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Getting the best out of government planning and community watershed management

E. Bruno, Philippines

Local government support for barangay (village) plans is a new initiative and an effective starting point in the management of the local sub-watershed. The participative approach focusing on watershed management integrates many of the community concerns and responses. Securing the ecological services of the larger area is also envisaged by providing various services to the different stakeholders and is the goal of the intervention. In achieving this goal a fourfold strategy is employed: (1) bring the process to the lowest level of governance, (2) build on local government initiatives, (3) feed back the process and outputs to the structures of existing initiatives, and (4) integrate community land use plans and strategies with the local government initiatives. Initial activities are already providing valuable changes.

Introduction

The passage of the Local Government Code in 1991¹ is slowly feeding into a process of change, affecting the understanding of all local government units in the Philippines as to their role in the management of natural resources. This is primarily reflected in the development of Comprehensive Land Use Plans (CLUPs), Forestland Use Plans and Watershed Management Plans². In Bukidnon Province in Mindanao, the Bukidnon Watershed Protection and Development Council (BWPDC)³ was established. This move was a recognition of its critical role as a “watershed province” and reinforced local governance for resource management, specifically watershed management.

Bukidnon plays an important role in the cultural and economic landscape of Mindanao, as it hosts the headwaters of four major watersheds in the island⁴. The provincial government understands that a balance is needed to maintain its ecological significance, while promoting the economic development of its people with a population of over a million. This balance is crucial in the overall stability of ecological services in Mindanao. Additional pressure on the remaining forest comes from being a prime agricultural and food provider for the region and continuing agricultural expansion.

While upland areas account for 50% of province, the 1987 SPOT data show that there is only 27% forest cover left, situated in the headwaters⁵. Most of the province’s forested areas are in the Upper Pulangi watershed, that includes the Kalabugao plain in the northeast and Mount Kitanglad in the west, and drains south and west to the Cotabato area. The council identified Upper Pulangi as one of the priority areas of intervention to maintain the remaining forest cover and implementing sustainable land use. The map below shows the Upper Pulangi Watershed of around 309 km² covering nine municipalities.

The forest is now seen as critical in ensuring effective water infiltration and a continuing and moderate river flow, at the same time maintaining good quality water for domestic and industrial use, irrigation and hydropower generation. The Pulangi hydropower plant built in 1980 has the capacity to generate electricity of 255MW, potentially supplying around 30% of the total Mindanao power consumption⁶. However, during prolonged dry seasons the plant experiences below critical water levels. Extra maintenance and repairs are also needed to address the siltation behind the dam.

Strategy and Objectives

ESSC started to work with the province in 2004 to facilitate community integrated management planning. Securing the ecological services of Upper Pulangi sustains the different stakeholders and contributes to the broader stability in Mindanao. This is the goal of the intervention, through a fourfold strategy.

First, is to build on local government initiatives. As of October 2003, the municipal local government units (MLGUs) submitted their watershed management plans. This is a requirement of the Provincial government resulting from the decentralization of resource management⁷, but bureaucratic limitations hinder the provincial and municipal government in setting up a genuine participatory process. In the development of the Bukidnon Watershed Management Framework the limitations of the approach are felt. There is now recognition that the initial outputs provide a framework that must be subject to revisions after going through a further participation at the barangay level.

The BWPDC recognizes that to be more effective, planning and program activities must be brought to the community level through participatory processes. It is the council’s mandate to work with municipal and barangay planners in

