

7 The politics of logging in the Philippines

Marites Danguilan Vitug

INTRODUCTION

The Philippine forests have been the most coveted among the country's natural resources, and the few who have been granted the privilege of 'taming' portions of them have reaped power and wealth. Deforestation in the Philippines, as in other parts of Southeast Asia, has been intimately connected with power politics. The dangerous intertwine of forests and politics was most glaring under Ferdinand Marcos (1969–1985). In bestowing upon himself the power to grant and revoke logging licenses – formerly held by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources – the Marcos government used the Timber License Agreement or TLA as a tool of political patronage.¹ Law enforcement was weak; violation of forestry laws went unpunished. Politicians, because of their direct or indirect stakes in logging (as lawyers for timber concessionaires, for example), pursued the interests of the industry over public and community rights to these resources.

FORESTS AND POLITICS: THE PLUNDER

If necessary, I will cancel all [logging] licenses in order to protect the forest . . . This is not said in anger; nor in pettiness or impatience . . . I have seen fortunes made overnight from the forest, and the wastage, and it makes my skin crawl to realize that there are many Filipinos who just don't care about the future generations' legacy in the way of forest resources.

(Philippine Lumberman 1978, cited in Vitug 1993: 25)

The above statement came not from some unyielding environmentalist, but from former President Ferdinand Marcos, the man who presided over massive deforestation in the Philippines and who, together with friends and relatives, plundered much of the country's forests for 20 years. He said this in 1978 before a congress of logging concessionaires, threatening the industry with reduced incentives and restricted license tenure. Why? That was his way of

reminding the timber concessionaires that he was still in charge and that if they wanted to continue in the business, they had to put up with, among other things, sharing the largesse with him.

In public, Marcos cleverly distanced himself from the ravage of forest resources which took place under his regime. He could conveniently lay the blame on the concessionaires – but did nothing to prosecute those who violated the law and overexploited the forests which had become a source of income for himself, other politicians and business cronies. The dangerous connection between forests and politics was most glaring during the Marcos era and demonstrates how politics became a driving force in the ravenous and short-sighted exploitation of the country's forest heritage. The deforestation rate peaked in the late 1960s at 300,000 hectares a year as the number of logging concessions grew, the export market for logs thrived and population increased. As a result, in 1991, only 6.46 million hectares of the original 27.5 million hectares was left. Of this, 1.79 million hectares is non-productive, meaning they are mossy forests unable to grow trees, while 1.8 million hectares is old-growth or virgin forests (DENR 1992).

The explanation for this rapid process of deforestation lies partly in the political and economic structure of the Philippines. The elite – some four hundred families – dominate big business, in both industry and agriculture. They own tracts of the best land, have access to the forests, have the capital to diversify into manufacturing and exports. Their wealth in turn secures political offices, influence and favors.

Since the Spanish period, the Philippines had been dominated by a strong land-owning oligarchy. When Marcos perpetuated himself in power – imposing martial law at the end of his second four-year term in 1972² – he dismantled the old oligarchy, blaming it for the backwardness and inequality of Philippine society. But Marcos fashioned his own 'oligarchy' – this time made up of cronies whose businesses he helped expand. Some took over old wealth while others were given new opportunities in construction and logging.

HISTORICAL ROOTS

The reputation of Philippine wood was already well-established by the turn of the century. So enamored were the Spanish colonizers of the Philippines' lush, tropical forests that Fajaro wrote to Philip III, 'At least 10 ships can be built every year in these islands, and by taking care of their many forests, even if a hundred ships were built now, there would be enough timber left to construct every year the 10 [I have] mentioned' (Corpuz 1989: 91).

When the Spaniards began their 300-year colonization of the Philippines, they were seduced by, among other things, mountains blanketed by unending forests. In 1575, the forest cover was estimated to have been 27.5 million hectares, almost 92 per cent of the total land area of the Philippines. The population then was only 750,000 (Roque 1990). During the Spanish regime, trees were cut mainly for building ships which serviced Spain's galleon trade with Mexico and

other countries. Shipyards were established in various parts of the country. With the setting up of the 'Inspección General de Montes' and the Forest Service in 1863, all timber on public lands was required to be cut under license. Certificates for forest exploitation began to be issued to private companies.

It was American colonial forestry in the Philippines, however, which pursued the systematic denuding of the forests. The Bureau of Forestry, headed by an American, had power to issue timber concessions on whatever scale and duration it deemed a lumberman's resources could match. Nearly 20 million hectares of forest lands was under the Bureau's control.

