

Some Social Insights on Philippine Programs in the Forestry Sector

Discussant:

Domingo M. Ramirez

College of Forestry

University of the Philippines Los Baños

College, Laguna

First, I would like to congratulate Dr. Percy E. Sajise and Dr. Enrique P. Pacardo for presenting a very comprehensive status of the Philippine Terrestrial Environment. The data presented are indeed very revealing and it is very apparent that in the next few decades, the Filipino environmentalist will have a lot of items in his environmental agenda. I honestly believe at this stage that there is no turning back... as delayed reactions could be very detrimental to all of us.

As a social forester, let me just concentrate on the items that have greater relevance to the social aspects of forestry and the areas we popularly call the uplands. Honestly, these are the points that I feel more comfortable to discuss.

The historical trend of the Philippine upland forest ecosystem, as presented in the paper, means only one thing: we no longer have sufficient forest cover to meet the demands of the continuously growing population in terms of productivity and ecological stability. The fact is that our forests are continuously decreasing while our population is continuously increasing (Fig. 1). We have reached that point in time where the critical impacts of forest denudation, such as accelerated soil erosion, loss of biodiversity, impairment of hydrologic cycle, displacement of cultural communities and poverty and malnutrition have brought about severe damages to lives and properties of our people.

Two of the more popular reasons cited for the depletion of the forest resources and the consequent degradation of the environment are commercial logging operations and shifting

cultivation (kaingin). While we cannot separately delineate the extent of destruction caused by each, history will tell us that, to a great extent, commercial logging immediately followed by shifting cultivation aggravated the problem of forest renewal.

As early as the 1970s, the government and the private sector had already realized that the problems in Philippine forestry were not purely technical but were also social and economic in nature. With more and more people engaged in the conversion of the forestlands into other land uses like agriculture, we have recognized that the punitive means of addressing the problem is not the solution. We have tried it for quite sometime but it did not work.

A GLIMPSE OF THE INTEGRATED SOCIAL FORESTRY PROGRAM (ISFP)

In the late '70s, the government, through the then Ministry of Natural Resources, initiated a number of "socially-oriented" forestry programs in its attempt to improve people's participation in government efforts on forest rehabilitation. Such programs included the Communal Tree Farming (CTR), the Family Approach to Reforestation (FAR) and the Forest Occupancy Management (FOM). Through Letter of Instruction (LOI) 1260 and Ministry Administrative Order (MAO) No. 48, these programs were lumped into one - the Integrated Social Forestry Program (ISFP) which was institutionalized in 1982.

Based on the Philippine Forestry Statistics of the DENR Forest Management Bureau (FMB), we have a total of 2,715 ISF projects all over the country as of 1989, covering an area of 525,619 hectares and involving 204,999 family beneficiaries. Of these, 128,772 have been issued their Certificate of Stewardship Contracts (CSCs; Table 1). It has been claimed that around 176,244 hectares were already developed. Fourteen Community Forest Stewardship Agreements (CFSAs) have also been awarded to cultural communities. These CFSAs cover a total of 37,672 hectares and 8,256 beneficiaries as of 1989 (Table 2).

The basic issue of whether or not the ISFP has really been a factor in the rehabilitation, development and management of the Philippine terrestrial ecosystem always lingers. It was DENR Assistant Secretary Bernardo C. Agalooos himself who admitted that the social and economic impacts of the program are still

insignificant. Most program beneficiaries have not attained self-reliance as they have remained dependent on and have anticipated government assistance to improve their way of living. Strong, active and community organized associations that are expected to manage their own concerns are still very few.

Some participants even claim that they are becoming poorer and poorer despite the program. The lack of capital, credit and other support services has contributed most to this very slow socio-economic development of the upland population.

Similarly, the ecological impact of the ISFP is still a question. While Assistant Secretary Agaloos claimed that the physical structures of soil and water conservation measures have improved the degraded hillsides of the ISFP sites, there are actually very few of them because of the physical, financial and time constraints of constructing them on the hillside farms by the farmers themselves.

