

**Upland Development Programme in Southern
Mindanao (UDP)**

Project No ALA – 97/68

**Report on a study to develop an Agricultural Market
Information Service for UDP Beneficiaries**

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Mission Details

Name of Project	Upland Development Programme in Southern Mindanao – UDP
Project Reference	ALA – 97/68
Country	Philippines
Duty Station	Davao City
Duration	2 man-months
Report Title	Report on a study to develop an Agricultural Market Information Service for UDP Beneficiaries
Objectives	To advise project management on the feasibility of establishing an Agricultural Marketing Information Service
By	Discussions at the PMO and PPO level, discussions with other interested parties and field visits and reviewing performance of other AMIS
ToR	<p>The duties of the specialist will be to conduct a study on the feasibility of establishing an agricultural market information system (AMIS) in selected areas of southern Mindanao.</p> <p>Faced with the outcome of this study the specialist would advise project management on whether to proceed with the proposed AMIS. The report will also make recommendations on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • who should the AMIS serve • which commodities are to be included in the AMIS • which areas are to be surveyed • what information should be included in the AMIS • frequency of information collection • form of information to be disseminated • frequency of information dissemination • most appropriate means of information collection • most appropriate means of information dissemination • future development of the AMIS including its possible integration with a national AMIS • estimated cost of operation
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1. Executive Summary

The UDP Project proposal identified lack of market information as a major constraint in achieving market led agricultural development. To address this constraint an input from an agricultural market information specialist was included in the Global Work Plan. The first two month mission was conducted from May to July and this is the report on that study.

Commodity production in the area is largely to meet subsistence needs with occasional surpluses being sold. There is some production of industrial commodities and small livestock. Some communities have moved beyond subsistence farming and produce commercial crops.

The marketing of produce is largely in the hands of the private sector with traditional relationships playing a dominant role in marketing activities. There is not much competition between traders in particular areas, with many enjoying more or less monopolistic conditions. Public sector support is largely confined to the provision of some infrastructure and some local ad hoc initiatives. Most government services are not aimed at or do not reach the upland communities. There are a number of important market centres in Southern Mindanao but not all are in the programme area. Marketing infrastructure, including roads, transport and post harvest facilities is generally very poor. Farmers are frequently indebted to local traders thus limiting their market options further.

There is little development of producer organisations. While there are a number of successful lowland co-operatives few of these are organised in upland areas.

The Bureau of Agricultural Statistics (BAS) collects and broadcasts wholesale grain and copra prices and Durian prices during peak season. It has little control however over the timing or content of broadcasts which are often included with retail price information. An AMIS which will operate at a macro level is currently being developed by the Mindanao Business Council, BAS and Growth with Equity in Mindanao (GEM). UDP is examining the possibility of supplying computer expertise to this initiative.

The history of AMIS in the developing world is generally not good with many services being starved for funds as a result of being over designed, budgetary cutbacks and withdrawal of donor support. Many do not supply commercially useful information to the target groups, the producers.

If farmers are to undertake market led production they must have market information. The challenge therefore for UDP is to design a sustainable and commercially useful AMIS. To achieve this, innovative approaches must be tried and tested. Data must be in a useful form which is readily understood by the beneficiaries. The nature and scope of

information needs to be assessed with follow up studies to validate. The system must be able to operate using existing resources.

Market information, which is mainly concerned with price information, should be distinguished from marketing information which encompasses a much broader range of information.

There is no guarantee that a sustainable and commercially useful AMIS can be developed but with careful planning and avoiding the temptation to over design or trying to include too much, especially at the beginning, the chances for success can be greatly increased. Project management should regularly review progress and make changes where necessary and discontinue the operation if it is not being effective or sustainable.

Because of the potential benefit of good market information to UDP beneficiaries the overall recommendation is that the development of an AMIS should be attempted.

2. Background to the mission

The UDP Project Preparation Report describes the immediate objectives of the programme (the purpose) inter alia

(1) (b) upland communities producing new marketable surpluses through sustainable market led agricultural development.