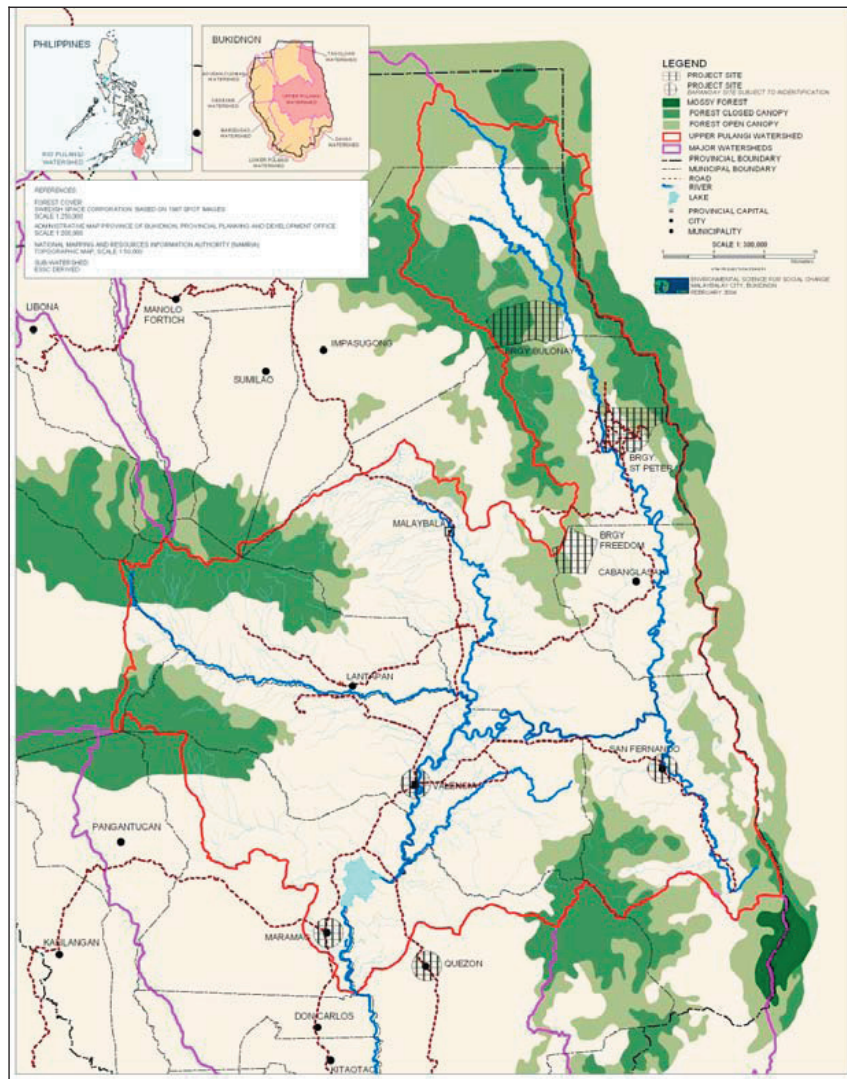


Figure 1. Upper Pulangi Watershed, Bukidnon, Mindanao, Philippines

generating Municipal and Barangay Watershed Management Framework Plans. This also requires involving government agencies in these initiatives. Thus the intervention is a partnership of the barangay, municipal, provincial and national environment agencies who will facilitate the process. The strategy is to involve six of nine municipal units within Upper Pulangi watershed⁸.

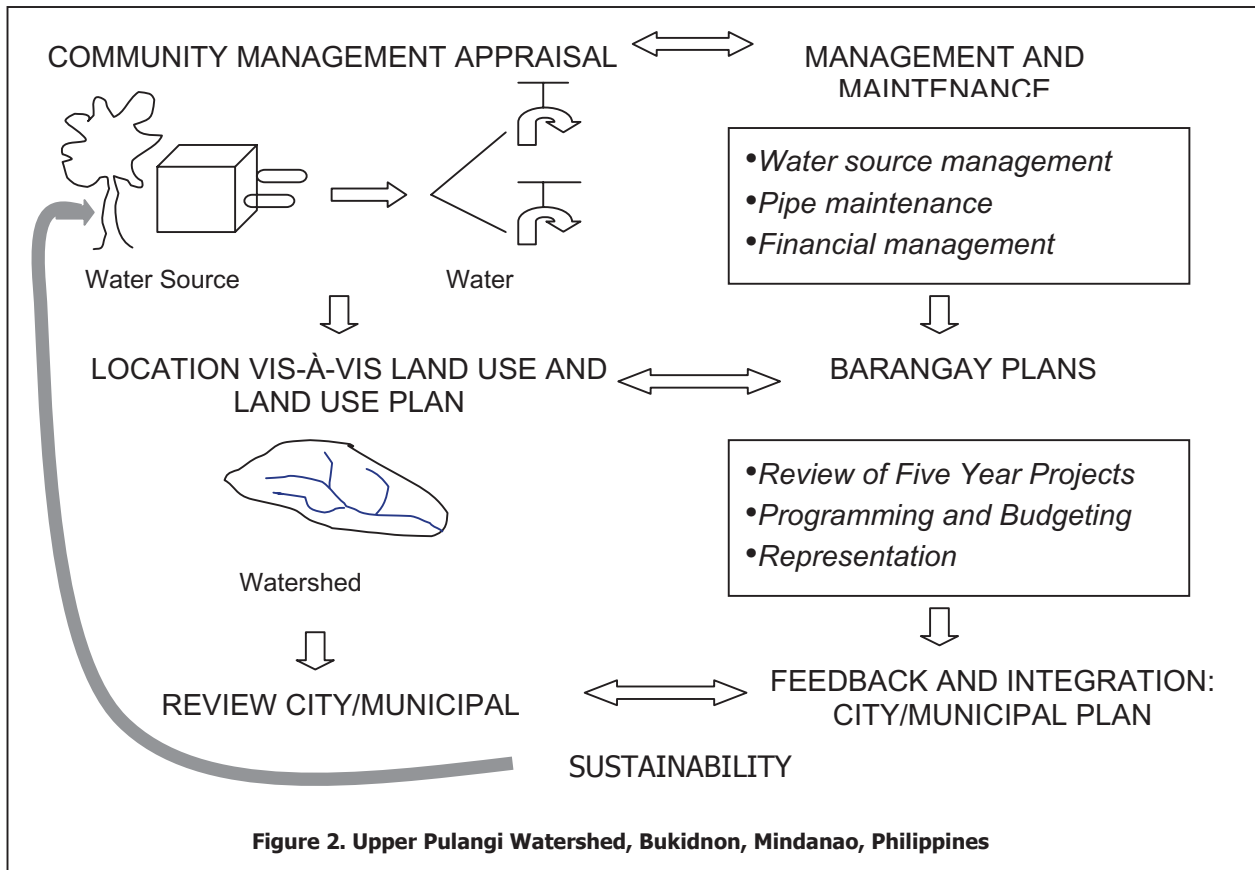
Second is to bring the process to the lowest level of governance. Mandated by various memoranda and circulars MLGUs prepared various plans for managing their areas of jurisdiction, such as the Watershed Management Plans⁹. Positive trends are taking place in terms of involving barangay residents in the planning process. Yet, the outputs are limited because plans are completed at the municipal level. Often a barangay may lose sight of the integrity of the plans as implementation comes piecemeal where a review of the overall framework is lacking.

