

THE ADOPTION OF COMMUNITY-BASED FOREST MANAGEMENT AND SOCIAL SENSITIVITY IN REGION 2, PHILIPPINES: LESSONS LEARNED FOR RESEARCH, EXTENSION AND DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Community-Based Forest Management (CBFM) was embraced under Philippine Strategy for Sustainable Development in forestry. It is a partnership among the various stakeholders, namely the communities represented by the People's Organization (PO), Local Government Units (LGU), Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), non-government organizations (NGOs), and the private sector. The Pos, as the de facto managers of the forest resources are being capacitated by the LGU and DENR as the supra-local actors usually under the assistance of an NGO.

During its eight-year implementation, respondents revealed many instances of institutional conflicts among the various stakeholders, which affected the sustainability of their participation. Nevertheless, one study site recently had a strong tripartite partnership of the PO, DENR, and LGU. Commendable contributions include comprehensive site development (CSD), livelihood enterprise and forest protection, thus, improving the POs' forest management capability, communities' standard of living and environmental conditions. Nevertheless, the great challenge for the various stakeholders is to orchestrate their varied interests that enable them to collaborate in addressing the following identified issues and concerns: (1) the PO's lack of socio-economic base, (2) corruption, (3) lack of transparency and accountability of organizations involved, (4) the loss of interest of PO members to participate in project activities, (5) lack of technical assistance, (6) loss of credibility of DENR, and (7) the lack of equitable benefit sharing.

INTRODUCTION

CBFM In Essence

The DENR, as mandated by EO 263, is implementing the Community-Based Forest Management Program (CBFMP) as a strategy for the forestry sector towards the fulfillment of the Philippine Strategies for Sustainable Development (PSSD). The program has the underlying assumption that local communities when organized, trained, equipped, empowered and provided with security of tenure over public forestlands develop a stake in the forest resources and are motivated to protect and manage them—thus its aphorism: *“People first and sustainable forestry will follow”*. CBFM was conceptualized to be under some predetermined priority areas—those under the DENR's people-oriented projects. It integrates and unifies all the people-oriented forestry activities of the Integrated Social Forestry Program (ISFP), Community Forestry Program (CFP), Forest Land Management Agreement (FLMA), and National Forestation Program (NFP). It has predetermined goals and a schedule of activities on a multi-level and multi-sectoral

(Peoples' Organization or PO, Local Government Unit or LGU, the DENR, Non-governmental organizations or NGO, and the private sectors) endeavor. This being a case of people-participation advocacy, it considers social sensitivity among its other principles to development. Hence, along these contexts, CBFM focus on the following features:

- Security of Tenure. The Community-Based Forest Management Agreement (CBFMA) entitles forest communities to use and develop the forestland and resources for a duration of 25 years, renewable for an additional 25 years.
- Social Equity. Social justice is the CBFM's basic principle in granting forest communities tenure and comprehensive rights to use and develop forest resources.
- DENR and LGU Partnership. DENR and LGUs provide technical assistance to CBFM participants to help them attain sustainable forest management.
- Investment Capital and Market Linkage. CBFM helps participants access investment capital, identify markets, and build marketing capabilities.

CBFM In Reality: The Case of Three Project Sites

The CBFM key activities start with the joint identification of CBFM sites by DENR and LGU representatives. From the identified sites, participants were selected then formed and strengthened into a CBFM-focused people's organization (PO) that would be awarded a Community-Based Forest Management Agreement (CBFMA). Thus, in the dissertation study conducted by the author, three CBFM model sites were selected. These model sites had received many awards and citations due to their commendable accomplishments especially in the forest protection and the Comprehensive Site Development Projects. Such projects had brought them short-term financial rewards.