The proposal goes on to outline what they perceived as some of the main problems and constraints in achieving this purpose. These include:

- limited access to information about markets for existing and other potential crops;
- limited physical access to markets;
- failure to penetrate markets due to lack of producer and/or marketing organisations;
- limited use of post harvest processing to add value;
- low investment in perennial crops.

To address these issues a Marketing and Enterprise component was included in the project design.

The report further recommended that an agricultural marketing information system be established, and included a substantial sum in the overall budget for the establishment of such a service.

In his initial input the Agribusiness Specialist concurred that there were serious deficiencies in the marketing of upland products and that independent and verifiable market information was not being received systematically or regularly by upland communities. As part of the strategy to address this an input from an agricultural marketing information specialist was included in the Global Work Plan. The terms of reference of this specialist are outlined below. The first two month input of the specialist was scheduled for the year 2000 and was conducted in June and July and this is the report on that mission.

3. Overall approach and methodology

As a first input the consultant:

- Prepared “An Overview of the Theory and Operation of Agricultural Market Information Services”. This is produced as a separate document to accompany this report and it:
 - outlines the theoretical basis and justification for an AMIS.
 - defines an AMIS and outlines the differences between *market* and a *marketing* information
 - defines different categories of market information
 - reviews experiences with agricultural market information services in general
 - discusses guidelines for setting up and operating an AMIS

- Field visits to communities in each of the five provinces where interviews were conducted with farmers and key community members and LGU staff.

- The provincial managers identified a representative sample of communities in each province and through PRA collected qualitative information on farmers attitudes and perceptions of market information systems. The commodities of immediate interest and the areas considered most relevant for price information to be collected from were identified.

- Discussions were held with the provincial managers and other technical staff to analyse the results of the PRA.

- Discussions were held with the Bureau of Agricultural Statistics (BAS)

- A number of meetings were held with the USAID funded Growth with Equity in Mindanao (GEM).

4. Current Situation

4.1. The Production System

While all communities where UDP will operate have not been profiled yet it is obvious that there will be quite a cross-section represented. Some generalisations can be made. Crop production is largely to meet subsistence needs with occasional surpluses being sold. The main subsistence crop is corn.

There is some production of industrial commodities. In many of the less elevated areas copra production is the major source of cash income from crops and at higher altitudes abaca fibre production is practiced.

In some areas charcoal production from ipil-ipil is a major source of income. Charcoal is also produced from coconut shells in some areas.

Coffee is also produced, mainly for Nestle. Rubber production is also promoted in some areas.

There is some small livestock production.

In most of the upland communities "commercial" agriculture is not practiced.

Some communities however have advanced beyond this subsistence level and are now producing cash crops such as banana (native varieties), mango, durian, jackfruit and other fruits. Where elevation is suitable there is some production of temperate vegetables.

4.2. The marketing system

The marketing of produce is in the hands of the private sector. Public sector support is largely confined to the provision of municipal market sites, some market information and a limited extension service to offer advice on marketing. There are some other intervention at LGU level but these tend to be on an ad hoc and very localised basis and are more often the result of actions by individuals in public life rather than part of a comprehensive or coordinated plan or policy.

There are a number of marketing options available to the farmer, the most common of which are:

- Farmers bring their produce to local assembly markets where they sell to traders;
- Traders buy at or near the farm gate - this function may be carried out by an agent of the trader;
- Traders buy the crop in the field;

- Farmers may send produce on consignment to traders in larger more distant markets;
- There are a limited number of trading co-ops which trade produce on behalf of the members, but these are largely confined to the lowlands;

There are a number of market centres in region XI. These vary in importance and function. Some markets perform a purely retail function while others combine both wholesale and retail. Retail markets also vary in their size and relative importance. The main wholesale markets of Davao City, General Santos City and Tagum while located in the region are actually outside of the project area. Other important market centers include Toril, Digos, Mati, Koronadal, Nabuturan, Caraga, Cateel.