One of the reasons the US continued to be involved in the Philippines was that the colony offered a rich supply of wood. Speaking before the US Senate in January 1900, Senator Alfred J. Beveridge argued: 'The wood of the Philippines can supply the furniture of the world for a century to come . . . And the wood . . . and other products of the Philippines supply what we need and cannot ourselves produce' (Congressional record 1900 in Schirmer and Shalom 1987: 23).

LICENSING THE PLUNDER

The Timber License Agreement (TLA) was the main instrument used to exploit the forests. The state issued this license to corporations to cut trees in a forest area of not more than 100,000 hectares for a period of 25 years, as provided by the Constitution. It was the powerful and well-connected who had access to these licenses. For politicians, retired generals, relatives and friends of Marcos, the TLA was a reward for loyalty. Among those who benefited were Fortuna Marcos-Barba, Marcos's sister, who operated five timber concessions; Herminio Disini, a Marcos business associate; and Alfonso Lim, a political supporter of Marcos. TLAs were distributed as a political and diplomatic tool. To attract Muslim rebels back to the fold, Marcos offered short-term licenses to fell trees in the forests of Mindanao, southern Philippines. When Marcos needed to buy electoral support in the 1970s the TLA was one currency. In return, money from logging supported a number of candidates during election campaigns. The timber industry determined the outcome of elections in areas wherever logging was dominant, as it was in Mindanao and northern Luzon.

To obtain a license to a forest concession entailed an appallingly low cost. In the 1970s the application fee for a timber concession was P 1 per hectare (US\$0.38). With an average selling price of about US\$140 per cubic meter of log, only US\$1.50 plus 75 cents for every cubic meter harvested went to government. These low fees tended to create excess demand for the exploitation of forests. Under Marcos, the number of concessionaires ballooned from 58 in 1969 to 230 in 1977, the highest recorded figure. Apart from these, Marcos issued short-term (meaning one to five years) 'special permits' to fell trees. Counting these, the number of licensees soared to 412 in 1969, 461 in 1970 and to 471 in 1976 (DENR 1992).

Marcos carved out parts of the country for his friends and family. Alfonso Lim, a steadfast supporter of Marcos since his bid for the Senate in the early

1960s, operated in 533,880 hectares and gobbled up adjacent logging companies through corporate raids sanctioned by Marcos. In 1979, for example, Lim met with the boards of directors of companies operating in the area. He came for a 'showdown,' determined to push for control of the companies, one owned by retired veterans (Veterans Woodworks), through a management contract he imposed. 'The contract was approved by the President,' he tersely said in a tense meeting held at the Manila office (minutes of the meeting of the boards of directors of Veterans Woodworks, Tropical Philippines Wood Industries and Sierra Madre Wood Industries with Taggat Industries, 28 March 1979, from the records of the Presidential Commission on Good Government). After the take-over, Marcos personally looked into the operations of Veterans Woodworks and its affiliates. He approved, in marginal notes, Lim's request for privileges for his companies such as a lease-purchase agreement between Veterans Woodworks and a state bank.

Also in the north, another crony, Felipe Ysmael, Jr, president of Ysmael Steel Company, ran a logging operation. In 1965, the first Marcos bid for the presidency, he was said to have donated millions of pesos to the Marcos campaign chest. Ysmael was rewarded with forest concessions – close to 55,000 hectares in the northern Philippines and 100,000 hectares in Palawan. Aside from that, he was able to borrow US\$13.5 million from foreign banks by using as collateral vast concessions he had received from Marcos that were guaranteed by the state-owned Development Bank of the Philippines. Marcos's sister, Fortuna Marcos, who was married to a military officer, also formed logging companies covering nearly 200,000 hectares of northern forests. One of their companies was granted a license through a presidential decree. Other relatives, including Marcos's uncles, mother and brother, were either members or chairpersons of various boards of logging companies.

AWASH WITH DOLLARS

Logging was the star performer among Philippine export industries. In the 1960s, logging concessionaires contributed as much as 29 per cent to total export earnings. From 1969 to 1972, logging firms raked in an annual average of \$300 million. This reached its peak in 1973 with record export earnings of \$472 million. Overall, the industry accounted for 5 per cent of the country's gross national product (*Philippine Lumberman*, various issues).

