

EXTERNAL CONSTRAINTS ON PARTICIPATION OF LOCAL PEOPLE IN THE PHILIPPINES

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ABSTRACT

Upland populations, both indigenous people and migrating settlers from the lowlands, were once considered as major culprits in accelerating the deforestation and degradation of forest lands in the Philippines. The treatment of these upland populations in the national forest policy changed drastically over time, from eviction to empowering them in forest management. Attempts to formulate people-oriented forest policies have been made since the 1970s, however, most of these have not realized the anticipated results. A major external constraint on participatory forest management appears to be an attitude which imposes government-designed forest projects on upland communities, where local people are requested to follow them, to act as tools of the government. In most cases, these projects do not consider local conditions such as land use, people's dependence on forest resources for their livelihood and the local value systems. Requiring local people to participate in such government-designed forest projects brings about only adverse effects, including resistance and conflicts between the government and local people, as well as among the local people themselves. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) may be expected to play substantial roles, not as instruments of the government, but as catalysts to empower the local people in formulating solutions on their own to existing problems. Bona fide participatory forest management will most likely work when they can function in that way.

INTRODUCTION

When forests were abundant, they provided economic value for the state. The year 1904, when the first logging lease was granted to a concessionaire, ushered in the period of forest development in the Philippines. Extensive commercial logging operations swept over the archipelago in the postwar period, and simplification of forest use by the state, i.e., log extraction, led to a disregard for other values in the forest. For the sake of national interests, those who had been dependent on the forest were institutionally excluded. Punitive measures, though proven ineffective, were adopted to exclude these people from the forest lands.

After the country experienced severe forest resource depletion in the postwar period, conservation of the remaining forests and rehabilitation of deforested lands became the primary concerns of the national forest policy. A comprehensive logging ban policy and government-initiated reforestation projects seemed to be adequate strategies for attaining the government's objectives. Local people, previously neglected in the forestry sector, have been increasingly expected to fill a role as partners of the

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government. People-oriented forest policies in the Philippines were at an embryonic stage in the late 1970s, and since 1982 have been developed in the name of the Integrated Social Forestry Program. Community-based forest resources management, institutionalized in 1996, is presently the key concept in national forest policy, seeking to fulfill the government's objectives, i.e., conservation of remaining forests and rehabilitation of deforested lands through local people's participation. Any people-oriented policies and projects will, however, be in vain unless the implementers understand the local conditions and value systems, i.e., the cultural and socioeconomic significance of forests for the local people.

The primary concerns of policy makers and foreign donors in the forestry sector are saving the forests, conserving biodiversity and rehabilitating deforested lands. Local people, meanwhile, do not necessarily share the same concerns, as they consequently discourage participatory forest management and, for the nation's sake, deprive local people of the space and resources that they are dependent on. How these people are encouraged and empowered to participate in forest management, therefore, depends on how the government understands the local conditions and value systems of the local people and trusts in their forest management capability. Highly centralized forest policies are not easily grasped by local people. A major external constraint on enhancing participatory forest management stems from government mismanagement, when the government tries to impose forest policies and projects designed without the consideration of the local people. The way in which participatory forest management is encouraged rests upon how the government understands the realities of upland communities.

'Participation' is an accepted concept in development strategies and covers broad categories, as summarized by Inoue (1998), i.e., top-down approaches, professional-guided approaches and endogenous bottom-up approaches. In this paper, we use the term participation in a broad sense covering all of these categories.

To focus on discrepancies between the actual state of forest use by local people and the national forest policies, three features are discussed in this paper through case studies, i.e., (1) limitations of the central forest governance in understanding local conditions, (2) problems of government-initiated community organization in forest management, and (3) roles of NGOs and the entailing problems.