While in theory there are a number of marketing options open to producers, in practice this does not appear to be the case. There are a number of reasons for this including cultural, logistical and financial.

Generally speaking there is not much competition between traders in particular areas and many traders seem to enjoy more or less monopolistic conditions in their area of operation. While economic theory tells us that monopoly situations are anti-competitive and that they distort the market, in some cases it may still be the optimum solution. Many areas cannot support a multitude of small traders and the only way that any scale economies can be achieved is by single traders. There are dangers of course in this situation and the monopolist may indeed try to abuse that power. One way of mediating this would be to provide independent price information.

The lack of commercial quantities which would justify individuals in organising transport to bring produce to markets further afield means that farmers have no economic alternative to selling to the local trader.

The age-old Philippino relationship of *utang na loob* or *debt of gratitude* is very important in Philippine culture and often tends to bind trading relationships even though the benefits often appear very one-sided. To outsiders this may seem a strange system and one that works to the disadvantage of producers. This may be the case but it is not necessarily proven. It should also be remembered that this is deeply rooted in culture and culture develops slowly over time and is very resistant to change. Programme interventions should be aimed at improving the relative position of the farmer within this system rather than trying to radically alter the system.

Frequently farmers are indebted to traders who have given them credit for inputs or have supplied consumables on credit on condition that produce is sold back to them.

In some cases the relationship with traders would appear to be even more complex and binding. Some interviews conducted by the consultant, while not establishing the exact nature of these have shown that even where producers know of better prices on offer within reasonable distances they do not bring produce to these outlets. This would suggest that there are other factors operating in some communities that need further investigation and analysis.

In some cases the only form of transport available locally is owned by the trader, and while the service is not supplied free (indeed charges are often very high) it will only be supplied to transport produce that is pledged to the trader.

Most of the farmers also have lacked the skills and knowledge to venture further afield to market their produce. Very often the convenience of the local trader and immediate cash payment is an overriding concern with producers.

4.3. Producer organisations

There is very little development of producer organizations in the project area (uplands). There are some successful lowland co-ops but hardly any of these have any involvement in the uplands.

4.4. Current situation with AMIS in the region

BAS operates a price collection service but this is confined to a limited number of commodities and they are experiencing difficulties in data transmission. They gather wholesale price data on rice, corn and copra three times a week. Durian fruit prices are collected during peak season. Prices are broadcast daily on radio but BAS have no control on how the information is broadcast and retail prices are broadcast at the same time.

4.4.1. Current developments

An AMIS is currently being designed with inputs from BAS, the Mindanao Business Council and GEM (the USAID funded growth with equity in Mindanao Project) who are co-ordinating this activity.

The proposal is that MBC will operate a subscription service giving price information on a range of selected vegetables and fruits in a number of market centres in the Philippines. The commodities are: tomato, potato, carrots, bell pepper, cabbage, Chinese pechay, cauliflower and plastic pepper. The centers are Davao City, Cagayan de Oro, General Santos City, Zamboango, Cotobato City, Butuan, Cebu, Iloilo, Bacolod, Tagbilaran, Benguet. A number of fruits including banana, mango, durian and jackfruit are also included. It is proposed that the Bureau of Agricultural Statistics (BAS) would collect

price information three times per week and that this would be submitted via the Internet to Davao where it would be processed and disseminated.

A number of meetings have been held between UDP personnel and GEM and BAS. It is recommended that the management information systems specialist from UDP would design their information system which would capture this data and enter it into a database. From this database information could be abstracted and disseminated. Such data could also be analysed for time series trends. UDP are examining an off-the-shelf software package which can be used for this purpose. It is recommended that only a software package which is available in the Philippines and which can be serviced locally should be considered. It is recommended that as part of the development and testing of a model that budgetary provision be made to engage the management information specialists for three short inputs per year over the next two to three years in order to work on the development of the system and training of programme and LGU personnel as needs evolve and the feasibility or otherwise becomes more apparent. In return for its services UDP should be considered as a consortium member and have free access to the data.