In 1965, the Philippines was supplying at least 30 per cent of the world's requirements, which made the country the biggest single log producer in the world. The industry created new millionaires who either entered politics themselves or became kingmakers. Those who entered politics directly include Democrito Plaza, former congressman and currently governor of Agusan del Sur province; Lorenzo Sarmiento, Sr, of Davao, former congressman; Gaudencio Antonino, former senator; Alejandro Almendras, former senator and congressman. For their part, the kingmakers supported election campaigns of sympathetic candidates, particularly in the forest-rich provinces of Mindanao

and northern Luzon. However, as the Philippine forests dwindled, Filipino loggers looked for greener options. Indonesia was their next haven. In the late 1960s, Filipino loggers trooped to Indonesia and taught their partners the business. Soon, Indonesia and Malaysia overtook the Philippines in log exports.

Eventually, log exports had to be regulated. Marcos predictably did not favor a total ban. Instead, he instituted a quota system tying allocations of export volumes to specified logging companies that fulfilled certain requirements. No less than the office of the President prepared the list of companies allowed to export logs. This practice was fraught with corruption. For every cubic meter of export allocation, some amount was charged by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, which shared the largesse with the office of the President.

POLITICIAN LOGGERS

Loggers in politics became institutionalized in the Philippines. Some congressmen owned logging companies. Others, who were lawyers, had logging firms as clients. According to prominent academic, David Wurfel:

Those who do not have great wealth themselves were found to have members of the economic elite among their legal clients. They tend to look after the client's interests in the legislative chamber . . . A common practice is for congressmen to be given a regular legal retainer's fee in return for aid and advice both in policy formulation and implementation affecting the interests of the firm.

(quoted in Abueva and De Guzman 1969: 211)

To a great extent, the presence of loggers in Congress simply demonstrated the traditional ties between political power and access to the country's natural resources. Like other businessmen, they entered politics to protect and expand their financial interests.

Conflicts of interest were occasionally exposed. Senator Gaudencio Antonino was charged in 1960 with using his position as a member of the Monetary Board to expand his business holdings, primarily a logging company. Antonino was present during board meetings when dollar allocations were granted to his firm, Western Mindanao Lumber Company. Senator Pedro Sabido, chairman of the committee on banks, also owned a logging concession in the 1960s. Sabido's law office followed up dollar applications of the senator's firm, Lianga Bay Logging Company, with the Monetary Board. At that time, the financial system was not yet liberalized so that foreign exchange movements were still regulated by government.

Martial law exacerbated the interdependency of politics and timber. Timber licenses were suspended or revoked if those in power were displeased with the concessionaires, i.e. if they did not pay up or cooperate with the Marcos government. To insure the continuity of their licenses, logging companies would

invite influential politicians to sit on their boards of directors. That move also sped up the renewal of licenses and avoided the high cost of delayed operations. 'The system created a need for politicians in logging,' Pat Dugan, a forester for more than 30 years, said in an interview. 'There was someone to holler for help, to expedite papers. It was influence peddling' (interview 1992). Bribery was, of course, a common resort.

Today, of the present crop of 196 congressmen, nine are engaged in the logging business. The dwindling of the forests and the cancellation of licenses has meant that the business is no longer as lucrative. Others have indirect interests in logging: they are not owners or shareholders but they lobby for the interests of the industry. In 1991–1992, when the bill to ban commercial logging was being hotly debated in Congress, no less than the Speaker of the House was closely identified with the industry. One of his major campaign supporters was a logging tycoon. In fact, wood for his vacation house in Palawan province was donated by his logger friend.

In the post-Marcos era, congressmen still use budget hearings – when the annual budget of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources is being deliberated – to seek favors, such as lifting a suspension of license belonging to them or their 'clients.' Others sought special permits to cut or haul trees. Some would attempt to corner funds for reforestation.

FORESTS AS BATTLEFIELD

In another arena, a battle for the forests was taking place and continues to do so. Logging companies operating in rebel lairs encounter the New People's Army, the military arm of the Communist Party of the Philippines. Usually, the NPA levies 'revolutionary taxes' from these companies. If they refuse to pay up, the guerrillas burn the concession's logging equipment.

The NPA tried to introduce environmental policies while continuing its taxation program. The denudation of the forests has become so severe that the need to protect and conserve them was not lost on the guerrillas, who need the money they collect from logging companies to survive. Ironically, they also need the forests – which offer protection and shelter – while fighting the war in the countryside. Bald forests mean open spaces which make them vulnerable targets. In 1990, the NPA tried a new tack by asking a few logging companies to reforest. They agitated for higher daily pay for workers assigned to reafforestation and threatened the companies with the burning of reafforestation sites if the workers were not given their increases.

