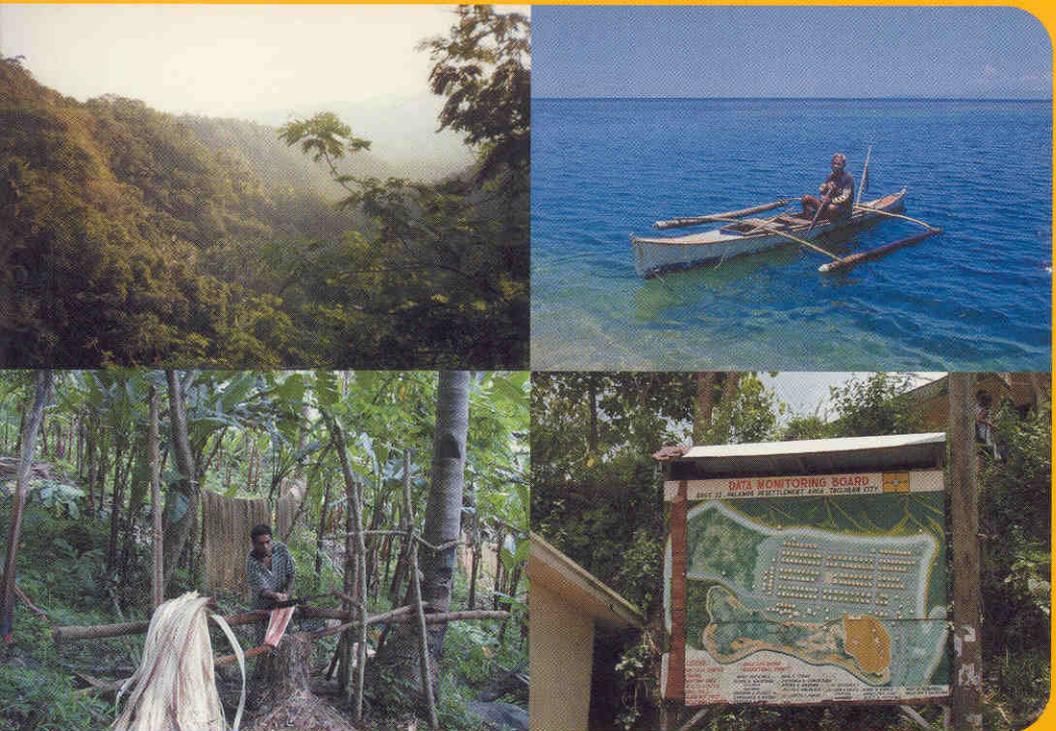


Natural Resource Management Strategies on Leyte Island, Philippines



HUMBOLDT-UNIVERSITÄT ZU BERLIN
Landwirtschaftlich-Gärtnerische Fakultät
Schriftenreihe des Seminars für Ländliche Entwicklung



Natural Resource Management Strategies on Leyte Island, Philippines

Andreas Groetschel (Team Leader)
Reynaldo R. Aquino
Inga Buchholz
Tellita G. Eufrazio-Mazo
Anja Ibkendanz
Novie A. Sales
Jan Seven
Kareen C. Vicentuan

SLE:
Podbielskialle 66
14195 Berlin, Germany
Phone: +49 – 30 – 31471334
Fax: +49 – 30 – 31471409
<http://www.agrar.hu-berlin.de/sle>

Baybay / Berlin, November 2001

SLE CENTRE FOR ADVANCED TRAINING IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Executive summary

Leyte Island is the 8th largest of the Philippine islands, located in Region 8, Eastern Visayas. It comprises of Leyte province and Southern Leyte province, with a total land area of about 750,000ha and a population of 1.5 million. 55% of the households depend on agriculture and fishing to make their living. The average annual family income (1997) stands at PhP66,000. The poverty incidence of families is 41%.