An off-hand assessment of the ISFP reveals that after more than eight years of existence, it has not significantly produced concrete outputs that would have improved the conditions of the forest ecosystem and the socio-economic being of the so-called "poorest of the poor" sector of the society. To an extent, it has created an extensive awareness of the social problem in Philippine forestry, but its contribution to forest rehabilitation efforts is still close to nil. In fact, some sectors believe that the Program somehow aggravates the upland occupancy problem. This may be true as more and more lowlanders are attracted to migrate to the uplands in the hope of getting a share of the ISF Program benefits. Due to lack of a reliable basis for actual forest occupancy and an effective forest occupancy protection activity, we have continuously accommodated everybody who claims to have occupied a piece of the public forestland sometime ago. The will to prevent future occupancy does not seem to be in our social forestry agenda.

In terms of the over-all program implementation strategy, we seem to have forgotten one of the major goals of the program: to lessen the destructive pressure on the critical uplands and the forest ecosystem. The ISFP should not be treated as an end, but as a means to address the social problems of forestry in the country. The Program should emphasize the development of economic alternatives **outside** the forestland domain without sacrificing the people's access to the resource. As I have always thought in the past, a major bulk of the social problems of forestry

in the Philippines could be solved in the lowlands, not necessarily in the uplands.

Finally, by this time, we should have already integrated and internalized the lessons that we have learned from the numerous "socially-oriented" forestry programs of the government and the private sector. After more than eight years, we can no longer make the excuse that we still have very little understanding of the origin of social forestry and the context in which it was developed. I believe that we now have more than enough lessons to work with considering the big number of social forestry projects and efforts so far done by the government as well as the private sector.

EQUITY AND TENURE IN THE CONTRACT REFORESTATION PROGRAM

So much has been said about the critical condition of the forests in the Philippines. Since the last decade, the government has undoubtedly taken serious steps to rehabilitate our degraded forestlands through various strategies of reforestation.

In 1986, the DENR launched the centerpiece of an all-out multi- sectoral effort to avert an environmental holocaust resulting from forest destruction and forest resource depletion. This is called the National Forestation Program (NFP), which puts the private sector in a frontline position as the vanguard of the country's reforestation efforts. The program is boosted by two soft loans negotiated by the DENR with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund (OECF) in 1988.

Part of the NFP is the Contract Reforestation scheme wherein an individual or an entity agrees to implement a series of activities required to reforest denuded areas, with the DENR paying for duly accomplished activities. This scheme provides incentives to the private sector, NGOs and local government units to become DENR's partners in forest resources conservation, development, management and protection.

Under the DENR Memorandum Circular No. 11, there are three major typologies of the Contract Reforestation scheme: the family contract, the community contract and the corporate

contract. The family contract is awarded to the bonafide local community household heads within the immediate vicinity of the identified reforestation area. The community contract is a negotiated contract entered into by the DENR and duly recognized local entities such as associations, cooperatives, NGOs, foundations and civic and religious groups **in behalf** of the community located in or adjacent to the reforestation site. This typology includes the local government unit (LGU) contract where LGUs having jurisdiction over the area could likewise enter into agreement with DENR. The corporate contract involves private corporations entering into agreement with the DENR to conduct reforestation through competitive bidding.

As of 1990, a total of 5,907 contracts covering an aggregate area of 72,251 hectares have been awarded to the three types of contractors by the DENR. It is significant to note that the family and the community contracts involve more local community people as contractors based on records.

A macro-level study conducted this year (1991) by the Asian NGO Coalition (ANGOC) showed that maximum participation by the local community people was achieved under the family approach. The same study, however, revealed that most community contractors are not really community organizations, but private individuals disguised as representatives of the people in the locality. Their "entrepreneurial" set-up reflects a tremendous inequity in terms of the distribution of financial benefits derived from the contract. Most of the financial benefits accrue to a limited group of individuals (usually the head of the organization and a few other officers) while the local community people are merely hired as daily reforestation laborers or are not involved at all. In fact, many of those interviewed feel that they are being short-changed by their "entrepreneur employer-contractors" in terms of daily payments for their reforestation efforts. To some of them, the contract reforestation program is just an ordinary government program and not truly designed for maximum local community participation as the government claims.

As this suspicion continues, the credibility of the government continuously suffers and the poor local communities are continuously forced to engage in forest destructive forms of economic activities because they have no other choice. Forest development has not provided enough opportunities and the benefits of reforestation have been inequitably shared. As Kummer (undated)

had put it: "Upland degradation is actually a reflection of uneven Philippine development in general. For those in poverty, environmental preservation is a luxury; as such, the poor have very little choice but to accept the continuing destruction. And those who benefit from the destruction will certainly allow it to continue."

