

***Community-Based Management of Natural Resources:
An Answer to Environmental Stress?***

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A New Development Paradigm

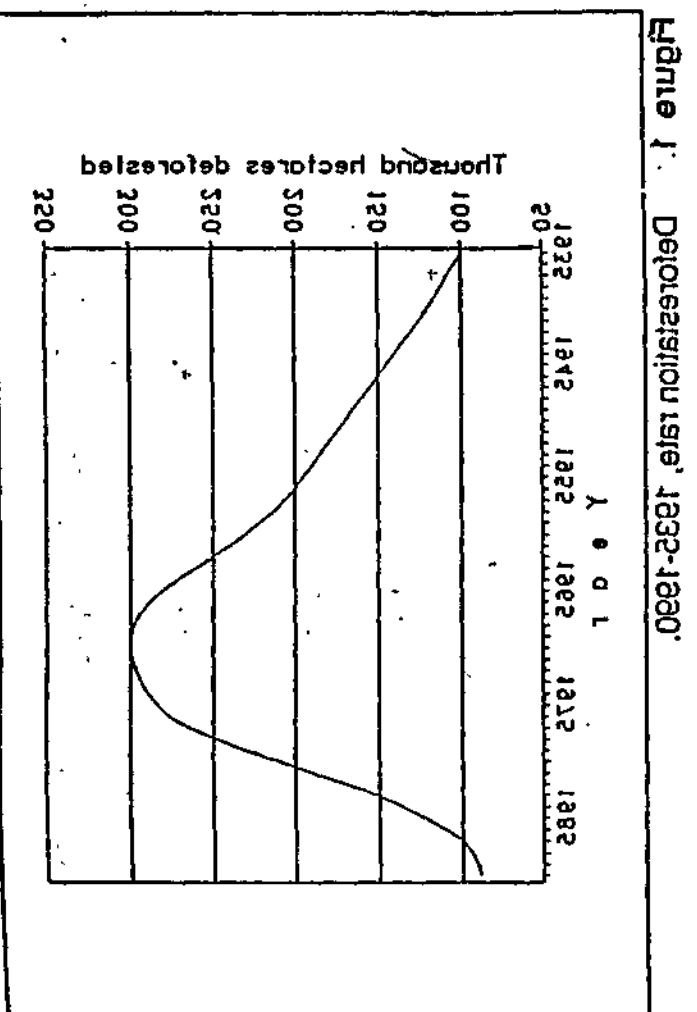
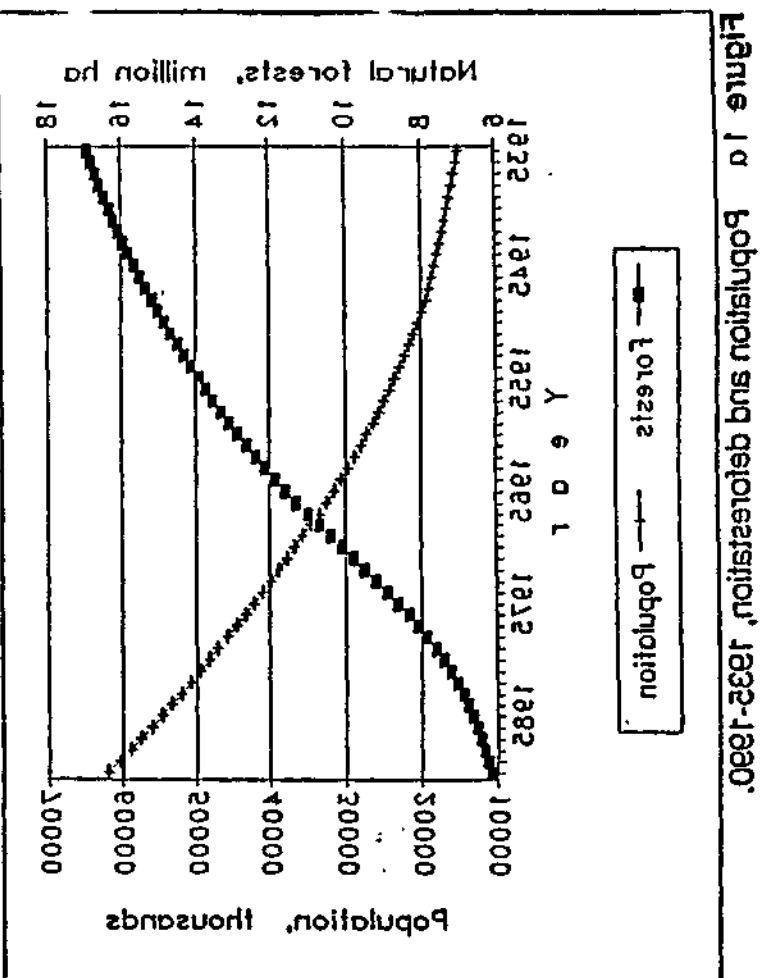
The rise of global concern on the growing deterioration of the environment has resulted in the quest for new ways of looking and doing things. Along this line, in developing countries, like the Philippines, the new thrust is now "sustainable development." A new paradigm that has emerged from this thrust, and currently gaining wide acceptance in the country is anchored on a community-based approach which combines the pursuit of sustainable management of the environment and natural resources with the goal of equity. This paradigm is specifically manifested in the Community Forestry Program (CFP) of the government through the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR). It is this program that the paper seeks to examine.

