

PARTICIPATORY PROCESS IN NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT AND THE POLITICS OF EMPOWERMENT

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ABSTRACT

This paper draws concepts from the experiences in Manupali Watershed in Bukidnon, Philippines. Participatory process has become imperative in agricultural development work because of the dismal failures of conventional top-down models. Because farmers are the main stakeholders of the Manupali watershed, they need to become equal partners in development actions that concern them. To achieve this, a new paradigm is required. This paper focuses on the central question of how participatory process can be institutionalized in natural resources planning and management. In the case of Manupali watershed with various stakeholders and different levels of control, it is viewed that local capacity building results to a gradual sharing of power among local stakeholders and in the longer term leads to a more sustainable use of watershed resources. This paper outlines the attempt to institutionalize the process via training needs assessment (TNA) and related capacity in the watershed. This paper aims to contribute to the discussion on how stakeholders participation can be made meaningful and can be integrated into existing institutions and local community processes particularly in the household level.

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INTRODUCTION

Industrialization is gradually transforming rural landscapes into urban centers and metropolitan areas. Despite this, vast populations remain dependent on a productive natural resource base for a living. However, the long term viability of the natural resource base is threatened by increasing exploitation of land, water and forest resources by a growing population. In recognition of the delicate balance between feeding a growing population and continuous industrial development, a need to focus on promoting sustainable agriculture and natural resource management is now becoming more pronounced.

Natural resource management is the rational utilization and conservation of land, water, and forest resources at farm-household and community levels for continuously improvement of the livelihood, and human welfare in general (Sharma, 1998). However, the dismal failures of most natural resources development and management interventions in the past were attributed to the conventional top-down models of development. This was partially anchored on the lack of capability among local planners. Hence, to achieve a rational natural resources management, a new paradigm is required. There is a need to adopt a model that widens the participation on decision making that directly influences their lives such as what resources and how resources are to be used. Natural resources management needs to include the traditionally excluded members of society—the local stakeholders, such as the local community, the local government units and other organizations that have direct stakes on a particular resource.

Starting 1998, a partnership between four organizations were forged and committed to assist in building local capacity for natural resources management at the local level, specifically in Manupali watershed. The objectives of the partnership were two-fold: 1) to build the capability of local planners, institutions, and local communities in natural resource management (NRM) and sustainable land use planning, and 2) to institutionalize the participatory process in the local political structures or institutions in the context of community resources management.

This paper describes the process of local capacity building for natural resources management in the Manupali watershed. We attempt to discuss the lessons that we learn from the experience related to the following questions: How can we improve the capacity of local government units and local community to manage their own natural resources? How can the participatory process in natural resources management be institutionalized at the local political structure and institutions? How can stakeholders participation be made more meaningful in natural resources management and sustainable land-use planning (SLUP)?

We have to warn the readers however that this endeavor is still a work in progress and the lessons that we learned are based on the latest monitoring information that we have collected in the field (March 2001).

THE PROCESS

The process flow of capability building for NRM and SLUP at the community level is shown in Figure 1. It shows the type of participants by respective groups of participants at different phases of project development.

During Phase 1, a study team from SEARCA and CMU conducted a Training Needs Assessment (TNA) focused on Manupali Watershed, at regional, municipal, and barangay levels. The results showed that government systems and structures for NRM planning were in place, so with the mandates, vision, and objectives at various levels. However, there was a need to integrate NRM into other plans, programs, and projects as well as to integrate these plans, programs, and projects into a unified whole that would ensure the integrity of the natural resources base of the area. Also, there was the need to enhance planning and implementation of the various plans and programs. The local planners and officials agreed that there was a need among local planners for a training on sustainable land use planning (SLUP). In addition, the government, through the Housing and Land Use Regulatory Board, placed enough pressure to every municipality in the Philippines to come up with a Comprehensive Land Use Plan (CLUP). We saw this as an opportunity for integration and institutionalization of rational natural resources management at the local level planning. Based on the results of the study, a training curriculum and materials on sustainable land use planning were developed.

