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## STAKEHOLDERS ADDRESS NATURAL RESOURCE-BASED CONFLICTS IN THE PHILIPPINES

**A WORKSHOP NATURAL RESOURCE-BASED CONFLICTS IN THE PHILIPPINES: TRENDS, CHALLENGES, AND ACTIONS WAS HELD ON 13-14 MAY 2004.**



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*75 participants from NGOs, national and local governments, donors, the private sector, and universities participated in the workshop.*

Conflicts over dwindling supplies of forests, fish and water in the Philippines are increasing, and effective mitigation tools and approaches are needed. To address this challenge, USAID organized and co-sponsored with the Philippine Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), a workshop on “Natural Resource-Based Conflicts in the Philippines: Trends, Challenges and Actions.”

Seventy-five participants from NGOs, national and local governments (including two former Cabinet Secretaries), donors, the private sector and universities reviewed conflicts over natural resources in Asia, discussed mitigation tools and identified priority actions. Participants came from the Philippines, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and the U.S.

The participants agreed that conflict mitigation strategies and tools should focus on conflict prevention rather than ‘curing’ conflicts. As conflicts are expected to get worse and lead to heightened violence due to an increasing demand for dwindling supplies of natural resources—forests, fish and water—priority actions include resolving conflicting policies and laws; developing baseline data on conflict areas including website and resource materials; adopting sector-specific alternative dispute resolution training programs; and establishing a network of practitioners capable of mitigating natural resource conflicts.

### **MITIGATING CONFLICTS CENTRAL TO MANAGING NATURAL RESOURCES**

The Philippines face four key challenges related to natural resource management: conservation, corruption, conflict and competitiveness. Conservation—the wise use of natural resources—is essential to sustainable economic development; however, growing demands for natural resources are severely depleting the country’s limited supplies of forests, fish and water. Corruption and other failures of governance such as the open access of forests and fishery resources, has led to pervasive overfishing, destructive fishing and illegal logging.

Conflict, often violent, results when resource users compete for declining supplies of forests, fish and water, especially when the loss of the natural resources threatens people's livelihoods. The lack of natural resources, especially water, can undermine the ability of the Philippines to attract and retain economic investments, and maintain an acceptable quality of life for Filipinos.

USAID, DENR and other stakeholders such as NGOs and public interest law groups have been engaged in addressing natural resource conflicts for many years. Natural resource managers have developed and applied tools such as mediation, negotiation, and community dialogues in different parts of the Philippines for a variety of natural resources. This workshop brought over 75 natural resource management practitioners and conflict experts to help stakeholders develop a better understanding of natural resource conflicts in the Philippines, describe where conflicts presently occur and future trends, assess what tools work well in mitigating conflict, and identify priority actions. The participants also shared experiences and agreed on next steps to address this increasingly important topic, not only in the Philippines but in other parts of Asia.

USAID's Asia and Near East Bureau provided core support for the workshop and the participants benefited greatly from the insights and guidance of Dr. Mary Melnyk, Senior Advisor for Natural Resources Management. Dr. Melnyk leads a USAID project to address natural resource management conflicts in Asia.

## **STAKEHOLDERS' OWNERSHIP FROM WORKSHOP PLANNING TO IMPLEMENTATION MADE A DIFFERENCE**

USAID/Philippines, together with the DENR, led a highly participatory process that included a core Working Group comprised of legal rights advocates, NGOs concerned with conflict mitigation and other USAID partners to oversee the design and implementation of the event. USAID contracted with Associates in Rural Development, Inc. (ARD) to provide logistical support for this workshop.

In order to better understand the extent of natural resource-based conflicts in the Philippines, USAID/Philippines worked with local partners to prepare a series of case studies on natural resource conflicts. Partners prepared nine case studies that described natural resources conflicts, actions taken to mitigate the conflict, and lessons learned. Dr. James Jarvie of ARD edited the case studies for presentation at the workshop. One case study documented that it is often more profitable to harvest forest products illegally than to meet all the legal requirements. This situation undermines the efforts of community groups to harvest forest products legally since illegal logging has kept market prices low, increased conflicts with community groups over forests, and reduced economic incentives for planting tree crops.

In designing the workshop, the Working Group agreed to focus on three natural resources sectors: forests, fish/coastal resources, and water—given the emerging importance of these resources and the lack of assessment regarding conflicts over the use of these resources. The group surveyed key stakeholders to identify who is doing what and where in various resource conflict areas in the country. The survey results, together with selected case studies, informed participants of possible conflict trends and challenges as well as guidance on possible mitigation approaches.

## **INCREASING CONFLICTS OVER DWINDLING NATURAL RESOURCES EXPECTED**

Mr. Rafael Camat, Assistant Secretary of DENR on Foreign-Assistant Projects, opened the workshop by noting the “mitigating conflict is not an easy task. If not handled properly, conflict leads to bloodshed.” At least 69 DENR personnel (and 13 community members) have been killed or

injured in the line of duty since the 1990s. He asked the participants to “think outside the box to help develop innovative ways to manage conflict over natural resources.”

Mr. Jerry Bisson, Chief of USAID/Philippines’ Office of Energy and Environment, stressed that around the world and in the Philippines, conflicts over dwindling supplies of forests, fish, and water are steadily increasing. What makes it more critical for the Philippines is that the country’s forests and coastal resources are important in terms of their global significance as well as their local cultural and economic value.

