

# Beyond the 'Mythic Community': Enhancing Collective Action in Community-Based Forest Management

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This paper examines the characteristics of communities in Community-Based Forest Management (CBFM) and analyzes their attributes that promote collective actions. It presents a brief history of community, its emergence as the central figure in natural resource management and conservation, and how it evolved as a sociological concept which gave birth to the idea of the "mythic community". The paper also describes two categories of communities in CBFM, i.e., self-initiated and externally-initiated, based on classification generated from the literature. It concludes with theoretical and policy and practical implications of the findings on the practice of CBFM.

## INTRODUCTION

The inadequacies and ineffectiveness of the state in managing natural resources have led to a major paradigm shift in forest policy and resources management (Ife 1999, Meinzen-Dick and Knox 2001). Breaking the old notion that considered communities as culprits of forest destruction, the new paradigm recognized the constructive role of community in forest resource conservation and development. In the Philippines, this shift marked the development of people-oriented forestry programs with families and communities taking the lead in resource management activities. These programs were later unified under one umbrella program called Community-Based Forest Management (CBFM) which embodied the paradigm change and devolution processes happening since the 70s.

CBFM founds itself on the belief that access rights and control over natural resources must be restored to

Philippines' indigenous and local communities. It became the national strategy for sustainable upland management which aims not only to arrest resource degradation and loss but also social justice in the uplands (Chiong-Javier 2001).

In the meantime, effective implementation of devolved programs requires collective action, or a conscious working together, on the part of the community or local users (Meinzen-Dick and Knox 2001). This collective action is not a problem to communities conceptualized as territorially fixed, small and homogeneous as "these characteristics supposedly foster the interaction among members that promote desirable collective decisions" (Agrawal and Gibson 1999). However, with the high level of mobility of many people and the globalization of their worlds, collective action for resource management

cannot be assumed to exist (McCay 1998, Meinzen-Dick and Knox 2001). Even “the very notion of a single, identifiable ‘community’ for ‘community-based resource management’ may be a fallacy where users are from diverse social backgrounds and economic position” (Agrawal 1997 in Meinzen-Dick and Knox 2001). Hence, the idea of a community as small, integrated groups using locally evolved norms to manage resources sustainably and equitably has, in many cases, become a myth (Agrawal and Gibson 1999).

In response to this changing nature of community, this paper examines certain characteristics of communities in CBFM and analyzes their attributes that promote collective actions. It argues that, notwithstanding the noted heterogeneity within communities, a sensible way to enhance collective action in CBFM is to capitalize on the ties that bind them without undermining the complexity and multiple realities of these communities.

The paper is organized into five major sections. The introduction is followed by a historical review of the notion of “community” as a sociological concept as well as the emergence of community as a central figure in contemporary natural resource conservation and management. This section provides the context from which the idea of a “mythic community” evolved. Section three briefly describes two categories of communities based on a classification made by a recent research on the assessment of CBFM in the Philippines

that involved the author. Using the wealth of information generated through this assessment and other empirical evidence from the literature, section four explores the attributes of CBFM communities that enhance collective action. The paper concludes by examining the policy and theoretical and practical implications of the findings that could enhance collective action in CBFM.

## **Community in history**

Traditional writers view community as consisting of “persons in social interaction within a geographic area and having one or more additional common ties” (Hillery 1955). Such “common ties” include history, interest, norms and a sense of identity. This creates a vision of community that is unified and organic, which fits quite well with the characteristics of some indigenous or ancient communities (Borlagdan, Guiang, and Pulhin 2001). The three important elements highlighted in the definition, i.e., area, common ties and social interaction, also correspond to the three ways in which literature sees community: as a small spatial unit, as a homogenous social structure and as a set of shared norms. These three ideas form the basis of most of the advocacy for community (Hillery 1955, Agrawal and Gibson 1999).