There are several premises that underlie the paradigm.

First, is the recognition of the alarming environmental deterioration, particularly deforestation, besetting the forestry sector. For instance, the country's forests in 1934 constituted about 17 million hectares; in 1969, only about 10.4 million hectares remained; in 1976, this further decreased to 8.5 million hectares and in 1980 7.4 million hectares.(1) Current estimates show that only 6 million hectares are left of which about 800,000 are old growth forests and 5.2, residual forests.(2) Figures^{landia} show the rate of deforestation from 1935 to 1990.

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The dramatic increase in the population growth rate through the years and, correspondingly, the need to sustain the country's primarily agricultural economy necessitated bringing into cultivation a large part of the forests. Thus., even marginal lands and those found in steep slopes which could not be sustainably farmed have been placed under cultivation. In addition, the adoption of lowland farming technologies usually brought by migrant settlers to the uplands has further aggravated deforestation. Likewise, it is to be underscored that destructive logging and mining practices by concessioners have contributed equally to deforestation.

Second, the paradigm also has acknowledged that a substantial number of the Philippine population are found in these forestal (upland) areas. Current estimates is about 20 million out of the total population of 65 million.(3) They are either members of indigenous cultural communities (ICCs) or migrant upland settlers. Most of them are dependent on the forest for their subsistence and livelihood. In fact, it is a common observation that upland farmers are much worse-off than their lowland, counterparts. The lowland - majority group - bias of past development efforts is the major culprit. This is greatly exacerbated by tenurial insecurity experienced by those cultivating forestal areas which, under existing national laws, are considered as part of the public domain and, therefore, could not be privately owned. (4)

Third, it is likewise realized that local communities who live within the forest and/or subsist through its products are in the best position to protect and manage the resource. This presumes, however, that their occupancy and claims are recognized by the government. The purely "punitive" approach previously undertaken by government is no longer applicable.

Lastly, the paradigm also takes cognizance of the need by the local communities not only to manage but also to utilize forest resources. It is envisioned that sustainable utilization of the resources will lead ultimately to the improvement of the socio-economic life of these communities.

COMMUNITY-BASED FORESTRY PROGRAMS

The Intergrated Social Forestry Program (ISFP) Experience

In the early eighties attempts have already been made by the government to institute a community-based approach in forestry management through ISFP. During that time, there was strong clamor for government to recognise the presence of a large number of forest occupants with private claims/rights on areas that are supposedly part of the public domain. Parenthetically, there was also the prevailing thinking that if these occupants are assured secured tenure on the land, they will be encouraged to adopt conservation practices, particularly on their farms. The tenure instruments, generally called stewardship agreements, are granted to individuals (Certificate of Stewardship Contract or CSC) or communities (Communal Forest Lease Agreement or CFSA). These will allow individuals/communities to have usufructory rights on their claimed areas for 25 years renewable for another 25 years.

The grant of tenure security to ISFP forest occupants, however, did not necessarily lead to the adoption of sustainable forest management practices. It becomes clear that the provision of tenure security is not sufficient to guarantee farmers' adoption of conservation strategies. The lack of continued provision of support services (technical and financial) had hampered beneficiaries acceptance of environmental friendly practices which are at the same time economically rewarding. This is exacerbated by the fact that stewardship contracts could not be used as instruments for accessing credit assistance.

