

Third Party Evaluator's Opinion on Forestry Sector Project

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Effectiveness

There were varying degrees of success in the expansion of forest cover (approx. 70,000 has. planted through the project, thus alleviating the dwindling national forest area total from 1993 pre-project 9.8 million has. to 2005 post-project 7.1 million has.) and improvement of household income across project sites, within the overall conclusion that the project did improve the environment and the local economies; there is some indication that the project was effective in dealing with large scale illegal logging activities perpetrated by monetarily/ politically powerful individuals, and also some smaller ones although this raised the concern on poor forest dependent individuals. Success was dependent on funds availability, active stakeholder participation especially through People's Organizations (PO's), and the passage and effective implementation of laws with attendant political will. The latter started with a number of policies and support programs from the 25-year Philippine Master Plan for Forestry Development (June 1990), to the Social Reform Agenda of 1994 which included indigenous people among its targets, and the adoption in 1995 of the Community-Based Forestry Management (CBFM) as the official strategy for sustainability, bringing together local governments, forest communities and the Department of Natural Resources (DENR) by 1997.

National level policy direction and support have to be cascaded down to effective translation into project conceptualization and project management skills. It appears that only with a mid-term review did the need for a more holistic approach arise, thus requiring tripling of consultancy services as detailed infrastructure development (road rehabilitation, water systems, bridges, drying yards, causeways and wharves, paved footpaths, river bank rehabilitation), training/workshops/seminars (income enhancement programs, e.g., for married women), and an afforestation survey.

Non project areas in nearby towns should be surveyed to validate the findings from project sites. It is not clear whether the project itself is solely responsible for increases in incomes and forest covers when other system-wide factors may come into the picture (natural disasters, general peace and order condition, economic cycles due to outside forces); differential impact of projects can be properly assessed with control towns.

Sustainability

Several major programs did not progress as projected, as some ceased to operate once project funding dried up. The DENR struggled but failed to get Plan implementation support, dramatically demonstrated by the failure of the proposed bill on "sustainable forest management" which kept it from pursuing aggressive strategies because of the lack of the enabling law. Sustainability is also dependent on the accumulated experience on reintegrating and engaging communities as forest managers in tandem with the Subproject Site Management Offices (SUSIMOs) organized to strengthen support for PO's. Income enhancement programs, quite successful where PO activity is high, can be used to sustain the financing of reforestation through daily allowances for operation and maintenance work in project sites. The proposed code of PO with residents prior to project implementation should be integrated to the manual from the inception stage. Project management skills should be prioritized.