However, the great transformations that happened in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (industrialization, urbanization, and modernization) has led to a fundamental change in human interaction. Tönnies described this phenomenon as a change from

*Gemeinschaft* to *Gessellschaft*, or from community to society. The *gemeinschaft* society where “people interact with a relatively small number of people, whom they know well, in many different roles” became a *gessellschaft* society where “one has interaction with many more people, but these interactions are limited to specific instrumental activities” (Agrawal and Gibson 1999, Ife 1999). This shift blurred the stereotyped idea of ‘community’ as homogeneous in the same way as human settlements became larger, diverse and heterogeneous (Uphoff 1998). It also dissolved the ties that anchored humans to their environment, in which they were said to have a harmonious relationship (Agrawal and Gibson 1999, Ife 1999).

With the rapid growth in population and the penetration of market forces, the community began to be viewed in an antagonistic way. Not only were their activities equated with exploitation but they themselves were also regarded as obstacles to efficient and “rational” forest use (Agrawal and Gibson 1999). Such verdict was anchored on the belief by many social scientists that the goals of conservation and the interests of local communities were in opposition. Hardin’s schematic representation even suggested that since conservation required protection of threatened resources and communities rely on these resources for their livelihood, people will tend to exploit resources without restraint (Agrawal and Gibson 1999).

The negative notion given to communities paved the way for policies and programs that regarded the local residents as hindrances to effective resource management and conservation (Uphoff 1998). As a result, the state took on its shoulders the tasks of managing and conserving the natural resources. This top-down approach, however, proved ineffective due to the limited capacity of the state to coerce their citizens into unpopular development and conservation programs. Faulty design, inefficient implementation, and corrupt organizations were also associated with the poor outcomes. This failure brought back the community at the forefront of the conservation scene. Empirical and historical works, as well as theoretic foundation on the role of community, have helped “resurrect community and local participation in conservation” (Uphoff 1998, Agrawal and Gibson 1999). Since then, sustained efforts were made to incorporate community involvement in resource management.

Meanwhile, the waves of societal evolution have given the concept of community a new look and meaning. Communities became characteristically diffuse, heterogeneous, diverse, and with multiple locations and social identities (Mehta et al. 1999). Despite these changes in characteristics of most communities, however, the designs of community-based programs and policies are still catered to the unusually isolated, forest-dependent, resource-conserving, “traditional” indigenous communities (Agrawal and Gibson 1999, Li 2002). This fallacy

of community-based approach to project implementation led to the conception of the idea of the 'mythic community'. This mythic community fails to attend to the differences within communities such as in terms of class, ethnic and gender inequities. It also ignores the realities of migration, mobility, marketization and globalization that promote multiple layers of interaction and diverse social identities. Such romantic myth of homogeneous community resulted to poor designs and ineffective implementation of community-based projects, hence, to failure (Cernea 1992, Agrawal and Gibson 1999, Li 2002, Cabanilla and Lamug 2002).

The poor outcomes of community-based conservation programs called for a reorientation and redefinition of social actors in community-based projects. Some authors argue that it is more important to determine the social organizations that can act as sustaining and enduring social structures for long-term conservation activities. "Such units of social organization, or social actors, can be (1) natural (existing) social units, such as the individual family household or a tightly knit kinship group or subgroup; (2) groups organized purposively to plant, protect, and cultivate trees; or (3) groups (or organizations) that were established for purposes other than forestry but are able to undertake forestry-related activities as well" (Cernea 1992).

In the case of CBFM, it is likely that the abovementioned social actors are by themselves highly heterogeneous, as the following

sections will indicate. This highlights the need to identify the ties that bind these groups together and capitalize on these ties to promote collective action.

### **"Communities" in community-based forest management**

In the Philippines, existing CBFM schemes may be classified based on how they were originally organized. A recent research project initiated by the Ford Foundation, Incorporated, "Community-Based Natural Resource Management in the Philippines: A Preliminary Assessment", came up with three categories of CBFM in the country on the basis of this criterion (Borlagdan, Guiang, and Pulhin 2001). These are: self-initiated sites, locally assisted sites, and national programs. The study covered 29 CBFM sites: five (5) are classified as self initiated, ten (10) locally-supported, and fourteen (14) under national programs and projects. Other related studies are also cited to provide empirical support.

