

## **NGO and Community Participation in Environmental Programs: A Case Study of the Community Forestry Program\***

Ang pag-aaral sa kaso ng limang NGO at lokal na komunidad ay isinagawa upang tingnan ang mga katangian ng partisipasyon ng mga ito sa *Community Forestry Program*. Lumitaw sa pagsusuri na bagamat mayroon pa ring suliranin ang mga NGO ay kakikitaan sila ng sariling kusa sa paglutas ng mga suliraning ito at hindi umaasa nang lubusan sa gobyerno. Nakita rin na ang mga komunidad ay aktibo sa pagpapalano at implementasyon ng mga proyekto. Inirekumenda ang mga sumusunod: paggamit ng katutubong kaalaman at kakayahan; pagbuo ng tiwala sa pagitan ng gobyerno, NGO at komunidad; pagpapalakas ng relasyon ng NGO at komunidad; pagtiyak ng mga papel ng gobyerno, NGO at komunidad sa CFP; pagsasanay sa NGO at komunidad bago simulan ang proyekto; at, gawing mas mabilis ang proseso ng akreditasyon ng NGO.

Together with the people power phenomena in the Philippines came the expansion of the arena for participation of non-governmental organizations" (NGOs) and communities

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This article takes off from the author's masteral thesis entitled "Governmental Organization-Non-Governmental Organization (GO-NGO) Collaboration in the Community Forestry Program: Selected Case Studies.

"In this paper, NGOs are defined as "private volunteer organizations, social development agencies, or alternative professional support or cause-oriented groups that are non-profit-oriented and/or legal which are committed to the task of development and are established for socio-economic, civic, religious, charitable, and/or social welfare purposes (Quizon, 1989:31)." To further differentiate the environmental NGO sector from the general NGO community, the former is as follows: (1) non-profit oriented; (2) voluntary; (3) flexible in dealing with environmental issues and problems; (4) close to crisis areas; and (5) alternative to inappropriate governmental structures and approaches (Ganapin, Jr. 1989:85-86).

in governmental programs. As a result, these actors have begun to play a more significant role in areas which used to be monopolized by the government. Traditionally, NGOs have been perceived as vehicles for the delivery of services where government was absent or to fill in gaps in official development programs. Communities, on the other hand, were viewed as the passive beneficiaries of such. However, times have changed. NGOs and communities now perform more roles in the decision-making process. This is nowhere more evident than in the environmental sector.

In January 1990, the DENR released the Philippine Strategy for Sustainable Development (PSSD). A product of various consultations with different sectors of society, the PSSD aims *"to achieve economic growth with adequate protection of the country's biological resources and its diversity, vital ecosystem functions, and over-all environmental quality (DENR, 1990:4)."* One of the PSSD's guiding principles is to promote citizen's participation in government programs and projects and to decentralize the implementation of the various programs subsumed in the strategy. And a means of harnessing citizens' participation is involving NGOs and communities in governmental activities. In particular, the DENR seeks to involve NGOs in various activities like community organizing, public information campaigns, research/situation assessment, environmental surveillance and monitoring, and science and appropriate technology in the pursuit of sustainable development (DENR, 1990a:12). Meanwhile, the communities are part of the planning, implementation, and monitoring/evaluation phases and are the ones who will ensure the sustainability of DENR programs. A specific program which promotes the involvement of NGOs and communities is the Community Forestry Program (CFP).

## The Community Forestry Program

The CFP operationalizes two of the principles of the PSSD --- the rehabilitation of degraded ecosystems and the promotion of citizens' participation. The program aims to rehabilitate the country's forests by tapping the assistance of upland communities and NGOs. Launched in 1989 through DENR Administrative Order (A.O.) No. 123, the CFP:

*... embodies DENR's commitment to democratize access to forest resources; it champions the principles of social justice and resource sustainability by allowing organized upland communities to benefit from the remaining forest resources of the country (Guiang, 1992:40).*

The CFP was formulated in response to the following issues and concerns --- the need to democratize access to forest resources, the role and responsibilities of rural communities in forest conservation, the exigency of generating employment and alternative livelihood systems in the upland, and the need for a community-oriented, resource-conserving, and an integrated upland development program (Guiang, 1992:41). These issues and concerns are all in congruence with the objectives of the CFP which are: (1) to equalize access to forest resources; (2) to address the need for forest conservation activities; (3) to train rural communities in managing forest resources; and (4) to arrest the spread of poverty in the uplands (DENR, 1989:80).

