

THE AGNO RIVER BASIN DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

A. CREATION OF THE AGNO RIVER BASIN DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION (ARBDC)

- The Agno River Basin Development Commission (ARBDC) was created by virtue of Executive Order 442 s. 1997 as amended by Executive Order 140 s. 1999.
- While Executive Order 442 was issued in 1997, the Commission became operational only in October 1998 following the appointment of a full-time Executive Director. Activities came in full swing in January 1999 with the organization of the Commission Secretariat.

B. THE MANDATE AND FUNCTIONS OF ARBDC

- ARBDC is mandated to oversee and coordinate all developmental undertakings within the Agno River Basin to ensure that resources planning and management are carried out in accordance with sustainable development.
- It is entrusted with the primary responsibility of developing a comprehensive plan for the integrated economic, social and physical development of the Agno River Basin where maximization of equitable benefits, preservation and enhancement of indigenous cultural communities and equity between upland and lowland people are given high priority.
- As such, its mission is to coordinate for the promotion of the socio-economic well-being of the people in the Basin and the protection of the integrity of the area's environment. Specifically, it undertakes the following:



Upper Portion of the Agno River

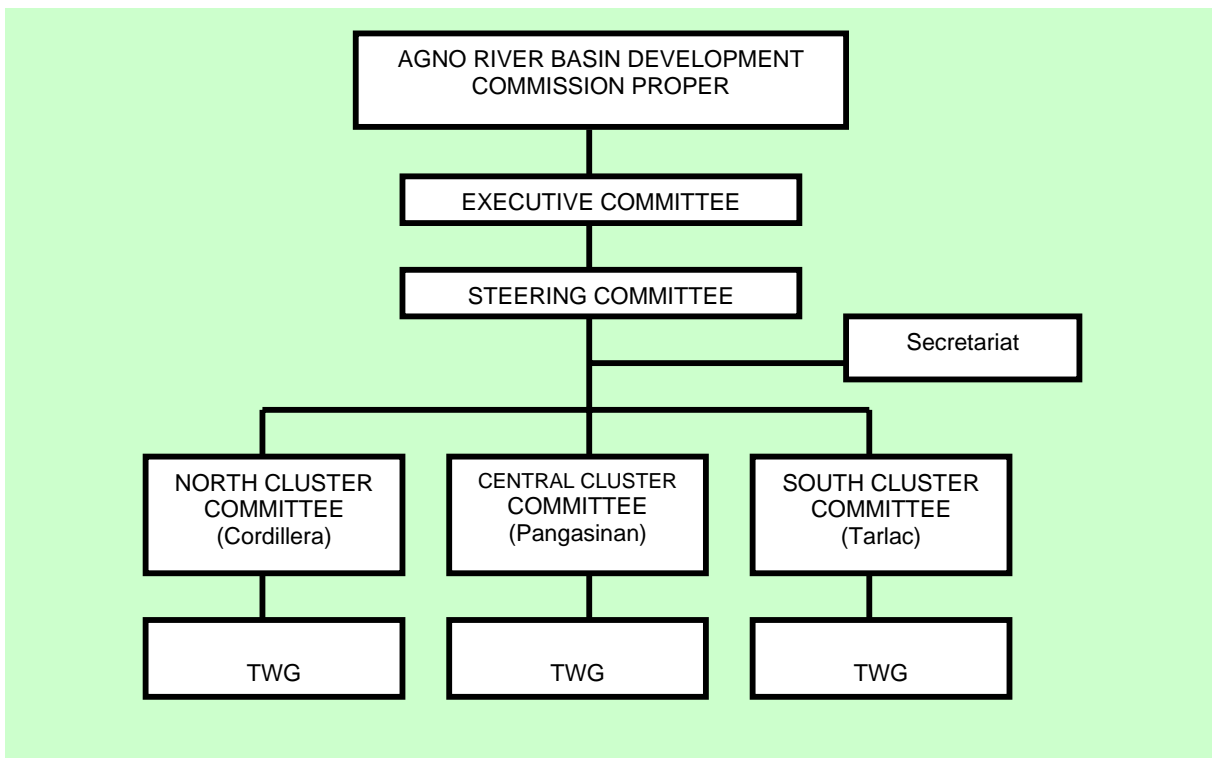
- Consolidates and harmonizes all development initiatives within the river basin under the over-all framework of a unified river basin management and development approach