The study (Fig. 1) involved a critical method of assessment of PO's attributes (leadership, commitment, interaction, managerial capability, linkage and participation) influencing the institutional viability (CBFRM capability, standard of living and environmental impact) of CBFM under the mitigation of the various degree of institutionalization (shared goal, internalization, expediency, habitualization and typification). Findings (Fig. 2) reveal that the institutionalization of CBFM hinges on the leadership, commitment, interaction and participation of the PO members. The higher is the degree of institutionalization of the POs (habitualization and typification), the greater is the chance that the CBFM institutional viability is attained. However, only one of the three study sites has its PO function as an active organization (but only with its officers and a handful of laborer-members) at the time of the study. The two other study sites were practically defunct. One of these sites had one of its PO chairmen become an LGU mayor. But in spite of its power and authority, it was not able to extend any direct financial or technical support to the project site. On the other hand, the third study site had only one PO member (a polygamous farm family) remained active. Nevertheless, all of the developed farms in the three sites still serve as model farms frequented for cross-farm visits.

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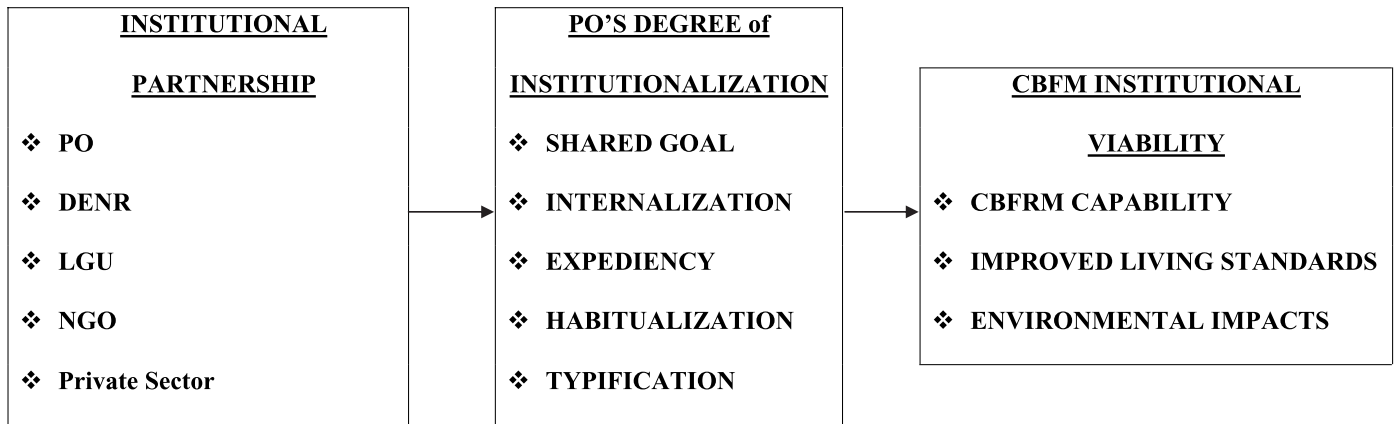


Figure 1. Conceptual model of the study showing the effect of POs' contributions in the institutionalization and the institutional viability of CBFM.

