

The Philippine CASA Review Process: A Brief History

In 1996, a global effort to press for a critical review of structural adjustment programs (SAPs) began taking shape, spearheaded by several international and national organizations. The Freedom from Debt Coalition (FDC) of the Philippines became a major national player in this effort.

The effort was first directed towards challenging the World Bank to do a joint review with civil society organizations. The WB eventually agreed with the condition that national governments would be involved as well. The process would be a trilateral review between civil society, the WB and governments — to be conducted in 10 countries representative of various regions and types of economies. It was named SAPRI or the Structural Adjustment Participatory Review Initiative.

The Philippines was one of 10 countries initially chosen for the SAPRI exercise. In 1997, after a long period of vague responses to invitations, the Philippine government finally decided in 1997 that it would not participate. This removed an important WB precondition for SAPRI— participation of national governments— thus making the Philippines ineligible for the exercise.

From the beginning, FDC was committed to pursue a Philippine SAP review process with or without the WB and the government. There were other countries that were excluded from the SAPRI because their governments also refused to participate. Civil society groups from these countries expressed similar commitment to go ahead and conduct a SAP review process led by NGOs and people's organizations. The global civil society steering committee of the SAPRI Network (SAPRIN) then decided that the national efforts particularly in the Philippines, Mexico, Brazil and Argentina be linked together in a global SAP review exercise parallel to that of SAPRI. This parallel review spearheaded mainly by civil society was eventually named CASA — the Citizens Assessment of Structural Adjustment.

To assert equal legitimacy with the SAPRI process and to incorporate its positive elements, it was agreed that CASA follow as closely as possible and as feasible the standard operating procedures and methodology of Sapri, including ensuring the broadest possible participation of civil society and working with branches of government that are open to participating or contributing to the review. The cooperation of other international institutions like the United Nations was also to be explored.

The Philippine CASA process started on October 23, 1997 with a meeting of about 15 national networks, NGOs and grassroots organizations, which agreed to pursue the following initial objectives:

- ❑ Undertake popular education on Structural Adjustment Programs and multilateral financial institutions;
- ❑ Conduct a common study and evaluation of the Philippine SAP experience; subject current economic policies to a critical review; look at the impact of SAP on the vulnerable sectors of society.
- ❑ Trace the relationship of SAP to the recurring boom-bust cycles of the Philippine economy;

- ❑ Understand current strategies and changing roles of the WB and the International Monetary Fund (IMF);
- ❑ Look at the impact of SAP on the role of the state in the economy; and,
- ❑ Press for alternative economic policies and strategies.

Operational procedures and the methodology of the Philippine CASA review process were also established, modeled as nearly as possible on the SAPRI process, which was seen to have many positive elements and features. The consensus was for CASA to be undertaken by the broadest possible network of organizations (NGO, PO or coalitions thereof), and for the process to be implemented nationwide. In terms of methodology, it was also agreed that the process be based on actual and concrete experiences told by people in public fora.

Eleven organizations attending the October 23 meeting agreed to be Convenors of the First National Assembly of CASA Philippines, which was held March 18-19, 1998 in Baguio City. These organizations were the Alliance of Concerned Teachers-Philippines, a national organization of public and private school teachers and professors); the Alliance of Progressive Labor (a national alliance of trade union groups); Freedom from Debt Coalition (a national coalition on debt, SAPs and other economic issues); Kanlungan (an NGO for migrant labor advocacies and services); Movement for Popular Democracy (a political organization); National Peace Conference (a network of sectoral and issue-based groups); Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (a national alliance of human rights groups, programs and advocates); Philippine Network of Rural Development Institutions (a nationwide network of local initiatives on rural development, cooperatives, etc.); Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement (a national NGO); Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (a nationwide NGO and mission partner of the Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines); and, WomanHealth Network (a national alliance of women's groups concerned with health issues).

The agenda of the First National Assembly was as follows:

1. Initial leveling off on SAP through study and discussion workshops and plenary presentations;
2. Consensus-building on the framework, methodology, and priority issues or themes to be addressed;
3. Formation of the Philippine Steering Committee; and,
4. Planning for the Philippine CASA process.