Due to the difficulties often associated with collecting wholesale prices it is proposed to collect retail buying price and to discount this back to arrive at the price paid to producers.

This is undoubtedly the easiest way to collect prices but the interpretation of such price data is open to error. In the initial stages at least, considerable effort should be devoted to validating the discounting mechanism and after that it should be validated on a regular basis. If this method proves to be sufficiently accurate it can also be used to collect prices in smaller markets in the UDP area.

4.4.2. Justification for UDP involvement with this initiative

This BAS/MBC/GEM/UDP initiative must be seen as being more on the macro level and not as directly relevant to UDP beneficiaries as might be considered ideal. There are valid reasons though why UDP should become involved in this:

- it provides an opportunity to develop and test a system where price information is being collected and transmitted by electronic means
- the prices that are gathered can be analysed for price trends and for frequency in the variation of prices - this will be useful in determining the desired frequency of price collection
- UDP can use the information to help develop and test its system of data transmission
- it is developing expertise within UDP

- it should help to insure compatibility between different AMIS which might be developed, as if this system is developed correctly it should become the standard

4.5.

5. Setting up an AMIS in the UDP area

In the accompanying paper “An Overview of the Theory and Operation of Agricultural Market Information Services” the theoretical justification for AMIS has been analysed in some detail; the difference between market and marketing information; current and historical market information has been defined and distinguished; the history of AMIS has been briefly outlined and some guidelines on establishing an AMIS have been outlined.

From that discussion it can be concluded that the establishment and operation of a viable and sustainable market information system is not an easy task and there does not appear to be any model which can be readily and easily adapted in the UDP Project area.

Given these difficulties the question must be asked “should UDP attempt to set up an AMIS?”

UDP sets out as one of its fundamental objectives the improvement of income amongst upland farmers by the adoption of market led production. Market led can be defined as using market information in order to make decisions on which commodities to produce, when to produce them and for which markets.

If farmers are to make market led decisions it follows from the above that they must have market information. **For decision-making purposes historical market information is necessary.**

When decisions have been made on commodity selection and production has begun current market information is used to:

Decide on which market or markets product should be shipped to or as will most likely be the case with most UDP participants as an aid to negotiating better prices with local traders.

The decision therefore at this point is not so much on whether to proceed with the development of an AMIS but on how to proceed.

Given the history of AMIS a new approach must be adopted by UDP if a useful and sustainable system is to be developed.

As the basic aim of UDP is to develop and test a replicable model in upland communities the same approach of developing and testing a replicable model should be adopted in the development of an agricultural market information system.

The primary objective therefore should not be the roll out of a single AMIS package to cover all target communities in all Municipalities and giving information on all commodities covered by the programme. The approach should be that after an in-depth study of a representative sample of covered communities various information packages should be developed and tested. The type of information to be collected, the frequency of collection, the geographical area from which information should be collected, the commodities on which information should be collected and any other data considered relevant should be established. When information is collected how it should be packaged for delivery to the target communities in an understandable and useable way needs to be determined. How the information should be disseminated needs to be established. On this latter point tracing studies need to be conducted to test if the information is actually getting through to the target audience and if it is, is that understood and is it regarded as being beneficial.

5.1. Price Collection

5.1.1. Where should prices be collected from?

Of most importance to producers is that point of first exchange. If farmers know what the prices being offered at that point are then they are in a better position to gauge whether the prices that they themselves are being offered is the going rate for that time and that point in the marketing chain. If the prices quoted are in markets too far removed or too many steps down the line in the marketing chain it can be difficult for farmers to estimate how those prices should relate to farm gate or local market centre prices. Here we face a dilemma. The collection of farm gate prices can be very difficult, prohibitively costly, and time consuming. In addition where farms are widely scattered and at varying distances from market centres the cost of getting product from farm to markets will vary. The problem is further exacerbated if the farmers from whom information is being collected do not supply on a regular basis. It would appear to be more feasible to collect information at market centres or at wholesale markets, especially if these are not too far removed from the farm gate, and to train extension officers to help farmers to interpret these prices and work them back to farm gate level. Periodically it could be useful to

check on farm gate prices and see how they relate to wholesale market prices. This should be done to validate the extension agents/farmers price interpretation.

