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A RESEARCH STUDY: IMPLEMENTATION EFFECTIVENESS OF FREE IRRIGATION SERVICE ACT IN MASALIP RIVER IRRIGATION SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT----------
This study explored the implementation effectiveness of FISA (R.A. 10969), reviews and examines the impacts, implementation considerations, and implications of free irrigation services in the Masalip River Irrigation System, particularly within the context of Agoo, Aringay, Sto. Tomas, and Tubao.

The NIA personnel particularly the IDO's have satisfactorily made their duties efficiently for they have helped many farmers in the application of their FISA's. While they demonstrated commendable performance in daily operations and during field, improvement was needed in by facilitating seminars to farmers to cater for their questions and queries about its scope and policies.

The implementation of FISA observed as "highly effective" in delivering water service delivery to farmers it includes monitoring and evaluating its service by gathering feedbacks for its improvement.

KEYWORDS: *Effectiveness of FISA, Funding support, efficient water service delivery, irrigation service development*

INTRODUCTION

Irrigation is the artificial application of water to land. Land requires irrigation before it is possible to use it for any agricultural production. Irrigation is a means to supplement rainfall and serves to increase crop produce. Irrigation in the Philippines is primarily managed by the National Irrigation Administration (NIA), consists of National (NIS), Communal (CIS), and Private systems, aimed at boosting rice production.

Irrigation in La Union managed by the NIA Region 1 and the La Union Irrigation Management Office, supports agriculture through key infrastructures like the 3,252-hectare Amburayan RIS in the north and the 1,475-hectare Masalip RIS in the south. Modernization efforts include new solar-powered systems to combat dry spells and reduce energy costs for rice and vegetable farmers. A 1989 study by Reyes and Jopelle (often cited alongside work by researchers like Ferguson or David in Philippine Institute for Development Studies documents) analyzed the performance and management of national irrigation systems in the Philippines, highlighting significant gaps between designed irrigation capacity and actual service delivery. Masalip River Irrigation System plays an important role as one of the National Irrigation System (NIS) in La Union. It uses an Ogee-type diversion dam for water management and supports over 3,300 farmers in Tubao, Agoo, Aringay, and Sto. Tomas. The implementation of FISA somehow made the life of farmers bearable for it serves through giving sufficient irrigation service for free to small land owners. La Union's agricultural landscape relies on a mix of traditional and modern irrigation systems.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND STUDIES

The Free Irrigation Service Act (FISA) RA 10969 is significant for it is created solely to help our farmers. Aiming in providing free irrigation services to farmers. This act seeks to lessen the financial burden on financial expenses, instead of spending on ISF they can now allocate their money to something that can actually help them maximize crop produce. It also promotes increased productivity and food security. Related studies go through into various aspects of this Republic Act, from its economic impact to its implementation challenges and benefits. It is an evaluation of the effects of irrigation projects in general and rice farming in particular, given the significance of the relationship between irrigation and farm productivity in the context of growing water scarcity. Additionally, there is no data on the effects of efficiency based on Stochastic Production Frontier (SPF) models (Njuki and Bravo-Ureta, 2018, World Bank,

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2011). By assessing the effects of the Irrigated Rice Production Enhancement Project (IRPEP) for small land holders, this study contributes to the limited body of knowledge and seeks to influence future initiatives and policies.

Through increased and more consistent food production, changes in agriculture during the past century have significantly increased food security. However, the management of water in agriculture has led to extensive changes in the land cover with watercourses, contributed to the degradation of ecosystems, and jeopardized the processes that sustain ecosystems and provide a variety of ecosystem services that are vital to human well-being (Malin et al., 2007).

METHODS

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research presents methodologies employed in conducting the survey to show the effectiveness of Free Irrigation Service Act in the town of Agoo, Aringay, Sto. Tomas, and Tubao it is carefully assessed in this quantitative study. It covers the description of the respondents, research instrument used in gathering data and procedure.

By employing a quantitative approach, this study explores in the effectiveness of FISA implementation and the development of service area in Masalip RIS. It aims to understand the challenges and problems encountered between farmers that serves as tenants and land owners.

DESCRIPTION OF RESPONDENTS

This research targeted the farmers in Masalip RIS preferably those who are already a beneficiary of FISA. A sample of 50 farmers in four different towns has participated in this research. All respondents were informed that all collected data will remain confidential and will only used for educational purposes only.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

The conduction of this research involved the use of a questionnaire made by the researcher. The study also will involve document reviews, and interviews to IDO's, which was used as a guide for the researcher. All questions were properly prepared, so as for the researcher to have the suitable questions for its respondents and bring satisfaction to its research objectives. The tool was also translated into Filipino to ensure greater understanding on to the questions given.