In Phase 2, the training proper at the local level was conducted. This was participated by representatives from the Provincial Government, Central Mindanao University (CMU), Municipal and barangay LGU's, BIDANI Institute, and SANREM CRSP. SEARCA, UPLB and IIRR served as the trainers and facilitators of the learning and sharing process.

In Phase 3, the CMU team was assigned to monitor and evaluate the CLUP of Valencia and Lantapan based on the SLUP format. The results showed that the needs of the communities were not captured in the CLUP. It was very general and there was insufficient factual data base on NRM. A separate Forest Land Use Plan (FLUP) was prepared. Thus, data base generation at the community level was recommended. This resulted in the preparation of Participatory Landscape Lifescape Appraisal (PLLA) manual for Community Resource Management. With the PLLA manual, a training of trainors (TOT) in PLLA was conducted involving 28 participants from the provincial office, CMU, BIDANI, HPI, and SANREM CRSP. The trained manpower from CMU and BIDANI was organized into five small teams in preparation for a training-workshop involving six communities in the Municipalities of Valencia and Lantapan, Bukidnon.

At this point, we would like to address one question: How is capability building for NRM effected and what organization or group of stakeholders to which institutionalization of participatory process is most appropriate? The CMU team conducted a group discussions and considered the possible organizations such as the Barangay Development Council (BDC) or the Program Planning and Implementing Committee (PPIC), which was organized by BIDANI, and create another Ad Hoc Committee. On the basis of the established criteria of stability, or sustainability, and equity of representation from various stakeholders, the PPIC came out as the appropriate organization to reckon with. It is represented by various sectors, tribal groups, civic, NGO's, and sitio leaders. It is also less affected by changes in local leadership.

Given such decision, a training-workshop on PLLA under Phase 3 was conducted involving the members of PPIC ranging from 22-41 members in six communities. The trained PPIC members were organized into sub-teams equivalent to the numbers of sitios. Actual PLLA work by sitios was then carried out with technical backstopping (TB) from the BIDANI team. The primary and secondary data were collated, consolidated and will be validated by the Barangay Assembly. (Note: The validation was postponed because of the national election.) The validated data will be used as inputs to the next activity which is the actual preparation of SLUP, a supplemental plan to be incorporated into the Barangay Integrated Development Plan (BIDP) or can also be the BIDP itself. The local SLUP or BIDP will then be submitted to the municipal level for integration to the Municipal SLUP. The BIDP will also assist, through the PPIC, the formulation of farm planning.

The process is yet to be completed. There is a need for continuous monitoring of the community and household dynamics as these are always influenced by other external factors such as changes in market and policy incentives. Participatory monitoring and evaluation will be carried out to determine the success and failure indicators of this kind of initiative.

The framework of capability building for NRM and institutionalizing the participatory process at the local level is shown in Figure 2. This will be made through the BIDANI process.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Although the activity is still on going and the capability building is still on the actual PLLA application phase, the following indications are noted:

1. Local pool of human resources are now trained in natural resources management, and are based in different organizations and levels of authority, such as the provincial development office, municipal development office and local barangay officials and community leaders. One main feature of this capacity building program is having a local anchorage—the Central Mindanao