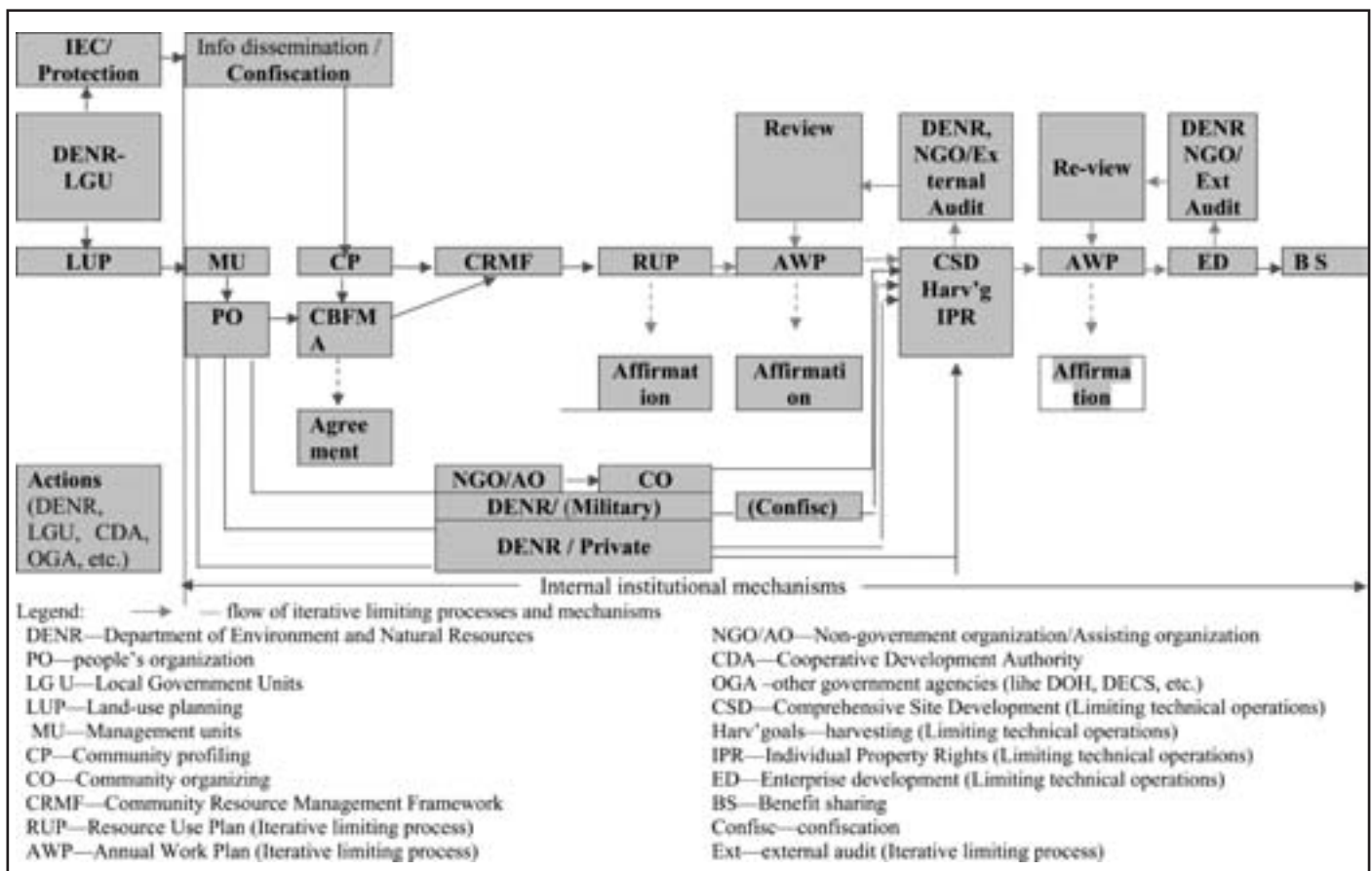


Figure 2. CBFM Implementation Framework

The experiences of the three study sites were the most cited success stories not only in the region but nationwide. However, it is perceived that there are iterative operations and mechanisms that limit the institutional viability of CBFM as a whole (Fig. 3). Under these limiting conditions, the POs simply cannot operate or the members do not earn a living. This must be the reason why, despite the fact that PO participation is viewed as the most important attribute affecting CBFM viability, it is not sustained. Thus some points along these iterative limiting conditions need assessment and adjustment. It must be noted and reiterated that the expected mechanism next to these limiting conditions is the consummation of the expected benefits to be shared by the CBFM stakeholders especially the PO. The author believes that if there is no equity in sharing of benefits there is no institutional viability. Nevertheless, this paper takes institutional viability as a measure of success of CBFM. Moreover, the majority of the key informants from the three PO respondents reveal that the largest portion of their funded activities went to the assisting NGOs and the DENR signatories with just a little amount left to finance their development activities and nothing left to maintain their developed sites.

