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PROSPECTS IN PHILIPPINE NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

by

James N. Anderson

As we search for legal tools which will help accomplish the goals of alternative development strategies we must be fully cognizant of the strong current against which we may soon be swimming. The strategies and tactics have been little tried, our experience and knowledge are limited, the commitment will be long, the odds are high against clear-cut success. Are we sufficiently committed to stick it out and give these alternative approaches a chance to succeed?

This paper is a sober stocktaking of the problems and the prospects for the tactics of local organization for participation and implicitly for the tactics of decentralization. I will draw on my experiences in the Philippines to illustrate problems of rural organization and participation that I believe have more general applicability. Finally, I will examine what I understand to be a critical and potentially highly fruitful sector, that of natural resource management, for the application of alternative strategies in law in development.

Problems and Experiences Concerning Grass-roots Organization and Decentralization in the Philippines

The problems of building grass-roots organizations have probably increased as a result of events of the past two decades in the Philippines. To be sure the degree of political consciousness and the arts of group organizing have increased enormously, but other changes have raised greater difficulties than ever before.

External intrusions on (formerly only partially open) local rural populations have had largely negative impacts on the ability to organize. In a relatively resource-limited country like the Philippines where population is already large and rapidly growing and is predominantly rural and poor, where political and economic power are highly centralized, where great disparities exist in wealth and access to society's benefits and where enduring social organization has long scarcely existed above the family level, new technologies alone cannot solve the numerous constraints on development. Yet, new and essentially alien technologies have received the highest

priority in development severely limiting the choice of development strategies. As a result rural people's institutions, organization, and ideology were expected to accommodate to the requirements of technological change. They haven't necessarily, or at least institutional changes haven't been as supportive of productive technology as hoped. As a result, rural institutions, organization, resource management systems and environments were unnecessarily disrupted precisely at a time when they might have played useful roles in contributing to an effective fit among factors which are locally appropriated and already relatively well adapted. The typical response to the side effects created by technological tinkering has been to create a new agency, to hire more government employees who apply piecemeal antidotal actions. Such ramification and duplication of government entities, each with its own organization, has itself degraded organizational capability.

Perhaps nowhere in the world is there such a plethora of government agencies and public sector corporations as in the Philippines. Because, even during the strictest part of martial law, almost no one was fired or even reprimanded, if an agency didn't do its job another agency was put up to help it out or to assume a specific function. Thus, in the minimal political unit, the barangay, there are on paper the relevant representative organizations of a large proportion of these government agencies: a pre-cooperative for all farmers (Samahang Nayon), perhaps also seldas (joint responsibility groups) or compact farms, an association of farmer-irrigators, perhaps a handicraft association, a youth group, a women's brigade, a men's police/watch group, a barangay council, a P.T.A., a 4-H club and so on. Government efforts, especially since 1972, have penetrated to the local level. Agencies vie to make their organization the most effective, but these projects have largely failed. At the same time the multiplicity of efforts have drained leaders and followers from genuine voluntary local organizations and eroded people's capability for action in their own behalf. In part, these agency efforts are a manifestation of the general assumption that on the one hand rural villages are full of harmony and cooperation, therefore, just waiting to be organized and on the other hand that no organizations or institutions worthy of the name exist or could evolve indigenously. Consequently, unrecognized or apparent local organizations of composition, purpose, scale and form which make sense to villagers are eroded or explicitly condemned while replacement organizations designed for agency convenience and which are forced on villagers languish. Sometimes genuine organizations go underground in self-defense. Unhappily, it is the rare case in which local people have been permitted or encouraged to enlist in their own organizations so that they might participate in their own development.

The martial law regime, despite its claims to enhance regionalism and decentralization, has produced more massive concentrations of power

and wealth. Local governments have been reorganized to implement national programs whether or not they were deemed relevant to local needs. Regional councils and provinces have begun to play a role in planning and inter-agency coordination, but they are excluded from most implementation and from any major decision making. Efforts to make some government services more efficient have not yet significantly affected the rural poor.

Government intrusions and incorporation have produced changes in the social scales of rural people. This modernization process has rapidly opened up previously relatively bounded rural systems and has incorporated local people into the world system, and made them highly vulnerable to and dependent upon new external institutions, resources and controls. New complexity has increased specialization and hardened social inequality (Eder 1980). In the newly-expanded social system few rural people were prepared to take advantage of potential new opportunities. Most rural people have suffered even more restricted occupational choices, access to resources, access to benefits of government and access to knowledge concerning how the system works.

