2002. The unit operates under the supervision of the BLGD Director and tasked to oversee the implementation of the follow-through plan of action and commitments of the LGUs. Technical and logistical support, like office equipment, vehicle, hardware and software for the IRAP databank, training manuals, reference materials, guidebooks, etc., were turned over by ILO to the agency in December 2002. The national accessibility databank, containing the information collected at the LGU level during phase 3, is to be updated every three years. The said databank is managed and maintained by the unit with technical support provided by the Electronic Data Processing Service (EDPS), another unit in the DILG. The EDPS operates and maintains the IRAP website, hosted by the DILG site at www.dilg.gov.ph
At the Department of Agriculture (DA)

ILO and ADB signed a memorandum of agreement in 2001 for technical cooperation on the implementation of the *Infrastructure for Rural Productivity Enhancement Sector (InfRES) Project*, financed by a loan from the ADB and implemented by DA. The ILO and DA signed a three-year contract in 2003 tasking the ILO to provide technical assistance on local resource-based rural infrastructure development and implementation. The collaboration aims to enhance capacity of LGUs to plan, implement, operate and maintain rural infrastructures projects. InfRES aims to improve productivity of farm smallholders and fisherfolk through infrastructure investments in areas with high poverty incidence and high agricultural potential. This is expected to increase rural income, improve food security, lead to economic growth and reduce poverty.

IRAP will be used to guide the LGUs in planning and prioritizing community access interventions through participatory needs assessment, identification of investment priorities and infrastructure construction. IRAP is the preferred methodology in identifying sub-projects of InfRES as the project dictates that to qualify for the assistance, the applicant LGU must have undergone training on IRAP. Otherwise, the LGU must first undergo the training program of the ILO.

During the implementation of the agreement, it was established that adjustments have to be done on the IRAP procedure, particularly on the roads prioritization process where alignment with the objectives of the InfRES project is called for.

In addition to the IRAP tool, the ILO is promoting its Labor-Based Equipment-Supported (LBES) method in construction and rehabilitation of roads identified in this DA-ADB project. Of the nine priority LGUs included in the first batch of sub-projects to be implemented, five expressed interest to use LBES.

### 4.0 Issues

After almost thirteen years of continuous application, IRAP managed to withstand four government administrations. It started during the Aquino administration, at a time when the Local Government Code of 1991 was enacted into law giving local government units greater autonomy to decide and manage their own affairs and resources. IRAP, being a local level planning tool, fits well into this new setup, being a simple and inexpensive tool well suited in the new development framework where “LGUs are obliged to effectively utilize the limited resources available for the maximum benefit of the local population”.

In spite of the newfound flexibility provided under a new policy environment, the expected demand for the continuous application of the tool was not realized as institutionalization both at the local and national levels was not fully attained, missing opportunities for mainstreaming, institutionalization and sustained application.
4.1 Mainstreaming

Mainstreaming is concerned with using the tool in the actual planning functions of LGUs and considered by national agencies such as health, education, public works, agriculture, etc., in their “inter and intra-sectoral priority investments”\(^1\). The LGUs are the primary users of the tool, with the aggregated accessibility data proving valuable for national agencies in validating sectoral proposals from provincial and regional development initiatives.

"Mainstreaming the procedure only started one year (2001) ago and it is too early to see concrete results already\(^4\). This is one of the findings of the tripartite evaluation team that conducted an assessment of IRAP’s final phase. However, two years after the nationwide application in the country, mainstreaming is yet to be seen. To date, no monitoring has been done nor any study conducted to ascertain whether LGUs and/or national agencies are indeed using the tool in implementing their respective mandates. Except for the DA InfRES project, no other development initiative can be attributed with the use of the IRAP procedure.

To better understand the situation, it is best to be familiar with the following:

- **Nature of local level planning in the country**

  Planning at municipal, provincial and regional levels is done by a technical working group (TWG) composed of representatives from the local planning office, concerned agencies, organizations and institutions. Experience proves that these representatives bring with them their respective agency priorities and interests and most often with pre-conceived ideas as to how development should proceed. Against this backdrop, IRAP was applied by municipalities resulting in clearly identified investment opportunities not only for the LGU for also for national development agencies in the area. Unfortunately, the nature of the composition of the TWG lends token appreciation of said results and the LGU is left on its own to address the prioritized sectoral needs. In this context, mainstreaming of the procedure in planning activities of agencies and development organizations and institutions becomes difficult to attain.