LIMITS OF THE CENTRAL FOREST GOVERNANCE IN UNDERSTANDING LOCAL CONDITIONS

Upland communities, their farming practices, land uses and livelihoods appear to be static in the eyes of outsiders, policy makers, and foreign donors in particular. The relationship between local people and their surrounding forest is seen as one of resource exploitation. Thus, the extraction of timber by local people is labeled as illegal logging and all types of swidden agriculture are prohibited. In reality, the relationship between people and the forest varies within different ecological and socioeconomic conditions, and changes dynamically. Upland communities are not isolated or independent from outside societies. Rather, upland communities have the potential to transform the landscapes in response to surrounding conditions such as agricultural intensification, and expansion and diversification of off-farm income opportunities. When outsiders think that upland populations need to be empowered, the premises are that they are powerless and that outsiders have an authority to give power to them (Rahnema, 1988). These

negative images, where the majority of the upland population are seen as environmentally destructive, need to be re-evaluated in order to change these premises.

1. Evolving Upland Landscapes

When the country thrived on logging operations and exports throughout the archipelago, control and management of forest lands were entrusted to the logging companies acting as concessionaires. Most logged-over forest lands, however, were poorly cared for by these concessionaires. It was impossible for a single bureaucracy to control such wide tracts of logged-over forest lands. Local people, the majority of whom were rural poor from the lowlands, saw these lands as an opportunity to have access to space and resources which were more or less open-access. Migrating settlers from the lowlands have been frequently perceived as the culprits in accelerating deforestation, since it has been thought that they were not familiar with upland conditions, and that this eventually led to environmental deterioration caused by swidden agriculture, locally termed as *kaingin* (e.g., World Bank, 1989; Kummer, 1992).

Several empirical studies, however, show that pioneer upland settlements, spontaneously formed by migrating settlers, changed from annual to perennial crop-based land use (Fujisaka, 1986; Fujisaka & Capistrano, 1986; Fujisaka & Wollenberg, 1991; Eder, 1996). These studies show that the evolution of pioneer upland settlements is manifested as landscape transformation, in which the relationship between the upland population and forest has also changed. Fujisaka and Wollenberg describe this upland landscape transformation as a process of co-evolution between pioneer cultivators and the forest ecosystem (*ibid.*).

When pioneer settlers started to use space and resources in the forest lands, their livelihoods were based primarily on natural resource extraction and agriculture, swidden agriculture in particular. By so doing, capital was accumulated to invest in tangible and intangible assets such as livestock, planting fruit trees or providing higher education for children. The role of swidden agriculture has decreased to become only a part of their livelihoods, whereas other uses of lands for garden production, i.e., planting fruit trees and other trees like bamboo around their houses and farms, has been frequently observed. *De facto* ownership of the land is firmly established and recognized among community members. In response to population growth and the decrease of available lands and natural resources surrounding them, dependence on swidden agriculture and natural resource extraction has declined. Instead, dependence on perennial crop production, fruits in particular, and off-farm income opportunities are increasing.

Swidden agriculture practiced by the indigenous people is also adaptive and dynamic. Hanunoo Mangyan in Mindoro, for instance, has shortened the fallow period from 12 years to 3 years within the last 40 years (Conklin, 1957; Hayama, 1996). This is primarily due to a government program which relocated the dispersed population into several permanent settlements in a common territory. There, pasture leases were granted to the politically and economically influential people residing in the cities. Shortening the fallow period led to a degraded rotation system because fertility restoration was hampered. This brought about a new approach to permanent agriculture, although the process was gradual. Co-evolution between indigenous swidden cultivators and the forest ecosystem is also underway.

These studies challenge the conventional image of the upland populations, especially regarding settlers who migrated from the lowlands, in which their practice of

swidden agriculture is seen as destructive to the environment and as converting the logged-over forest lands into grasslands. On the contrary, these populations are adaptive to the given ecological and socioeconomic conditions. In spite of the fact that the government has not given legal recognition to any types of swidden agriculture, for human settlements the opening of lands and exploitation of natural resources are inevitable to some extent. As discussed by Fujisaka and Wollenberg (ibid.), giving legal recognition to swidden agriculture and the extraction of natural resources in upland communities would eliminate 'us-before-them' attitudes in which people compete to exploit a resource before others, and enhance resource conserving practices.