To some extent, the presence of rebels in the mountains helped protect the forests but only in so far as this deterred loggers and settlers from penetrating the area. Once the logging companies were in, a relationship of convenience and coexistence evolved – logging companies cut the trees, paid up and let the rebels be. For the NPA, as long as the loggers did not hamper their operations, an unholy alliance prevailed.

With the decline of the communist insurgency throughout most parts of the country in recent years, forests are no longer a battlefield. Only those forests which were former guerrilla strongholds and where no roads had been built remain intact.

REFORMS UNDER AQUINO

After the demise of the Marcos regime, under the new government of President Corazon Aquino (1986–1992) significant reforms were introduced in forest management. It was a time of awakened environmental awareness in the country, partly influenced by the environmental movement in the West. Along with the flowering of democracy after two decades of authoritarian rule, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) advocating environmental issues appeared everywhere. They performed a watchdog function, as did the press, which was unshackled after 1986. At times, the NGOs played an adversarial role, as when lobbying for a complete ban on commercial logging; but in some cases – for example in community-based forestry and reforestation programs – they cooperated with government. The debates in the Senate (1990–1991) on whether to ban commercial logging were important for the NGOs. The issue united some of the NGOs while dividing the environmental NGO movement as a whole. Some were for a selective ban on commercial logging while the more vocal ones were for a complete ban.

The issue tested the strength of the NGOs, their capacity to lobby Congress and to articulate their views in the media. A Task Force for a Total Commercial Log Ban was formed by groups like the Haribon Foundation, a former bird-watching club; Green Forum, a coalition of environmental NGOs; Green Coalition, led by Senator Orlando Mercado; Miriam Peace, a university-based NGO; Legal Rights and Natural Resources Center; Philippine Ecological Network; Philippine Environmental Action Network; and the Visayan Forum. Except for the Visayan Forum, the NGOs are Manila-based. Most are middle-class groups with no developed links to the grassroots. They stepped up their lobbying, attended Senate committee meetings, watched floor debates and aired their views in print as well as in broadcast media.

But for all their visibility in the media and their lobbying with the Senate, activist groups lost sight of the House of Representatives. 'We were not vigilant enough,' recalls Angelina Galang, Task Force member and an academic. 'We were focusing on the Senate while the House already went for a selective log ban. There is also a need to improve our strategic planning and get a critical mass of citizens to support us' (interview 1992). Having learned its lesson, the Task Force is monitoring both Houses of Congress. Other NGOs are pushing for the passage of the bill while monitoring the activities of timber concession holders and lobbying for their cancellation. The Cagayan Anti-Logging Movement (CALM) adopted a strategy of presenting evidence of violations by TLA holders, potent grounds for cancellation of their licenses.

Many of the environmental NGOs have come a long way from being passive observers to becoming aggressive and outspoken advocates. Haribon, now one of the most active NGOs, evolved from a bird-watching club into a conservation foundation that focuses on scientific studies. It found its pollution studies sitting on the desks of politicians without effect. Says Maximo Kalaw, head of Haribon: 'Politicians told me at that time: "It is hard to listen to you. The trees don't vote and the fish don't vote. The farmers and fishermen have coalitions. But you don't have any. So why should I vote for the forest?"' (interview 1990).

Haribon then decided to build a constituency which would closely monitor environmental issues and support environment-friendly politicians. Green Forum later emerged with Haribon as the core force responding to the government's inadequate attention to environmental problems. A coalition of several NGOs, Green Forum stresses that the environment knows no political color.

An awakening to environmental problems was also occurring in various parts of the country. Communities organised to stop the logging operations of timber concessionaires. Environmental education was stepped up. The Catholic Church made an impact in 1988 when the influential Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) wrote a pastoral letter warning of the perils of environmental destruction. The CBCP called on people to speak up and organize around ecological issues. The NGOs working in community development saw the degradation of the forests, the pollution of the rivers, and how this deprived people of their sources of livelihood. Environmental problems were so intrinsically linked to the social and economic milieu that it was difficult for NGOs not to speak up on green issues.

On another front, the Philippine Ecological Network and 43 children went to the Supreme Court on 20 March 1990 and asked that the highest court of the land stop the DENR from issuing and renewing timber license agreements. In a petition, they argued that government has violated their rights to environmental protection by granting more areas for logging than are actually available.

At the same time, the concept of 'sustainable development' was given international recognition in a report for the United Nations by the Brundtland Commission on Environment and Development (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987). Although there had been discussion of 'sustainable development' in the mid-1970s, this did not capture popular attention.