The effort is to implement the process in one barangay

for each of the six MLGU partners¹⁰. Experiences in these six barangay sites will be important inputs to assess the Upper Pulangi Watershed situation and as a basis to revise the existing framework of the province.

Third, is to feedback the process and outputs to the stakeholders of existing initiatives. Bringing the processes to the lowest level of governance does not assure a sustained effort. Processes and outputs must be presented back to existing structures to generate greater support and enhance policies that otherwise constrain communities in taking an active role in the management of natural resources within the watersheds. The feedback mechanism provides political leaders a basis to make informed decisions that are based on community experiences. Venues for this feedback include the municipal and provincial watershed councils.

Through a series of meetings, community resource management plans and the updated data will be brought to a broader stakeholders' dialogue to draw out resource management



concerns at the province. The aim is to enhance existing plans, programs and policies based on the data agreed by the stakeholders and ongoing activities.

Fourth, is to integrate land use plans and overall strategy with local government initiatives. Taking off from the first step, barangay level land use plans and activities for implementation will be integrated with the local government planning process. This takes the form of a Barangay Development and Annual Investment Plan at the barangay level.

Beyond the strategies and plans are broader opportunities for strengthening management. One of the significant local developments emerging out of the ongoing activities is the story of the Bendum Tribal Council, which has a Certificate of Ancestral Domain Claim (CADC)¹¹. This marginal hamlet has prevented cutting of its forest from where many streams of potable water emerge. Recent efforts of the neighboring barangay, composed of migrants, to gain access to better drinking water has led to the tapping of this water source. Now that the Bendum community is recognized for its good stream maintenance, there is greater recognition of the role they play in resource management and an acknowledgement of their contribution as a culture to ecological services as a whole. The overall process that lead to this level of recognition for the Bendum CADC is gaining acceptability in the five other sites where there are also other government tenurial instruments including Community Based Forest Management¹². Such mainline government programs are seldom integrated with local government activities but as part of a broader approach could strengthen communities to secure

the ecological services of Pulangi Watershed.

The integrative nature of working with full local participation ensures that local relations are strengthened and the communities' asset benefits are developed. Other programs are also strengthened on the ground and new working relationships are established. Such broader agreements can be forged securing ecological services with other indigenous communities and migrant communities in the watershed, and not just by the imposition of government demand for compliance.

"Is this a project implementation or another sort of planning activity facilitated by local government units?" is a frequently asked question by communities when initially approached. The response is to clearly state that the approach is to understand what is desirable by the community and to relate this with what is broadly sought. The desirables most involve both planning and implementation activity. Planning is desired to base strategies on local conditions, such that municipal local government units will allocate budgets for community watershed management development, and a barangay may seek funds to implement its plans.