Leyte Island has relatively flat lands along its coastline, and rugged to mountainous terrain towards the interior. Large plains can be found on the eastern and western side of Leyte province. Forest lands were once the most important natural resource. In 1939, 42% of the land was covered with trees, but by 1987 this area had decreased to 12%. Figures from Southern Leyte province indicate that 76% of designated forest land is under agricultural production. The major agricultural crops grown are coconut, abaca and sugarcane as cash crops, with rice, cassava, banana, sweet potato, and corn grown primarily for subsistence. Only about 6% of households are primarily engaged in fishing, however, additional fishing activities for home consumption is common. Marine resources have been depleting due to over fishing and destruction of natural breeding grounds by dynamite and poison fishing.

The Leyte Island Program for Sustainable Natural Resource Management aims at supporting efforts to combat the further depletion of natural resources on the island. The GTZ supported programme is the umbrella for three projects, namely the Leyte Bufferzone Forest Management and Reforestation by Smallholder Communities Project (BUFOM), the Integrated Community Based Coastal Zone Management, Silago Bay (ICOM) and the Tacloban Urban Development and Environmental Management Project (TUDEM). The programme emphasises participatory planning and implementation by strengthening private and official initiatives for the mutual benefit of the people involved. It started in January 2001 and is due to run for approximately ten years.

This study, which was commissioned by GTZ, aims at providing base line information to LIP. The findings are based on research conducted in four sites, which are also pilot sites for the LIP projects, and on information collected from different institutions and programmes at various levels.

The institutional framework for natural resource management

The major players in natural resource management in the Philippines are the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), the Department of Agrarian Reform, and the Department of Agriculture including its affiliate authorities. A large area in the highlands of Leyte Island is under the jurisdiction of the Philippine National Oil Company (PNOC). It is exploiting the geothermal resources and is also responsible for environmental management of the area. Land titling is always with DENR, while responsibilities concerning actual land utilisation are shared between these institutions. Forest lands are under the jurisdiction of DENR; activities on alienable and disposable (A&D) land are the responsibility of DA, while DAR is the organisation in charge of land under the agrarian reform programme. The disputed delineation between these different areas is often a cause of problems.

The decentralisation process, ongoing since the early 1990s, has shifted responsibilities from the central government to a local level. Local Government Units (LGUs), especially at the municipal level, are the supposed key players for implementation of projects and support measures such as extension services. There are offices whose defined task is to support the local development through their expertise and financial help. The Local Government Code stipulates the tasks for agricultural planning and development, environment, health, social, and other related tasks. However, important positions such as the Municipal Environment and Natural Resource Officer (MENRO) are optional, and so far, have not been established.

National line agencies are still responsible for providing support to LGUs. Only limited staff and budget has yet been devolved. The decentralisation process created new offices at provincial, municipal, and barangay level but the necessary budgetary provisions to act independently has not been provided. Hence, part of LGUs tasks is still covered by national line agencies, making the actual distribution of responsibilities difficult to understand.

The Agriculture and Fisheries Modernisation Act (AFMA), the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP), and the Community Based Forest Management Program (CBFM) are the main government initiatives to tackle natural resource management problems. The strategies, as outlined in the Fishery Code or the Forestry Masterplan for example, sound very reasonable on paper. However, implementation suffers from various constraints at the grassroots level. Most ap-

proaches make use of People's Organisations (POs) as their organised target groups. Community organising is in most cases done by NGOs contracted on a temporary basis.

The situation at barangay level

Poverty is a major concern on Leyte Island. The average household is in urgent need of cash income to cover daily needs and other expenses, particularly the education costs of children. With all income spent on daily needs, there are hardly any savings for investments or unforeseen expenditures. Those households receiving remittances from members working in Manila or abroad are usually better off. However, not all remittances arrive regularly.

Limited availability of, and access to, suitable agricultural land are in many places the main reasons for people to adopt shifting cultivation practices on forestlands. In addition, illegal logging is another way of mitigating income problems. However, damage by illegal activities in forests also takes place on a larger scale and with the support of, and for the benefit of, government officials.