2. Emerging People-initiated Tree Plantations

Market access is a critical factor in landscape transformation, especially to perennial crops. The government has tried to facilitate people-oriented forest policies since the late 1970s for forest conservation and reforestation. The Integrated Social Forestry Program, into which all the preceding people-oriented forest policies in the late 1970s and the early 1980s were integrated, was institutionalized in 1982. Long-term land tenures of 25 years were secured in the uplands, where migrating settlers from the lowlands were the main targets of programs. The rationale from the government's point of view in securing the usufruct right was that long term tenure would make farms productive through perennial crop planting and the introduction of erosion control farming techniques, eventually lowering the upland population's pressure on the forests. As previously described, upland communities would then be expected to be able to make the transition to perennial cropping. Several empirical studies show, nevertheless, that legal recognition of land ownership alone does not achieve this end (Conelly, 1992; Garrity & Agustin, 1995). Let us consider a case study in the northern Sierra Madre Mountains situated in Isabela province, northern Luzon, which is the last frontier of commercial logging operations in the Philippines (Seki, 1998).

In Isabela, logging operations were banned in 1990, and this led to a struggle among many previous logging workers searching for alternative livelihoods such as illegal logging activity and upland farming. The government also regulated the middlemen dealing with extracted timbers from the natural stands. Fast-growing species, particularly yamane (*Gmelina arborea*) which is harvestable in 5 to 7 years, have been recognized as a replacement for the Dipterocarp species by furniture makers and middlemen. This strongly motivated the local people to establish small-scale forest plantations in their own backyards and farms, collecting yamane seeds, germinating and transplanting them. Those engaged in timber extraction in the distant interior forests were also given incentives to plant, considering the increasing transportation cost for logging operation in the natural stands.

In the upland frontier, as with Isabela, local survival strategies are highly dependent on the available markets. Communities attune themselves to whatever forest and agricultural products and labor are marketable at any particular time. Fast-growing tree planting found in the case study was not for reforestation or forest conservation purposes per se, but for profit-making, partly for cultivating cash crops. The market plays an influential role in upland landscape transformation. The market itself, however, does not entail forest conservation mechanisms. Moreover, capricious markets encourage the local people to engage in other cash crop production or even to move to other places seeking better opportunities.

It is obvious that control, by central or even local governments, of large tracts of forest lands (the government term for land designated as forest, but not necessarily under forest cover), is quite difficult and these highly centralized forest policies do not appeal to the local people living in varied and dynamic upland conditions.

3. Dual Ownership over the Forest: Government vs. Local People

The Regalian doctrine, imposed over the archipelago by the Spanish crown in the 16th century, is the legal basis on which all land without official title is under state sovereignty. Ancestral lands occupied by indigenous people were included in this state property. Such lands are, thus, under dual ownership, i.e., customary *de facto* ownership by indigenous people and *de jure* ownership by the state. Let us discuss a case study in Ifugao province, constituting the Cordillera Mountains in northern Luzon, for how state control pulls local people apart from the forests (Hayama, 1999).