The other basic concerns that ISFP had not emphasised at the outset pertain to the importance of a more wholistic planning focus and continuous community organizing efforts. In general, the program has centered more on the development of farms cultivated by the beneficiaries and less on the development of the whole forestal area of which these farms organizing efforts had been acknowledged since the start given ISFP's community-based orientation, the lack of trained forestry officers largely affected the outcomes of the program in many ISFP sites. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that in recent years improvements in the approach and implementation of ISFP have been made continually and the lessons being learned from its experiences are constantly inputted into the refinement of other community-based forestry programs.(5)

The CFP

CFP is the most recent attempt by government to protect and conserve the remaining forests of the country through a community-based approach. (6) Currently, there are 52 CFP sites with an average size of 1,000 hectares per site. Of this, 50 sites are now covered by DENR-NGO service contracts. CFP covers both old growth and residual forests. Community-beneficiaries include ICCs, upland migrants, and mixed ethnic groups. The following shows the distribution of CFP sites by various categories.

CATEGORY	NUMBER
<u>Forest Type</u>	
Old growth	5
Residual	40
Mixed	4
National Park	1
<u>Type of Community</u>	
ICC	7
Upland Migrant	18
Mixed	25
<u>Extent of Pump-priming Intervention</u>	
Minimum/Low	17
Maximum/High	33
<u>Funding Source</u>	
ADB	33
USAID-NRMP	17

There are several basic features of CFP.

First, it adheres to the new development paradigm based on the goals of sustainable forestry management and equity/poverty alleviation. This shall be implemented through a community-based and participatory approach in program planning and implementation.

Second, the NGOs are considered the prime movers in the social and technical preparation of the local communities. This is made possible through a contract signed between DENR and concerned NGOs in which the services of the latter are contracted for three years to assist CFP communities.

Third, the development of knowledge, capabilities, and skills of organized groups within the CFP communities are primordial. This shall be done through community organizing works, trainings, and participation in all aspects of CFP activities.

Fourth, there are provisions for financing pump-priming activities (contract reforestation, nursery development, timber stand improvement, etc.) intended to provide employment to those who shall be economically displaced from their sources of livelihood, as a consequence of CFP. These pump-priming jobs can be substantial (as in the case of ADB-funded sites) or minimal (in USAID-NRMP, sites).

Fifth, inclusion of alternative livelihood activities which are not necessarily forest-based are likewise provided. Such activities are envisioned to dissipate CFP-communities dependence on the forest resource.

Sixth, a fundamental feature of the program is the grant of tenural security to CFP communities. The tenure instrument is called Community Forestry Management Agreement (CFMA) which imbues the community with the right to manage and utilize the forest resource for 25 years renewable for another 25 years.

Seventh, the preparation of a Community Forestry Management and Development Plan (CFMDP) is deemed crucial to the attainment of sustainable utilization of the forest. A thorough resource inventory (physical, socio-economic, and institutional) is required in the preparation of the plan.

The operationalization of the above is shown in Figure 2. It is envisaged as a long process starting from community orientation, selection of core leaders, and action planning; to the actual conduct of various activities to socially and technically prepare local communities to assume ultimately the responsibilities for sustainable forest management; and up to the preparation and approval of CFMA,

the instrument that will guarantee legitimate possession and utilization of the resource, and of the CFMDP which shall provide the basic framework and mechanisms for ensuring sustainable management and use of the forest.

Initial Observations and Analysis.

The CFP is only in its second year of implementation; yet, it is not too early to determine its prospect as a community-based participatory programming to relieve environmental stress. Initial program experiences could already provide some grounds for analysis.

As a community-based approach, CFP has still to define what and who constitute the community. Unless this is succinctly specified,, its social acceptability will suffer greatly and ultimately the program goals may not be realized. The program's wide acceptability will be largely premised on the issue of who benefits from it and who are excluded.

Any definition of "local community" will have to include spatial, economic, and socio-political considerations. For instance, CFP sites usually traverse several villages/communities; oftentimes, these villages constitute separate political/administrative units,, Moreover, there are direct users of the forest who draw sustenance and livelihood from it and who may or may not reside within the forest zone. These users can be ICCs, upland migrant settlers, or combination of both. Since forest protection is a major concern in CFP, political authorities (village council of elders, barangay official, etc.) may have to participate in the legitimation and enforcement of community rules and regulations on forest protection.

There are empirical indications that CFP's operational definition of "local community" has been quite loose, tentative and highly dependent on the perception of the assisting NGOs. For example, in most sites, "community" is seen as the association/cooperative either organized by the NGO for CFP purposes; or already an existing one but used by the NGO to implement CFP. Oftentimes, these organised groups are composed of few members relative to the total population of the CFP community and are composed of the better-off sector. There are also cases where many direct users of the forest resource have been excluded. In CFP sites with mixed social groupings and where ICCs are the minority, memberships are sometimes confined to the

majority social group. The effectiveness of a community-based approach in forestry management will hinge primarily on the wider participation of the larger community, specifically the major stakeholders, that is, those who mainly subsist from the resource.