Land use patterns of farm households and socio-economic conditions did not differ much amongst the four research sites. An exception is the barangay Palanog with its strong influence from urban Tacloban. Agricultural production is taking place on very small holdings and is done mainly for subsistence. Yields are generally low, and only occasionally can a surplus be marketed for cash income. The same applies to fishing activities. The only common cash crops are abaca and coconuts. Credit facilities are available almost exclusively through shops or middlemen. There are no large agricultural producers or fishermen found at the research sites. However, there are small but successful individual initiatives such as (fruit) tree farming and aquaculture.

Environmental awareness and motivation is limited. Even those people who understand the linkage of persisting land utilisation practices and the depletion of the natural environment, cannot address environmental concerns due to their short-term economic needs. The struggle to satisfy their families' daily needs determines their activities. Individual efforts in tree planting on private lands are rare.

Assessment, conclusions and recommendations

The perceived needs and requirements of the local population show a high degree of congruency with the objectives of the three projects under the Leyte Island Program. With poverty prevailing on rural Leyte Island, a main task of the projects will be to combine efforts of sustainable natural resource management with possibilities to improve the livelihood of the population. Current projects provided by different government agencies have not yet solved the problem of sustainably increasing the living standard on a broader scale.

Uncontrolled use of forest lands is widespread. People without access to suitable agricultural land often engage in illegal logging or try to survive as shifting cultivators on forest land. Institutional support for environmentally sound utilisation of natural resources is currently almost unavailable to the local population. Extension services are very weak and still suffering from the problems brought about by decentralisation. While the responsibility of providing extension services to farmers lies with the municipal LGUs, they lack the staff and financial resources to successfully accomplish this task. National line agencies have not yet devolved the required personnel and budgetary allocations.

Past and ongoing programmes in forest management have not yet been as successful as intended. Reforestation efforts have not yet been able to significantly increase the tree cover in the region. New attempts will have to take into consideration the fact that broad involvement of people in CBFM projects will only be achieved by providing additional financial incentives such as viable livelihood projects. The long-term commitment of resources can only be reached if combined with short-term support.

The same applies to marine resources. Approaches to establish sanctuaries suffer from little awareness about their benefits. Local fishery ordinances are difficult to implement, and law enforcement often suffers from the unavailability of basic equipment for fish wardens. However, coastal and marine resources are of great potential for municipalities.

The coordination and cooperation amongst different institutions and between all levels leave much to be desired. There is often confusion about responsibilities when it comes to land issues. Titling of land is difficult, and people, particularly in settlement projects, sometimes do not know whom to approach. Devolution of tasks has so far taken place mainly on paper. National line agencies are still

heavily engaged in implementation of projects, although this should be with respective LGUs. NGOs often complain about difficulties in dealing with government institutions.

Local Government Units are in need of support for planning and management of their natural resources. Techniques for environmental planning and management are widely unknown. Capacity building at the municipal, provincial, and regional levels is required. Comprehensive Land Use Plans (CLUPs) rarely include forestlands, as those areas are still considered to be under the sole responsibility of DENR. The lack of experience in the LGUs excludes the valuable marine resources from development plans. However, the Local Government Code envisages a more active role for them.

LIP could help in tackling the prevailing problems in natural resource management through different measures. Activities in line with the requirements include awareness raising campaigns, which will be necessary to support motivation for protection initiatives. Technical and economic planning is still required for the CBFM sites as well as for the sanctuaries. Viable alternative income sources have to be identified and promoted. National line agencies as well as LGUs will benefit from technical, and in particular management training. Co-ordination and collaboration between different institutions should be fostered. Capacity building for environmental planning and management is urgently required at all levels.

All project efforts will have to be coordinated by the programme management. Ensuring the political support necessary for successful implementation will be one of the main tasks. Support at the policy decision-making level will be a prime concern when dissemination of successful activities becomes the major concern. The broad range of problems in the field of natural resource management calls for broad participation of important agencies. The composition of technical working groups should be adjusted to changing programme and project requirements.