MAKING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT WORK

After the 'People Power' revolution in 1986 brought President Aquino to office, a strain of idealism ran through the DENR leadership, a belief that democracy could be made to work for public interest. There was also a very strong anti-Marcos sentiment in government which pressured against repeating previous malpractice. At the DENR, that meant several things.

First, the number of licensees was cut from 143 in 1987 to 32 in June 1992. A number of politicians' concessions were closed down. Even loggers close to politicians were affected. The allowed volume of harvest was reduced

from 6.03 million cubic meters to 1 million cubic meters. Logging in virgin forests was banned. Reforestation became a centerpiece program of the DENR. The deforestation rate was recorded at 80,000 to 88,000 hectares a year from 1988 to 1991 compared to 300,000 hectares a year in the late 1960s under Marcos (DENR).

But even reforestation was colored by patron politics. A political decision was made by DENR Secretary Fulgencio Factoran to distribute reforestation funds through congressional districts to make congressmen cooperate. Under the DENR's contract reforestation program, private corporations, non-governmental organizations, communities and families were encouraged to enter into a contract with the DENR to regreen denuded forests. The majority of these were families residing in areas where reforestation is a priority program. An NGO study found that family contracts were most beneficial in providing employment and enabling families to buy the work animals they need (Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development 1991).

POWER TO THE COMMUNITIES

Communities were also encouraged to manage the forests. Upland communities – where there is an estimated population of 10 to 18 million³ – could manage and protect the forests and eventually reap their harvests. As organized communities, they could be awarded Community Forest Management Agreements (CFMAs) with the understanding that the community will have the privilege to harvest mature trees in the area. The CFMA is the key instrument of the program. Community organization and training are awarded to local NGOs.

The belief is that communities are in the best position to manage and protect the forests. However, before they can fully assume such a role, the problems of poverty and tenure must be addressed if these communities are to be convinced to assist government. It is one way of democratizing access to forest resources and alleviating poverty while, at the same time, protecting the remaining forests. 'It was a bold move,' says Ernesto Guiang, DENR consultant for community forestry during the Aquino administration. 'Financially, community forestry is viable. It is labor-intensive and geared for small-scale harvest' (interview 1992).

At the start of the program, communities were organized with the help of NGOs. Areas for community forestry projects should be able to offer adequate opportunities for livelihood, such as backyard farming and agroforestry, so that cutting of trees is not their main source of income. These also give them sustenance while the trees are not yet ready for harvest.

Residents of upland communities usually do not have the operating capital to begin a forest products enterprise. The DENR therefore advances certain operating costs. The communities are required to deposit into a trust fund part of the revenues from timber sales. The fund is to be managed by the communities themselves.

The selection of which NGOs to work with is a sensitive process. The democratic space opened up after the demise of the Marcos administration resulted in an explosion in the number of NGOs. The Securities and Exchange

Commission lists about 30,000 NGOs, including what are disparagingly called GRINGOs or government-initiated NGOs. The latter type of NGOs are backed by local politicians and have questionable non-profit credentials. 'The patronage system is strongly at work in the community level,' wrote Guiang and Bienvenido Dolom (then national coordinator of the Community Forestry Program, CFP) in an internal report. Many of the NGOs 'are hiding behind the cloak of community development when their main target is forest products extraction' (Guiang and Dolom 1991).

As for fees, the DENR set heftier forest charges: a reforestation fee of P 12,500 (US\$480) per hectare deposited with the Philippine Wood Products Association (PWPA), which is composed of all forest concessionaires; forest charges, from P 30 (\$1.15) per square meter to 25 per cent of FOB (freight-on-board) value. Pending determination of FOB value, the forest charge was set at P 550 (\$21.15) per cubic meter for common and construction hardwood and P 3,000 (\$115.40) per cubic meter for premium species like narra and kamagong. The reforestation fee is returned to the TLA holders if they comply with the DENR's reforestation requirements. If not, the money is forfeited.

MAKING THE CHOICE

The first strategy the DENR chose to implement was the rehabilitation of degraded ecosystems, for obvious reasons. But the government's lack of resources forced the DENR to set its priorities. Competing for urgent attention were the problems of urban and industrial pollution; forest and upland ecosystems; and water resources conservation. Urban air quality is among the worst in the region and most of the urban rivers are biologically dead. Furthermore, city dwellers are the most politically influential and the most vocal. But the DENR chose the green environment over the brown. Recalls Factoran: 'It was a difficult decision to make. And we gambled on pouring our available resources heavily toward the rehabilitation of the forests' (interview 1992).