On the technical level, the CFP was an attempt on the part of the DENR to strengthen the shift from large-scale commercial forest management to forest management by local communities. This shift involves the awarding to upland community residents of twenty-five year Community Forestry Management Agreements (CFMAs) which are renewable for another twenty-five years. CFMAs give upland communities forest products utilization privileges subject to the submission and approval of a management and development plan, to compliance with

DENR rules and regulations, and to adherence to the principles of sustained-yield management (DENR, 1989:82 and DENR, 1991:10). The CFP, then, is the DENR's attempt to attain sustainability in the uplands.

In the implementation of the CFP, the DENR utilizes a sequential strategy. The initial phase involves the social preparation of rural communities with pump-priming activities (e.g., reforestation, timber stand improvement, and assisted natural regeneration). It is during this phase that NGOs will be selected to assist the DENR and the communities. The second phase commences once the communities are organized, registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) or the DENR, adequately trained in forest management and utilization, and are capable of managing and investing their funds. It is only during the second phase that CFMAs are awarded to the rural communities. This is followed by the third phase wherein the DENR will supervise and monitor the harvesting, processing, rehabilitation, and reforestation fund generation of the rural communities (Guiang, 1992:44). This sequential strategy is being implemented through a structure which works on three levels --- national, regional and community levels.

### ***The CFP and the Non-Governmental Community***

NGOs, a vital factor in the CFP, perform eight essential functions: (1) to facilitate discussions between the DENR and the rural communities with the aim of explaining and reaching an agreement on the terms and conditions for project implementation; (2) to assist the communities in organizing themselves into a legal entity and in registering with the SEC or the DENR; (3) to train the communities to take over the administrative work and all other related tasks; (4) to aid the communities in conducting an inventory of forest resources within their respective project sites; (5) to assist the communities

in preparing a management and development plan pertaining to their project sites; (6) to ensure that the inventories and plans are completed on time; (7) to guarantee that the communities have access to appropriate technical assistance and on-the-job training during the implementation stage; (8) to aid the communities in developing and implementing new enterprises and livelihood projects not necessarily related to forest resources; and (9) to assist the communities in marketing forest products and other commodities they grow, harvest or process (DENR, 1990b:193-194). The quantity and significance of the tasks assigned to NGOs reveal how critical the role of these groups are in determining the fate of the CFP. The importance of NGOs in this program is reiterated in Section 5 of the CFP Manual of Operations which states that:

*No project shall be approved for implementation unless:*  
*(i) a competent and credible NGO has signified its commitment to assist in project implementation ... (DENR, 1990c:173).*

This emphasis on NGO participation in governmental programs is an adherence to one of the recommendations of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED). According to the Commission, governments should recognize the significance of NGOs, along with communities, as "important and cost-effective partners" in the task of protecting and rehabilitating the national and global environment and in the implementation of national conservation programs. Recognizing the importance of NGO and community participation in government programs necessitates that their right to know and to have access to relevant information pertaining to the environment and natural resources be upheld and respected. Moreover, these groups should be involved in the decision-making process (WCED, 1987:319 & 328). Thus, through the PSSD in general and the CFP in particular, the DENR hopes to realize increased NGO and community participation in environmental programs.

## The CFP and Communities

Although community participation in environmental programs is touted as a relatively new approach being utilized by the government, it actually traces its roots to the social forestry programs of the 1970s. Community participation as a strategy:

*... contrasts with standard approaches applied in the past which limited the grant of forest products utilization privileges to large corporations and denied this privilege to upland communities. In effect, therefore, this new approach represents the first phase in a comprehensive restructuring of the forest industry (DENR, 1990c:172).*

According to Factoran, "the basic principle behind community-based forest management is that the communities themselves are in the best position to manage and protect the forests (cited in Vitug, 1993:158)." Moreover, the fact that there is an estimated 15 million people living in the uplands provides a sufficient rationale for citizens' involvement in forest resource management and conservation. Since it is virtually impossible and certainly undemocratic to deny these people the use of natural resources, the next best thing is to tap them as protectors of such resources. In this way, they will realize that for them to be able to continue to benefit from their environment, they must make sure that the resources are sustainably utilized, conserved, and protected.

The CFP is one particular environmental program which emphasizes the importance of citizens' participation in environmental activities. In this program, the communities are responsible for ensuring that the projects are nurtured until their maturity, that is, twenty-five years after their launching. The CFP contracts given to the communities are renewable for another twenty-five years. After the initial 48 project sites implemented beginning 1989 under the auspices of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the World Bank, another 17

project sites were launched in 1992, this time funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

### **The Participation of NGOs and Communities in the CFP: Issues and Problems**

An examination of the nature of NGO and community involvement in selected CFP project sites reveals various lessons which may prove to be useful if NGOs and communities are to meaningfully participate in government projects. Among the NGOs and communities studied were the Maranatha Agribusiness and Forest Management Systems (MAFMS), Federation of Apayao Tribal Communities Foundation, Inc. (FATCFI), Eastern Visayas Rural Development Foundation, Inc. (EVRDFI), Negros Forest and Ecological Foundation, Inc. (NFEFI), and VIBANARA Multipurpose Cooperative, Inc. (VMCI). The first four were involved in the first batch of CFP projects under the auspices of the ADB while the last participated in a CFP project funded by the USAID.