- Oversees and manages resource use and resolve competing demands for these resources
- Develops management information systems and monitoring and evaluation approaches and integrate these into planning and policy decision-making processes
- Negotiates for funding from local and external investment sources
- Adds value to river basin resources even as these are preserved
- Takes to task other government agencies, non-government organizations, peoples' organizations and the private sector in preparing plans and policies and translating these into effective action plans, programs and projects.

C. THE ORGANIZATIONAL SET-UP OF ARBDC AND ITS MEMBER AGENCIES

- The Agno River Basin Development Commission was created as an inter-agency Commission under the Office of the President with DENR Secretary as Chairman, DOE Secretary as Co-chairman and the Governors of the Provinces of Pangasinan, Tarlac and Benguet as Vice-chairmen.
- The Commission has, as its member-agencies, 16 government departments and agencies namely: the Department of Agriculture, Dept. Of Tourism, Dept. of Budget and Management, Dept. of Local Government, National Economic Development Authority, Dept. of Agrarian Reform, Dept. of Trade and Industry, Dept. of Public Works and Highways, National Irrigation Administration, Philippine Atmospheric Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration, National Power Corporation, National

Organizational Structure: Agno River Basin Development Commission



Commission on Indigenous Peoples, Office of Civil Defense, National Water Resources Board, Philippine National Police Region I and CAR, NGOs from CAR, Region I and Region III and the Local government Units of San Manuel, Pangasinan; Itogon, Benguet and Moncada, Tarlac. The heads of these agencies constitute the membership of the Commission Proper.

- A Commission Secretariat is responsible for the day to day operations of the Commission. This is headed by the Executive Director with four contractual employees: Executive Assistant, Planning Officer, Executive Secretary and Computer Operator. The Secretariat is complemented by four detailed administrative personnel from other government agencies.

D. THE AGNO RIVER BASIN

- The Agno River Basin covers 68 municipalities and 5 cities in the provinces of Benguet, Pangasinan and Tarlac.
- The Agno River Basin is the fifth largest river basin in the Philippines with a catchment area of 8,013.41 square kilometers. It has a total length of 270 kilometers with an estimated annual run off of 8,044 million cubic meters and a level area of 2,646 square kilometers.
- The Basin provides the lifeblood of a great portion of northwestern Philippines. It is considered a major food basket and an energy generator and is one of the richest ecosystems in the country. The lower catchment areas are the sites of vast tracts of agricultural lands for which large volumes of water are appropriated for irrigation purposes. The outlet at Lingayen Gulf is a major fishing community.



Location Map, Agno River

E. ARBDC INITIATIVES IN THE AGNO RIVER BASIN

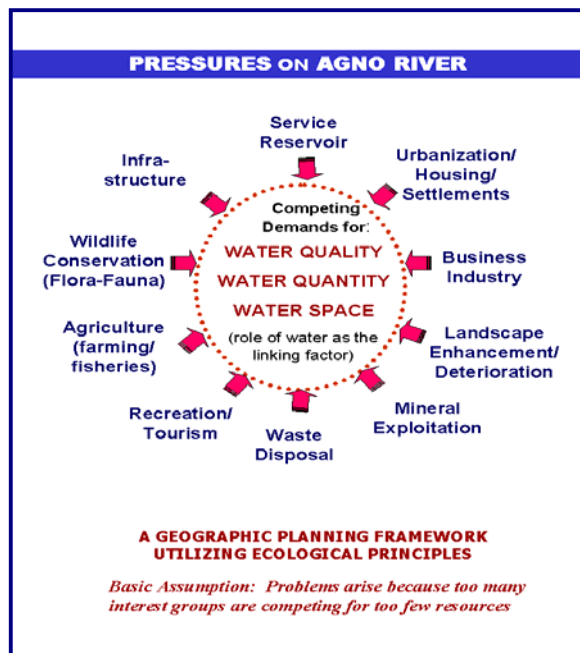
- ARBDC was able to establish a broad-based participatory institutional and decision making processes to effect a multi-stakeholder coordination for river basin planning and management. It caused the organization of committees and technical working groups