The decision was influenced by several major factors. The forests and uplands cover 15 million hectares of the total land area of 30 million. Of the 15 million hectares, 6.5 million are forest lands of which 1.8 million are virgin forests (DENR 1992). They are the 'primary regulators' of the Philippine environment, for to these ecosystems can be attributed the well-being of the soil cover and crop lands, freshwater supplies, air and even coastal areas.

Furthermore, the problem in the uplands was not only ecological; it was also social. Extreme poverty was driving the 18 million Filipinos in the uplands to cut timber. 'By putting government machinery to work for them, we had hoped that this would give them some of the political voice that would let them be heard in Manila,' says Factoran (interview 1992).

To implement its greening program, the DENR turned to foreign sources of funds. Soft loan packages from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund of Japan (OECF), each donor providing US\$120 million, went to a national forestry program which included

reafforestation contracted to upland families, communities, and NGOs – and improved forest law enforcement. It was the largest assistance package for the forestry sector ever granted anywhere. In 1990, this was followed by a US\$125 million grant-in-aid from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID); in 1991 by a US\$369 million environment and natural resources sectoral loan from the World Bank, at that time the largest single assistance package ever developed by the World Bank for the environment.

However, field assessments made by the University of the Philippines in Los Banos showed that corporations and some non-governmental organizations, which covered two-thirds of the area funded by the program, had low survival rates and a number of them made profits much higher than was intended by the program (Severino 1994). The survival rate of newly planted trees after three years has been estimated at 65 per cent, well below the target of 80 per cent at the beginning of the first massive reafforestation program undertaken by government. It was resumed on a limited pilot project scale involving non-governmental and community organizations in 1995.

In 1995, community organizations whose reafforestation contracts had high survival rates entered into 25-year community forest management agreements, or CFMA, with the DENR to manage their forested areas. This means that they will have cutting rights to the forests. But the communities will have to present their development plans to be approved by the DENR and pay an annual license fee and application fee. Only then can they harvest trees. The use of heavy equipment such as bulldozers and yarders is not permitted. The CFMA holders are required to reforest open and denuded areas, usually at their own expense, using funds from the sale of forest products. They are also asked to organize forest protection teams that work closely with DENR.

THE PRESENT: WORKING WITH RAMOS

President Fidel Ramos is no stranger to logging. When he assumed the presidency in June 1992, he divested his shares in Greenbelt Wood Products, a logging company which was earlier found to have logged illegally. The President, his daughter and late father were among the seven stockholders. Its license was cancelled during the administration of President Corazon Aquino. But Ramos claimed he was unaware of the operations of the company because he was not involved in the day-to-day running of the firm. In the 1992 presidential elections, the logging industry was said to have donated to the Ramos campaign. But Ramos wants to be known as the environmental president. He has put environmental protection on his list of top five priorities and has appointed an environment-friendly secretary of environment and natural resources.

Basically, forest management in the term of President Ramos operates as it did in the Aquino years.⁴ The same political pressures exist but they have become attenuated because the number of logging concessions awarded has decreased to the present figure of 32. Records show that the logging companies increased to 38 during the early part of President Ramos's term. In some of

the cases, DENR gave in to political pressure. For example, Woodland Domain, owned by Representative Renato Dragon, was no longer qualified for continued operations. Yet it returned to the active list of TLAs after June 1992. The same thing happened to Luzon Loggers, owned by Representative Junie Evangelista Cua. In other cases, politicians lobbied for the reinstatement of TLAs.

The lobbying from congressmen, governors and politicians on behalf of logging companies continues. For example, the license of Consolidated Logging and Lumber Mills Inc. (CLMI) was suspended for exceeding its allowed cut. DENR Undersecretary Ben Malayang admitted that political pressure from local officials to lift the suspension was intense,⁵ but it remains closed. The prevailing problem for the DENR with regard to logging companies is still compliance with laws and the need for careful monitoring.

In the beginning of 1992, when President Ramos assumed office, he created an anti-crime commission led by Vice-President Joseph Estrada, a former movie actor. Estrada operates in a high-profile manner, and part of his program was to team up with the DENR in an anti-illegal logging crackdown. Thus, a number of arrests and confiscations were made and these became newspaper headlines. Though short-lived, it nevertheless sent signals to the industry of the risks of illegal activity.