The MAFMS project site is located in Ilocos Norte. It covers an area of 1,000 hectares of residual forests and has a total of 216 participants (CFP Task Force, 1992:1). Most of the project participants come from households which depend on upland farming and lowland agriculture for their livelihood. The MAFMS's participation in the project was initiated by the group itself. In particular, it has participated in community organizing, training, information and education campaigns, perimeter surveys, and opening of trailways (MAFMS, 1993:1-3).

On the other hand, the FATCFI is involved in a CFP project in Apayao. Launched on 19 December 1991, this project covers 1,000 hectares and has a total of 254 families as beneficiaries. The community's main sources of livelihood are swidden cultivation, rice paddy farming, rattan-gathering, banana production, and placer mining. The FATCFI was tapped by the DENR to participate in the project and it has so far been involved

in policy formulation, project implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Its main concerns are community organizing and training and information and education campaigns (FATCFI, 1993a:1-3).

A CFP project in Negros Occidental is handled by the NFEFI in coordination with the community residents. This project also covers 1,000 hectares of forestlands and has 100 participants. Most residents earn their living through upland agriculture and sugarcane planting. Like the FATCFI, the NFEFI was tapped by the DENR to manage this project. As parts of its CFP contract, the group is involved in policy formulation and project implementation. In particular, it conducts community organizing activities, education campaigns, and surveys and mapping (NFEFI, 1993:1-3).

The EVRDFI administers the Leyte CFP project which covers 1,000 hectares of forestlands situated in two *barangays*. Residents of these areas are mostly upland farmers and agricultural workers. The EVRDFI's participation in the CFP was initiated by the group itself and it has conducted community organizing and training, information and education campaigns, and law enforcement activities (EVRDFI, 1993:1-3).

The CFP project in Isabela is under the governance of the VMCI. This cooperative was established by the residents of the four *barangays* covered by the project with the assistance of an NGO (i.e., the Bicol Upland Resources Development Foundation, Inc. or BURDFI). The project site spans 4,845.18 hectares with 300 participants as target beneficiaries. Among other things, the VMCI has conducted activities geared towards the development of the management capabilities of its members. Several training workshops which sought to develop skills for livelihood have been held. There have also been seminars which focused on equipping the members with the proper skills and knowledge to handle the implementation of the CFP in the area (Velasco, 1994)



The experiences of these groups as they participated in the CFP, while varied, share certain commonalities. In all these cases, the inadequacy and delay in the release of funds appears to be a common problem faced by the groups. Because of the delayed release of funds, the groups had to conduct their own fund-raising activities or had to pool their personal resources together to get their respective projects on the road. According to the NFEFI, funding is a critical factor which greatly affects project operations. In the group's involvement in the CFP, delayed transfer of funds has been experienced. The group points out that:

*The 15 percent mobilization fund which is ... to be a seed money for operations came last 25 October 1992 and the foundation had to [pay in] advance all the expenditures (NFEFI, 1993:2).*

As for the MAFMS, the group had to advance the expenses for the third and fourth quarters of 1991 as operating funds were released only in February 1992 (MAFMS, 1993:2). Meanwhile, in the case of the EVRDFI, the members of the group "*did strategies and initiatives in order to cope ... [with] activities stipulated in the work plans for the period (EVRDFI, 1993:2).*"

On the part of the FATCFI, the problem was the inadequacy of funds to be utilized in financing key and major activities which were integral parts of the project. By September 1992, a total of 1,101,781 pesos have been released by the DENR but according to the FATCFI, this amount is not sufficient to finance project activities like trainings, education campaigns, reforestation, timber stand improvement, assisted natural regeneration, and agroforestry. As a result, the group has had to rely on its NGO Services Fund savings to finance some project activities like the purchase of the project's nursery site (DENR, 1992:1 & FATCFI, 1993b:6).