In the first two years of the contract reforestation program, the issue of tenure came out with a big bang. There are actually two tenure-related issues involved in the activity: (a) private claims on public forestlands identified as reforestation areas; and (b) the access rights to the trees (and possibly the land) after the actual contract reforestation has been completed.

The identification of reforestation areas, which are subjects of private claims, has given rise to problems with serious repercussions on the sustainability of the program. This is particularly true in places where most of the public forests are already claimed. In Cebu for example, there were instances when privately claimed lands in the public forest were identified as contract reforestation areas by the DENR and subsequently contracted out to NGOs without the knowledge of occupants. As such, the implementation of the contract reforestation project was adversely affected.

A concomitant tenure-related problem concerns the issue of protection and maintenance of the reforested areas. The Forest Land Management Agreement (FLMA) came out in response to this. Here, the DENR enters into an agreement with the communities, NGOs and other qualified entities who will protect, maintain and benefit from the trees covered under the reforestation project. Priority is given to the individual or group that contracted the reforestation activity with the DENR.

The FLMA is actually an approach to guarantee the sustainability of the renewed forest resource. It is premised on two valid grounds: (a) that the community has to participate in forest protection; and (b) that to ensure sustained community participation, tenurial security coupled with economic incentives have to be provided for. Yet empirical reality may dissipate the good and valid intentions of the FLMA. Since a large number of reforestation projects are contracted out to secondary groups like private entrepreneur NGOs, this means that there will be a larger number of secondary groups than base/community groups that will directly benefit from FLMA. In such cases, the community will only benefit indirectly through employment as they did in the contract reforestation project.

A possible serious complication concerns the reforestation areas that are occupied and contracted out to an NGO group instead of the community. The grant of the FLMA to the NGO contractor will provide a legitimate basis for the displacement of occupants whose status has not been legally recognized.

The FLMA, as a response to the tenurial issues posed against contract reforestation, has another weakness. Prospective FLMA grantees contend that the economic incentives attached to the agreement are long-term and not attractive enough to induce those groups to enter into it. It is further claimed that their financial motivations are primarily short-term, hence they would rather concentrate on garnering more short-term contracts such as the three-year contract reforestation project.

In summary, the family approach of the contract reforestation program exemplifies direct participation of the community people in all phases of the activity. The community approach, on the other hand, which is supposed to be pursued in behalf of the community does not necessarily enhance genuine community participation. With its loose definition and operationalization, the gains could be dissipated. Generally, community contracts to real and organized groups composed of community residents will have a more direct impetus than those granted to secondary groups.

SOME REMINDERS ON THE COMMUNITY FORESTRY PROGRAM (CFP)

In another attempt of the government to include the local communities in forest development and management, the Community Forestry Program (CFP) will soon be launched on a pilot basis. In general, the Program aims to transfer the major responsibility of forest resource management and utilization from the commercial timber licensees to the local community within or adjacent to the area.

The Program's operational framework reflects that its success rests primarily on the shoulders of a capable NGO which will be entrusted to develop the local community into an eventual forest resource manager. The effort, as expected, will be complemented by a strong local community organization which will actually take charge of the development, protection, management

and utilization of the forest resource equally among its constituents.

The over-all goal of providing equity concerning access to the forest resource is the salient feature of the Program. Caution must, however, be observed in its implementation because at present, both the NGOs and the local communities still lack the experience and the preparation to undertake such a gigantic task. While community experiences on reforestation and forest protection may be claimed as sufficient, forest harvesting (or logging) and forest product utilization may not be as easy to handle. These are specialized economic ventures requiring a different set of experience and expertise for the implementors. For the community to acquire these, it may require a long process of creating awareness and instilling the value of forest conservation in the mind of every community member before actual operation. For how long? -- It is not easy to tell.

