



UNITED NATIONS RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

# **OPPOSITION AND RESISTANCE TO FOREST PROTECTION INITIATIVES IN THE PHILIPPINES**

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## ◆ Preface

International concern that forest conservation programmes and projects are not achieving their objectives has been increasing in recent years. Explanations of “project failure” often focus on technical constraints associated with finance, administration and “know-how”. Far less attention has generally been paid to institutional, social or political aspects that influence both the orientation and performance of conservation initiatives. Participatory or community-based approaches to forest protection, which have gained in influence in recent years, have moved some way towards overcoming these limitations by adopting a more integrated approach to forest protection. Nevertheless, their proponents have often ignored many of the pitfalls and tensions that beset “people-centred conservation”.

In this paper Howie Severino examines how the implementation of environmental protection initiatives can be undermined by the responses of local “stakeholders” whose interests and livelihoods are affected by specific forest protection programmes and projects. Following a brief assessment of attempts by the government of the Philippines to reverse forest destruction and promote community-based forestry, the author presents four case studies which focus on very different types of forest protection initiatives and sets of actors. They include large commercial interests which use political and bureaucratic connections to subvert government attempts to curb unsustainable logging and conserve watersheds; NGOs that do not have the necessary community organizing skills; and grassroots organizations that lack cohesion and external support. The author also shows how institutional reforms associated with decentralization can undermine environmental programmes in contexts where, for example, local authorities attach relatively little importance to conservation and waste human and other resources that have been devolved for forest protection.

Beyond analysing the politics of project failure, Howie Severino identifies key factors that have served to counter these negative experiences. He stresses, in particular, the importance of strong grassroots leadership and external support for people’s organizations; sensitive approaches to community organizing on the part of NGOs; lobbying key people in executive or legislative positions of power; exposure of malpractice in the media; and the formation of broad-based alliances that link local and national actors.

This paper was commissioned for a workshop on “Social and Political Dimensions of Environmental Protection” that was organized jointly by UNRISD and the Institute of Environmental Science and Management (IESAM) of the University of the Philippines at Los Baños. Held in April 1996, the workshop formed part of an UNRISD research project of the same name which involved case studies in Costa Rica, the Philippines and Senegal.

Given the sensitive nature of some of the issues, and the difficulty of researching situations involving conflict, corruption and malpractice, UNRISD decided to engage the talents not only of university scholars but also of investigative journalists with academic backgrounds and extensive experience in the environmental field. Until recently, Howie Severino co-ordinated the Environment Desk at the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism. He has written numerous newspaper and scholarly articles on environmental politics in the

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Philippines and is currently a reporter for **The Probe Team**, an investigative news programme on Philippine television.

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May 1998

Cynthia Hewitt de Alcántara  
Deputy Director

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## ◆ Abbreviations and Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
CBBC	Cebu Bishops-Businessmen Conference
DENR	Department of Environment and Natural Resources
EDSA	E. de los Santos Avenue
IESAM	Institute of Environmental Science and Management
IFMA	Industrial Forest Management Agreement
ISF	Integrated Social Forestry
KPPSK	Kapunungan sa Pagpanalipod ug Pagpalambo sa Kinaiyahan (Organization for the Protection and Development of the Environment)
LABB	Luntiang Alyansa para sa Bundok Banahaw (Green Alliance for Mount Banahaw)
MCWD	Metropolitan Cebu Water District
MMWDPG	Muleta-Manupali Watershed Development Project Group
NGO	non-governmental organization
NIPAS	National Integrated Protected Areas System
NPA	New People's Army
OECE	Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund
P	peso
PAMB	Protected Area Management Board
PCIJ	Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism
PO	people's organization
TAC	temporary allowable cut
TLA	Timber License Agreement

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# INTRODUCTION

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Many well-intentioned forest protection policies, programmes and projects in the Philippines have not achieved their goals because of the way implementation has been affected by the responses of different stakeholders. This paper considers how and why local interests undermine attempts by outside agencies or grassroots organizations to protect forests and identifies areas for action to improve implementation.

The forest protection initiatives referred to, such as controls on commercial logging and community-based reforestation, were introduced within the context of recent national forestry policies, which have opened up avenues for involving local people in environmental protection. These policies reflect a growing consensus among many policy makers and development practitioners, in the Philippines and abroad, about the need for what might be called “participatory conservation” (Utting, 1996), namely, an approach to forest management characterized by the active involvement of local communities.

However well-intentioned such policies are, efforts at implementation in the Philippines and other countries have exposed a host of constraints that affect their likelihood of success on the ground. It becomes necessary, therefore, for analysts to examine not only the political obstacles to more enlightened forestry policies at the national level, but the obstacles posed by various local interests once these policies are in place.

This paper examines several such constraints by drawing on four case studies from the three main regions of the country: Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao. Most of these studies were assembled primarily from material gathered by this author in his work as an environmental journalist with the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ), and also, more recently, as a volunteer for a grassroots organization active in upland communities. The case study in Mindanao draws heavily on the work of Ruth Martinez Ignacio, who studied what happened to forest protection activities in a farming community that suddenly became the focus of national and international attention because of successful environmental activism. The present author also visited the town in May 1996 and conducted his own interviews.

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## THE FOREST POLICY BACKDROP

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For much of the post-war period, forestry policy was premised on two primary assumptions: (1) upland degradation is caused by farmers carrying out shifting cultivation, or *kaingineros*; and (2) the timber concession system is the best means of protecting, managing and developing the nation’s forest resources.

In the last decade, however, new policies and presidential declarations on community-based resource management (F.V. Ramos, 1995) and new forestry laws, such as the National Integrated Protected Area System (NIPAS) Act (Republic Act 7586), have turned these assumptions on their heads. Upland farming communities are now seen by the government as potential stewards of the remaining forests; timber companies are viewed more as villains than protectors.

In a 15 May 1996 speech before the annual meeting of the International Tropical Timber Organization, President Fidel Ramos professed in clear terms this shift from corporate to community forestry. He denounced the commercial concession system as “benefiting only those with financial and political clout”, and described it as “biased against indigenous peoples and local communities” (F.V. Ramos, 1996).

We are determined to restore the rights of local communities and indigenous peoples to the enjoyment of our natural resources. People who are organized, who have a real stake in the forest, who have effective ownership, acknowledged rights of use, and who have accepted the protection and management responsibilities over these forests can be depended on to achieve our vision of sustainable management of our forests. We believe that only by empowering organized local communities and indigenous peoples would we be able to arrest the degradation and loss of our forests (F.V. Ramos, 1996).

Of course, only time will tell whether government actually invests enough in upland programmes to make this vision a reality. But such strong rhetoric is being backed with the formulation of policies that will be difficult to reverse. Many national government functions, including pollution control, small-scale mining regulation, agricultural extension services and community forestry programmes were devolved to local governments in 1992 under one of the most far-reaching decentralization laws passed anywhere in modern times.

The changes in policy and official thinking have coincided with the near-depletion of commercially viable forest resources, higher public awareness of the consequences of forest destruction, and a shift of the onus of blame from *kaingineros* to loggers.

In the last several years, a wide range of government and non-government initiatives for forest protection have been launched. Some of these are official policies meant to benefit forest lands nation-wide. Others are specific activities carried out by NGOs whose involvement in environmental programmes increased tremendously following the EDSA uprising in 1986 that ousted the Marcos régime.

Of all government environment programmes in the Philippines, forest protection and rehabilitation have received the most attention by policy makers (Factoran, 1992). The forestry sector has, by far, also been the most favoured by foreign donors, according to data from the Asian Development Bank (ADB, 1995). The

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