



REVIEWS

Poffenberger, Mark, Soriaga, Rowena and Walpole, Peter. *Communities and Forest Stewardship: Regional Transitions in Southeast Asia*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2006. 150 pp.

For many years, peoples of Southeast Asia have depended on forest resources for livelihood. Southeast Asian governments have also embarked on various projects that utilized forest resources in order to raise revenues to spur economic growth. Thus, the decline in forest cover in the whole region had been largely related to the politics of logging and other extractive industries within the forestry sector. Interest in studying the politics within the forestry sector has increased over time and this had been indicated by the number of studies on environmental politics in Southeast Asia that focused on this particular subject matter.

Today, the forestry sector remains important in the Southeast Asian region. The book *Communities and Forest Stewardship: Regional Transitions in Southeast Asia* clearly makes this point. One of the main reasons why governments and peoples must give attention to the forestry sector is the continuous and fast decline in forest cover, which happened mostly in the twentieth century. In the book's foreword, Mark Poffenberger, one of the authors, noted that the region's "primary forests shrank from over 250 million hectares in 1900 to less than 60 million hectares in 1989." Such development resulted in the crafting and implementation of a number of legislative measures and

policies by Southeast Asian governments. These measures were supposed to address not only the declining rate of forest cover but also achieve the sustainable use of forest resources. Much of the governments' initiatives have dramatically failed despite support that had been provided by international donor organizations. Thus, the authors of the book emphasize that a change in approach is necessary as far as the forestry sector is concerned.

Initially, what makes this book an interesting read is the fact that more recent studies on environment and politics have mostly focused on issues concerning climate change and global warming. Much of the studies about the politics within the forestry sector in the region have been published back in the 1990s. Hence, it is quite interesting to find a book that "explores the process of change that is currently under way in the forestry sector in Southeast Asia, and attempts to identify where progress is being made in conceptualizing and operationalizing participatory modes of stewardship, and where barriers are constraining change." Those interested in the study of environmental politics in Southeast Asia would definitely appreciate the attempt to analyze the process of change as well as the role that communities play in such process.

The book is divided into five parts. The first part provides an overview of the various concepts related to communities and forests. Concepts such as community forestry and participatory forest management are defined. The context that frames the emerging change happening within the region is likewise briefly discussed. Part two focuses on continuity and change in Asia's forests. It provides a short but adequate discussion of the history of forest management in Southeast Asia, an overview of the issues concerning the forestry sector over the years including land tenure arrangements and the emergence of industrial and commercial logging as well as the social responses to deforestation. The third part discusses the different policies, laws and national programs including the processes of legislation and program implementation in different countries in the region. The most interesting and significant part of the book is the discussion of the experiences of specific countries, namely, Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. The fifth part analyzes the forest transitions by identifying the supportive as well as the constraining forces to community forest management. It also explores the potential application for community forest management in Southeast Asia in the future. Finally, the concluding chapter discusses the prospects for

change in the region. The important role of communities, local governments, national government, and the international community as forces influencing community forestry transactions is highlighted.

Definitely, the book is a useful material for students of Southeast Asian environmental politics. More specifically, the country case studies can provide background data and initial analysis for the comparative study of community forestry policies and processes in the region. At the same time, those interested in studying social movements would also find the analyses on the dynamics of community forestry and the interactions among various actors in different countries quite useful. The authors have clearly made the point that based on the experiences in the region, the following are the key factors in successful community forestry management: (1) existence of national policies and a policy framework; (2) priority given by the national leadership and the will to implement the policies; (3) collaboration among different sectors; and (4) provision of adequate funding and support from international donor organizations. Indeed, it is in these aspects that the book makes its significant contribution.

While the study makes its novel contribution, it also opens up other areas for further study. For instance, the authors have cited several times that the Philippines has made important steps in recognizing the land tenure rights of its peoples through the delineation and issuance of Certificates of Ancestral Domain Claim by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources and later on the enactment of the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA). While these initiatives may be considered remarkable, it is also important to note that the implementation of IPRA is replete with challenges. Indeed, as the authors pointed out, the priority given by the national government to community forestry is crucial. At this point, the implementation of IPRA that basically recognizes the rights of indigenous peoples to their ancestral lands and ancestral domains is challenged by the priority given to the implementation of the Mining Act. It is therefore interesting to examine how this development has affected the transition of community forestry in the Philippines as well as in other countries. Finally, it is also important to determine how community forestry management has affected the environment. Although it would be difficult at this point to make a regional assessment, perhaps other researchers can pursue this significant area of research.—**RUTH R. LUSTERIO-RICO**, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR AND GRADUATE PROGRAM COORDINATOR, DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES-DILIMAN.