Other than that, we see a continuity of policy today. Differences lie in the emphasis. Under DENR Secretary Angel Alcala,⁶ the thrust is community-based forest protection, which was started during the Aquino administration. Multi-sectoral forest protection committees composed of Church, media, NGOs, and the military are being set up. Communities are organized by DENR to plant, and have access to forests. DENR provides money for seeds and a subsistence subsidy. This is done mainly in critical watersheds. The rate of deforestation has gone down marginally, from 80,000 to 88,000 hectares per year in 1991 to 75,000 to 80,000 hectares per year in 1993 (DENR 1994).

Overall, the NGO community is friendly to the DENR because Secretary Angel Alcala was formerly with an environmental NGO. In general, NGO cooperation with the government has been strong in the post-Marcos period. Following the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit in 1992, a Philippine Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD), composed of representatives from government agencies and NGOs, including one representing the business sector (Philippine Business for the Environment Foundation), was formed with the blessing of President Ramos. This is a high-level partnership between government and NGOs which enables the latter to contribute to policy. The PCSD is a new layer in the bureaucracy but it represents a fresh initiative. The question is: will it really be effective? A lot will depend on the influence the Council will have on government agencies and the support given by President Ramos.

'Ramos has accepted a rather revolutionary concept, that of social movements as counterparts of the state, not just an extension. It is the whole idea of partnership,' points out Maximo Kalaw, PCSD member and head of Green Forum, an environment NGO (interview 1992). The PCSD also shows Ramos's sensitivity to what the NGOs have to say. He considers them politically important. So far, the best that the Council has achieved is the bringing together

of government and private volunteer groups in a high-level body that could plan and experiment with this problematic concept of sustainable development.

There is some wariness among NGO representatives who sit in the PCSD that the President's overtures to this partnership are largely a cooption device. The large centralised NGOs believe that working within the parliamentary arena, rather than out of it, gives them a forum to help shape policy. They express awareness of the importance of keeping vigilant and remaining accountable to their constituents. The media also play a critical role as watchdog of government as well as NGOs. Since the end of the Marcos era, the Philippine media have been actively reporting on environmental issues. President Ramos is particularly attentive to what media have to say, prompting critics to describe his administration's agenda as media-influenced.

So far, a vacuum has been filled at the top, but there still remains a large one below – at the grassroots. To 1994, less than 2 per cent of the targeted area had been given over to community management agreements.⁷ The space is wide for NGOs that are based in remote and rural areas, those that can assist upland communities in making the new alternative to the flawed TLA system work. Fox concludes that:

[while] these programmes were only initiated after most forests were cut and degraded, the DENR should be credited for providing the means of empowering people to manage local forests. In addition, the Philippines should be acknowledged as the only South-East Asian country to have established procedures for recognizing the rights of indigenous peoples to their traditional homelands.

(Fox 1993: 311)

NOTES

- 1 The term Timber License Agreement was introduced in the 1960s, but the system dates back to 1904 under the American colonial administration when the Philippine Bureau of Forestry, then headed by an American, was given the power to issue timber concessions at discretionary scale and duration. From the outset, the system clearly favored commerce rather than forest protection.
- 2 Ferdinand Marcos officially lifted martial law in 1981 but it continued in practice. It came to an end in February 1986 when a popular revolt ousted Marcos, after he lost in an election, and swept his rival, Corazon Aquino, into power. Throughout the martial law period, free speech was stifled, Marcos's political opponents were jailed, and dissent came mostly from the underground communist insurgents.
- 3 The Philippines' fast-growing population puts pressure on the uplands and other natural resources. President Fidel Ramos is pushing for a family planning program that will slow down population growth, for which he has drawn the ire of the Catholic Church.
- 4 Under President Aquino the reforestation program was credible, although by DENR calculations, about 17 per cent of the funds spent – P 390 million or US\$15.5 million – may have gone to the pockets of some DENR officials, politicians, and parties contracted

to reforest. The Commission on Audit found that some contractors abandoned their projects after collecting the initial 'mobilization fee,' the money given to help prepare the site for reforestation.