consisting of all stakeholders within the River Basin and eventually restructured into cluster technical working groups which is currently the forum for ground level inter-agency/inter-sectoral coordination works of the Commission.

- It was able to generate a consensus among the stakeholders on the desired development direction of the Agno River Basin through the preparation of a **Strategic Framework Plan for the Agno River Basin**.
- The ARBDC, in line with its mandate, established the coordination mechanism for the preparation of the plan in accordance with participatory principles.
- It set up a planning approach which allowed for the consideration for all the development actors to input their view points on the main concern of sustainable water resource management. The approach tied up individual institutional objectives into a set of common goals that were consensually reached.

F. THE AGNO RIVER BASIN MASTER PLAN

- The Agno River Basin Master Plan embodies the direction to which the development of the Agno River Basin will be driven as envisioned by the different groups of stakeholders in the area, considering the problems and issues confronting the Basin and current development impulses and opportunities.
- The plan is specifically prepared in the light of the following conditions:
 - the need for the immediate coordination of programs and projects with strategic implications to the development issues presently facing the river basin
 - the current lack of necessary human and financial resources that sets a major constraint in the preparation of a long-term, expensive master plan at the present time
 - the need to provide a strategic framework as a basis for the comprehensive master plan (medium- and long-term coverage), the short-range budget plan, and the operations-action plans
 - the need to identify, develop and enhance programs and projects within a short period of time, towards a desired future



- the need to maintain flexibility in decision-making considering alternative courses of action that are open in the future, with the dedication and commitment to act and decide on the basis of a contemplation of the future
- The Master Plan serves the following purpose:
 - The plan is a framework to guide in succeeding planning activities for Agno river Basin. The framework level denotes the plan's general character, putting forth development scenarios within long-term perspective and setting the overall blueprint to guide in succeeding detailed planning for specific geographic areas and sectors in the basin.
 - It is also strategic in the sense of it identifying vital action areas, demanding both immediate and long-term attention, that form part of the foundation for future development activities to achieve the desired long-term scenario.
 - It defines the areas of coordination among development actors to ensure that current and future programs and projects address long-term river basin concerns and objectives. It touches upon institutional arrangements to minimize if not eliminate the bottlenecks of coordination and cooperation and facilitate decision-making beyond existing local and regional planning and decision-making mechanisms.
- For the Planning exercise, the River Basin is divided into four planning clusters: (1) The Cordillera, referred to as north cluster; (2) Eastern Pangasinan, as Central East cluster (3) Western Pangasinan as Central West cluster covering municipalities located westward in the direction of the Lingayen Gulf; (4) The Tarlac area covering all areas south of Agno. The inter-relationships among the development of these cluster were drawn up based on a review of existing major resources and development patterns in each of the clusters. The scenarios were then analyzed in terms of their impacts on the other clusters. This guided in the formulation of strategic interventions aimed at minimizing adverse development and negative externalities.



- The formulation of the strategic plan and the plan is guided by the following principles:
 - The plan shall ensure an integrated economic, social and physical development of the Basin- a striking balance among conflicting interests and optimizing the utilization of natural resources;
 - The plan shall ensure maximum participation of all stakeholders in the area, establishing the most effective approach to effect an active and sustainable collaboration among stakeholders from government agencies, non-government/people's organization, and the private sector;
 - The plan shall be prepared in accordance with appropriate devolution and sharing of functions and technical expertise among the participants in the planning process, particularly between the foreign experts and the local counterparts;
 - The plan shall ensure the preservation and enhancement of indigenous cultures and communities;
 - The plan shall ensure the preservation and enhancement of indigenous cultures and communities;
 - The plan shall promote equitable sharing of costs and benefits from the Basin's natural resources across sector's, groups of communities, across space and time; and
 - The plan shall ensure long term sustainability of plan implementation; embark on massive capability building activities to promote local self-reliance and initiatives in the development process.