For the VMCI, its problem is not so much the inadequacy of funds or the delayed release of such but the difficulty in meeting the accounting requirements of the project's funding agency. According to the Ilagan CFP Project Manager, filling out forms and accounting for each expenditure is something alien to the community residents. In order to reimburse their money, receipts have to be produced for each purchase. Initially, the members of the cooperative found it difficult to meet such requirements but after a few training sessions on proper accounting procedures, they gained knowledge on basic accounting skills. The BURDFI, as the NGO partner, has a financial officer which oversaw the accounting needs of the cooperative during its early years (Velasco, 1994).

Delay in the processing of the accreditation papers of NGOs was also cited as a problem. According to the NFEFI, the delay in the processing of their papers which they experienced can be traced to the practice of requiring NGO papers on a piecemeal basis. Furthermore, changing the officers assigned to handle the processing of papers often aggravates the problem as it then takes a longer time for these officers to respond (NFEFI, 1993:3).

Attitudinal problems were also faced by the groups. There are different angles to this problem. First is the wait-and-see attitude of the participants prior to the implementation of the project. The MAFMS cited their experience where community residents had a wait-and-see attitude because they were not fully aware of the objectives and mechanics of the CFP and they were wary of the government's move to involve them in the project (MAFMS, 1993:3). This attitude has led to the delay in the launching and the full implementation of the project. Second is the negative and skeptical attitude of the NGO and the community participants toward the government. According to the FATCFI, this skeptical attitude can be traced to "*failed previous government project, government bureaucracies, and pre-patterned community approach (FATCFI, 1993h:6)*" Third is the conflict-

attitude between the government and the NGOs particularly on the issue of hiring members of the project's technical staff. In the case of the FATCFI, this problem hindered the smooth operation of their project because the DENR would not approve the people they recommended for their technical staff. The FATCFI cites their case as an example where:

*... we could not import competent technical staff acceptable to your and the Department's requisites [because of ... negative attitudes toward customary and traditional laws] (FATCFI, 1993b:6).*

Fourth is the negative attitude that government projects are "milking cows." This attitude, perceived by the FATCFI as existing among the community residents, was also attributed to the dismal track record of past government programs. Thus, community residents had a general view that people who get involved in government projects are not committed to the goals of the CFP but are only in it for the money. A parallel notion is that reforestation projects mean immediate economic benefits for participants. Since such projects involve large funding, target beneficiaries immediately assume that they will be receiving huge financial rewards. Thus, when they learn that the benefits of participating in the CFP are reaped only after several years, they lose interest (Velasco, 1994). This was one of the problems faced by the members of the BURDFI when they were trying to convince the community residents in Isabela to join the CFP.

Low morale and lack of discipline were exhibited by the participants from the communities and the NGOs. These were due primarily to late salaries and delayed release of operating funds. In the case of the FATCFI, the participants could not grasp the idea that they are being paid based on input and production performance. Since they are not used to bureaucratic processes, they could not relate to the fact that the payment for services they render have to pass through several channels before reaching them (FATCFI, 1993b:6).

In addition, there is also the problem of the lack of exposure to service-oriented programs and of technical expertise on the part of the NGO members. The FATCFI, in citing this problem, accepts the fact that its staff is not adequately equipped with the proper technical skills needed for the project. Hence, the group suggests that the DENR should conduct technical training workshops for NGO members particularly those assigned to the field (FATCFI, 1993b:6-8).

On a more general level, the MAFMS mentioned two problems which they encountered in the process of working in the CFP --- the poor economic condition in the project site and insurgency (MAFMS, 1993:3). These problems may not be directly related to the CFP but it is undeniable that they have an effect on the operations of the project. Because of poverty, uplanders opt to practice swidden cultivation rather than participate in the CFP because the former is more financially-beneficial in the short-run. Since most uplanders live below the poverty line and subsist on a day-to-day basis, they prefer to be involved in income-generating activities which will enable them to earn money quickly. Practicing swidden cultivation provides them with their needs whereas if they participate in government forestry projects, they have to wait for a long time before they are able to reap the fruits of their labor.

Another way by which poverty inhibits participation in the CFP is by limiting the community residents' access to information, education, and skills. According to the FATCFI, most of its members come from indigenous community groups and as such they live below the poverty level. This has prevented them from taking up higher education and deprived them of developing their potentials and skills. Thus, when they get involved in government programs, they are not adequately trained in the technical aspects of the programs (FATCFI, 1993a:3 & 1993b:6). In the end, the inadequacy of skills of the project participants hampers smooth project operations.