Making a greater commitment to intensification of production and commercial agriculture has delivered significant advantages to those culti-vators who could seize the opportunity. However, this very commitment to economizing has increased individuality and accordingly reduced the quality of village collective life. Important, not just sentimental, qualities have been eroded, like mutually interdependent reciprocity, the incentive and capacity for collective action and norms for getting along with others, for organizing production, for solving problems and for maintaining common resources. Over the short term these are significant losses that will re-quire time, energy and resources to reconstitute within a new structure. A final factor concerns leadership of collectivities. Commitment to and success in production for the market often tends to encourage investment in economic pursuits to the neglect of involvement, and especially leadership, in collective action that does not directly benefit a cash-oriented farmer.

Many of the policies that have resulted in more rapid rural development since 1972 have also quickened the flow of rural outmigration. A major category of outmigrants is made up of those neither very secure nor very insecure. Some persons in this middle group possess sufficient education, employment skills, capital for initial support, connection and knowledge of opportunities which permit them to take the calculated risk of outmigration for employment. Their absence from their natal village, sometimes in sizeable numbers, constitutes a loss of available talent which is important for leadership and followership in effectively functioning rural organiza-tions. Being generally young, less conservative, less risk-averse, better

educated and generally able, their immediate presence is missed. However, if successful, they do contribute indirectly to local rural development through reduced pressure on available local resources and by establishing a basis for further outmigration (Anderson 1975 b).

The Philippines is well known as a developing country where an enormous gap exists between the rich and the poor. For convenience it has been identified as essentially a two-class system. But this masks the most important feature of the Philippine system of social stratification--it is a continuous status system. The degree of difference in wealth and power vaires enormously from upper to lower echelons of course, but the striking thing is that within a barangay the differences between the relatively secure and the insecure (both below the "poverty" level) are also great. A recent study of income distribution in a not very depressed Philippine barangay illustrates the point. Corpeño (1980) reports that the mean household income for 311 households is ₱6800 per year which closely approximates the Philippine poverty line (approximately ₱7.5=$1). Of the total income for the entire barangay 10 per cent of households earns 27 per cent of the income. The upper 32 per cent earns 61 per cent of the total. The upper 50 per cent earns 88 per cent. The lowest 34 per cent earns 9 per cent. The lowest 10 per cent earns less than 1 per cent of the total village income. Obviously, there are major differences in needs and priorities among the households in this not abnormal barangay. How can one or two organizations serve the needs of such diverse and skewed populations? Barangay leaders who all come from within the upper 32 per cent of income earning households earn almost 7 times more than the lower 34 per cent. What does "participation" mean for this latter group? What sort of organizational capability exists among them? They obviously aren't about to launch a separate organization, badly as this may be needed, to represent their positions. They are not about to forfeit the leadership available to them by openly challenging those who serve as intermediaries, patrons and counsels for the important events in their lives and who provide their residential lots and perhaps a large part of their employment.

We can carry the illustration a step further. Only 20 per cent of the total income of the barangay comes from agriculture. Almost 50 per cent comes from work in the informal sector and in handicraft manufacture. Modern intensive agriculture will never provide more employment than at present. Technological changes will undoubtedly reduce labor requirements or employment opportunities. What kind of handicraft or small-scale industries can absorb a large number of unskilled workers and at the same time provide annual salaries of at least ₱7000 (twice the income of that for present adult daily wage) which do not require costly travel and which are satisfying enough to keep workers committed and occupied so that they do

not have to engage in multiple occupations to make ends meet? How can people this close to the margin of survival find time to invest in participation in organization? And to what end?

In the Philippines relationships of power dominate everything. Relationships of dominance and submission are acknowledged by every Filipino daily. If all Filipinos know and accept one thing it is that persons are not created equal. The most basic behavior that one learns is to acquiesce to superiors and lord it over inferiors and dependents (to whom you usually do it nicely). While a great deal of effort is allocated to personal intermediation (i.e., individual efforts to use personal connections and chains of connections to manipulate human affairs), outside the family nothing like the equivalent is put into collective action.

Filipinos undertake concerted collective action mainly in two circumstances: (1) to accomplish particular tasks at the conclusion of which the grouping breaks up until the next occasion for its mobilization, and (2) to join together in response to a catastrophe or a life-or-death situation involving a community. Few have had the experience of helping to keep a large collectivity going for an extended period of time. One exception (discussed later) relates to various associations formed for the management of specific common natural resources. Meaningful identification with any group, other than the family, is rare among rural Filipinos. The most important thing to avoid--unless much is at stake--is confrontation with a figure of authority or power. A major part of social behavior and etiquette is geared to maintain a smooth, properly respectful and loyal demeanor toward those in positions of power. In most rural areas socio-political ties remain very much stronger with patrons than with equals. Thus, it is common to encounter a situation in which tenants compete with each other for the favors of a patron which severely reduces the possibilities of mobilization for collective interests and for the development of horizontal solidarity. The situation is changing, but most relationships remain dominantly vertically structured. Where structurally imposed inequalities block rural people's continued livelihood there may be no alternative to confronting the source of power. But in doing so they realize that they must prepare for the worst, for a fight to the death, because the power figure will seldom rest until he gets his retribution for his interiors' effrontery or disloyalty. He'll pursue and punish them, one by one.