- The Master Plan is directed towards the achievement of the following development goals:
 - Judiciously develop and manage the resources of the Agno river Basin;
 - Maintain an ecologically balanced environment;
 - Develop the eco-tourism potentials of the river basin;
 - Ensure and sustain food security in the basin;
 - Generate livelihood opportunities and develop entrepreneurship;
 - Improve access to social services;
 - Promote and institutionalize community participation in decision-making and development process;
 - Uphold, protect and respect the rights, interests and cultures of the people in the basin;
 - Enhance the disaster management capability of the communities in the basin;
 - Provide efficient and adequate infrastructure support to all sectors and areas in the Basin; and
 - Develop Agno Rivers potential for commerce and navigation.

G. EXPERIENCES IN RIVER BASIN WATER PLANNING

- **What We Have Learned**

- Importance of inter-agency and grassroots participation in the planning and plan implementation process
- Sustaining capacity building at all levels of decision-making (from bottom to top) to institutionalize sustainable river basin and watershed management perspectives
- Addressing social and economic problems as an important aspect of integrated river basin management
- Strengthening/capacitating the coordination mechanism (structures, processes and manpower skills) to carry out an effective integrated river basin management
- The need to mobilize all potential financial sources from the local, national and foreign sources, both public and private investments to finance river basin development

- **What We Have Gained**

- *Laid the groundwork for institutional cooperation/coordination in river basin planning and management*

Through the master planning process, the ARBDC was able to establish a broad-based participatory institutional decision-making process to effect a multi-stakeholder coordination for river basin planning and management. This is directly achieved through the organization of inter-agency and inter-LGU committees and technical working groups (TWG) consisting of representatives from major stakeholder groups within the Basin and eventually re-structured into cluster technical working groups. These inter-agency committees and TWGs continue to be the forum of stakeholder coordination and cooperation.

The local government units, belonging to different regional administrative units were also given the institutional environment by which to come together to discuss and agree on development concerns that have inter-LGU/regional dimensions.

- *Generated a consensus on the desired development direction for the Agno River Basin*

Through the master plan, the ARBDC was able to bring into surface the development milestone for the future scenario of the Agno River Basin, encapsulated in a vision statement, a mission and development principles. These were generated through a multi-stakeholder consensus-building and reflect the different view-points of the various groups.

- *Increased dynamism in decision-making, widening perspectives, evolving and sustaining operational concepts on sustainable development*

The Master Plan provides the framework for a unified watershed management to ensure the sustainability and productivity of natural resources. The Master Plan and the planning process itself marked the commencement of advocacy activities geared towards the institutionalization of a river basin management framework into the plans, programs and decision-making processes among national line agencies, local government units and private groups with significant stakes in the development of the river basin.

The plan preparation process also significantly contributed to watershed management capability building. The process was partly geared towards improving the technical competence of officials and staff from government agencies, private sector and non-government organizations for them to become effective participants in expanding the basin's economic base and in managing and protecting the basin's environment and natural resources.

- *Opened up opportunities for social and political participation among various groups*

The Master Plan is one of the mechanisms by which the ARBDC initiated and continue to cultivate political and social participation of key stakeholders, particularly indigenous peoples. It provides the process for nurturing people empowerment and the advancement of pro-people initiatives in the development and management of natural resources.

- *Directly contributed to the national strategy of adopting the river basin as an integrated unit for government action towards ensuring the sustainability of natural resources*

The Philippine Medium-term Development Plan asserts a strategy on water resource development and management that uses the river basin as a spatial unit of government policy interventions. The preparation of the Agno River Basin master Plan supports and contributed this strategy and sets the standard by which future river basin planning activities and processes in the Philippines will be prepared and implemented.