In the case of Ifugao, the omnipresent ponded terraces for rice production in the higher elevations have been maintained for generations, and the forests are recognized among local people as either common or private property. The government avowal to control the forests, both community and private forests claimed by local people, includes the Cordillera Mountains in which Ifugao is situated, since they are the watershed forests of the lowland plains in Luzon. Community forests, which are natural stands and located in the topmost areas of the mountain ranges, have been customarily preserved as watershed forests and as places where community members can obtain logs for housing materials. Materials for woodcarving, which contributes significantly to the household economy, are also procured in the community forests. The use of community forests is regulated by the government, and extracting trees is prohibited. It is true that the available trees for woodcarving are decreasing, but extracting only these available trees does not bring about deforestation in the community forest. Private forests, interspersed like a mosaic over the village, are man-made, generally originating from swidden agriculture. Efforts of locals to cut grasses or to plant trees to facilitate forest regeneration are the basis of claims for *de facto* private ownership. Most pine trees found in private forests were planted. Materials for woodcarving are also obtained from the private forests. A permit issued by the government for cutting trees for woodcarving in the private forests is required, and this regulates the tree species to be harvested as well as their volume. Without this permit, woodcarving products are confiscated at check points along the way to Manila and Baguio, the villagers attempt to sell them at higher prices. The people's opposition to government permits stems from the fact that, not only do they require considerable cost and time, but also the local people feel that their customary forest management system is being infringed by the government. They believe that they have the right to use and dispose of their own property. The only choice for them is to sell their woodcarving products in the local market at unfavorable prices. They also believe that they themselves can preserve the forests through cleaning the forest floor, thus facilitating forest regeneration, and planting trees, as they have been doing since their ancestors' time. This case study indicates that state control, without recognizing the real local systems, eventually discourages the people from managing the forests.

PROBLEMS OF GOVERNMENT-INITIATED COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION IN FOREST MANAGEMENT

Huge loans from foreign financing institutions enabled the government to embark on large scale reforestation projects over the archipelago, beginning in 1988. Upland populations and local people residing close to the forest lands are expected to be agents in promoting government-initiated reforestation projects under the name of participatory forest management.

The Department Administrative Order of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) on community-based forest management in 1996 is the institutional arrangement which encourages local people to participate in forest management, including reforestation activity. The principle of community-based forest management, basically the same as previous people-oriented forest policies, is that 'forest occupants' and 'forest dependent communities' (both government terms), who reside close to or in the forests themselves are logically the most appropriate front line managers and stewards of the forests (DENR, 1997). 'Community' in the context of a forestry project, however, is not the existing one (a community in this sense refers to the territorial society of a barangay, the smallest administrative unit) but a government-initiated organization for the forestry project's sake. The government-assigned or selected NGOs train local people to set up local people's organizations. The organization is commonly comprised of a board of directors, general manager and project divisions such as logging operations and reforestation activity. The organization is then registered with the government and recognized as a recipient of the government support. A sizable portion of the forest lands are leased to the organization for its management.

In reforestation activity, the site is decided by the government, not by the organization, and only its implementation is entrusted to the organization. 'Participatory' forest management from the government's perspective, therefore, refers to local people employed as laborers by their local organization. The organization is expected to work as a government instrument to realize its objectives. When the organization takes little account of local conditions, problems such as forest fires may occur on the project site.

It has been found that many of the large scale government-initiated reforestation sites, in which the government contracted with NGOs or other organizations, resulted in failure due to forest fires and poor management (Korten, 1994; Seki, 1996). This implies that the local people's participation was not enhanced as the government had intended. In order to meet the national goal of reforestation in a short period of time, quotas were allocated to respective local offices of the DENR in which reforestation plans were made only on paper. Contractors were expected to follow the government instructions. Poor results in the performance of reforestation projects stem, not from the local people's indifference towards the projects, but rather from their resistance against imprudent outside control over the space and resources which they have long utilized. Reforestation sites were usually planned in grasslands, viewed as waste lands and unused lands in the eyes of outsiders, especially the policy makers and foreign donors. For the local people, on the other hand, grasslands are not necessarily considered in that way. A case study shows that grasslands contribute to the household economies of local people for grazing cows and water buffaloes, harvesting grass for thatched roofs, hunting wild animals and as preserves for future use as crop fields (Hayama, 1998).

When plans for reforestation sites are made by the government without taking the local people's land use into consideration, it is local organizations that can bridge the gap

between the two sides. In most cases, however, the organization works as a contractor with the government, not as a coordinator.