For many farmers in UDP areas price information from nearer home, perhaps at local assembly centers, may be more relevant. The system being designed by UDP will allow for information from smaller and more local markets or market centres to be input into the system. The system will also allow for analysis and for price tracking.

It should be clear from what is said above that price collection will inevitably be a compromise between an ideal system and what is practical and within the available resources. So long as it is recognised that some compromises have to be made and that suitable allowances and adjustments can be made so that the intrinsic accuracy and usefulness of the information is not compromised this trade-off should not be a problem.

It should also be remembered that at the present status of most of the target groups that indicative prices are likely to be sufficiently accurate. As the production and marketing system improves and experience is gained it should be possible to refine the system further.

5.1.2. Who should collect price information.

This is the area that is most prone to error and where most expense is involved.

At the macro level BAS would appear to be the obvious choice and this is what is proposed. At the micro level alternatives will need to be employed.

One possibility is that at the micro level the LGUs could perform this function and even where some markets of interest are outside the programme area the help of the LGU in those areas could be enlisted in return for sharing information.

An innovative approach tried at SMISLE in the latter stages of the project, whereby the community members collected prices for commodities of interest during harvest time showed considerable promise.

Whoever collects prices it must be done using existing resources in order for it to be sustainable. There is a temptation to propose that in order to kick start the operation the

project would fund this information collection initially and transfer the cost at a later date but experience shows that this does not happen.

If any market information Service is to operate successfully in the programme area for the benefit of the target groups it must be done using existing public resources.

5.2.

This may mean that the service might not be as comprehensive or as detailed as would be considered an ideal.

But it is not an ideal world and very often what is achievable will be a trade-off between many conflicting demands which must be matched to available resources both in terms of finance and manpower.

5.2.1. Data processing and analysis

It should also be taken as given that for a market information system to be useful and particularly for the analysis of historical and seasonal price trends data should be stored in a form that lends itself to the generation of a variety of different reports. Some type of data base programme is necessary to provide this flexibility. Spreadsheets no matter how elaborate they are, are not suitable for this type of work.

UDP will evaluate market information system software programmes that are commercially available in the Philippines. With the help of the management information systems specialist this evaluation will be done and recommendations made on what other inputs are necessary to generate the type of reports required.

It is likely that future inputs will be required from the information systems specialist in order to set up the system and to modify it or refine it as considered necessary in the light of future experience.

The envisaged system will be able to produce reports tailored to individual needs if required.

5.2.2. Price disseminating

This system being envisaged will be capable of producing tailor-made reports for individual communities if this is required. If an area is only interested in the prices of a

selected number of products in specific market centres this system will be capable of producing these reports automatically.

While Radio is regarded as the most useful way for distributing information over a wide area and to people living in relatively inaccessible and remote areas it cannot be taken for granted that this service will always be available as a public service. If radio stations are broadcasting prices at no charge the disseminating agencies usually have very little control over how the prices are broadcast or at what time. If price information is to be focused more narrowly radio is not the best way to do it as it is unlikely that the radio stations will broadcast specific packages for specific areas. Timing of broadcasts are also very important. Mixing up retail and wholesale prices should also be avoided.

Alternative methods of dissemination should be tried and evaluated. Depending on communications information packages could be distributed electronically either by telephone, fax, e-mail or two way radio or a combination of two or more of these media. Where circumstances permit each of these media should be tested and the results evaluated.

One area of price dissemination which is often overlooked is testing how successful the media are at reaching the target audience, how well the message has been understood and how useful it proves to be. When dissemination starts surveys should be conducted to test this. If the information is being received and understood but is not proving to be useful by reasons why should be investigated and corrective action taken if it can be identified. The reasons for this failure to impact can be many and varied. It may be that the wrong information is being delivered or that some other constraints need to be addressed first. If however some constraints are insurmountable and AMIS can be of no practical benefit there is no point in continuing with it.

