



THE UNITY OF DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

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EcoGovernance



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acronyms	iii
Background.....	1
Three Propositions About Development, Environment and Governance.....	1
The Development Aspirations of the Philippines.....	2
Environmental Threats to Philippine Development	3
The Environmental Governance Dimensions of the Threats	4
The Imperatives For Transparency, Accountability and Participatory Decision Making	5

ACRONYMS

ARMM	-	Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
CBFM	-	Community-Based Forest Management
CPUE	-	Catch Per Unit Effort
DAI	-	Development Alternatives, Inc.
DENR	-	Department of Environment and Natural Resources
EcoGov	-	The Philippine Environmental Governance Project
FLUP	-	Forest Land Use Plan
GOP	-	Government of the Philippines
IEC	-	Information, Education and Communication
LGU	-	Local Government Unit
MFPC	-	Multi-Sectoral Forest Protection Committee
MMDA	-	Metro Manila Development Authority
NGO	-	Non-Government Unit
PO	-	People's Organization
TAP	-	Transparency, Accountability and Participatory Decision-Making
USAID	-	United States Agency for International Development

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BACKGROUND

The Philippine Environmental Governance Project (EcoGov) is a joint undertaking of the Government of the Philippines (GOP) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), to install in the Philippines improved system of decision making and of taking action against five key threats to the nation's environment: illegal forest cutting, illegal forest conversion, illegal fishing, over fishing and solid wastes.

The project focuses on three areas in the country: Western and Central Mindanao, Central Visayas and Northeastern Luzon. These are where the threats are either most pronounced or their control is most urgent and needed to alleviate poverty and to promote peace and security among the local population.

This paper outlines how EcoGov plays a role in development and environment in the Philippines and how its thematic concerns link to the ultimate goals of improving the environmental support system for economic growth and security in the country.

THREE PROPOSITIONS ABOUT DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND GOVERNANCE

There are perhaps three fundamental propositions about development, environment and governance from which EcoGov finds its *raison d'être*:

1. Development is the complex of desired economic, social and cultural transformations of a nation (e.g., reduce poverty; improve cultural articulation; strengthen human and economic security). It requires a robust environmental base. The opportunities for development are expanded if the nation's environment has both the quality and integrity to support a wide mix of human enterprises and interests.
2. Environmental quality is the direct result of both the behavior of nature and human behavior. Not much can be done with respect to the former, except to better anticipate it or prepare for it. Human behavior, however, can be controlled or influenced by the operating institutions of society, particularly the government. Moreover, a better environment brought about by better human behavior lowers the risk from what otherwise might be a threatening behavior from nature.¹
3. Good governance is the complex of decisions and actions that regulatory institutions in society—government in particular—make and do to (a) control human behavior and (b)

¹ A poor environment magnifies natural threats like flooding and earthquakes (a phenomenon earlier proposed by the author to be referred to as "enviromagnification"); what otherwise are severe threats from natural occurrences may be mitigated by a strong and robust environment.

harness society's endowments for the common good. Good governance is a necessary precondition to good environment. It would be difficult to achieve a robust environmental base for the nation's development without addressing the issues and constraints of governance.

A good governance of the environment eventually leads to a wider opportunity for national development.

THE DEVELOPMENT ASPIRATIONS OF THE PHILIPPINES

There are perhaps five core development concerns in the Philippines:

1. Poverty Alleviation. The Philippines is poor. Almost 40% of the country's population have incomes below the poverty threshold set by the government. In some parts like in ARMM, it is almost 70%. This is a sure brew for social instability and a threat to national security. It is to the country's interest to improve the income of its people.
2. Population Growth. The Philippine population is large (almost 86 million today). It must subsist on a land area that is among the 20 lowest percentile in the world (29.8 million hectares). Its growth rate of 2.3% is among the highest in Southeast Asia (compared to, say, Thailand [1.17%] or Indonesia [1.6%]). It is to the country's interest to: (a) reduce population to within the it's ability to supply its basic needs; (b) improve population quality to a level in which the proportion of those which are net producers of goods and services would be higher than net consumers; and (c) expand the utilization of marine areas as locus for wealth-making because these comprise a much larger ecological base for development (221 million hectares) than land.
3. Peace and Security. Since its re-establishment as a republic in 1946, the Philippines has been continuously wracked by insurgency, rebellion and internal strife. Unrest is widespread, mainly linked to the skewed distribution of land and incomes. There are continuing insurgency in Northeastern Luzon, the Northern Cordillera, Central Luzon, Southern Taglao and Bicol, Mindoro, Western Visayas, Central Visayas, Eastern Visayas, Northern Mindanao, Eastern Mindanao, Souhern Mindanao, Central Mindanao, Western Mindanao, and in much of the Sulu archipelago. The mix of the insurgency threat are both from the poliical left, in some instances the political right, and from religious minorities. Stringing all of them together is the common thread of poverty and skewed incomes.
4. Cultural Disarticulation. The Filipino culture is deemed by most as inherently good and progressive. Filipinos have the capacity to care for others and to be sensitive to the needs of their communities. They possess the traits that find merit most elsewhere in the world: respect for elders, a deep sense of faith on the divine, and a healthy respect for the environment. And yet, we have among the highest rate of criminality in most of Asia, a *kultur* of corruption that borders on almost being entirely shameless, and a virtual caste system of social and economic elitism that routinely marginalize the poor. It is to the interest of the country that it is able to realign its political, economic and social orders to what are consistent with the native traits of the Filipino people.
5. Economic Security. Beginning in the 1960s, the Philippines has had only from modest to low, and even in some years negative, economic growth. Unemployment has been steadily rising so that domestic labor has been increasingly departing our shores. Housing opportunities continue to be low and the economic continues to be highly

dependent on DFIs. It would be to the interest of the country to muster its own internal capital to attain a competitive economy for its people.

ENVIRONMENTAL THREATS TO PHILIPPINE DEVELOPMENT

The development of the Philippines is highly constrained by the deteriorating quality of its environment. EcoGov deems five threats to be especially critical because they touch on the basic natural endowments and support systems for the poorest Filipinos:

1. Illegal forest cutting. Forests provide the Philippines a number of critical ecological services, among them: (a) sequestration of water, (b) carbon sequestration, (c) as sources of biofuels and fiber, (d) pest breaks, (e) wind breaks, (f) flood mitigation, and (g) biodiversity. Yet, they have been rapidly diminished in the last 100 years. Today, only 17% of the total land area of the country has standing forest cover. While much of the destruction was due to the combination of commercial logging, fire, pest and diseases, and agricultural conversion, one major threat to the remaining stands is illegal cutting.
2. Illegal forest conversion. The other major threat to Philippine forests today is their widespread conversion into agricultural lands: for small crops by swiddeners, for sugar, banana, pineapple, oil palm and other industrial crops by large plantation owners. As with illegal cutting, forest conversion is an especially serious threat to Philippine forests because they are done most everywhere by individuals and small groups, in such small increments that they are hard to monitor and control.
3. Illegal fishing. Illegal fishing threatens almost two-thirds of total reef fisheries in the Philippines. These are mostly coastal fisheries that support the subsistence of poor fishing communities that are hardly able to venture outside their municipal waters. Illegal fishing likewise threaten coral reefs and their biodiversity. Thus, its long term impact is most serious indeed.
4. Over fishing. Together with illegal fishing, over fishing is estimated to cost the Philippines about US2.5 billion of foregone fisheries a year (*Reefs at Risk in Southeast Asia*, 2002). Since 1948, fishery CPUE has plummeted from about 11 t/hp to less than 1 t/hp today (White and Cruz-trinidad, 1998).
5. Solid waste management. The management of solid wastes is heavily eating up LGU budgets. It comprises 5-18% of the total expenditures of 17 LGUs in Metro Manila. It eats up 42% of the total expenditures of MMDA. These are large amounts which could otherwise be invested on development.

There might be more threats than these five. But either they are derivatives of a combination of them (e.g., flooding being due to deforestation and improper disposal of solid wastes), or they are not as basic to many of the poorest communities as these five.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE DIMENSIONS OF THE THREATS

There are perhaps two areas of concern to address the threats: (1) technical, and (2) institutional.

The first involves determining the mix of technical interventions that would most efficiently address the threats. That is, they are cost effective with respect to the degree with which the threat is reduced. These interventions are for technical experts to identify. They may include FLUP, CBFM and MFPCs to address the first two threats; MPAs, seasonality schedules and community enforcement to address the second two, and integrated waste management to address the fifth.

The second recognizes that even with technical tools being available to address the threats, the tools are not properly deployed or effectively used because there is a fundamental incapacity of the concerned institutions to make the definitive decisions or to take the needed actions to use them, or to even address the threats in the first place.

Some may refer to this incapacity as the “lack of political will”, which could be true in many instances. But it could also be that the reason is because the concerned institutions lack the public support, or the capability to muster public leadership, to embarking on the measures or to address the threats. They are unable to obtain the necessary support from their constituencies to address the threats.