Let us refer to a case study concerning the traits of a government-initiated local people's organization which stirred up conflicts in resource use among the local people. This case study is again in Isabela province, as previously noted (Seki, 1998, 1999).

A people's organization, set up with the assistance of NGOs, covered four neighboring barangays. Some 5,000 hectares of the forest land was leased to the organization. Land allocation for undertakings such as agroforestry development, reforestation, and use of the remaining forest for logging operations was all arranged by the government. The organization was expected to follow these plans. The government design tended to limit agricultural land use in favor of expanding reforestation areas. The majority of previous logging workers were landless, however, thus the forest lands were the only area they could secure for cultivation. The organization allotted only small plots of land for these people. Compared with the lands already occupied or acquired by earlier claims before the forestry project was inaugurated on this site, the allotted lands by the organization were much smaller. This obviously created feelings of discontent and mistrust among them towards those who managed the organization. Conflicts concerning logging activity also arose between members and non-members of the organization. The organization is legally permitted to cut trees within the leased area with an annual allowable volume. On the contrary, non-members are not allowed to engage in logging operation there and have to travel to distant forests for timber extraction, still considered as an illegal activity. Timber market competition is, however, favorable to non-members, since the logging operation under the organization requires the payment of taxes. This makes legally extracted timbers more expensive than those illegally extracted by non-members. Neither the government nor the organization can regulate the illegally extracted timbers distributed in the market. Complaints to non-members and the government rose among logging workers under the organization.

Local organizations have an advantage in collecting local information and, when considering local land use, they could formulate rules for forest management. However, when the organization is just a government instrument as illustrated by the case study, i.e., when the government issues orders and the organization is expected to follow them without considering local concerns, especially for those who have little access to the project, the consequence is conflict between the government and local people as well as among the local people themselves.

ROLES OF NGOS AND THE ENTAILING PROBLEMS

As we saw in the case of Ifugao, there are also some areas in the Philippines where local people customarily established forest management systems [e.g., Goda, 1989; Wiber, 1993] or where indigenous people were united and encouraged to manage their own territory by an individual person (usually a missionary) [e.g., Magno, 1998]. In general, however, it is difficult to find such cases, especially in upland communities formed by migrating settlers and lowland communities close to forests. The government, thus, has tried to establish a government-designed forest management system.

In previous case studies, we saw that the lack of local participation in design and decision-making processes resulted not only in project failure but also numerous conflicts. It is obvious that even the local government has limitations in collecting local information. Local people, on the other hand, have little access to information on the projects and

administration. In bridging this gap, and in pursuit of more effective forest management by local people, the government assigned significant tasks to NGOs. It is stated that 'no project shall be approved for implementation unless a competent and credible NGO has signified its commitment to assist in project implementation' (DENR, 1990). One feature in implementing government projects in the Philippines, the role of NGOs brings high expectations from the government. This is perhaps due to the facts that the government expects an NGO participatory approach with the local people in collecting local information, and that the involvement of NGOs which are supported by donor agencies can reduce the government cost. NGOs in the Philippine forest sector can be considered as subordinate agencies of the government.

As we noted previously, NGOs are expected to set up local people's organizations and, in fact, a great number of NGOs have already been involved in forest projects and community organization over the archipelago. It is reported, however, that they have encountered many difficulties, including the government's lack of understanding about their roles, financial constraints, delayed release of project funds, 'a wait-and-see' attitude among the local people and insurgency problems (Bennagen, 1996). The NGOs, thus, are also in a learning process.

