

## **CARPER EXTENSION BILL**

### **Completing Land Distribution and Building Family Farmers' Cooperative Enterprises**

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#### **SUMMARY**

Agrarian reform is at the heart of social justice to correct centuries of injustice, oppression and neglect of poor landless women and men family farmers. The 26-year Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) is currently at limbo pending the enactment of a law that will complete the redistribution of all remaining haciendas and private agricultural lands. Decisive action is needed to ensure the immediate passage of the CARPER Extension Bill, create a high-level independent Commission to review and audit the performance of CARP, and conduct a participatory review of the Department of Agrarian Reform's ARCESS program.

#### **CONTEXT AND IMPORTANCE OF THE PROBLEM**

The Philippine agrarian structure is made up of small peasant farms and large plantations. The total agricultural land area constitutes about 32% of the country's total land area, or around 10 million hectares. In 1986 before the CARP, government estimated that around 20% of Filipino families controlled 80% of the lands.

In 2012, the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) estimated that some 4.3 million hectares has been distributed since 1972, of which 38% are private agricultural lands. Empirical studies show that CARP has resulted in significant improvements in the welfare of ARBs, increasing farmer household incomes and expenditures and decreasing their likelihood of being poor.

Despite provisions in the CARP that ensure equality between men and women as qualified beneficiaries, DAR figures show that as of end-2012, only 29% out of 2.3 million ARBs were women. Aside from their limited access to land, women's opportunities as farmers are also limited by unequal access to extension services, irrigation, or farm equipment and other inputs. Many service providers still do not recognize women as farmers, but through convergence, recognition of women as farmers are being addressed.

RA 9700 or the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program Extension with Reforms (CARPER) is currently the law governing agrarian reform. It has three components – Land Tenure Improvement (LTI); Program Beneficiaries Development; and Agrarian Justice Delivery. The LTI component involves the acquisition and distribution of lands to landless farmers. The issuance of a Notice of Coverage (NOC) initiates the compulsory acquisition and distribution of private agricultural lands, one of the modes of distribution under the CARPER.

The Land Acquisition and Distribution (LAD) phase of the CARP (1988) and the CARPER (2009), however, expired on June 30, 2014, except that lands that have already been issued NOCs as of that date will continue to be processed until distributed. One estimate based on DAR figures shows that about 500,000 hectares out of the LAD balance of 1.2 million hectares (as of June 2009) still have to be distributed. These are mainly private coconut, rice and sugar cane lands in the heart of landlord country in the Western Visayas and Mindanao.

In addition to the June 2009 LAD balance, about 1.2 to 2.7 million hectares of land claimed as having been distributed are suspect to having circumvented or avoided the law or were not

really transferred to the control of farmer beneficiaries through, e.g., the use of dummies in Voluntary Land Transfers (VLTs), unwarranted exemptions and conversions, excessive retentions, fake “joint ventures”. An independent Commission should look into the lands that avoided or circumvented the law and take steps to have them declared null and void and subject the lands to coverage and distribution.

On May 26, 2014, President Benigno Aquino III certified as urgent a bill that will complete the LAD component and renew DAR’s authority to issue NOCs until June 30, 2016. In September, the Senate approved the measure (SB 2278) with 18 affirmative votes; its counterpart at the House (HB 4296) has yet to be approved.

Moreover, the CARPER also seeks to ensure that an integrated package of support services reaches existing and new agrarian reform beneficiaries, including credit and farm inputs. The DAR’s Agrarian Reform Community Connectivity and Economic Support Services (ARCESS) program is mandated to help the ARBs become viable entrepreneurs. According to the People’s Agrarian Reform Congress, only 44% of ARBs (or 1.166 million) had access to support services as of December 2013 based on DAR figures.

The ARCESS program should be reviewed to build on successful models of ARB enterprises and prioritize partnerships with existing strong farmers’ organizations/ cooperatives to deliver relevant support services, e.g., capability building in their farm management and business operations.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Enact the CARPER Extension bill to complete land distribution by 2016 and to ensure meaningful delivery of integrated support services.**
- Create a high level independent Commission with powers to review and audit the performance and accomplishments of CARP.**
- Conduct a participatory review of the ARCESS program.**