All communities are not in the same state of readiness for a market information system or require the same level of information. This presents an ideal opportunity to develop different information packages and to study how a market information system could benefit different upland communities.

6. Some final points to be considered

Just because a project proposal identifies a need for an information system is no guarantee that a suitable system can be designed and operated and that must be recognised. Given the history of other AMIS the the odds are not in favour of project intervention in this area being successful.

The chances of success however can be greatly improved if there is a realistic assessment made of the resources available and likely to be available in the future.

Services tend to be over-designed and over-ambitious. This is indicative of a failure to make a realistic appraisal of the capacity and the resources of the implementing agencies and unrealistic expectations of resource allocation in the future.

The system should be under designed rather than over designed. Setting up an AMIS should be regarded in the same way as setting up any other enterprise and the same type of business planning process should be gone through. The steps outlined in the enterprise development manual should be followed .

The main thrust of Project involvement in the development of an AMIS should be focused on developing and testing methodologies for delivering market information and on measuring the impact which it has on improving the relative position of upland farmers in the marketing chain.

It must also be emphasised that an agricultural market information Service is or should be for the benefit of producers.

It is important for programme management to realise that one of the functions of management is to review activities and where it is obvious that something isn't working or is not sustainable action must be taken. Emotional attachments to ideas or the spending of "good money after bad" or somehow thinking that sunk costs are a justification for spending more money, should be avoided.

It may happen that an ideal but very sophisticated and expensive AMIS could be identified. Such a system may not however be affordable. This is not to say that the whole operation should be abandoned. During the investigations it may be that a much simpler system which would be less than ideal but still be of major benefit to the target communities could be operated sustainably. In such a scenario the logical and practical choice would be to opt for the simpler but ultimately sustainable system.

There is also the possibility that a good and sustainable system can be developed but due to other constraints it may not have an impact on the livelihood of the target communities. If this is the case the reasons for such a failure to impact should be analysed. If this analysis reveals that there are constraints which can be addressed and solved then the AMIS should be continued.

Even where an AMIS has operated successfully over a period of time it is difficult to establish empirically that reductions in marketing margins where they occur are as a result of the AMIS or how much of the reduction can be attributed to other factors. Perhaps the best indication of the effect of an AMIS is given by the level of usage by the producers. It is a reasonable assumption that producers will not continue to seek out information from a particular source if that is not deemed to be useful. If farmers continue to tune into local radio stations to hear price broadcasts or to use whatever other means of dissemination are used to obtain price information it must be concluded that they find it useful.

7.

8. Concluding remarks

Just because an AMIS is considered necessary and desirable there is no guarantee that one can be developed which will meet the standards of usefulness and sustainability.

It is unlikely in the short or medium term that existing trading patterns will change whether an AMIS is introduced or not. If that is indeed the case the theoretical justification for an AMIS, namely that it would promote spatial and temporal arbitrage would not hold. That is not to say that an AMIS would not be effective. We all know that if we're in a negotiation situation the more information we have the stronger will be our relative position. In the same vein if we were to go to a public auction the more information we would have on prices of the items being auctioned the better position we are in to judge when to bid or not to bid. Similarly if the seller has good price information he will know if the price being offered is reasonable. The same sort of reasoning can be used in the case of upland farmers when they come to trade their produce. If they have independently supplied and verified guide prices their position in the marketing process has been strengthened.

The impact which a good AMIS can have on the livelihood of producers makes it well worth the effort for UDP to attempt to develop such a service despite so many failures in the past. While a failure is a failure at least if there can be lessons learned which will help to make the future system viable then those services that have not succeeded will not have been a total loss.