An attendant concern is related to the participatory nature of the community-based approach - where assisting NGOs during the preparation period of the local communities will ensure their total participation in planning and implementation of all CFP activities. Such participation will enable the community, as individuals and collective group, to strengthen capabilities and skills to assume later on the management of the forest resource. It is in this sense that CFP is viewed as a continuing process of institutional development.

However, it seems that the participatory approach is not adhered to in all CFP sites. In some sites, instead of partnership between the local community and the assisting NGO, what prevails is an employee-employer relationship. The former becomes the source of wage labor for the latter who, in turn, has to implement certain pre-set milestones. This practice is usually observed in CFP sites where substantial amounts for pump-priming activities are provided. (7) In this situation,, pump-priming activities become the main attraction for the community to participate in CFP. They are seen as the end in themselves rather the means for achieving community participation. The notion that these activities are to be done within the context of organizational capability-building and community development seems to be lost.

In contrast, in sites where participatory approach is adopted, the communities have meaningfully participated in various CFP activities. In fact, it is observed, that they are now beginning to show feelings of "ownership" of the project. For instance, some of the communities have taken on a very active role in forest protection? they have asked DENR to deputize them as forest guards. A number of them have already apprehended illegal loggers which include some village officials. In other words, local communities have begun to assert their collective will and even have challenged the powerholders, if called for.

An observed common denominator among these communities is the presence of strong and continuous community organizing efforts by the assisting NGOs. Considering the process orientation in community organizing, there is a growing reservation that the three-year service contract of the assisting NGOs might not be sufficient for the social

preparation of the community. The government may take over the community organising work after the termination of the NGOs service? contract. However, after that period it will also be heavily involved in monitoring the implementation of CFMDP by the local community and the provision of technical assistance. The role, therefore, of qualified NGOs may go beyond their three-year service contract. The possibility that local communities themselves would "hire" these NGOs to assist them is not at all far-fetched.

The principle of partnership, that underlies CFP, among government (DENR), NGOs, and local communities in attaining sustainable development is a plus factor. For the government, there is the recognition that the task of arresting environmental degradation is formidable and seeks the assistance of NGOs and local communities. For the NGOs, the work of preparing the communities to assume responsibilities for forest management in the long run is likewise awesome. And for the local communities, the challenge is to manage the forest sustainably with the hope that as a consequence they will derive sufficient income and improve their socio-economic well-being.

At this point in time when the program is only starting, the role of NGOs is most crucial. Their performance will largely determine the preparedness of the communities for sustained forestry management. Thus, the selection of the NGOs that shall undertake the task is pivotal. Field observations show that the manner in which NGOs dispense their services to the local communities is highly dependent on their orientation and capabilities. For example, NGOs who are experienced in community organizing tend to concentrate on developing the social competencies of the local communities; on the other hand, those oriented towards the bio-physical side of forestry give more focus on technical activities. NGOs have to possess both competencies since these are vital to CFP's success,

The lack of qualified local NGOs) aggravated by the presence of fly-by-night, ones had been an initial problematic issue in CFP. Hence, service contracts for some sites had been awarded to NGOs with insufficient qualifications. However, the tightening of the selection requirements and process (9) in the recent past has mitigated the entrance of unqualified NGOs. Nevertheless, it is still necessary to review the performances and accomplishments of contracted NGOs and to institute appropriate actions for those who have not come up to expectations. This, in turn, is premised on a systematic monitoring and evaluation system.

The role of government in a community-based program which places emphasis on the preparation role of NGOs should not be confined to merely monitoring the progress. For a time, this is the job that DENR has given itself. Noteworthy though is the recent reversal in its perceived role. It is now more proactive and provides technical assistance to both NGOs and local communities. In a few sites where there is some tension between NGOs and the local communities, DENR is also trying to bridge the gap.

Interestingly, the program continues to evolve mechanisms that aim to facilitate resolution of problems and issues at the same time share common experiences. One such body is the Regional Distillation Group (RDG) composed of concerned DENR field offices (regional, PENRO, and CENRO) other government agencies, and NGOs. While its launching is quite recent, there are indications that RDG could become a functional forum for participatory decision-making.