### **Communities in self-initiated CBFM**

"Communities" in self-initiated CBFM belong to four indigenous cultural communities (ICCs) such as the Ifugaos in Banaue; the Bontocs in Bontoc and Sagada; Ikalahans in Nueva Vizcaya and the Higaonons in Misamis Oriental. Research interest on these communities stems from their notable indigenous forest management systems, which they managed to sustain until the present time. These are: (1) the *muyong* system of Ifugao; (2) the *tayan* of the Bontoc; (3) the *saguday* of the Sagada; (4) the

indigenous management practices of the Ikalahan; and (5) the *gaop* system of the Higaonon (Borlagdan, Guiang, and Pulhin 2001).

Recent literature continue to view indigenous communities (IPs) or ICCs to retain their organic characteristics, that is, a group of homogenous people, living in a common territory and sharing common interests and norms. This is reflected in Covo's (1986) report to the United Nations which describe ICCs as:

...those, which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and post-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems (Add 1-4).

However, as the five cases studied demonstrate, communities in self-initiated CBFM are complex and have great variations among and within them. The five cases belong to the three of the five basic types of ethnic social organizations identified by Jocano (2000) in his important study of the patterns, variations, and typologies of Filipino indigenous ethnic communities. Arranged in a continuum

of increasing complexity, these social organizations are characterized as follows (Borlagdan, Guiang, and Pulhin 2001):

1. *Puró* type. This includes the slash-and-burn (*kaingin*) farmers, such as the Ikalahan, who live in scattered semi-permanent settlements or neighborhoods called *puró*. Representing the kindred type of social organization, it is generally composed of related persons occupying a particular settlement and having close interaction with one another. The organizational focus is on the settlement, while group life centers on the family and the neighborhood. Among members of the Kalahan Educational Foundation (KEF), sharing and cooperation constitute the major theme of group life.
2. *Ili* type. Derived from the Bontoc name for "village," this type consists of groups of people living in villages of various sizes, called "hamlets," albeit predominantly large and compact. The hamlets are further subdivided into smaller politico-juridical units which function as the economic, political, and religious centers. This type of organization has been noted among the Ifugao, Bontoc, and Sagada. Elders and influential members of the community who comprise the council of elders assume sociopolitical leadership.
3. *Banwa* type. Represented by the Higaonon, the *banwa* is characterized as the most complex type of indigenous social organization. It is made up of

several villages organized in large communities or domains. Each village is composed of several related or unrelated families, held together by village alliances and a complex set of customary laws. As in the Higaonon of Minalwang, political leadership is vested in the head of the influential family (*datu*), who is assisted by the council of elders.

While clan, in most cases, is the dominant type of social organization responsible in CBFM, hence may be viewed in operational term as the “community”, resource management decisions are based on complex social structure such as class and gender differentiation. In all cases, the decision of the elders/clan leaders dominates over that of the ordinary clan/tribal members. Gender differentiation is also distinct, especially in the *muyong* of Ifugao and the *tayan* of Bontoc, in which women are not allowed to participate in collective decision-making on forest-related concerns (Borlagdan, Guiang, and Pulhin 2001).

Increasing population, penetration of cash economy and globalization also continue to alter existing social structure that adds to the complexity and plurality to realities of communities in the self-initiated CBFM sites. For instance, with the booming tourist industry and other opportunities, a growing number of Ifugaos in Banaue have engaged in off-farm employment (permanent or seasonal) to augment their limited cash income from the farm. This has given rise to a new social class that imbibed lowland

culture and less interested in maintaining the *muyong*. Others, however, endeavor to divide their time in farm activities and part-time employment but also straddle in two types of culture – the traditional subsistence economy and the market economy introduced by the lowlanders.

It should be noted at this point that the self-initiated CBFM communities studied are not isolated cases in terms of their heterogeneous characteristics. Recent studies and field observations corroborate that distinction in status and well-being exists even among indigenous peoples. For instance, Cabanilla and Lamug (2002) noted that wide disparity exists among IPs participating in DENR reforestation project in the same region. Accordingly, the low assets of the Ata-Manobos of Talaingod in Davao del Norte were a stark contrast to the local leaders and crop buyers among the B’laan of Mindanao in Davao del Sur. Similarly, field visits to the Higaonon tribe in Claveria, Misamis Oriental indicate the wide economic disparity among its well-off *datu*s and deprived members, yet project benefits continue to be captured by the former at the expense of the latter. The heterogeneous nature even of IP communities makes CBFM intervention more complex and hence not appropriate to central planning and control.