## **CONFLICT DYNAMICS, TOOLS, AND LESSONS LEARNED PRESENTED**

Dr. Jarvie provided an overview of conflict in Asia. In dealing with natural resource conflict, he noted that “preventing is better than curing” and because of very limited reporting of natural resource conflicts in the media, there is little information available to assess the true extent of the problem. Dr. Ernesto Guiang, Chief of Party of the Environmental Governance Project (ECOGOV), presented an overview of conflict trends in the forest and water sectors, which are expected to worsen as population and demand for natural resources increase and resources dwindle. He also highlighted that current conflicts have shifted governance of forests from “protect, prohibit, and punish” to “protect, participate, and profit.” Under this latter approach, natural resource users have greater authority and responsibility over natural resources and receive more benefits from their protection and use.

Mr. Ronet Santos, Program Coordinator of Volunteer Services Overseas, focused attention on the coastal sector and reiterated the view that conflicts will increase, especially due to overfishing and destruction of habitats, and the stakeholders need to have better tools to deal with increasing disputes, including violent clashes over coastal resources. Ms. Ann Koontz and Ms. Susan Naval, EnterpriseWorks Worldwide, clearly showed how providing communities with tenure over forest land and resource extraction rights to natural resources contribute to local peace and order, and economic development. However, they also vividly documented how corruption can destroy local enterprises, deter investments in forest plantations, and fuel conflict over forest resources. The newly elected mayor of Tabina, Zamboanga del Sur, Mayor Romulo Lumo, gave examples of how he led community members in mitigating conflicts through information sharing, participatory monitoring, and enforcement of local laws. He also candidly shared some of the negative aspects of his work, including how many of the people affected by the solutions he implemented did not vote for him. Tabina is among the 19 coastal towns located in Illanda Bay, southern Mindanao that is dependent on the critical resources of the bay.

Dr. Dolly Nepomuceno of the Laguna Lake Development Authority (LLDA) highlighted successful government intervention of LLDA to resolve conflicts over fresh water resources. She noted the importance of having a national government body with a coordinative, regulatory and developmental mandate, using up-to-date scientific and participatory generated information as a basis for allocating water resources. Ms. Marlynn Mendoza, of DENR’s Protected Areas and Wildlife Bureau, discussed challenges in conserving wetlands and working with Muslim communities in the Ligawasan Marsh, Mindanao. She emphasized that community members are not homogenous and they have different views about how to best use natural resources and the role of outside groups in managing natural resources. To be locally accepted and sustained, she noted that biodiversity conservation efforts should incorporate various indigenous knowledge systems and values of the community. Ms. Kimberly Sais, Senior Policy Advisor, USAID/EGAT’S

Office of Environment and Science Policy, shared tools and a framework for conflict mitigation being developed by USAID'S Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation.

For the last presentation, Dr. Cynthia Irmer, Planning and Development Collaboration International (PADCO), shared her experience in Thailand and related it to the Philippines. She emphasized that conflict resolution strategies may required deeper involvement of communities and grassroots organizations in analyzing the nature and sources of conflicts, participating in needs assessments to build stakeholders' capacity, and proposing solutions to resolve conflicts.

### **PRIORITY ACTIONS TO MITIGATE NATURAL RESOURCE-BASED CONFLICTS IDENTIFIED**

The participants were divided into three groups: forests, fish, and water to discuss natural resource-based conflicts in more detail. A spokesperson reported the results of each group's discussion in a plenary session. Results included maps showing priority areas based on threats to biological diversity from natural resource-based conflicts. In particular, the participants highlighted the need to increase support to mitigate natural resource-based conflicts in parts of Mindanao, Palawan, and Northern Luzon. Although the participants recognized the value of increasing the use of alternative dispute resolution, they also stressed the need to increase the penalty for violation environmental laws to serve as a significant deterrent. Participants identified a number of priority actions, such as resolving policy overlaps by reviewing conflicting provisions of environmental laws. For instance, provisions of the Indigenous People's Rights Act and Mining Law conflict with respect to the mandated process and authority over resource permitting and land use development. There is also a conflict between the Indigenous People's Rights Act and the Integrated Protected Areas Act regarding authorities mandated over land use development (i.e., who determines what areas are to be set aside as 'no-touch' zones, which are considered ancestral domains) and regulating the use and transport of natural resources found within ancestral domains that are also considered as protected areas. Similarly, conflicts over land use arise due to conflicting provisions under the Protected Areas Act and the Mining Law as it is not clear which law will take precedence if a given forest area is deemed critical to maintain biological diversity and ecological services and at the same time, there are valuable mineral deposits at the site. Lastly, participants considered designing alternative dispute resolution programs to address specific natural resource sectors and conflicts.

The participants also recognized the need for additional training and networking on conflict mitigation. They also outlined plans to develop baseline data on natural resource conflicts, including a website and resource materials.

The DENR is often criticized for causing natural resource conflicts through poor governance and highly centralized control. The Secretary of DENR, however, strongly supported this workshop and sent a number of DENR staff, including some of the DENR's most progressive individuals who spoke candidly about the need to sustain the Department's progress toward decentralized and participatory management of natural resources.

The workshop participants left with very encouraging impressions, especially from field managers who deal with conflict on a daily basis. A leaser of an upland farmer federations said this was the first time they were able to discuss and share their experiences with such a diverse audience. He believed that previous development projects failed because they did not identify conflicts over natural resources as a critical issue.

Stakeholders need to be engaged in a transparent, participatory process in order to deal effectively with complex issues like natural resource conflicts. In developing appropriate natural resource conflict measures, it is important to build the ownership of key stakeholders in designing and holding the workshop. Participants identified a number of actions needed, the lead person for each action, and expected results within three to six months. Other countries with escalating natural resource conflicts may be interested in replicating this workshop's participatory approach in order to identify and apply strategic actions to mitigate natural resource-based conflicts.