The major incentives built into the CFP for local communities include provision of tenure security and the right to utilize and harvest forest products based on an approved management plan. In this proposition while tenure security is recognized as a necessary incentive, it is not the sole consideration. As already pointed out, in ISFP the grant of tenure security has not inevitably led to the adoption of conservation strategies. What is likewise desired is concrete and viable economic incentive. The forest products utilization component is the other side of the coin. Yet integral to the incentives are controls to guarantee adoption of sustainable utilization practices. Under the new guidelines for CFP implementation (DAO 22, s.1993), the CMDP shall specify how the community will manage the resources - in detail for the first three years. The plan shall be updated initially at the end of the third year and every five years thereafter. Forest extraction cannot be commenced until the CMDP is approved by DENR. Hence, the grant of CFMA does not mean immediate forest product utilization.

A distinctive facet of the CFP under the new guidelines is that local communities will not be treated as free riders. The guidelines provide that all cost advanced by DENR (e.g., in contracting the services of the NGOs for the preparation of the community) shall be recovered/reimbursed by participants to the government by requiring them to establish a community Forestry Development Trust Fund (CFDTF). This trust fund shall comprise 30 percent of the gross revenues from sales of forest products which, in turn, may be used for reforestation and rehabilitation of the CFMA area. Later on after the government cost have been fully recovered, it can be used to fund other forestry related

activities. If there are other surpluses, the fund can be spent on other investments the community sees fit in consultation with the DENR, While the trust fund will be managed by the community, it has to submit to DENR quarterly reports on its use. DENR may also conduct post audit of the fund.

CONCLUDING NOTE

In general, the prospect of CFP as a community-based approach not only to relieve enviromental stress but also to empower socially and economically poor local communities appears to be encouraging. The fact that it is currently undergoing continuous refinements, both at the policy and implementation levels, augers well for the program. The commitment of the present DENR leadership to the approach serves as a strong impetus for the pursuit of CFP's goals.

Sustainability of the program will remain a recurring issue despite the fact that it has been carefully crafted to ensure that its gains are sustained. The thinking that sustainability will be dependent solely on local communities might not be a realistic presumption, at least in the medium term. The partnership of government, NGOs, people's organizations/local communities will still continue to be the key to CFP sustainability.

Parenthetically, there are claims that while a community-based approach is indeed sound and an attractive alternative for relieving enviromental stress, it may not be able to fully cover all the six million hectares of forests that still have to be protected. There is a growing concern that the recent spates of Timber Lease Agreement (TLA) cancellations might bring into open access large tracts of forestal areas. The long process involved in the preparation of communities may militate against the use of community-based forestry as the sole approach in forest protection.

Given the above, what seems apparent is the need to explore other innovative approaches/arrangements which could complement CFP. Whatever these arrangements are, they should adhere to the principles of sustainable forestry management and equity.

NOTES

1. DENR, Master Plan for Forestry Development, 1990.
2. The estimate for the hectarage of the old growth forest is provided by National Resource Management Program, a project funded by USAID. DENR's estimate in 1990 is 984,000 hectares.
3. Owen J. Lynch quoting Ma. Concepcion Cruz in his article, "Securing Community-Based Tenurial Rights in the Tropical Forests of Asia," a report from the World Resources Institute's Center for International Development and Environment, November 1992.
4. In the Philippines, (forestal) areas whose slopes are beyond 18 percent are generally considered part of the public domain and, therefore, could not be privately owned unless declared alienable and disposable.
5. An innovative mechanism that has evolved from ISFF is the Upland Working Group which pilot tests ISFF approaches, documents the experiences, and manualize them for the use of field implementors.
6. Another community-based program dealing with the sustainable management of the environment and natural resources is the Regional Resource Management Program, a DENR-World Bank endeavor. The focus is on watershed management and adopts an integrated area development approach.
7. The Asian Development Bank funded CFF sites have very substantial provisions for pump-priming activities while the Natural Resources Management Program provides only minimal amount. For the former, the total budget per site is about P10-P13 millions of which a big chunk is set aside for pump-priming activities. In the latter, the budget per site is about P2.3 millions.
8. In the selection of NGOs which shall be contracted to provide services to local communities, preference is usually given to local NGOs provided they qualify.
9. As part of the tightening of the selection process of NGOs, the latter are required in the preparation of their technical proposals to first visit the CFF site and consult with the local communities. Moreover, the village, through the barangay captain, participates in the NGO selection. Competitive bidding has replaced negotiated contracting. Furthermore, to ensure that really qualified NGOs will be selected, the bidding is publicized in major national newspapers.