### **Communities in externally-initiated CBFM**

Externally-initiated CBFM can be divided into two categories: locally

assisted initiatives such as those involving the local government units (LGUs), nongovernment organizations (NGOs), and the academe; and the national government programs or projects initiated by or in partnership with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) (Borlagdan, Guiang and Pulhin 2001). These external actors serve as catalysts for the formation of groups that can be mobilized towards resource conservation and management. As such, they are faced with a big task of identifying (or establishing) a viable group capable of sustaining the process and the flow of benefits established through their programs (Cernea 1992).

“Communities” in externally-initiated CBFM have been largely associated with people’s organizations and small groups, which are organized to achieve specific project objectives. Subcategories within POs include the associations and cooperatives normally established to implement CBFM projects, and the bigger federations, which are made up of these two groups (Borlagdan, Guiang, and Pulhin 2001). On the other hand, the “small groups” category constitutes the farmer groups (e.g. Landcare in Claveria, in Claveria Misamis Oriental and Lantapan, Bukidnon; BEST Project in Malaybalay, Bukidnon; ISF/UDP in Upper Bala, Davao del Sur; and BLUDPP in Buhilalo, Camarines Sur). In some instances, the community is defined as a locality – a human settlement with a fixed and bounded territory such as *sitio* or *barangay* (e.g., Guba,

Bansalan, and Kabulanan, Mt. Kitanglad, and Don Victoriano).

These externally associated communities may belong to different ethnic origins, may actually identify themselves with several social groups, and may be new to the place. In general, they are more diverse than the communities in the self-initiated CBFM sites. Some community members maintain both upland and urban residences that provide them more social interaction and multiple social identities. Communities may also be highly stratified in terms of assets, religion and dialects. Moreover, they can be highly diverse in terms of their forest-related interests as well as the extent of their dependence on the forests. However, they may have limited shared norms in terms of promoting a more sustainable forest management.

The literature is replete with examples of negative outcomes associated with the inability of government and other external groups to take into account the complexity and multiple realities of rural communities in the design and implementation of CBFM projects. Fujisaka (1993) in his case study of a national CBFM project in Laguna analyzed how religious differences among community members had resulted to two warring groups that barred collective action preventing the achievement of project objectives. Similarly, Pulhin (1996) in his study of a Community Forestry project, in Claveria, Misamis Oriental, described how the NGO’s definition of the

community as a locality (i.e., barangay) had resulted to the marginalization of the IPs in favor of the elite sector in the area. Related studies conducted in other countries point to the same result (Cernea 1992).

Despite the noted negative outcomes, there are also indications that right form of economic incentives and benefits can mobilize communities towards collective action. These binding factors include the different forms of livelihood and employment opportunities provided by the projects. Aside from economics, some peripheral factors could also serve as ties that bind these externally-initiated communities. These include tenure system; environmental awareness; acquisition of additional knowledge through participation in training, cross-farm visits and related activities; and technical assistance. While these latter factors could act as 'community binders', experiences in various sites demonstrated that they are not sufficient to sustain the communities interest in collective action that promotes sustainable forestry management (Borlagdan, Guiang and Pulhin 2001).

A perfect example showing the successful combination of the above factors in forming an externally-initiated community was the experience of the Community-Based Coastal Resources Management (CB-CRM) Project in Bolinao, Pangasinan. In this particular case, the local residents were unified by their pursuit to hinder the establishment of a cement plant that would cause further

degradation of their water resources. Heightened environmental awareness, fueled by a vigorous program on public environmental education and the active involvement of LGUs, played a catalytic role in the community mobilization and formation of CRM-oriented people's organization (Talaue-Mcmanus et al. 1998).