Insurgency, on the other hand, affects project operations in several ways. For one, participants may fear for their lives out in the fields where they are vulnerable to being caught in the crossfire. Another reason is that an unstable peace and order situation in the provinces causes anxiety among community residents. There is always the fear that the project may be temporarily stopped or canceled because of insurgency and militarization (MAFMS, 1993:3). A further dimension of this problem, experienced by the BURDFI while working with the VMCI, is being accused by outsiders of being subversives. When the NGO won the contract to implement the CFP and manage it for the first three years of implementation, those who lost the bidding embarked on a black propaganda campaign by claiming that several NGO and cooperative members were active in the New People's Army (NPA). This made it more difficult for the CFP implementors to encourage more community residents to join the project (Velasco, 1994). Because of the reality that these issues are ultimately linked to the CFP, the government, NGOs, communities, and other concerned entities must work together to resolve them.

With regard to the partnership between the DENR and the NGOs, two additional problems were encountered by the NGOs in the process of working with the government. The first problem is the breakdown of communication linkages between the government and the NGO. The problem of miscommunication may be traced to the geographical distance between the DENR Central Office (located in Quezon City) and the project site. Miscommunication may also be due to cultural differences among the participants. One instance was cited by the FATCFI. The use of phrases like *isulat ang totoo* on the part of the government was, from the point of view of the community members, tantamount to saying that the latter were lying or feeding the government officials false information (FATCFI, 1993b:7-8).

The second problem is the presence of hierarchical working relations. This issue of hierarchical working relations was cited by the MAFMS based on their experience. The DENR was the one issuing orders and the organization was expected to simply follow those orders (MAFMS, 1993:3). In such situations, the NGO becomes the subordinate of the government and the latter retains its powers over the former. The NGO then becomes the implementing arm of the DENR. This is what happened in the case of the MAFMS wherein the organization was involved in project implementation only, specifically in community organizing, training, and information dissemination.

### **The Future of NGO and Community Participation in Environmental Programs**

In the face of all the problems faced by NGOs and communities as they participate in environmental projects of the government, they have formulated recommendations to improve the situation they are at present. To resolve the issue of delay in the transfer of funds, the groups suggest that the authority to release project funds should be delegated to the regional DENR offices. This lessens the geographical distance between the central offices of the government and the community and NGO participants and, thus, enables faster communication among the parties concerned. This will also shorten the length of time in the processing of papers required prior to the release of funds. This recommendation, of course, will prove to be easier to implement in provinces where there are already smooth working relations between the DENR Regional Office on the one hand and the NGOs and communities on the other. Such is the case in Isabela.

To augment the inadequate funds allocated by the government for the various projects, it is suggested that the NGOs and communities involved should take the initiative of

implementing income-generating activities apart from the project itself. The FATCFI suggests the formation of a credit cooperative with the capital to be deducted from the payments to be made to the participants. This cooperative will then be the source of operating funds (FATCFI, 1993b:8). For its part, the VMCI opened a *sari-sari* store which caters to the needs of the residents. The profits earned are then channeled to various revenue-generating projects such as poultry-raising, handicraft-making, and banana-planting (Velasco, 1994). This makes the groups less dependent on the prompt release of government funds.

Another problem is the delay in the processing of NGO accreditation. As in the problem of delayed funding, the MAFMS suggests that steps should be taken by the government to eradicate bureaucratic red tape in the processing of papers (MAFMS, 1993:4). For example, if NGOs and communities are already accredited by the SEC, there should no longer be any need to be accredited by the DENR and vice-versa. A single accreditation by an authorized governmental unit should suffice.

With regard to the attitudinal problems cited by the groups, the resolution of these will require a comprehensive approach. The wait-and-see attitude on the part of NGO and community members can be significantly reversed if they see that the government is committed to the project and is sincere in involving NGOs and communities in the CFP. One means of showing sincerity and commitment is by releasing project funds and paying the participants for services rendered according to schedule. The latter move will greatly encourage more participation from community members as most of them live below the poverty line (MAFMS, 1993:4). Thus, having a definite and reliable source of income will contribute to changing their attitude toward the CFP in particular and the government in general.

There is also the need to address the conflictual attitude among CFP participants. Conflicts arise from the participants' having varying perspectives as to how to go about conducting activities related to the projects. An example where there was a disagreement between the DENR and an NGO was cited by the FATCFI:

*It was not necessary for us to have connected our pipe layout to the... unused tank for the constructed water system as we had tapped our pipe directly to a naturally-made intake. Construction of a deposit was not necessary with the volume of flow from a naturally-made intake (FATCFI, 1993b:9).*

The FATCFI was justifying a move it made with regard to improvements done in the project site because the DENR officials did not agree with the group's action. Had there been prior agreement as to how to conduct project activities under the contract, there would be no need for any of the parties involved to justify their actions to the others.