- **Lack of clear and expressed demand**

  Mainstreaming IRAP can be facilitated if there is a clear and expressed demand from the target users. This demand can be either: inclusion in the planning guidelines as an additional planning tool option for LGUs; or, donor organizations expressing preference for IRAP application (like what happened with the DA-ADB project). For instance, SWOT and Problem Tree Analyses are widely used at local level because the planning guidelines prescribe them and a significant number of organizations providing technical assistance to LGUs use them. On the other hand, a donor such as the ADB, favored IRAP as a planning tool option and was subsequently included in the DA InfRES Project. It must be made clear that a few LGUs using the procedure do not constitute a clear demand.
• Local government system

In the Philippines, local governments are elected into office for a 3-year term, with possibility of re-elections for a continuous 9 years. In most cases, a newly elected local chief executive immediately puts into action programs that are his original and in no way can be attributed to the previous administration. With such practice, continuity becomes irrelevant and promising activities initiated by the previous administration becomes history. Similarly, if a losing administrator utilized IRAP, it is expected that the incoming executive will prefer a totally different procedure. In such situation, mainstreaming never stands a chance.

• Low level of support from academic and training institutions

New methods and techniques are attractive to academic and training institutions. In fact, they even encourage their graduate students to try innovative approaches and procedures. However, such support is always short-lived and co-terminus with the acceptance of the research output or a graduate thesis. We must understand that academic institutions in the country have limited resources and will venture only into new grounds if there is ample financial and technical support from someplace. State universities with which the IRAP project tried to develop a collaborative relationship somehow faltered in the delivery after they were left on their own in Phase 2. Initial reactions were enthusiastic and very promising but waned after it was realized that resources from the project are likewise limited. An ideal situation would be when the teaching and training institutions take on IRAP to be part of their curriculum or offered as part of their technical assistance package to LGUs.

4.2 Institutionalization

Change of administration, change of priorities

Institutionalization can be described best if the following conditions are present: there is an office in a national government agency responsible for IRAP; there is a focal organization or persons in charge of overseeing the promotion of the procedure; and, there is an annual allocation reflected in the General Appropriations Act. Such conditions can only happen if policy and decision-makers at the highest level support such actions. The President, Vice President and Senators are elected for a 6-year term and they are responsible for laying the development direction of the country. However, similar to actuations at local level, a newly elected national leadership will embark on programs that do not necessarily jibe with that of the previous leadership. Such practice results in "flavor of the month" programs putting to waste the gains of nationally supported endeavors of the past administration. IRAP went through 4 presidents but the good thing that happened was that it was never identified with any of them thus remained in place even under a new national leadership. The downside of this is that IRAP remained at the periphery of the executive circle and was not projected as strongly as the other programs of an incumbent president.
4.3 Sustained Application

The widespread and continuous use of the IRAP procedure at local level, with the results of its application considered by the higher level local government unit, is the desired situation to describe sustainability. To realize this, it is imperative that the IRAP procedure be presented as a planning tool option in the prescribed set of planning guidelines used by local government units. This also requires that a critical mass of technical personnel familiar with the procedure be in place and distributed throughout the country. To attain this, IRAP should “ride” on the government bureaucracy and be entrenched in the agency mandated to provide technical assistance to LGUs. Another way is for IRAP to be part of the curriculum or skills development programs of teaching and training institutions so that it can be made conveniently available as a training package for the target users.

- Focal agency

Is the IRAP procedure housed in the correct agency? This question comes to mind when we compare the stages of IRAP promotion and application. The project started with the DILG and was effectively promoted and applied throughout the country. The ILO technical assistance team was present all throughout the application and a counterpart team from the government became the conduit of the technical assistance to LGUs. However, while the DILG was busy directing the application, the Housing and Land Use Regulatory Board (HLURB) is also busy directly involved on the preparation and updating of the municipal Comprehensive Land Use Plan (CLUP). HLURB is mandated to formulate, manage and implement local planning guidelines and standards and is tasked to oversee that planning activities of local government units adhere to the prescribed processes. Clearly, promoting IRAP was correct with the DILG, sustaining its application should be with the HLURB.

