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Issues and constraints in accelerating irrigation development in the Philippines

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The rate of irrigation development in the Philippines has been alarmingly slow. The level of irrigation development in terms of the ratio of actual to the total potential irrigable area of 3,019,609 hectares increased from 45.2% in 1985 to only 60.35% in 2017 (NIA, 2017). As a result the country has resorted to rice importation for many years to address food security instead of boosting self-sufficiency for a more inclusive economic growth. This paper aims to identify various issues and constraints associated with irrigation development in the Philippines and formulate policy recommendations for accelerated irrigation development in the country. Numerous related data and information regarding irrigation were collected and analyzed. Key informant interviews (KII) and focus group discussion (FGD) were conducted with the engineering staff of the National Irrigation Administration and Irrigator's Association in various regions result suggest that irrigation development is constrained by a multitude of factors ranging from engineering and technical, including lack of adequate and reliable hydrologic data for proper irrigation system planning and design; lack of site-specific design criteria; lack of sustained comprehensive research on water resources and irrigation; inadequate watershed and aquifer protection; competing land and water uses, among others to institutional and policy issues and most notably NIA's rationalization plan. Results also showed over estimation of irrigable areas leading to eventual suboptimal irrigation performance and deterioration. Results of this study may be used by policy makers and irrigation development planners to enhance food security in the Philippines.

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