Other examples of successful externally-initiated communities include: the Bukidnon Environment Small-Scale Tree Farm (BEST) Project initiated by the local government, the NGO/PO-initiated Kalahan Educational Foundation (KEF) and Mag-uugmad Foundation, Inc. (MFI), and other programs spearheaded and catalyzed by local/external institutions and/or individuals (Pulhin n.d.). However, already noted, not all externally-initiated communities have success stories. Some are divided by fragmented socioeconomic interests and composed of heterogeneous population clusters that inhibit a collective unified action (Cernea 1992).

### **Attributes of CBFM communities that enhance collective actions**

More than large financial investments, CBFM programs require "some form of collective action to coordinate individuals' activities; develop rules for resource use; to monitor compliance with rules and sanctions violators; and to mobilize the necessary cash, labor or material resources" (Cernea 1992, Meinzen-Dick and Knox 2001). The following selection provides a closer look at some of the attributes that enhance



coordinated action and discusses how each has contributed in fostering collective action in some CBFM communities.

1. *Sociocultural factors* refer to history, genealogy, language, customs and beliefs, and other related factors. The commonalities of these factors have been proven to enable the community members to pursue collective action in resource management and conservation. These were also associated with psychological factors, like common identity and a sense of belongingness and obligation to community members. These characteristics are indigenous to the traditional communities, such as the Ifugaos, Bontocs, Ikalahans and Higaonons, mentioned earlier in the selection. Their social cohesiveness and the harmonious relationship with nature promoted by their culture have helped them in the sustainable management of their ancestral domains (Borlagdan, Guiang, and Pulhin 2001).

Not all communities, however, have a sociocultural composition similar to that of the mentioned indigenous peoples'. Externally-initiated communities, in particular, are composed of members coming from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds. As such, the effect of 'heterogeneity' in collective action has become a theoretical puzzle in community-based forest management. Many argue that differences in sociocultural backgrounds result in differences in interests among the users, and therefore, to conflicts in consensus-building and norm-enforcement.

These factors have been associated to problems of distrust and lack of mutual understanding (Varughese and Ostrom 2001, Ostrom 1998, Borlagdan, Guiang, and Pulhin 2001).

However, a study of Varughese and Ostrom (2001) in 18 forest user groups in Nepal revealed that heterogeneities "do not have a determinant impact on the likelihood or success of collective action" in a group. Although the research does not discount the possible negative effect of heterogeneity in coordinated action, it suggested that "heterogeneity is not a variable with a uniform effect." Another study by Theodori and Luloff (2001), on the other hand, revealed that community heterogeneity resulting from the process of urbanization did not lower the community attachment in urbanized areas. On the contrary, rural communities were found to exhibit statistically significant lower levels of community attachment than those of the most urban site. These suggested that while homogeneity has been usually equated with collective action and sense of belongingness, heterogeneity does not necessarily result to the opposite effects.

2. *Economic opportunities and benefits* are the major factors that bind people together, especially in locally assisted and national program sites. It is the presence of clear and secure profit opportunities, which may be in form of livelihood programs or employment activities, that drive the local residents towards responsible management of forest resources, both in terms of development and exploitation (Ascher

1995). Hence, collective action among community members is, most of the time, enhanced by economic factors.

However, evidences showed that collective action effected by economic factors is not only enhanced when there is high availability of resources or profit opportunities. For instance, in some areas of Nepal, resource scarcity also drives the forest users to act collectively. However, this depends on effective leadership, consensus on action to be taken, ability to enforce restriction, and confirmation from government that local organizational units are empowered to take such action (Hobley and Shah 1996).

On the other hand, economic self-interest among the members makes it crucial for the user groups to act collectively (Ascher 1995). While there are some studies suggesting that slightly unequal patterns of wealth distribution do not prevent "uniform interests" among the members, heterogeneity that is "tantamount to heterogeneity in economic interest" (Vedeld 1997 in Varughese and Ostrom 2001) can lead to conflict rather than collective action (Varughese and Ostrom 2001).

3. *Geographic factors* pertain to shared locality or territory, such as ancestral land, and attachment to "special places", e.g., sacred groves or sacred mountains. It could also serve as a tie that binds community members and enforces collective action (Borlagdan, Guiang, and Pulhin 2001). Yet, this still depends on some geographic consideration like scale and boundary issues (McCay 1998).