Table 1. Integrated social forestry projects, individual CSCs, 1989

REGION	PROJECT (No.)	TOTAL AREA (ha)	BENEFICIARY (No. of Families)	CSCs Issued
CAR	183	20,740	18,243	7,901
1	193	26,248	13,319	8,313
2	182	34,175	15,569	15,569
3	147	25,021	11,324	9,611
4	293	83,619	34,621	15,347
5	116	32,699	8,000	5,691
6	299	54,953	18,170	15,179
7	226	22,664	14,466	10,386
8	111	22,516	7,824	4,133
9	103	44,486	12,643	data not available
10	257	34,307	12,563	12,127
11	501	87,271	28,550	18,702
12	104	36,920	9,707	5,813
TOTAL	2,715	525,619	204,999	128,772

Table 2. Community forest stewardship agreements, 1989

Region	Name of Group	Location (Province)	Area (ha)	Beneficiaries (No.)
2	Kalahan Educational Foundation	Nueva Vizcaya	14,672	3,000
	Bayagong Asso. for Community Dev't. Inc.	Nueva Vizcaya	1,213	250
3	Siglakas ng mga Negrito sa Canawan	Bataan	165	103
4	Pundasyon ng Bagong Buhay ng Gubatnon	Mindoro Occ.	1,340	400
	Pundasyon Hanunuo Mangyan, Inc.	Mindoro Or.	3,980	781
	Samahan ng Nagkaka-isang Mangyan, Inc.	Mindoro Or.	2,065	415
	Pinagsurutan Foundation, Inc.	Palawan	1,335	746
	Domadoway Foundation	Palawan	2,531	604
	Tagbanua Foundation of Coron	Palawan	7,748	994
	Tagbanua Educational Foundation of Lamani, Inc.	Palawan	1,425	174
	Kapisanan ng Huyon-uyon Mabuhay Asso. Inc.	Quezon	512	130
6	Malay Highlanders, Inc.	Aklan	79	528
10	Temple of Eternal God, Inc.	Agusan del Norte	49	31
12	Bage-bage Muslim Returnees, Inc.	Cotabato	500	100
TOTAL			37,672	8,256

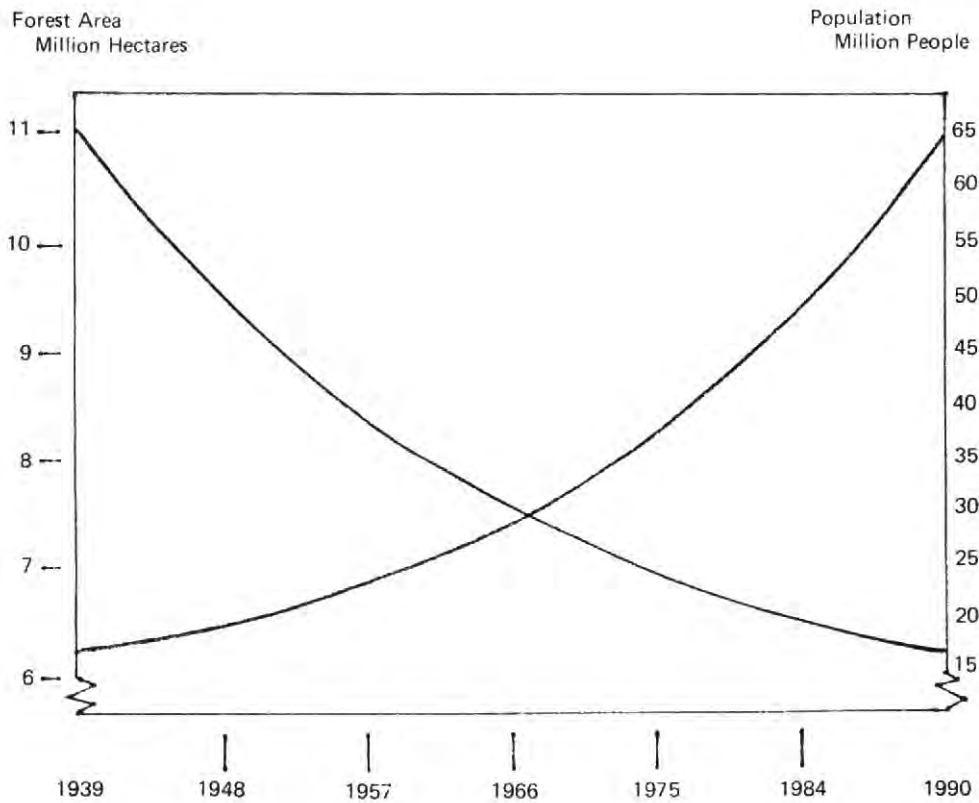


Figure 1. Decrease in forest area compared to population increase, 1939-1990

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