These conflicts may also be a result of cultural differences among the participants. Perhaps the DENR (and the government in general) will benefit by heeding the following plea:

*May we have the option to solve such [problems] with the same desired specified results. Being from the area and region, we know more of our customary, traditional laws, politics, religion and beliefs, negative and positive traits all affecting the social structure of our communities (FATCFI, 1993b:7).*

In other words, the government is encouraged to make use of indigenous knowledge --- technical or otherwise --- existing in the areas where CFP projects are located. The government should assimilate such knowledge rather than impose on the communities and NGOs. There should be a



conditionality, though, that only those indigenous practices which adhere to the principle of sustainability should be permitted.

The people's distrust of government and any of its program or project can be reversed for the good but "*only through example and not blackboard lectures.*" In other words, it is only through concrete actions on the part of the government that the people will develop trust in the government and its activities. Examples of such concrete actions are the turnover to the participants of refunds and other benefits earned from being members of the cooperatives set up for the CFP and the tangible manifestations of economic upliftment derived from the projects (FATCFI, 1993b:7).

Lack of discipline, low morale, and lack of technical expertise are pertinent issues which must likewise be addressed by the participants. These may be resolved by conducting training sessions and workshops for the CFP participants (i.e., participants both from the government and the non-governmental sectors). The focus of such activities should be to orient the participants on the nature, aims, guiding principles, and mechanics of the project they will be involved in. Moreover, such activities should develop and strengthen their technical and administrative capabilities (FATCFI, 1993b:8). Every issue related to the CFP which is raised during these sessions must be carefully threshed out to ensure smooth project operations. The MAFMS made a significant point with regard to this issue --- that the effort to educate, inform, and train all CFP participants should be a continuing process (MAFMS, 1993:4). Hence, the training sessions for project participants should not remain simply as a pre-implementation activity but should be conducted regularly throughout the duration of the project and should be incorporated into the project schedule itself.

The resolution of the problem regarding the poor economic condition in the project sites is one of the objectives

of the CFP. In the case of the MAFMS, the group suggested that one means of alleviating the community's low economic standing is for the government to construct an all-weather road. This will facilitate the transport of the products generated from the CFP project (MAFMS, 1993:4). This move will contribute to the community's income. Other recommendations include the implementation of income-generating activities not based on the extraction of forest resources and the establishment of credit cooperatives.

The insurgency problem is an issue which, as one NGO admits, is beyond any of the participant's control. But although such is the case, providing employment and livelihood projects may help contribute to the solution of the problem of insurgency (MAFMS, 1993:4). This solution, though, will work only if it is poverty which pushes people to turn to armed struggles. Otherwise, such a solution will hardly make a dent. As regards the VMCI experience, the participants pointed out that one factor which contributed to the decreased level of insurgency activities in the project site is the fact that the combatants opted to be involved in the CFP project rather than continue fighting. In fact, most of the residents of one of the four barangays covered by the Ilagan CFP project are former members of the NPA (Velasco, 1994).

In the final analysis, these NGOs should be commended for formulating solutions to their problems on their own and for not depending on the government for the resolution of these issues and concerns. This reflects the growing self-reliance among the members of the country's NGO community.

### **Lessons from NGO and Community Participation in Environmental Programs**

The experiences of the five groups in participating in the CFP reveal that NGOs have gone a long way from being the implementing arm of government and that communities are

longer passive actors in the program process. However, improvements can still be done in the following areas to make NGO and community participation more meaningful and productive:

*Expand participation by encouraging the use of indigenous knowledge and skills.* In the formulation of policies geared toward environmental protection and conservation, the use of indigenous knowledge and skills should be promoted and encouraged provided that these are consistent with the practice of sustained-yield management. In fact, a scholar argues that the government must encourage rural communities and indigenous groups to actively participate in environmental protection particularly as such pertain to natural resources they depend on for survival (Agbayani, 1993:68). As expressed by the FATCFI, the participants native to the project site have an advantage because this is the environment in which they grew up. Furthermore, they know more about the customs and traditions practiced in the area than the government. According to the FATCFI:

*Because of the social structure within the region and the nature of the program ... we cannot just go and get the ball rolling without getting our management representative and staff from within the locality. Millions worth of government projects have failed in the locality because of such projects being directly managed by non-natives of the locality (FATCFI, 1993b:9).*

This means that the government would do well to harness indigenous knowledge and skills which are appropriate and environment-friendly. The practice of imposing foreign technology on the upland communities, for instance, ought to be stopped as this only creates cultural conflicts between the government and their target beneficiaries. Leeway should be given to the indigenous communities to apply traditional skills they have developed through years of living and surviving in

the forests as long as such practices are not ecologically-destructive.