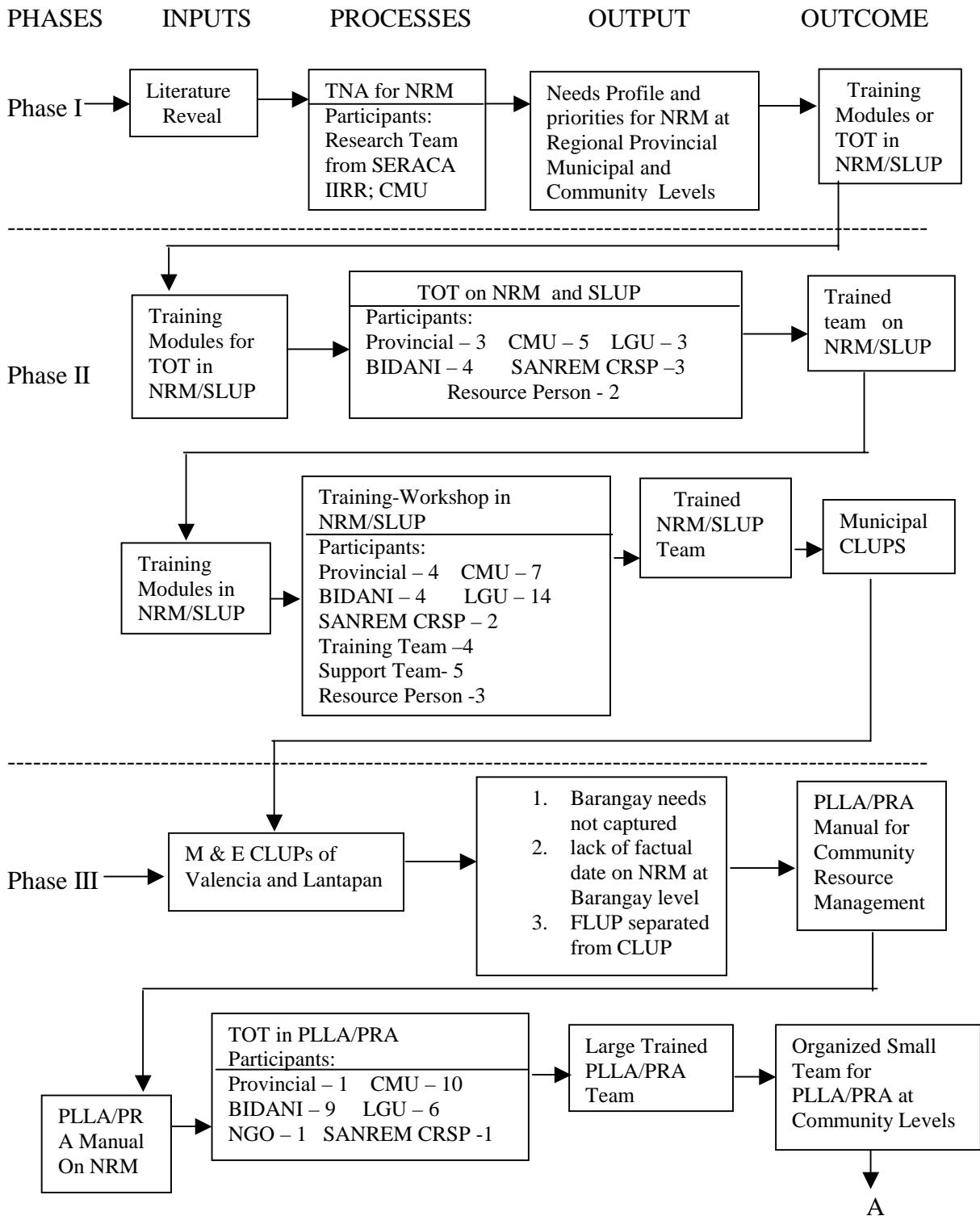
University-BIDANI Institute. The choice of local institution like CMU is based on the fact that research and academic institution is more stable in terms of organization, as there is no rapid change of leadership and ideally is immune to politicking which is common in many localities in the Philippines. The university has also the mandate to do extension activities along this concern. This may be a long term investment but can provide sustainability to many efforts in the management of local environmental resources.

2. The trained career professionals in the provincial as well as in the municipal levels can now have a common framework to discuss issues with the local scientists and academics, with less and less dependence on imported expertise from Luzon and from abroad, which is expensive, and support is not always available.
3. The local leaders (the PPIC members at the community level) are already able to complete the actual conduct of PLLA in their respective barangays. One barangay has already validated its data with the Barangay Assembly. Hence, capability for PLLA is building up within PPIC.
4. The PLLA, NRM and SLUP concepts and process have enriched the already participatory nature of the BIDANI processes.

CONCLUSION

The path towards building local capacity is not a straight line. From each turn, we learn what works and what doesn't work. In this arena, there is a need for flexibility, tempered with a good grasp of community processes. What doesn't work should be replaced kindly with a new approach, grounded on the principle of providing local community both the opportunity and responsibility to manage their own resources, define their needs, goals and aspirations and make decisions affecting their well being. For example, training on SLUP of municipal development officers does not guarantee a plan that reflects many local communities' unique goals and aspirations. Hence, the municipal SLUP training should be complimented with other activities which target the local communities. This would allow the local people to participation meaningfully in the planning and decision making processes at a higher level.