What is achievable may not always be the ideal, but if what is achievable can make a real contribution to the upland communities, then that is what the programme should pursue. Enterprises undertaken should be "*internally consistent*". Basically what this means is that whatever an organization or group or even an individual plans to do it should be consistent with the resources available in terms of manpower, abilities, know how, finance, technology available etc.

The services being developed should start very simple and on a small scale and should really be regarded as a pilot programme. It is always much easier to start small and grow bigger than to try and start big and have to constantly cut back. The latter scenario is very demoralising and also tend to do value people's or opinion of the service. Every new activity involves a learning curve and as people move down this curve tasks become easier and is possible to expand the activity without having to expand extra energy. This learning curve which can really be equated to experience is something that all processes have to go through. In the light of that experience the process can be modified in order to be more effective and if the process brings about change the changed circumstances may in turn require the process to be further modified. Development is a dynamic process and

even when a viable AMIS is developed it should not be left frozen in time but should be regularly reviewed in the light of changing circumstances.

If and when such a sustainable service is designed it needs to be tested for usefulness and reliability. If it is found to be useful and reliable there is every reason to continue with it. If it is not found to be useful it should be discontinued.

Finally, how can we say if an AMIS is effective? This is indeed a difficult question to answer and can usually be only measured over an extended period, and even then it is hard to say unequivocally that if there has been an improvement that it is totally due to the AMIS. The usual measure is whether there is a reduction in marketing margins i.e. is there a bigger percentage of the final selling price going back to the farmer. A much simpler even if less accurate measure is “*are people using it*”. If people continue to seek out information from the AMIS it is safe to assume that they must find it useful.

9.

The general recommendation is that the programme proceeds with the development and testing of an AMIS. The two conditions of usefulness and sustainability must be kept to the forefront at all time.

10. Recommendations

- The AMIS should serve producers – traders generally have their own ways of getting information
- Other bodies involved in marketing e.g. DA Regional and Provincial Offices, DA Bureaux, DA Marketing section, DTI, PCA, DOST, Agribusiness centres should be consulted and areas of collaboration explored
- Market Vendors Associations should be consulted as a potential valuable source of information
- That UDP should continue to meet with BAS, GEM and MBC to work on the development of the macro information system
- the UDP MIS Specialist continues to work on designing of a data handling system and in writing the specifications
- the MIS specialist should evaluate commercially available software packages which could be used for data processing and distribution
- the objectives and rationale of the proposed system be explained to LGUs and other provincial and municipal bodies
- that these bodies be asked to undertake the collection of market information at particular market centres which will be identified
- the personnel who will undertake the task of gathering market information should be identified for further training
- following on from work which was begun near the end of SMISLE the possibility of community members collecting market information should be pursued
- the centres where information should be collected from be identified
- the commodities including crops and livestock for which information is required should be identified – these will depend on current production and identified opportunities
- some market centres outside of programme area such as Tagum and Digos should also be included and information gatherers for these locations should also be identified – the BAS/MBC/GEM/UDP AMIS will collect prices from Davao City and General Santos City
- alternative means of distributing information should be evaluated, these could include radio but special attention should be given to the possibility of

using community facilitators or whatever other means is used to disseminate information from the other components

- the MIS Specialist should be retained for a number of short inputs during the first two to three years when the system is being developed and fine-tuned
- UDP should fund training, software purchase and possibly some hardware
- in the initial stages the number of commodities and the areas being focused on should be very limited
- the type of information to be disseminated needs to be established
- the possibility of collecting and distributing information on prices of inputs should be investigated
- the marketing co-ordinator and the MIS specialist should attend a training session being held in Cagayan de Oro for information gatherers in the proposed MBC scheme
- initially UDP can support some costs for data processing, analysis and reporting, but this should only be as part of the development and should only be at a level where the work can be handed over without putting a strain on the recipient's resources. This type of support is different from supporting recurrent operating costs
- When information packages are being disseminated there should be follow up studies to measure their reach, comprehension and usefulness and the relationship between the prices actually received and the prices disseminated
- the possibility of setting up a Web page from which other interested users could retrieve price information should be investigated