In line with this, the government should respect indigenous cultures. As it is, the inclusion of upland communities in environmental programs is already a commendable move on the part of the DENR. However, because the DENR operates with its own organizational culture, it is unavoidable that conflicts at the cultural level will occur. The best way to resolve such conflicts is for the DENR to get acquainted with and respect the cultures of the indigenous groups it is working with. In particular, the FATCFI suggests that:

*As so-called partners of the Department, may we be more professional not to have pre-conclusions basing on hearsays and be more professional in viewing cultural differences (FATCFI, 1993b:7).*

In other words, the DENR must respect the NGOs and the communities and the latter will do likewise. In addition, the government should not impose its ideas on the communities but should harness indigenous skills and knowledge for its various programs provided that such adhere to the principle of ecological sustainability. Sometimes, indigenous skills are even more appropriate to apply than the foreign technology being promoted by the DENR. Where no appropriate indigenous skills are being practiced, that is when the DENR trains the community residents on alternative technologies and skills.

*Develop trust between the government, the NGOs, and the community residents.* Based on the experiences of the NGOs and communities involved in various CFP projects, mistrust of the government can be traced to the dismal track record of past government projects. This is further intensified because of the government's failure to deliver its promises (e.g., release operating funds on time, pay wages on schedule). A means by

which to develop trust between the government and the people's sector is to improve the communication linkages among them. Transparency in government, NGO, and community operations (e.g., opening books of accounts, holding public consultations and deliberations) and voluntary exchange of information will contribute to the improvement of relations between both parties. Developing trust likewise involves the performance of duties effectively and efficiently which will reflect the commitment to the program and the desire to attain its objectives.

A particular means by which the government can develop trust on the part of the NGOs and the community residents is to release funds according to schedule. Since most CFP participants live on a day-to-day basis, a day without wages is a big problem to them. Government would do well to make it a point to pay the salaries of the participants on time. In this way, community residents will believe that the government is sincere in reaching out to them and is committed to the project.

*Strengthen the relations between NGOs and the community residents.* In cases where members of the community also belong to the NGOs, there is no problem in developing smooth working relations between the NGOs and the communities. But in instances where no local NGO exists and a national NGO has to be "brought in" from outside to assist community residents, *working relations may be strained* because of mistrust or other attitudinal problems. In the case of the FATCFI and the community residents of Lenning, Apayao, there was no need for the participants to get acquainted with one another as some of the NGO members also belonged to the community (FATCFI, 1993a:4). This facilitated the development of smooth working relations between the NGO and the community residents.

Such was not the case in Isabela. The members of the NGO which won the contract to assist the community in the CFP project came from Bicol (since BURDFI is a Bicol-based NGO). This fact, coupled with the residents' perception that it

implementation of the CFP project will deny them the economic benefits they derive from illegal logging in the area, made it difficult for the BURDFI to convince the residents to participate in the CFP. However, after various consultations with NGO members, community residents, DENR officials, and local government officials in attendance, a plan was agreed upon whereby the BURDFI will organize the residents, assist them in setting up a cooperative, and train them to manage the forests (Velasco, 1994). Because of the persistence of the NGO members, they were eventually able to gain the trust and confidence of the residents and their working relations has improved.

Orientation workshops where members of the NGOs and the community residents introduce themselves and discuss the details of the project may likewise help break the ice. Once again, strong communication lines play an important role in strengthening relations between the NGOs and the community residents. Information should be shared freely and the NGOs must make it a point to relay all pertinent information coming from the DENR to the upland community members. Regular consultations, dialogues, and meetings should be conducted to enable all parties concerned to deal with problems and issues immediately. Such activities will facilitate the development of good working relations between the NGOs and the communities.

*A clear delineation of functions of government, the NGOs, and the communities should be done.* Although the CFP contract to be signed by NGO participants clearly states the functions to be performed by the DENR and the NGOs, there are still instances where there is an overlapping of functions. In order to resolve this problem, there is a need to clearly define the tasks and responsibilities of the parties involved. One step which may be taken is to hold consultations where both parties go over the CFP contract and thresh out gray areas. In this way, problematic issues will be ironed out prior to contract signing and program

launching. Again, this will save precious time and scarce project funds.