The desirables

The intervention is a continuous process yet set within the time frame of this engagement. The following key results are sought:

- Emergence and crafting of barangay level land use and natural resource management strategies that use the watershed as the management unit in planning.

- Forged agreements that are drawn from residents to implement the land use and natural resource management plans that are viable with support from different levels of local government (barangay, city/municipal, provincial).
- A more realistic management framework for the Upper Pulangi Watershed that integrates the outputs and experiences of communities and that will upgrade the Bukidnon Watershed Management Framework.
- Recommendations based on the barangay level planning process that enhance national policies and programs on natural resource management.

Balancing the efforts to address environmental sustainability and poverty alleviation is often one-sided with the declaration of a protected watershed or a mere series of handouts. Bringing watershed management to the communities attempts to strike a balance through a broad review of all concerns and options. Community participation is an abused jargon, yet is central to the process. Such participation is worked out through the barangay structure, which is small enough to capture the responses of those working on the land. The challenge is to avoid the bureaucratic system of government that merely places at the barangay level the responsibility to enforce national or even provincial laws and policies. It is therefore important to primarily draw out first the community rules and the basis for regulation within the barangay that can be supported up the line with local government units providing greater support, where applicable. Then national laws and policies need only to affirm these community-based natural resources management rules.

Key lesson

A basic question underlying community-based initiatives is how to institutionalize initiatives once they are put in place. The barangay, being the smallest political unit in the Philippines, has inherent advantages but also has severe limitations. For example, barangay projects are often limited to infrastructure because of the higher level of governance is required of community-based initiatives.

In bringing the watershed management to the barangay level with recognition from the higher level of government, there also comes the expectation of community management and a greater chance of natural resource management concerns being incorporated in barangay plans.

Soliciting the commitment of local government executives and barangay officials requires that natural resource management actions reinforce municipal and provincial framework plans. This necessitates a clear articulation of natural resources management concerns at the municipal and provincial level.

However, the approach of bringing watershed management to the barangay level has yet too create an lasting impact in the province. ESSC recognizes that its engagement through the local government planning process can only progress to implementation through the development of the capacities of both the community and the local government.

Notes

- ¹ Local Government Code of 1991, RA 7160
- ² Executive Order 72. (1993) Providing for the Preparation and Implementation of the Comprehensive Land Use Plans of Local Government Units Pursuant to the Local Government code of 1991 and Other Pertinent Laws. Malacañang, Manila. President of the Philippines. 25 March 1993.
- ³ Presidential Order 270, March 1995. The BWPDC is created “in order to fully protect and preserve the remaining forests in the Bukidnon Watersheds and rehabilitate open areas within their headwaters.”
- ⁴ ERD. (1996a) Province of Bukidnon. Map Publication. Manila Observatory, Quezon City.
- ⁵ NAMRIA-Philippines (1988). Philippine Forest Cover, Swedish Space Corporation, 1:250,000 maps, based on 1987 SPOT Images, Namria, Makati.
- ⁶ Bukidnon Watershed Protection and Development Council, Bukidnon Watershed Framework Plan,
- ⁷ Local Government Code of 1991 (General Provisions, Basic Principles, Section 3, paragraph i) defines the role of LGUs as follows “Local government units shall share with the national government the responsibility in the management and maintenance of ecological balance within their territorial jurisdiction, subject to the provisions of this Code and national policies”.
- ⁸ Selection was based on the groupings in the province.
- ⁹ The Bukidnon Watershed Management Framework Plan mandates the council to facilitate processes of situational analysis, planning and programming in each municipality. The framework plan also encourages the municipal councils to facilitate similar process at the barangay level.
- ¹⁰ The site selection criteria include: presence of natural forest cover, diversity in tenurial instruments, and minimal presence of assisting organizations.
- ¹¹ A Certificate of Ancestral Domain claim (CADC) is an acknowledgement by the Philippine government of a cultural community’s ancestral claim to the land. As most indigenous communities today have never received any land titles since the Spanish times this is the first small step in redressing the imbalance. A CADC needs to have a management plan affirmed by the National Commission for Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) a national level bureaucracy (RA 8371, 1997).
- ¹² Community Based Forest Management Agreements (CBFMA) are granted to communities on forestlands controlled by the Department of the Environment and Natural Resources (EO 263, 1995).

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