Forest Foundation Philippines
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Forests in the Anthropocene: Perspectives from the Philippines

SUMMARY FOR DECISION MAKERS

The diverse configurations of forests across the archipelago are the living heritage and beating landscape of our collective history and aspirations as peoples. The triumphs and travails of the Philippine forestry sector are vital depositories of environmental and development lessons for every Filipino. The book entitled *Forests in the Anthropocene: Perspectives from the Philippines* is part of the Forest Foundation's Learning Landscapes Program objective to contribute to the public appreciation and understanding of forest conservation policy and practice.

The first chapter, "Forest Conservation in the Philippines: Linking People, Forests, and Policies" (Pulhin, Catudio, and Pulhin-Yoishida 2021) provides a foundational understanding of the historical context and policy trajectory of the Philippine local forestry sector. It begins by outlining intricacies of forest-culture interactions that are manifested in precolonial and persisting customary forest practices and indigenous natural resource governance. A critical retrospection of historical policy trajectories brings to fore how the confluence of colonization, industrialization, modernization, and commoditization molded the current status and challenges in the local forestry sector. Colonial, centralized, and extractive orientation in the past century, particularly in the postwar and Marcos martial law years, highlight the elite capture and drastic deforestation and degradation of our forests. Subsequent local civil society and historical environmental movements have brought pioneering lessons in the paradigm shift toward community forestry and conservation. Anthropogenic climate crisis impacts have likewise highlighted the primacy of forest conservation and protection as strategies of mitigation and pillars of resilience. There is also a need to enhance sustainable non-timber forest products, forest-based industries, and upland livelihood development as integrated goals in balancing production and protection of forest resource development. Potentials and pathways are outlined to pursue the advancing goals in community forestry, science-based and sustainable forest governance through multi-stakeholder collaboration, integrated natural resources management, and forest landscape approach.

The next chapters of the book share case studies, social experiences, sustainability issues, and policy perspectives depicting the dynamics of varied forest ecosystems, communities, and diverse institutional actors across the archipelago.

Chapter 2, “A Networked Landscape: Using Relational Structures to Examine the Implementation of Community-Based Forestry Projects in the Mount Kalatungan Mountain Range” (Nguyen Long, Diaz, and Martines 2021), examines social networks and institutional relations within community forestry projects involving indigenous forest communities in Mount Kalatungan Mountain Range. The study demonstrates how social network analysis (SNA) can provide insights on local institutional dynamics, power relations, resource-based decision-making, conflict issues, and organizational leadership practices within a forest landscape to improve conservation approaches and development interventions. SNA findings can also be triangulated with other methodological tools and community development processes to fully unpack the complexities of institutional dynamics inherent in forest landscapes.

The multi-sited anthropological study in Chapter 3, “Protecting the Environment: An Exploration of the Roles, Motivations, and Lived Experiences of Forest Guards in the Philippines” (Lasco 2021), sheds light on the marginalized narratives of the *bantay gubat* within critical forest biodiversity areas in Luzon and Northern Mindanao. Common themes that emerged include the sense of financial, physical, and legal vulnerability; lack of recognition; the role of politics in their work; and a range of motivations including a strong sense of identity and a conception of the mountains as “home.” Descriptive findings and analytical insights provide information to improve relevant policies and programs, support arguments for greater support and recognition for their work, as well as serve as baseline data for further research to understand the many other contexts and environments of forest guards.

Forest conservation, culture, and livelihood interactions are further examined in Chapter 4, “Social-Ecological Assessment of Abacá *(Musa textilis)* and Giant Honey Bee *(Apis dorsata* F.*)* Indigenous Forest Enterprises through a Transdisciplinary Approach” (Matias et al. 2021). Highlights of the study reveal that normalized difference vegetation index (NDVI) analysis of the Higaonon community forest from the past 15 years shows that community forest enterprises could support indigenous livelihoods while maintaining forest cover. Employing a transdisciplinary approach in research enabled a more holistic examination of how abacá and wild honey forest livelihoods integrate traditional knowledge, sustainable forest practices, and conservation-oriented organizational processes and contribute to decreased natural resource exploitation pressure on their forests. These culture-forest interactions within forest livelihoods are worth exploring in the Anthropocene where potentials for conservation projects can integrate factors that enhance multiple ecological, cultural, and economic benefits for forest-dependent communities.