- Budget

Applying IRAP in a sustained fashion would require a regular budget. As it stands now, only government has the capacity to do this especially if it is going to be a new allocation in the General Appropriations Act. This route has been proven to be circuitous and uncertain. But, the application can be done using the existing structure if there is clear endorsement for its use. For instance, SWOT is prescribed in the HLURB planning guidelines and their regional technical assistance teams provide this to the LGUs. Within each HLURB regional office is the Land Use Planning and Zoning Assistance Unit that visits local government units to oversee the activity. IRAP therefore, must also be prescribed in the guidelines and be used continuously even without additional budget from government.
• **Continuing expressed demand for the method**

The whole country experienced IRAP for more than a decade. Regional training teams were organized to provide the needed technical assistance to LGUs and the outputs were collected to constitute a national databank, designed to provide a convenient information source on accessibility conditions. After Phase 3, when the ILO Technical Assistance team office closed shop, silence ensued both at central and LGU levels. Clearly, the LGUs are not expressing demand for a repeat of the application, nor is the DILG initiating moves to update the databank under its responsibility. Contrasted with the SWOT analysis in the HLURB guidelines, no demand for its use is needed anymore because it is already a prescribed method and the LGUs cannot do anything but comply.

5.0 **Recommendations**

The issues discussed in this paper point to elements that are needed to ensure a successful and sustained IRAP application. The Philippine experience indicates that some of the elements were already in place but must have been overlooked or were not fully utilized by the project, thus leading to missed opportunities that could have resulted in institutionalization, mainstreaming and sustained application. A review of past implementation activities can reveal these observations. Based on this awareness, the following could have helped if the environment within which IRAP was implemented was clearly read and understood.

• **Set realistic targets**

Some targets are based on assumptions that may later prove to be wrong. For instance, IRAP formed regional technical assistance teams and assumed that these can always be around for the LGUs. However, the members of the team come from various LGUs and offices and naturally place their mother units always on top of their order of priorities. Expectedly, after the funding stopped, the members returned to their respective offices practically disbanding the IRAP regional teams. It will take another round of official representations, with corresponding budget allocations, before a regional team can be formed again.

In some instances, targets set are beyond the capacity of the project team that results fall short of expectations, effectively eroding credibility to continue relying upon the offered technical assistance. It also helps if the policy and bureaucratic environment are carefully studied in setting the project targets, coupled with a good understanding of the dynamics in local governance.
• Maximize Collaborative work

Study other on-going development planning initiatives and explore/develop possibilities for collaboration. Such actions will lead to substantial savings in manpower and resources and help in spreading the technology to a wider range of potential users. There are cases when the promise of collaborative work is listed as a pre-condition for LGUs to avail of any technical or financial assistance from development projects. Formal agreements to forge mutually reinforcing partnerships will not only help in attaining the desired outputs but also enhance credibility and spread the risks of failure.

• Map out strategies to create demand

As stated earlier, the demand for the use of IRAP may not only be expressed by the users themselves but also can be prescribed by policy as expressed in planning guidelines and standards. One strategy to create demand is to touch base with the national agency tasked with formulating and managing planning guidelines and standards and work for the inclusion of IRAP procedure as a planning tool option for LGUs. This may take a while and will require representations at national policy and decision-making circles, but the results will significantly facilitate in addressing the need for an expressed demand for IRAP.

• Establish or be part of a strong and relevant network

Being part of an effective and relevant network can open a lot of doors for the implementation of the procedure to prosper in the right direction. The network can be an ideal avenue for constructive feedback and criticisms as well as point to different opportunity directions. This is effectively illustrated in the proliferation networks among non-government and people’s organizations where access to information, technology and opportunities are always present.
References

1 The IRAP Project: An Assessment of Sustainability and Institutionalization, Geoff Edmonds, April 1996.
2 Second Experts Group’s Meeting, IRAP, 5-6 September 2000, Bangkok
3 Aide Memoire, Evaluation of IRAP Phase 1, 17 June 1994
THE I RAP PHILIPPINE EXPERIENCE:

Lessons on Institutionalization

IRAP APPLICATION IN THE PHILIPPINES

Program phase

Nationwide

Project phase-selected

Pilot testing

Research dev’t.
Lessons on Institutionalization

Issues crucial to sustained IRAP application

Mainstreaming
Institutionalization
Sustainability

Mainstreaming

Nature of local level planning in the country
Lack of clear & expressed demand
Local government system
Low level of support of academic & training institutions
Lessons on Institutionalization

- Change of administration/focal agency, change of priorities

Sustained application

- Budget
- Focal agency
  - Continuing expressed demand for the method
Lessons on Institutionalization

Lessons learnt

- Set realistic targets
- Maximize Collaborative work
- Map strategies to create demand
- Establish or be part of a strong and relevant network