Not all NGOs are familiar with the local conditions, and the majority are initially outsiders in their assigned area. NGOs are considered to have a special status on the ground that enables them to avoid many of the pitfalls of development projects implemented by bureaucratized government agencies (Rahnema, *ibid.*). When their attitude is merely that the local people should be enlightened and taught, however, it does not appeal to them. The majority of the local people already have negative experiences with failed government projects and are skeptical of any projects introduced by outsiders. Regarding government-initiated local people's organizations, as previously mentioned, when NGOs are just government instruments imposing tasks on local people there will be dismal consequences of resistance and conflict. In this way, the NGOs become an obstacle hampering local people's participation in forest management. The problems lie in that NGO activities in project sites are carried out in the framework of government supervision. For the sake of government objectives such as reforestation, the relationships between NGOs and the local people are subordinate.

NGOs have the potential role, nevertheless, not as government instruments to impose government forest projects on local people, but as mediators to tap the unheard voices of local people, especially the politically and economically weak. This can become a catalyst to bring out their will in participatory forest management, which is in reality a time-consuming process. In the case of Pinatubo Ayta, for the Negrito who were seriously affected by the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo, for instance, it took about 10 years to initiate their own participation in claiming their lands (Shimizu, 1997). This case shows that both local people and NGOs are in a process of mutual learning.

Bona fide participatory forest management is one in which local people have the initiative in activities. What NGOs can do, thus, is to grope for solutions together with the local people and respect their decisions.

CONCLUSION

It is obvious that conventional types of centralized forest governance have limitations in understanding the value systems of local people and their socioeconomic conditions. One alternative to overcome problems in forest management is to provide

adequate property rights and management responsibility to local communities. The government of the Philippines chose to strengthen the relationship with NGOs, through which it attempts to manage the forest lands. The government expects that NGOs will work as instruments of the government in forestry projects, and that local people's organizations that have been trained by NGOs will continue to do the same after the NGOs withdraw. Both NGOs and local organizations are, therefore, still under centralized forest governance. It has always been taken for granted that local people, especially the rural poor, are recipients and objects of development projects, and their participation is interpreted to mean that they accept the projects as clients, laborers or employees. Naturally such external controls over space and resources cause local resistance and conflicts. Even under community-based forest management, local people have little chance to participate in the design process or decision-making.

The lesson from these case studies is that government projects which cannot gain the understanding and support of the local people are likely to result in failure. It deserves special emphasis that if planners impose projects on local people without understanding local conditions and value systems, the projects will likely lead to adverse effects on both the land and people. In most cases, the government's objectives in forestry projects do not coincide with the prime necessities of local people. On the other hand, understanding local conditions and their value systems does not mean going to the other extreme of 'local people know best and local technical knowledge can work most efficiency'. It is necessary to pay attention to the cultural, economic, agro-ecological and socio-political contexts in which the local people are situated, and be aware of how these contexts influence the ways they use and manage forest resources, as discussed by Bebbington (1996). It is important to note that forestry projects are only a part of overall community development. It is significant that the government, NGOs and local people find shared goals in forest use and management. Implementers need to pay attention to the possibility that they may carry biases towards the local people, biases which arise from the type of economic development they have experienced (Rahnema, *ibid.*).

It cannot be denied that NGOs are actually supporting bodies for both the government and local people in the Philippines. NGOs should not only act as subordinate agencies of the government, but also enhance the local people's capabilities in tackling their problems on their own rather than depending on the government and NGOs.

People-oriented forest policies have been formulated since the 1970s in the Philippines. In 1987, the Upland Working Group of the Philippines had already suggested (1) making tenurial arrangements more compatible with the diverse local traditions and agricultural practices in the uplands, (2) decentralizing and empowering local institutions, and (3) focusing the social forestry strategy more closely on the needs of upland people (Aquino et al., 1987). It is still too early to declare failure concerning the few accomplishments of people-oriented forest policies in the last decade, when people-oriented projects were launched all over the archipelago. The government, NGOs, local people and even intellectuals are still in a learning period. It will be important to see whether the government will be flexible in restructuring its forest policies to be more in line with local conditions. Bona fide participatory forest management cannot be attained in a short period of time.

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