Many writers² suggest that institutions may find themselves constrained on their ability to achieve their mandates because they lack legitimacy, public trust and credibility to act for and on behalf of their constituencies. They are unable to gain public support for what they do, or even for what they will sincerely seek to do.

Legitimacy refers to the degree that an environmental institution is accepted by its constituency to be the correct institution to exercise a particular mandate. Its publics and constituency recognize the validity of the institution’s authority.

Public trust is the extent that an environmental institution’s constituency has confidence that the it works to protect their interests and to promote their welfare, and only them.

Credibility is the degree that an institution’s constituency has confidence on its ability to execute its mandate.

Environmental institutions can have unequal levels of these three. If low, their ability to execute their mandates would be weak in that they are hardly able to command public support for their decisions and actions.

If LGUs or the DENR – as the two institutions that the project is concerned about – are not able to more fully address the threats, it can be because they suffer from the malaise of the Filipino public losing its confidence that they are the correct institutions to lead in the efforts to address the threats, that they have only the public’s interests when they seek to address the threats, or that they have the real capability to address the threats. They are unable to muster the leadership and needed public support for their efforts, to mobilize a significant social movement to address the threats. Worse, to many of their publics, their confidence on these institutions have become so low that, to them, they are more part of the problem rather than of the solution.

² E.g., see Utting ed. 2001; IGES-SUIGES 2001; SANREM-LGSP-IIRR 2001; Contreras 2001; Grainger et al. 1998; Jones 1984; Barbiers 1998; Barnett & Morse 1973; Kasperson 1969; Halachmi 1995; Rambo 1984; Blondel 1995; Hayami 1976; Anderson et al. 1984; O’Riordan 1971; Bentley 1967.

THE IMPERATIVES FOR TRANSPARENCY, ACCOUNTABILITY AND PARTICIPATORY DECISION MAKING

The real impediments to LGUs and the DENR being able to address the five threats may not lie on how much they are able to muster technical measures to address the threats. It would seem that whenever they like they could readily procure the necessary science and technology, or adopt legal measures, to address the threats.

It appears that, *ceteres paribus*, their critical need is to raise the public's confidence on them as state institutions to improve the Philippine environment. To need to improve their legitimacy, public trust and credibility, to their constituencies and in their publics' eyes.

To address legitimacy, the core concern is to elevate the degree that the public is made fully aware of what the two institutions are doing about the threats. Assuming that they are in fact doing their best, to the best of what their limited resources can allow, to address the threats, the one sure way of convincing the public that this is the case, would be to keep it continuously informed of their efforts. It follows that to address the decline if not outright loss of legitimacy, transparency of public service—or ensuring that the publics and constituencies of LGUs and the DENR are always made fully and correctly informed of their actions, in a manner that is timely and which will allow them to both register their support or objections to the actions and to correct them if necessary—would be a significant measure to be pursued toward this direction.

To address public trust, the core concern is to elevate public confidence that when doing their mandates, LGUs and the DENR will seek only to serve the public's interests. They will not use the measures to address the threats as cover for graft, or as opportunities for corruption, or to realign public rents and environmental assets for the benefit of only a preferred few. Consequently, strengthening public accountability—or ensuring that there are working mechanisms of command and control, check-and-balance, standards of due diligence, and of rewards and sanctions, which will allow the two institutions to readily explain what they do and how they have used the resources that the public had reposed on them—would be a key measure to be pursued toward improving public trust.

To address credibility, the core concern is to ensure that the decisions and actions of both LGUs and the DENR are solid and robust. That is, they reflect a wider range of collective wisdom that emanates from the larger public rather than from only their staff or officials. Technical competence and environmental wisdom must be clearly distinguished here. The first is a function of schooling. The second, of experience. LGUs or DENR may have the large concentrations of technical competence, but environmental wisdom is almost always ensured and sharpened only by deriving it from the sense of a larger public or constituency than are represented in the internal staffing of the two institutions. In this sense, one measure to pursue to address the problem of credibility among LGUs and the DENR is to widen the participation to their processes of making the decisions, or taking the actions, to address the threats. This means routinely involving representations from different sectors, constituencies, publics and stakeholders to reducing the threats.

Transparency, accountability and participatory decision making constitute the solutions to the fundamental issues of legitimacy, public trust and credibility, which are what actually hamper LGUs and the DENR to lead in the efforts to reduce the five threats.