PROBLEMS, ISSUES AND CONCERNS

The POs recognized the tremendous benefits they accrued from the implementation of CBFM in their localities. Nevertheless, they also raised some problems, issues and concerns that need to be addressed:

1. The lack of a stable socio-economic base, the lack of an institutional partnership for social services and the lack of diverse source of subsistence and income in these communities often force the local people to depend on natural resources. Although they have internalized the significance of conserving biodiversity and other life support systems, they continue making a living from the open access resources, which is why they fail to completely end illegal resource extraction.
2. The POs used to experience delays in the implementation of their project activities due to voluminous and lengthy processing of requirements for the issuance of their Resource Use Plan and Community Resource Management Framework. It entails a heavy financial burden in "follow-ups", where in most cases the DENR personnel in charge use such requirements as a means to demand "grease" money. The suspension order for harvesting has also caused the PO much loss due to non-marketing and disposal of their harvest.
3. The lack of transparency and accountability between and within PO, DENR and NGO caused members to distrust the officers, which further caused management conflicts. One example is the case of one study site where respondents claim that an NGO instigated conflict among the members in order to attain their own prescriptive agenda. This NGO conspired with few but influential DENR-CBFM personnel in creating a scenario that would freeze issuance of their Annual Work Plan. This phenomenon totally stopped the cooperative's operations and they admitted it caused some of the members to go back to dependence on open access resources for subsistence. Though the PO is already a bit empowered to assert their agenda they cannot do otherwise than to operate at the mercy of these influential people. They also expressed some doubts with their ADB contract. They claim they have not seen any MOA, neither have they received any directive from ABD as to the cancellation of their funds.
4. Many PO members lost their interest to participate in project activities as the DENR lost credibility and the LGU lost its

political will. The PO members also admit that most of them lost their interest to participate in project activities due to the non-sustainability of cash-driven activities like reforestation, agroforestry, and timber stand improvement. Another reason is the poor support system from other government law enforcement agencies like the DENR, military, and LGU, since these agencies believe that forest protection is the PO's sole responsibility. They were discouraged as they observed the lack of back up support at times of critical situations like in encounters with illegal loggers. They were even blamed by those officials for initiating such danger. The confiscated timber the PO turned-over to DENR was gone without due notice or dialogue. The respondents even say that a few, very influential members of these groups serve as escorts and/or protectors of illegal poachers and financiers.

5. The PO perceive a lack of DENR technical assistance. The POs recognize their lack of applied technical and social skills in implementing CBFM projects and that they still need substantial technical assistance despite the trainings and seminars attended.
6. The respondents claim to have observed that most of the DENR personnel function more as a nuisance than a support system to the POs. Instead of facilitating the work on the ground, they make things complicated, thus causing much delay in the operation. For instance, on the issuance of a cutting permit, or the approval of Annual Work Plan, this could be dealt with in a much shorter timeframe if there were a sense of urgency and real commitment on the part of the DENR. The respondents complained that the effective operationalization of its AWP was at most good only for 6 months, sometimes as little a two months; the rest of the period was wasted in waiting for its processing and affirmation usually due to heavy requirements and lengthy processing. This interfacing role of the DENR, if not properly directed to meet the needs of the POs, would continue to spoil the real spirit and ultimate intention of the program towards empowering the locals to be at the forefront of the forest development.
7. The lack of an equitable benefit-sharing scheme is a major problem. The respondents recognize the immeasurable value and gains they can take from the forest resources awarded to them. However, they believe they cannot avail of such benefits if access and control are in the hands of the DENR. Moreover, they also perceive that they are least benefited in their institutional partnerships. They cited some cases where the PO has to spend a lot of money, time and effort in the preparation of the requirements. They find themselves at the begging end. Nevertheless, they admit that even within their organization, there is no equity.

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Recognizing CBFM as a participatory strategy for sustainable development in forestry and adopting the principle of social sensitivity, the researcher arrives at the following conclusion:

This paper wishes to reiterate that Community-Based Forest Management (CBFM) is a people-oriented strategy, the basis of which is people participation. One of its concepts is that all its activities must be community-driven. Thus, along the context of the afore-mentioned principle and concept, the researcher arrives at the following conclusions:

CBFM is not yet that relevant to the global paradigm of **sustainable development**. The approach is more of the

traditional/conventional forestry— the activities focused primarily on hard technology with soft technology as the secondary objective. The way the researcher sees the situation is that it takes *productivity* (economic sustainability) and *stability* (environmental sustainability) as the primary conditions and *social equity* (social sustainability) as the enabling conditions in sustainable development, whereas, it should be the other way around. In fact, the PO members have not improved their standard of living. Such perception can be supported with following the phenomena observed in the field:

- a. The majority of the activities undertaken were more of the traditional conventional forestry like forest protection and harvesting. Therefore, there is a need for the implementers to reexamine what sustainable development is and should be, and to move from traditional forestry to social forestry with an emphasis on CBFM as its variant. Leveling-off is necessary since the paradigm shift is far different from the previous.
- b. There is a need to reduce the volume of requirements and to modify annual work plans into longer terms, like 3-5 year plans but with annual accomplishment reports for checks and balances; a breach of which could be the reason for cancellation of RUP.
- c. The DENR's way of correcting the PO from non-compliance is still that of the traditional punitive way. However, the PO must always be given the benefit of the doubt. Holding permits in abeyance means a complete cut-off in operations, which is tantamount to the cut off of the PO households' subsistence. The PO complained they were the only ones being punished for non-compliance of institutional arrangements while the implementers were not. The implementers just get punished if caught involved in corruption. Therefore, there is a need for POs training in conflict management, computer-based management information systems (GIS/MIS), social and business negotiations, skills in resource production and utilization, and enterprise development.
- d. Corruption is becoming habitual and normative and must be admitted as a reality. It is a disincentive to the PO especially when they are setting up institutional arrangements and is also a disincentive to some DENR field workers who worked hard but did not share in the benefit. Thus, there is a need to legalize/legitimize such mechanisms to some regulated and reasonable proportion for every medium to large-scale project searched by other agencies.
- e. Local knowledge of the PO must be recognized, like in their choice of species to be planted in a particular development area. The implementers and other institutional partners must learn to be culturally-sensitive if possible through training on value reorientation.
- f. The practice of people participation is not yet as participatory as it has been conceptualized to be under the defined institutional arrangements of EO 263. There is a need for some kind of motivating and incentive mechanism. The POs must also have participation in decision-making in all aspects of project activities even in the preparation of the evaluation reports of the DENR or NGO.
- g. The operations of the project as well as the participation of the members are not continuous/sustained. Participatory development approaches and techniques to community mobilization is then a felt need.

Furthermore, CBFM under the local reality of the three study sites, is not yet community-based as conceptualized in EO 263 since the researcher observed the following:

- h. That the size of membership in each of the three sites is not large enough (only between 5 to 10% of the households) to represent the communities involved.
- i. That the number of active members is too small (usually only the set of officers).
- j. That major activities undertaken were not community-driven but rather DENR / NGO or donor-driven.
- k. That the functions of the PO as the de facto managers are limited. The DENR representatives seem not to be willing to relinquish their role in the management of the forest resources. The DENR still practice traditional control in the management of forest resources like in the issuance of special permits within the CBFMA watershed units without the PO's consent. For example is the issuance of permits for the gathering of drifted woods to outsiders. Such permits encourage illegal logging and the PO maintains that the members are more entitled to the woods as it is one of the products derived from their area of jurisdiction.
- l. That the mechanism / instrument of harvesting in Individual Property Rights (IPR) is faulty since the permits issued enhanced illegal logging, too. The PO observed those holding the instrument bringing out truckloads of timber but found the holders plantations still untouched.

Summing up all the issues, problems and concerns discussed, the major issue at stake is the conflicting interests of the various interest groups or institutional partners. Conflicts of interest have caused divisiveness both within each and among the various interest groups. It was observed, for example that the majority of DENR personnel who were most frequently in the field have more common interest and sentiment with the PO than those absorbed in their work in the office; thus the difference of perspective in decision-making. Therefore, there is a need for the decision-makers to be in the field more often to consider the interface between what is ideal and what is real before a decision is made. As partners in development, the stakeholders must face the great challenge before them, to direct their varied roles and interests in an orchestrated manner, to be more effective and efficient in empowering the local forest communities or the POs (as the de facto managers) in managing forest resources.

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