In short, the rural barangay is little more than a congeries of families residing together at a particular moment in time. This is not to say that some organization doesn't exist among families, but there exists only a limited sense of group identity and of strong obligation to the barangay as a whole. Most important roles are familial or occupational, linking strategically

others in highly personalistic bonds. The barangay "community" itself is not the basic unit of social and economic organization, despite the way in which it is usually portrayed. There are limited occasions and, in the rural Filipino's mind, little necessity for cooperation on a barangay wide basis. Even in the political sense the barangay is not a strong corporate entity. It is usually difficult to discern the social boundaries of the barangay, except where clear geographical boundaries exist. It is very weakly organized to solve barangay-wide internal problems or to protect residents against outside forces. Most of the associations listed above are recent government introductions. In each of them participation is voluntary and membership tends to be on an individual rather than a family basis. Generally, a sense of shame or government fiat guarantees what limited commitment exist toward them. On a narrower than community-wide basis persons organized with reference to husbanding a common resource, religious organizations, irrigation communals, youth clubs and so on can demand committed participation from individuals who join in them.

It is unnecessary to go on with other things I would wish to say about rural organizations in the Philippines. Work is becoming available which makes, in general terms, many of the points I would make (for example, see Cheema 1980; Colson Ralston and Anderson 1981; Hollnsteiner 1979; Johnston and Clark 1981 or see excerpted edited version by F.L. Golladay of the World Bank; Po and Montiel 1980 and, of course, Uphoff and Esman 1974 and the numerous works published by the Cornell Participation Project). However, permit me a recitation of lessons learned concerning some of the ways by which rural organizations are killed in the Philippines. (Some of these are patented by government agencies.)

1. By not recognizing that an existing organization is already in place when another is introduced.

2. By pushing development of an organization too fast, well beyond the capabilities of its leaders or membership. (It's a slow process.)

3. By overloading organizations with too many functions or requirements, such as responsibilities for reporting. (Even one function is different enough early on in the development of an organization.)

4. By insisting that the organization develop at the same pace and that it maintain continuous operation.

5. By overpaternalistic supervision by government agencies or private voluntary organizations. (But also by withholding supporting services.)

6. By introducing an overdose of funding. (But also through inadequate funding or resources at critical junctures.)

7. By taking inadequate account of seasonal or other timing highly relevant to particular rural people, which can seriously reduce their availability for participation.

8. By mixing incompatible groups of different social classes and other interests making the organization vulnerable to elite capture. (Although leaders will always be from the higher statuses than followers in the essentially continuous status system.)

9. By not reconciling different needs.

10. By not letting participants take a modicum of control and practice as capability warrants. (Let participants make small mistakes and learn from them.)

11. By not recognizing adequately that different procedures for organization, controls, accountability and linkages with the larger system are permissible for organizations with different functions.

12. By not being responsive enough to the participants' perceptions of the need for organization, the purpose(s) of organization, how much organization and participation is required, what kind of organization and participation, and for whom.

Before turning to the final section of this paper, I must reflect briefly on the prospects for law and development. On the one hand, they are very good. The legal profession is a prestigious one in the Philippines and there are an increasing number of lawyers (although still a small minority) who are contributing time and effort to provide legal services for the poor (usually individually, rather than collectively). The University of the Philippines Law School and the Law Center are the leading institutions in the region. They are at the forefront of research and action programs concerning problems of law and development in the Philippines, as some of you know better than I. Some of the best case material on organizations in rural development have been prepared or are being prepared by Filipino colleagues. Finally and closely related, I am continually impressed by the scale of development, commitment, implementation and training in community and group organizing techniques which exist in the Philippines today. The C.O. approach is already well established in the National Irrigation

Administration and is small but growing in the Ministries of Agrarian Reform and of Agriculture. All this bodes well for future efforts in extending law as a tool for development and for helping realize greater success in mobilizing rural peoples in their own organizations through which they can, hopefully, more effectively participate in their own development. However, there is another side and I must sound a final caution. Philippine culture and society provide a remarkable example of a totally pragmatic attitude toward law. Law is meaningful to Filipinos only in the likelihood of its implementation. There is considerable relativity concerning "right" and "wrong." Morality assumes a very different significance from our own. It depends upon the context, the situation, even the persons involved. Ends are of ultimate importance to Filipinos. Laws are means only. They are important to the extent to which they can help achieve a particular end. They are used, stretched or overlooked toward the realization of ends. Thus law is perceived as an instrument to gain power or access to resources.