VALIDATION OF THE INSTRUMENT

In validating my research instrument, I did a series of questions and various kind of survey questionnaire that answers the objective of this research. I have asked in our agency who has expertise in doing so, I used content validation to ensure that the instrument I will be using is aligned in to the specific objectives of my own research. This helps me in identifying which questions I needed to add or remove for me to be able to arrive in my goals in conducting this research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This presents a policy-focused review of the impacts, implementation considerations, and implications of free irrigation services in La Union particularly Agoo, Aringay, Tubao, and Sto. Tomas. It is structured to support in working to improve agricultural productivity, equity, and service delivery.

The Free Irrigation Service Act is designed to reduce the direct cost burden on farmers, improve access to irrigation water, and strengthen agricultural resilience in communities that depend on consistent water delivery. In practical terms, it shifts irrigation from a cost center borne by irrigators to a public service supported through government financing and administrative coordination.

In La Union, where farm households often operate under tight margins and weather variability can quickly affect yields, the policy's value lies not only in cost relief but also in predictability. When irrigation fees are removed or reduced, farmers may redirect scarce resources toward seeds, fertilizer, labor, or household needs. That can improve farm viability, especially for smaller producers.

The policy also carries governance implications. Free service require transparent eligibility rules, strong local implementation capacity, and dependable maintenance systems. Without these, benefits can be uneven, and the intended productivity gains may be weakened by infrastructure decline or poor coordination between agencies, irrigators' associations, and local governments.

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Key findings on expected benefit of FISA:

1. *Lower production costs.* Removing irrigation fees can improve net farm income, particularly for rice growers with limited cash flow.
2. *Broader service access.* Households that previously rationed water use or skipped service due to cost are more likely to participate consistently.
3. *Greater equity.* Fee relief can be especially important for tenant farmers, smallholders, and women-managed farms that face higher vulnerability to input shocks.
4. *Potential yield stability.* More reliable irrigation supports cropping calendars, reduces drought stress, and can improve planting confidence during critical growth periods.

The strongest policy case is not that free irrigation alone transforms agriculture, but that it creates room for better farm management when paired with reliable water delivery, responsive maintenance, and extension support.

CONCLUSION

Free irrigation service act is not only about removing irrigation service fees. It is about whether irrigation can function as a public good that stabilizes production, reduces input pressure on farmers, and improves equity for small land owners. In provinces like La Union, where agricultural livelihoods are highly sensitive to climate variability and rising costs, irrigation support can become a decisive factor in whether farmers remain viable. A strong conclusion recognizes that the act's value is measured not by its headline promise alone, but by its ability to convert public spending into real agricultural resilience.

Free irrigation reduces direct operating expenses for farmers and can improve net farm income. Moreover, reliable water access helps farmers plan planting schedules and reduce crop stress during dry periods.

Smaller farms gain proportionally more because irrigation costs are removed for land owners with 8ha. This act is a sigh of relief, when irrigation becomes publicly supported, several benefits tend to appear together. Farmers experience lower cash outlays, local production systems become more stable, and government gains a more visible role in agricultural risk reduction. These gains are especially important in regions where farmers face thin margins and repeated shocks from weather, pests, or price fluctuations.

For local governments and implementing agencies, the act can also serve as a signal that irrigation is being treated as foundational agricultural infrastructure rather than an optional service. That shift matters because it can alter planning priorities, budget allocations, and maintenance responsibility.

The central lesson is that "free" does not mean "costless." Irrigation systems still require operation, maintenance, coordination, and accountability. If the service is not paired with dependable institutional arrangements, the policy can weaken over time through underfunded canals, inefficient distribution, or disputes over access. In practice, the success of the act depends on how well local institutions translate policy intent into daily water delivery.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The implementation of free irrigation service carries significance because irrigation directly affects the daily realities of agricultural work. When water service is accessible, farmers are better positioned in managing their fields with confidence and consistency. This can help create more stable growing conditions and reduce avoidable operational strain.

It highlights the broader value of public support for agriculture. Reliable irrigation service can contribute to a stronger farming environment and reinforce the role of local production in community livelihoods. For La Union, this means treating irrigation as a priority investment rather than a secondary concern.

For policymakers, the next step is to protect financing and strengthen oversight. For NGOs and stakeholders, the priority is to help communities monitor service quality and sustain collective responsibility. If these conditions are met, the act can become a durable instrument for agricultural resilience in La Union particularly in Masalip River Irrigation System.

Post-implementation of the Free Irrigation Service Act (FISA) in La Union requires shifting focus toward sustaining infrastructure and strengthening Irrigators' Associations (IAs) to ensure long-term functionality and a commitment

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towards a more productive cropping year ahead. Key actions include establishing regular maintenance schedules, implementing water-saving technologies, conducting capacity-building trainings, and monitoring performance to ensure the system is operating efficiently without the previously collected fees.

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