In considering the effect of geographical scale in collective action, "small is (sometimes) beautiful:" small enough for easy monitoring by communities, but large enough to enable comprehensive management of resources. Geographic boundary, on the other hand, can be important for instilling a sense of 'ownership' and responsibility in people, enhancing local stewardship (McCay 1998).

In the case of the Ikalahans, securing the boundary of their ancestral land has been the main driving force for collective action that resulted to the issuance of the first forest lease agreement in the country and consequently, the sustainable management of the area.

Similarly, in Nepal, forest boundaries serve an important function to the users as these borders determine the users who will manage and use the forest resources. These boundaries must also be clearly demarcated and agreed by the users to avoid any conflict (Hobley and Shah 1996).

4. *Institutions* can be seen as sets of formal and informal rules that shape interactions of human with others and nature. In general, they are understood as both enabling (in terms of providing people with ways through which they can negotiate their way through the world) and constraining (in providing the rules for action). On the other hand, most mainstream institutional theories tend to view institutions as rules, regulations or conventions imposing constraints on human behavior to facilitate collective action (Agrawal and Gibson 1999, Mehta

et al. 1999). Several studies on community-based resource management suggested the evolution of institutions from mere rules to embodiments of social practice which are molded by social and power relations. In many respects, they have become synonymous with people's everyday life practices and ways of viewing the world (Mehta et al. 1999).

As demonstrated by the self-initiated CBFM, various forms of indigenous institutional arrangements facilitate collective action that promotes sustainable forest management. In the saguday, for instance, the council of elders appoints a *membantay* (administrator or caretaker) to ensure the enforcement of customary practices in relation to the cutting of trees as well as the maintenance and protection of the area (Cruz 2001). In the muyong, this same set of responsibilities is assigned to eldest child to ensure that the family or clan forest is managed according to locally defined and legitimized rules and regulations (Borlagdan, Guiang, and Pulhin 2001). Among the Ikalahans, the *tontongan* provides the mechanism for resolving forest-related conflicts such as illegal logging, forest fires, land grabbing and encroachment. They find this arrangement to be more efficient, democratic, and reliable, compared to the time-consuming and financially draining legal courts (Dolinen 1997).

Institutional arrangements are very helpful in promoting cooperation when social relations do not provide a common ground for such a condition

(Vira 1993). However, it is important that the different groups who will be affected by such institutions will have representatives in the formulation process. Members of these groups should also have opportunities to exercise a right to remove their representatives if the performance of the representatives is unsatisfactory as deemed by those affected by rules (Ribot 1996 in Agrawal and Gibson 1999).

Aside from the abovementioned attributes, there remain other factors that also foster collective action in community-based resource management. One of these is the issue on property rights, which is defined as "the capacity to call upon the collective to stand behind one's claim to a benefit stream" (Bromley 1991 in Meinzen-Dick and Knox 2001). It is important to address this issue because these rights: (1) offer incentives for management; (2) give necessary authorization and control over the resource; (3) reinforce collective action; and (4) demonstrates government commitment to devolution (Meinzen-Dick and Knox 2001). Moreover, property rights give the local users an assurance that they will be able to continue to use the forest in the future, hence, the people become more motivated to care for forests (Ascher 1995).

Threats to natural resource sustainability, environmental or problem awareness and encouraged participation of the local residents could also mobilize people towards a coordinated action (Uphoff 1998, Vira 1993, Talaue-McManus 1998).

## **CONCLUSION: FROM MYTHIC COMMUNITY TO COLLECTIVE ACTION**

The continuous onslaught of tropical forests, coupled with mounting upland poverty and glaring inequity in resource access and distribution, had forced scholars, policymakers and practitioners to rethink the role of community in forest management. As a result, the community-based forest management was born. Departing from the traditional notion that regard communities as the main agent of forest destruction, the new paradigm highlights the potential of communities to engage in collective action that will advance a more sustainable and equitable forest resource management (Borlagdan, Guiang, and Pulhin 2001).