A Promising Sector for Law in Development: Local Natural Resource Management in Marginal Areas

If the foregoing section reads like a counsel for surrender it is not intended as such. Clearly there are reasons to encourage rural organizations in the Philippines. It may be useful to concentrate efforts on organizational efforts on a particular vital problem area, one in which a crisis presently exists or will soon be evident, but where circumstances are not yet entrenched and where activity is likely to have a major payoff for local rural people who already possess organizational capability.

I am suggesting a focus on developing critical renewable resources -- such as upland watersheds, coastal zone resources, irrigation water -- projects which, experience has shown, are often optimally managed by residents/users themselves. For example, there are the Ilocano farmer/irrigators of Laur, Nueva Ecija (Bagadion and Korten 1980, Unson 1978), the Ilocano Zangeras of Ilocos Norte Bacdayan (Lewis 1971, Coward 1979) and Isabela (Lewis 1971), the irrigators of Sagada, the irrigation communals of Camarines Sur (de los Reyes 1981), the Ikalahan watershed managers, the Barangay Villarica Association of Upland Farmers, the Manobo uplanders of Kagawasan (Hollnsteiner 1979) and so on.

In the Philippines today, the forces of population pressure, resource scarcity, dependence on natural resource exports, increasing demands for the entire range of products in the agricultural sector, a growing mass of landless poor, and environmental degradation combine as never before to threaten the effective development and management of natural resources,

which are critical for any hope of sustained development. Whether one's concerns lie with land, soil, forest, watersheds, water, estuaries, coastal zones, fisheries or food, all are threatened by an onslaught of private, public, national and transnational interests. Until quite recently, and in many cases still continuing today (although often seriously flawed), traditional management systems of specific local populations husbanded the fragile and finite resources required for sustenance and exchange and maintained reasonable ecological balance. However, the increasingly unequal power of national and local-level institutions in the prosecution of rapid development has swamped many local institutions or seriously increased inter-institutional conflict. The survival in this decade of many long-evolved meaningful local institutions, which effectively regulate rights to and manage resources and which could be retuned to do a better job, is seriously in doubt. In the recent past the government has incorporated previously autonomous areas and has set out nationwide, commodity-oriented resource policies. These are conflicting or inconsistent in themselves but even worse they take no account of people who have traditionally used the resources governed under "modern" tenure policies. Moreover, each resource is the responsibility of a separate government agency which goes its own way, in spite of the fact that all the resources are importantly linked. The fact that they are presently all within a Ministry of Natural Resources makes no difference. The goal of each is maximum resource exploitation. Efforts at regulation which might protect and adequately manage the natural resource and contribute to stability of fragile ecosystems are imperfect to say the least. In some cases they are designed (or contain longstanding loopholes) so as to permit the rip-off of the last easily exploitable resources at big profits. In other cases, it is simply that the regulations are unimplementable, especially in the context of rampant graft, corruption and collusion that pervades this sub-sector. In the uplands and in the coastal zone, above all, land grabbing is going on at a fantastic pace as the powerful seek to control that which up to now was unimportant and neglected. In these same ecosystems local tenurial and resource management systems, many of which are productive, protective, energy efficient, resource conserving and sustainable are in direct conflict with modern, nationally-codified, profit-oriented systems (Anderson 1980: 41). As we have seen with existing local organizations and institutions generally, modernizers are often unaware that indigenous systems of forestry and fishery conservation exist and continue to operate. In other instances there appears to be a total lack of concern that other people, much less other resource systems, are utilizing resources that are now exploited by private and public corporations, until those people get in the way. When that happens they are expelled by the law or by private force. If you've been reading about upland and coastal zone "squatters" these are those very people.

Very recently it has become increasingly clear to the Philippine government, whose present and future prospects for economic development are entirely dependent on the export of natural resources, that continued laissez-faire approaches and blatantly ineffective management policies and implementation procedures have resulted in major losses in production. It is also understood that they have raised new social and political problems (not to mention a tragic toll in human misery). They have also exacerbated ecological instability and degradation, all of which is foreclosing future options concerning vital resources.