The division of labor in the CFP, or any other environmental program for that matter, should be based on the expertise of the parties involved. For example, the NGOs' expertise is community organizing and training and the government's specialty is administration. For their part, the residents' proximity to the problem areas gives them a first-hand experience of the environmental problems which plague their provinces. Given such a scenario, the NGOs should be tapped to perform community organizing and training activities, the government should take care of the administrative work, and the communities should focus on formulating solutions to the problems based on their experiences. This will eliminate the possibility of assigning tasks to participants which they cannot fulfill adeptly. One example cited by the FATCFI is that the group was tasked to conduct technical training workshops for the upland community working with them but the staff members' lack of technical experience prevented them from doing so. The group's administrator, thus, suggests that courses emphasizing technical and management/administrative skills development should be conducted by the DENR prior to program launching. Annual refresher courses and re-orientation sessions should likewise be held (FATCFI, 1993b:6 & 8). Therefore, through partnership with the government, the NGOs and communities will be able to develop new skills and gain new knowledge. On the part of the government, it will acquire information regarding indigenous environmental practices.

*Prior to program implementation, training workshops should be conducted for NGO and community members.* The rationale behind such a move is to acquaint all parties involved with every detail and with the mechanics of the program such that by the time the program is in operation, the NGOs and residents will no longer be wondering to themselves what they are expected

to do and how they are to go about accomplishing their tasks. This suggestion was raised by the FATCFI as it pointed out that its CFP staff:

*... lacks exposure to service-oriented programs, technical experience, and management/administrative skills. However ... the management has tried and will [continue to] try to correct such shortcomings mostly [with the] direct involvement and commitment of the staff and community (FATCFI, 1993b:8).*

In particular, training workshops in the different CFP components should be conducted. These are reforestation, timber stand improvement, assisted natural regeneration, and agroforestry. Furthermore, NGO members should be instructed in technical activities like perimeter surveying, mapping, and resource inventory, among others. Once the NGO members are equipped with these skills, they can in turn train the community members. In this way, knowledge and technical skills will be passed on from one sector to another. Technical training workshops involving CFP and community participants should be conducted to develop and strengthen the technical skills of NGO and community members. Once they are armed with these skills, they will no longer be dependent on the government to provide them with technical services.

*Make the NGO accreditation process more flexible.* An oft-cited problem on the part of NGOs is the delay in the processing of their accreditation papers. The DENR NGO Desk has attempted to resolve this problem by having national NGOs accredited by the NGO Desk National Office and the regional and provincial NGOs accredited by the respective NGO Desk Regional Offices. Still, there continues to exist the problem of delayed processing of papers. This has been attributed to "*too much bureaucracy and red tape*" in government (MAFMS, 1993:4). To address this concern, it is advised that paperwork be kept to a minimum. The government must keep in mind that it is working with



NGOs and rural communities which are not used to and even shun the practice of having to fill up many forms. Thus, paperwork should be reduced to the bare essentials. On the other hand, the NGOs should see to it that they comply with all the requirements for accreditation and submit such promptly. After all, it is not just the government which should do all the adjustments.

The government should also avoid biased decision-making in the accreditation of NGOs. According to the EVRDFI:

*It has been observed that NGOs under "politicians" are always being prioritized specially in the accreditation process. This should not be done ... to avoid frustrations [on the part] of NGOs [who aim] for the development of poor Filipinos (EVRDFI, 1993:3).*

Hence, the DENR should, in the selection of NGOs which will participate in various programs, adhere strictly to the criteria set forth in A.O. No. 52, Series of 1992 (i.e., "General Rules and Regulations on the Participation of Non-Governmental Organizations in the DENR Programs"). Moreover, emphasis should be given to the track record of NGOs and their officers and members in development programs.

### **NGO and Community Participation in National and Local Governance**

The recent years have witnessed the increasing role of NGOs and communities in governmental affairs. NGO and community participation is an emerging trend in governance and a trend which has been generally looked at positively. Despite this, problems continue to arise in the process of government, NGOs, and communities working together. In light of these, there is a need for all parties concerned to address such problems together in order to strengthen NGO and community participation in national and local governance.

The participation of NGOs and communities should not only be promoted but, more importantly, should be actualized. Participation should not only mean taking part in the program process or being physically present in the project site. Meaningful participation should include having an influential voice throughout the program process particularly during the decision-making stage. The presence of NGOs and communities should be felt not only out in the field but also in the boardroom where crucial policy decisions are made.

Through the increased participation of NGOs and communities, it is hoped that the genuine empowerment of these actors will be attained. But empowerment is not manna from heaven or a gift from the government. Rather, it is a process of enabling entities --- be they NGOs, POs, community groups, or individuals --- to decide for themselves. Thus, empowerment is not something which is served on a silver platter but is something which one works for. Therefore, the challenge for the government and the people's sector is to struggle for and achieve genuine empowerment of the people --- together. In the end, according to a former DENR Secretary:

*Indeed, NGO and PO participation in government undertakings will remain a crucial component of development efforts. It is not a question of how long these organizations will remain actors in the development agenda; but rather, it is a question of how large a role they will play (DENR, 1992:1)©*

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