Figure 1. Process Flow of Capability Building for NRM/SLUP at the Local Level



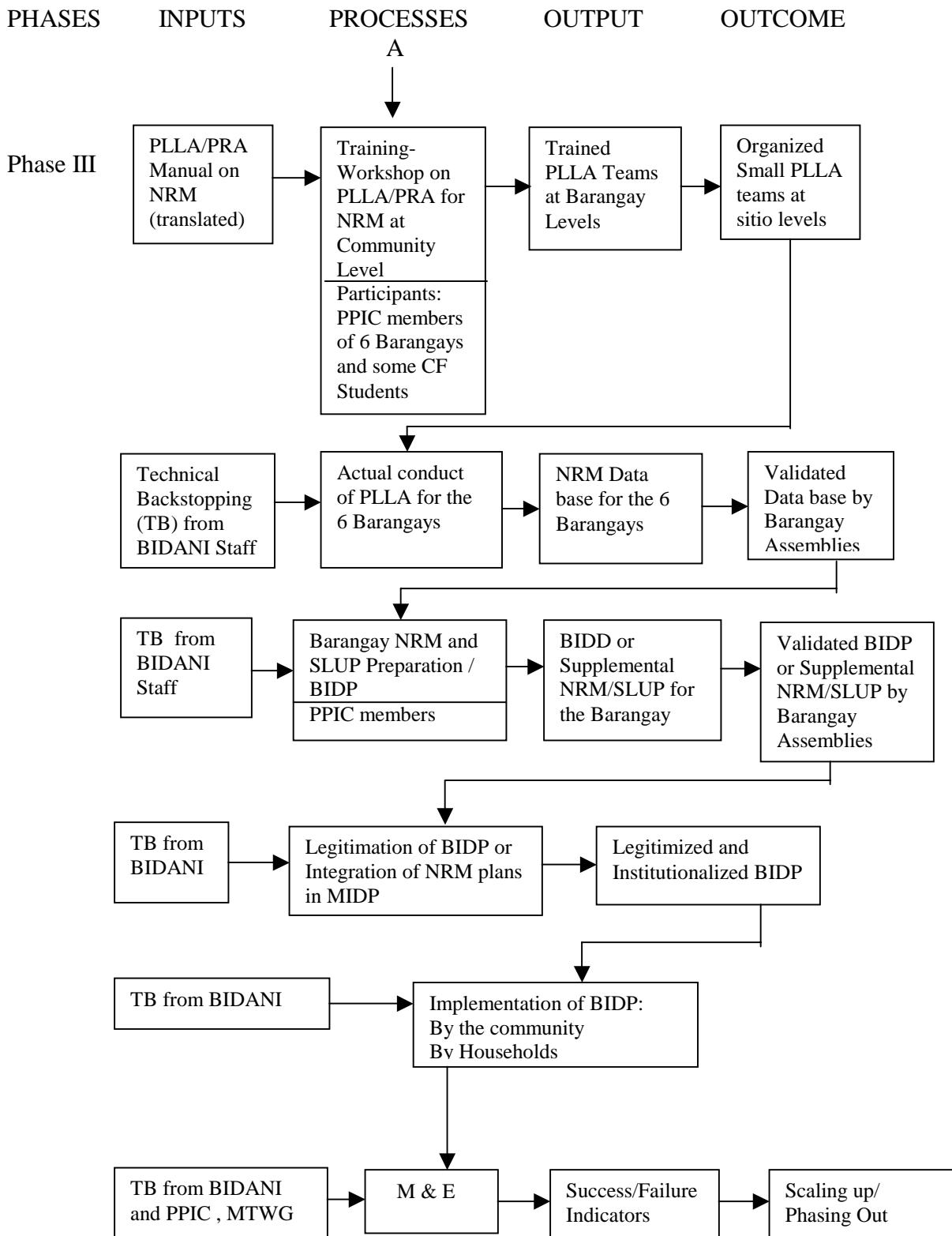


Figure 2. Framework of NRM/SLUP and institutionalizing the participatory process at the local level through the BIDANI Approach