- 5 Undersecretary Ben Malayang resigned from the DENR on 30 June 1995.
- 6 Secretary Alcala's term turned out to be a setback in terms of forest protection. He was weak and easily succumbed to political pressure. He approved the revival of operations of a few timber concessions and did not run the community forestry program well. As part of a Cabinet revamp, President Fidel Ramos transferred Secretary Angel Alcala from the DENR to another Cabinet post on 30 June 1995. Under the new DENR secretary – Victor Ramos, former presidential assistant on energy and environment and DENR undersecretary – no canceled timber concessions are being revived and the community-based forestry program is taking off.
- 7 See Braganza 1996: 327 for an in-depth study of Community Based Forest Management in a Higaonan community.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abueva, J. and R. De Guzman (1969) *Foundations and Dynamics of Filipino Government and Politics*, Bookmark, Manila.
- Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (1991) 'Community Participation, NGO Involvement and Land Tenure Issues in the Philippine Reforestation Program', Makati.
- Braganza, Gilbert C. (1997) 'Philippine Community-Based Forest Management: Options for Sustainable Development', in R. Bryant and M. Parnwell (eds), *Environmental Politics in Southeast Asia*, London: Routledge.
- Broad, R. and I. Cavanagh (1993) 'From Plunder to Sustainability', in *Plundering Paradise: The Struggle for the Environment in the Philippines*, Berkeley, University of California.
- Caufield, Catherine (1984) *In the Rainforest*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- CNN (1992) Documentary on the Philippine Forest, Network Earth.
- Corpuz, O.D. (1989) *The Roots of the Filipino Nation*, vol. 1, Aklahi Foundation, Quezon City.
- DENR, Department of Environment and Natural Resources.
- Dugan, Pat, 1992 interview.
- Factoran, Fulgencio, 1992 interview.
- (1994) 'Reflections on the adoption of sustainable development as an approach to the environment', unpublished paper.
- Fox, Jefferson (1993) 'The Tragedy of Open Access', in H. Brookfield and Y. Byron (eds), *Southeast Asia's Environmental Future: The Search for Sustainability*, Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur.
- Galang, Angelina, 1992 interview.
- Ganapin, Delfin (1986) 'Forest resources and timber trade in the Philippines', *Forest Resources Crisis in the Third World*, Sahabat Alam, Malaysia.
- Garrity, D., D. Kummer and E. Guiang (1992) 'The upland ecosystem in the Philippines: approaches to sustainable farming and forestry', National Research Council, unpublished.
- Guiang, Ernesto (1990) 'Lessons learned from the initial implementation of DENR's community forestry program', Department of Environment and Natural Resources (unpublished).

- 1992 interview.
- Guiang, E. and B. Dolom (1991) 'Internal report on the DENR community forestry program', Department of Environment and Natural Resources (unpublished).
- Head, S. and R. Heinzman (eds) (1990) *Lessons of the Rainforest*, Sierra Club Books, San Francisco.
- Hurst, Philip (1991) *Rainforest Politics*, Zed Books, London.
- Kalaw, M. (ed.) (1989) 'A Haribon Reader on the Philippine Forest', unpublished MS.
- 1990 and 1992 interviews.
- Kummer, David (1992) *Deforestation in the Postwar Philippines*, Ateneo de Manila University Press, Quezon City.
- Lim, T.G. and M. Valencia (eds) (1990) *Conflict over Natural Resources in Southeast Asia and the Pacific*, Ateneo de Manila University Press, Quezon City.
- Lynch, Owen (1983) 'Withered roots and landgrabbers: a survey of research on upland tenure and displacement', National Conference on Research in the Uplands, Bureau of Forest Development, Quezon City.
- Nectoux, F. and Y. Kuroda (1989) *Timber from the South Seas*, World Wildlife Fund International Publication.
- PBS Documentary (1992) *Can tropical rainforests be saved?*
- Philippine Lumberman*, various issues.
- Poffenberger, Mark (1990) *Keepers of the Forest*, Ateneo de Manila University Press, Quezon City.
- Porter, G. and D. Ganapin (1988) *Resources, Population and the Philippines' Future*, World Resources Institute Paper no. 4.
- Presidential Commission on Good Government (1979) Minutes of meeting of the boards of directors of Veterans Woodworks, Tropical Philippines Wood Industries and Sierra Madre Wood Industries with Taggat Industries, 28 March.
- Roque, Celso R. (1990) *Earth, Water, Air, Fire: Essays on Environmentalism*, Kalikasan Press, Manila.
- Schirmer, D. and S. Shalom (1987) *The Philippines Reader*, South End Press, Boston.
- Severino, Howie (1994) 'Contractors wasting reforestation funds', *Manila Standard*, 3 October 1994.
- Turner, M., R.J. May and L. Turner (1992) *Mindanao: Land of Unfulfilled Promise*, New Day Publishers, Quezon City.
- University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies (1992) *Saving the Present for the Future*, UP Press, Quezon City.
- Vitug, Marites Danguilan (1993) *Power from the Forest: The Politics of Logging*, Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, Manila.
- World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) *Our Common Future*, Oxford University Press.