It is coming to be recognized that adequate management of critical, fragile and ultimately finite resources for high sustained yield, for relative environmental stability, and for social equity requires: knowledge (traditional and research-generated knowledge), appropriate technologies, political will, infrastructures, transportation, markets, meaningful incentives to producers but also effective administration including collective organizations and institutions of local people most closely involved and affected by changes in a resource system. Mobilizing efforts to recapture or generate knowledge and appropriate technologies, political commitment and reorganizing market relations and economic incentives are difficult enough. Often, reforming the administration of agencies which control resources so that they can reach and reinvolve rural people in the management of their resources is even more difficult. Rebuilding local resource-managing organizations is the most difficult and costly of all. Yet, decentralized administration and forms of collective management may be the only feasible long-term means of protecting and optimally utilizing fragile, limited resources. Recent applied research projects focusing on communal irrigation and upland community organization in the Philippines have suggested patterns of agency reform and local organization which are much more effective than established designs.

So far I have emphasized the value of identifying and joining up with people in existing traditional resource management systems in efforts to rejuvenate and retune these systems. Just as promising and perhaps more interesting to most participants at this symposium are instances of development of effective new resource management organizations where none may have existed before. A growing body of work is documenting the processes associated with these developments. Apparently a higher degree of success has attended them. In part this must be due to the critical importance of the resources managed in the people's way of life. Also, there are clearly some other very special considerations concerning the management of resources that make them a meaningful focus for people's mobilization and participation. Despite my downbeat tone in the preceding parts of this paper I am very upbeat about these efforts. I have had the opportunity to

be closely associated with several development efforts involving the management of upland resources and water resources over the past several years. I am now engaged in work that documents such developments in the coastal zone.

Let me summarize briefly some of the circumstances that appear to be associated with these success stories. First, the management project itself and the organization for participation came through the initiative of local people themselves. Second, the developers who responded to the requests for help and who worked with the local populace considered the projects to be of major importance. They dealt with critical problems of general importance. Moreover, the developers were supported in this belief by their superiors, who also had reasons to make serious commitments to the general problem and the project. Thus, the developers devoted genuine and protracted attention to the specific local experience. Third, the developers could not assume that they knew all the answers on these projects because they were in new and relatively unknown areas. The developers were therefore open. They learned from and with the local people that they were working with. They came to understand that there was a great deal of vital importance for the project, that they had to learn from the long experience of the people in their own environment. Fourth, the projects thus evolved from a mutual dialogue and working relationship. The critical elements were not those of preplanning or careful design, they were the daily working through of specific problems, together with capable, continuous supervision and training which incorporated what was being learned together with necessary technical knowledge. Fifth, as the project continued, rather than losing interest and momentum, both developers and the people vigorously challenged and responded to each other. Sixth, from the inception of the project indigenously-based organizations began to evolve. They had problems. Things did not go smoothly. They needed help and support of organizers. They ran into obstacles in leadership, in the conduct of affairs and in administrative capacity. But they survived and progressively developed capability. Seventh, in this process the participants learned about their own resources and they came to understand resources that they lacked. Genuine feedbacks occurred, not only within the organizations themselves, but between the local organizations and government agencies and local government organizations. These were developed on a firm basis of mutual respect and appreciation of the problems of the other side. These were the common points of critical importance to this point in the process of documentation. If it sounds as though more accommodations had to be made on the developers' side in order to engage in the dialogue and growth process that occurred in the course of these projects, I believe the evidence shows that this is indeed the case.

Being an academe, all of the foregoing of course suggests a critical research agenda. I won't disappoint you, but I will specify that this will not be research in the same old style that it has usually been practiced. This research task will require many new tools for a new order of applied research. Much more research is needed on the types of rural organizations and local participation that are associated with specific resource management problems. More research is needed to document the processes of organization for the management of resources, the critical points in such developments, questions of functions, scale, internal logic, responses to changes in the state of resource system, linkages and so on. Other lines of research will be essential. Much work is needed on understanding indigenous concepts and countering the destructive effects of national resource laws and policies. Work on upland land tenure is critical, especially as to the means of providing security so that people can engage in more stable technologies that offer effective management of resources. But work is just as critical on a whole range of other resource systems and their tenures in the marginal areas of Third World countries. These are even less well understood, such that many fundamental problems concerning them have not even been raised.

Governments are beginning to understand that such research which will deliver answers to the critical questions of properly managing resources is of the highest priority. Some government agencies have begun to conduct experiments of their own in alternative management systems. A few have seriously entered into the process of learning as they experiment with projects in uses with various systems and channeling findings into reorganization of the agency and retraining of technicians. These experiments require adequate documentation. In all this the focus must be upon what are the critical problems for people in the complex interaction between them, their needs and their resources.

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