Until recently, the notion of a “mythic community” – a group of people living in small spatial unit with homogeneous social structure and bound by common interest and norms – has remained a universal icon in CBFM. This paper supports emerging literature on common property resources, which argues that in the face of a rapidly changing world, such an ideal community hardly exists even among indigenous cultural communities. Instead, CBFM communities on the ground, both in self-initiated and externally-supported initiatives, are increasingly becoming heterogeneous, diverse, and with multiple social identities, and hence are more complex than what most of scholars, policy makers and planners have originally conceived. Such misconception of the grounded

communities has barred collective action and contributed to the failure of some CBFM initiatives.

The present study points to a number of theoretical and practical implications. At the conceptual level, categorization of communities in CBFM into self-initiated, locally assisted, and national programs assisted, provides an alternative and hopefully a more useful framework to better analyze and understand the complex social relations in different CBFM sites. It departs from tendency of the State and most development practitioners to lump CBFM communities together assuming homogeneity rather than heterogeneity amongst community members and to downplay power struggles and heterogeneous outcomes within communities. This statist view of community perpetuates the elite’s control over and benefits from the forest resources and further marginalizes the upland poor.

Considering the different context by which the CBFM communities in this paper are categorized, the present typology may not be comparable to the more popular ones such as Tönnies’ notion of *Gemeinschaft* to *Gessellschaft*. However, it’s usefulness goes beyond forestry and may also apply in similar context such as the irrigation and coastal resources sectors. It should be pointed out though that typologies of communities are mere conceptual tools to better understand social realities. Consistent with the idea of “grounded community” the main message of this paper is not much in terms of which typology should be adopted but rather

ensuring that whatever category may be chosen, it should appropriately reflect the multiple and complex social realities on the ground.

On a more practical aspect, the notion of a mythic community as basis for collective action in CBFM should be abandoned. Instead, CBFM planners and practitioners should start with the communities on the ground. They should have an in-depth understanding and appreciation of the complex socioeconomic and political realities of each community and be able to identify and capitalize on the ties that bind community members as basis for identifying strategies for collective action. The implications of this on the policy and practice of CBFM are as follows:

### **1. Improving the policy process**

CBFM policies should be anchored on ground realities. Thus, current policy process should be improved to include appropriate feedback mechanism from the field that would allow a more dynamic and responsive policy formulation process. Likewise, policies should be flexible to allow site-specific intervention that address identified needs of specific groups in the community.

As a valuable input to policy formulation, a community forum that would promote exchange of experiences and learnings from different CBFM sites should be instituted at the regional and national level. Such a forum should have some degree of independence from the DENR and should be organized by the

civil society but with legitimacy both from the government and the CBFM communities, themselves.

### **2. Strengthening the planning, monitoring and evaluation of CBFM projects**

Considering the complexity and multiple realities of CBFM communities, the present standardized approach to planning would not work. Project design should be community-specific and specially designed to address the realities of grounded communities. In all cases, an in-depth participatory community analysis is required that goes beyond the current standardized practice of “community profiling”. Such an analysis should go deeper into the social and political context of CBFM communities, the prevailing local power structure, the characteristics and interests of different groups/stakeholders, and the identification of the ties that bind community members.

Considering the complex power relations within communities, appropriate monitoring and evaluation mechanism should likewise be installed to ensure that those who benefit are really the intended beneficiaries of the project.

### **3. Focusing on community-building**

In most, if not all, externally-initiated CBFM sites, POs are the de facto “community” managers. Consequently, most of them are faced with daunting community organizing challenges, especially those in large CBFM areas spanning several

*barangays* or municipalities, which are often characterized by high degree of sociocultural heterogeneity, diverse political and economic interests and varied resource management practices. Oftentimes, they lack the necessary organizational skills to steer different interests and voices toward a common goal. This points to the need for prior community building as contrasted with community mobilization. Thus, community organizers should focus to forging cohesive community in the same way as they need to focus on organizational capability building (Borlagdan, Guiang, and Pulhin 2001).

#### 4. Continuing research support

A continuing research is needed to support CBFM implementation and realize its objectives. Participatory action-research and process documentation type of research should be vigorously pursued and should form part of the project design especially for well-funded projects. Such researches should highlight local community dynamics resulting from the socioeconomic and political diversity within communities. They should also explore deeper the ties that bind community members in varying situations and how these promote collective action in CBFM.

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