- *Provided the basic framework for problem solving concerning the utilization and management of natural resources*

With the Agno River Basin Master plan defining the development guidelines and principles that have been agreed upon to underlie development decisions within the Basin, it thus lends the basic elements towards resolving conflicts and issues on resource management. It for instance set the basic policies in resolving compensation issues in the course of the planning and implementation of the multi-billion dollar project, the San Roque Multi-purpose Dam Project.

- *Provided the basis for the monitoring and evaluation of development projects in terms of impacts on the environment and viewed from the perspective of a unified lowland-upland resource management continuum*

Prior to the creation of the ARBDC and the preparation of the Agno River Basin Master Plan, the system for project monitoring and evaluation was set upon politico-administrative jurisdictions as the main unit of assessment. The decisions derived from such system failed to consider the wider context on which these individual units make a broader impact. Through the master plan, a context was defined for the collaboration of the existing project monitoring and evaluation systems and the actors which expanded project decision-making from parochial to river basin considerations.

- *Strengthened the integration of programs and projects, both on-going and proposed to address and re-enforce inter-relationships and maximize the benefits from each project.*

- **The Present Challenges**

Institutional Challenges

- *On watershed protection.* There is a need to assess current policies and decision-making processes on watershed protection with the end in-view of increasing motivations and capacities among all stakeholders in watershed areas to sustain long-term productivities and regenerative capacities of watershed resources
- *On water and natural resource utilization and development.* There is a need to mobilize private investment resources and grassroots managerial capabilities to meet the demand for water and other natural resource facilities and ensure proper maintenance and operation of said facilities
- *On water and other resource use regulation, monitoring and evaluation.* There is a need to generate water and resource utilization standards and establish regulatory mechanisms that are location-specific to ensure that obtaining resource conditions are effectively addressed.
- *On technical data.* There is a need to update and improve the reliability of present information and data on water and other natural resources to ensure that decision-making processes are reflective of ground-realities and responsive, effectively and promptly, of real issues.
- *On stakeholder participation.* There is a need to decentralize functions on water resources management from the NWRB to lower level planning units in order to make broad-based participation feasible and to ensure that plans/program and policies on water resources management are responsive to actual ground conditions. The implications of the Indigenous People's Rights Act should also be considered in designing management and access strategies to water resources, particularly those falling within ancestral domains, with the aim of strengthening the capacities of indigenous cultural communities in watershed management.

- *For watershed protection*, there is a need to strengthen the capabilities of other stakeholders at the local and grassroot levels to effectively mobilize them for sustainable resource management purposes. Institutional adjustments for broad based participation include capitalizing on group stakes to build incentives for active involvement in sustaining the integrity of the environment.

Political Challenges

- *Strengthening collaboration*. The decision-making process continues to be dominated by parochial interests, notwithstanding agreements on collaboration and cooperation. The ARBDC needs to persevere on its advocacy activities concerning river basin management to overcome this barrier and achieve a political environment by which the benefits of cooperation and coordination are recognized at both the lower and higher level administrative units.
- *Gaining political legitimacy as an institution*. The ARBDC is constantly confronted with the question of its relevance as a resource management structure, particularly among law-makers. This puts into light the lack of appreciation as to the benefits of setting in place institutional structures for river basin management. The ARBDC is working for its transformation into an Authority through a legislative action in order to lend stability to its existence as an institution and to expand its scope of responsibility, influence and accountability to meet the institutional requirements for a decisive river basin planning and management of the Agno River Basin.

Financing

- The present sources of funds for the implementation of the Agno River Basin Master Plan are from the national and local government units. Given the budgetary constraints being felt at all levels of the bureaucracy, alternative fund sources need to be explored. A potential source being looked at is from the private sector. The ARBDC is then expanding its advocacy to gain the support of the private sector and build an attractive environment for their involvement in natural resource management.