In Chapter 5, "Exploring the Nexus Approach in Forest Conservation and Energy Access for Policy Integration and Coherence in the Philippines" (Solis 2021), policy interphases of forest conservation goals and energy policies are discussed. The articulation of international frameworks in national energy and forest laws is likewise examined. Lack of policy coherence is observed despite the interdependency between forest conservation and energy access. There is also a gap in policy and legal frameworks which are meant to integrate both forest conservation and energy development goals in the Philippine context. This is attributed largely to a historically fragmented approach when it comes to policy- and law-making, as the latter is centered on sectoral lines and does not consider interconnectivity. It emphasizes the imperative to overcome legislative inertia by updating obsolete national forestry laws and bridging the discord between energy development and forest conservation to improve climate mitigation and adaptation strategies.

Chapter 6, "Examining Sustainability Issues in the Water Dependent Economy of Downstream Sectors in the Cagayan de Oro River Basin" (Almaden 2021), reveals the embedded complexity and intersecting policy challenges and sustainability issues of the downstream water governance featuring water shortage and pollution brought about by unhampered industrialization, urban expansion, agricultural pollution, and weak policy enforcement. A synthesis of research studies highlights how sustainability issues in water governance are compounded by the recurring climate crisis–induced floods and droughts as well as prevailing upstream forest decline in the Cagayan de Oro River Basin (CDORB). It highlights the impetus for stronger policy enforcement to protect and ensure critical ecological services derived from the CDORB. The findings and conclusion reiterate that sustainable water governance in downstream CDORB entails a multistakeholder, strategic, and ecological purview that integrates climate change mitigation, sustainability mechanisms, and the protection and conservation of upstream watershed areas.

The case studies and discussion analysis provide highly relevant scientific information and policy inputs in improving approaches and frameworks in the Foundation's commitment to Grow Forests, Grow Livelihoods, Grow Partnerships, and Grow Advocates.

From these, we put forward the following recommendations:

Promoting integrated natural resource and environmental management approaches through community-based processes and science-based decisions and policies in forest conservation and rehabilitation.

Integrating climate change mitigation, adaptation, and resilience frameworks, as well as objectives in forest conservation strategies, policy-making, and development interventions within focal conservation areas.

Continuing support in the legalization and policy development of relevant forest conservation statutes. This includes the ratification of updated central forest law and statutes in conservation at the national level and the passage of forest conservation–oriented resolutions in local government units.

Policy lobbying to strengthen social safeguards, labor rights, and human development mechanisms for forest protectors and forest rangers and accrue recognition of their contributions as environmental frontliners and key actors in forest conservation.

Examining and addressing policy gaps and development nodes between forest conservation and other sectors including renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and watershed-based water governance to improve and innovate conservation models. Forest conservation objectives can be integrated into rural-based and small-holder renewable energy technological models. Likewise, agroforestry-based livelihoods and forest rehabilitation components could enhance the responsiveness of disaster rehabilitation and resiliency mechanisms, alongside watershed protection as a key strategy in urban river basin and water governance policy mechanism.

Promoting citizen science through community-oriented participatory research, integration of local and traditional forest and conservation knowledge and lessons from community conservation practices. This includes the facilitation of traditional knowledge platform exchanges across community forest conservation actors and organizations, as well as cross-sectoral learning exchanges between forest community actors, students, scientists, artists, and health and urban-based conservation advocates.

Promoting collaborative research and technological innovations to enrich and update the national and local database and information system on forest ecosystems and advance forest conservation-oriented scholarship in the country. This includes the promotion of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches and supporting academic diversity from both social and natural sciences.

Continuing support of sustainability and fair trade mechanisms to boost ecological and economic returns of particularly non-timber forest products as key strategies in community forest based-livelihood and forest conservation.

Developing policy frameworks, incentive mechanisms for ecological and social entrepreneurship; linking of eco-consumers and ecological and social entrepreneurs with forest-based livelihood peoples organizations; promoting fair trade and accessibility of sustainability certification; and sustainable livelihood capacity-building of community forest organizations. The concept and promotion of eco-cultural forest-based livelihood framework can be explored to account for local forest knowledge, values, beliefs, and practices alongside community cooperative mechanisms are key strategies of sustainable forest management, conservation, and viable livelihoods.

Continuing engagement with a broad spectrum of social sectors in traditional and social media platforms to communicate forest conservation advocacy principles, practices, and pathways and highlight its linkages to social development and well-being.

Broadening policy discourses and public awareness of the importance of forest conservation, ecological restoration, and biodiversity protection in our development responses and future outlooks in light of the global climate change challenges and COVID-19 pandemic.

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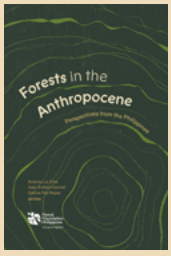

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