

Research abstract reports for Field Research Program, FY 2011

GCOE grantee: **Adrian L. Albano**

Field work duration: **June 12–July 26, 2011**

Research Title: **Conserving forests in privatized forest commons:
trends and management options in an Ifugao
village, Philippines**

Area/Field: **Ifugao, Philippines**

A brief report of the field research

In the Philippines, the national strategy to reverse deforestation and conserve forests is through community-based forest management (CBFM) programs. More recent theoretical and empirical studies, however, suggest that there is no superior model of forest management and that other models may be as effective (Bromley and Cernea 1989; Feeeny et al. 1990; Ostrom 1990; Agrawal 2007). Despite the general acceptance of these research findings, forest management programs in the Philippines continue to utilize CBFM as the national strategy.

The primary question in this study is, “how can the remaining forests be conserved when they are already individually privatized, and when the people prefer land use other than forest?” To answer this question, two sets of primary data were collected regarding land use and land ownership. Some of the data had already been collected prior to this fieldwork, such as the 2010 satellite images of the village, the village land use plan, and the initial map of farmland ownership. During this fieldwork, I mostly added to and corrected my previously collected data.

Before I went to the study village, I printed the village 2010 satellite image on a large tarpaulin so villagers could easily identify their farms and houses. Throughout my stay in the village, I hung the map at the village hall, which is often frequented by villagers. I got them familiar with the image and then used it to identify and verify their land claims. I supplemented this satellite image map with video and farm photographs taken using a zoom camera from within and around the village. With these tools, I identified vegetable and rice farms, fallow lands, and forests as well as their owners/claimants as well as their land use allocation based on the village land use plan.

I stayed at a house near the village hall that is near the elementary school and a church and also happens to be located at the center of the village. In addition to interviewing key informants regarding land use, land ownership, and their transition, I was also able to participate and observe the current initiatives affecting forest conservation in the village. I attended regular meetings of elected (*barangay*) village councils, conflict resolution meetings, and meetings to discuss a planned construction of a micro-hydro-electric power plant by a large company in the village.

Overall, I was able to collect and verify my data and I am currently writing a paper with

a similar title for journal publication.

Report 2: Abstract for web site

Research theme/title: **Conserving forests in privatized forest commons: trends and management options in an Ifugao village, Philippines**

Name: Adrian Albano

Year: 2011

Fieldwork location: Ifugao, Philippines

Keywords: forest conservation, privatization, community-based forest management, indigenous peoples

Research background: Earlier forest management policies in the Philippines were ineffective because they did not reflect reality, the already existing local institutions in particular. The same is true for current community-based forest management (CBFM) programs that assume communal ownership of forest resources and a strong community interest to preserve forests. This case study demonstrates that such assumptions may not necessarily be true as natural forests are being cleared and a large part of the remaining forests are already individually owned.

Research question and methods: The primary question in this study is, “how can the remaining forests be conserved when they are already individually privatized, and when the people prefer land use other than forest?” To answer this question, land use and land ownership data were collected. Legal prescriptions, the local land use plan, and actual land use and ownership were identified and compared with the help of the Google Earth Ikonos satellite map, WorldView-1 image taken in March 2010 and farm photographs.

Findings: Just like in neighboring villages, forest clearings have been going on in the village, especially with the opening of farm-to-market roads. This process is complemented by the transition in the ownership of swidden farms and forests from communal property to *de facto* private property. Both processes are taking place despite national laws prohibiting forest clearing, and despite the presence of a community land use plan. With a high (>60%) incidence of poverty and most of the 86 total households employed in vegetable farming, forest clearing is expected to continue.

Implications: These trends have important implications to current conservation and forest management policies, especially in areas occupied by indigenous communities in the Philippines. Ideally, the people themselves should agree to conserve forests. The individual owners of forests need to be engaged in a binding agreement to conserve them. However, with the high income potential from vegetables, the current owners are

less likely to conserve the trees. Conservation initiatives from both NGOs and other entities, however, will work only after the *de facto* owners are able to engage in a legally binding contract. This could happen after their claims of ownership are legitimized by the state law (*de jure* ownership) and also after local land conflicts are resolved. **Directions of future research:** Due to some contradictions and confusion in current Philippine forest policies, future research is needed in the review of these existing policies to identify their inconsistencies and conflicts and suggest amendments or provisions that towards the recommendations of the above study. A related area of concern which would need further research is to identify the implications of such policy changes to the administrative functions of certain government agencies, or simply how to achieve the above recommendations under a combination of a decentralized and central government organizational structure.

Some pictures



Description: Middle part of the study village showing vegetable gardens on previously forested land.

Date taken: June 29, 2011

Image location: Tinoc, Ifugao, Philippines

Taken by: Adrian Albano



Description: Forest clearing is now mostly for vegetable production but, as this picture shows, it is also carried out as a means for individuals to establish their claims on the land.

Date taken: July 1, 2011

Image location: Tinoc, Ifugao, Philippines

Taken by: Adrian Albano



Description: Abandoned rice terraces located in the lower part of the village. Most villagers now engage in more lucrative vegetable production on lands closer to the road in the upper part of the village.

Date taken: March 15, 2011

Image location: Tinoc, Ifugao, Philippines

Taken by: Adrian Albano



Description: Land use contrast. These vegetable gardens (planted with Chinese cabbage and carrots) were once covered by forests like those in the background.

Date taken: November 6, 2010

Image location: Tinoc, Ifugao, Philippines

Taken by: Adrian Albano

References

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