Six thematic working groups were formed to address specific areas to be studied for impact of structural adjustment. These were:

- ❑ SAP and social services
- ❑ Gender and SAPs
- ❑ SAPs and labor and industry
- ❑ SAPs, agrarian reform, rural development and food security
- ❑ SAP, environment and indigenous peoples
- ❑ State, macroeconomy and SAPs

A CASA Steering Committee was also formed composed of representatives from these thematic working groups and geographical areas (NCR, Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao), members-at-large and FDC as the lead organization. The members of the Steering Committee are:

Lead organization: Freedom from Debt Coalition

Thematic working groups:

SAP and social services — ACT Philippines

Gender and SAPs—KRUZ-ANAWIM

SAPs and labor and industry—SPP

SAPs, rural development and food security—Philnet-RDI

SAP, Environment and Indigenous Peoples—TriPeaceDev-West Mindanao

State, macroeconomy and SAPs—BISIG

Members-at-large:

Task Force Detainees of the Philippines

Institute for Popular Democracy

Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates

WomanHealth

DECS Employees Union

PSLink

Regional representatives:

Luzon—Upland Development Institute (Cordilleras)

Visayas—FDC Cebu

Mindanao—FDC Zamboanga and Western Mindanao

As outlined by the First National Assembly, the Philippine CASA process has the following components:

- ❑ Popular education/economic literacy on SAPs and the economy among grassroots organizations and communities

CASA will hold educational activities for grassroots organizations and communities to enable participants to make the linkages between national and macroeconomic policies and their everyday realities. Educational activities will also help empower participants in advocacy and campaign efforts.

- ❑ Public forums and assemblies led by civil society

The main component of the CASA process, these will involve a National Opening Forum (public), followed by regional Forums, Thematic Conferences and finally, a National Closing Forum where the results of the assessment will be synthesized. The Forums will be venues for communities, peoples' organizations, and citizens' groups to discuss and testify as to the impact of SAPs on their lives. The Forums will involve the broad participation of civil society. The initial CASA network shall reach out to other groups and organizations and help expand the

participating organizations and entities. National and local government officials and offices will be invited into the process.

- Research, which will involve the following:
 - Survey, integration, synthesis of existing researches and studies on Philippines SAPs;
 - Contributions from ongoing research initiatives from participating organizations;
 - Conduct of new research work in behalf of CASA
- Government inquiries into SAPs, with the participation and cooperation of civil society

There are strong possibilities that the Philippine Congress will conduct inquiries into SAPs, with the help of legislators who work closely with civil society.

- Linking with and initiating campaign and advocacy efforts to promote policy alternatives and popular intervention in decision-making.

The outcome of CASA will be circulated and disseminated through media, publications, and popular education. While the assessment itself is already a campaign process, the CASA network will link up with as well as initiate more vigorous campaign efforts during and after the assessment proper.

There were repeated attempts in 1998 to lobby for government's participation in the SAPRI. When these failed, Philippine civil society, with FDC as lead, decided to proceed with the exercise as CASA.

In 1999, the thematic working groups further streamlined the policy issues to be addressed by the CASA review, to wit:

- Impact of trade liberalization on labor in terms of rate of employment or unemployment; manner of employment; gender and employment; and, wages (rate; levels relative to cost of living; etc.)
- Impact of trade liberalization on food security in terms of size of croplands and land conversion; cost of production; productivity; livelihood of small farmers; access to food by urban and rural poor; allocation and consumption within the household; role of women in ensuring food for the the family
- Impact of privatization and budget policies on delivery of basic services by the state and the role of women in compensating for reductions in health, education, women's programs and basic utility services.
- Impact of the liberalization of markets on the environment and the rights of indigenous peoples, with focus on SAP policies that led to the passage of the Mining Act
- The role of multilaterals in Philippine economic policy-making and their impact in terms of changes in state and market relations.

The following reports summarize the researches into the effects of specific SAP policies on various economic and political sectors in the Philippines, bringing to the fore their most

important findings in order to give a substantive sense of the impacts of SAPs on people, communities and the environment.