



How Community-Based Research Influences National Policy on Water Management in the Philippines

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Abstract

This paper describes a process of communicating Community- Based Water Management (CBWM) research results to policy. It describes the method as “loops of a spiral,” i.e., multi -stakeholder and participatory policy analysis where policy makers and researchers work together toward a policy solution. This process was done in Lantapan, Bukidnon, Philippines, and some of the lessons learned were brought up to the national level.

Three key issues comprised the policy advocacy agenda: a) a rapid degradation of water resources even in remotely rural communities, b) a community- based methodology for monitoring water quality and trends, and c) a watershed-based planning approach for water management.

Scaling up of the research results, however, meant that community- based researchers needed to partner with certain national agencies for policy advocacy. The strategic choice of partners facilitated the snowballing of the policy cause not just within national agencies but also with sub-national entities. The authors, however, argue that this policy advocacy is still in progress and impacts are not yet discernible. Nonetheless, the solid research done with community participation, the local policy impacts, and the strategic partnerships forged may be factors that define a possible

best-practice approach in influencing national water policy from a community-based research perspective.

Keywords: community-based water management, water policy, participatory policy analysis, partnerships, Bukidnon

Introduction

Policymaking in the Philippines is a complicated process. For one to influence policy, a deeper understanding of the process is needed. In theory, policy formation starts with a recognition of the problem followed by the predictions and projections done to have a clear understanding of the potential policy solution (Dunn 1996, Dye

In a rationalist and expert-led policy model, policymakers usually listen to policy analysts, mostly economists, on most of these issues. However, as the roots of democracy deepen in a society, the sphere of policy influence broadens, and other forces such as the private sector and civil society, in addition to the state-centered forces, participate in and affect policy analysis.

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It is in this context that this paper explores the possibility of having, and the manner by which, communities far away from the center, influence national policy on natural resource

management, in particular, on water resource management. As seen in Figure 1, civil society, the private sector and state-centered agencies all input in the process of policymaking. In the Philippines, in fact, the executive and legislative branches of government have increasingly welcomed advice and feedback from these various sources in the belief and expectation that the confluence of information and knowledge foundations may lead to a more relevant and sound policy. In terms of community-based research and information, (while indeed, most of their usages

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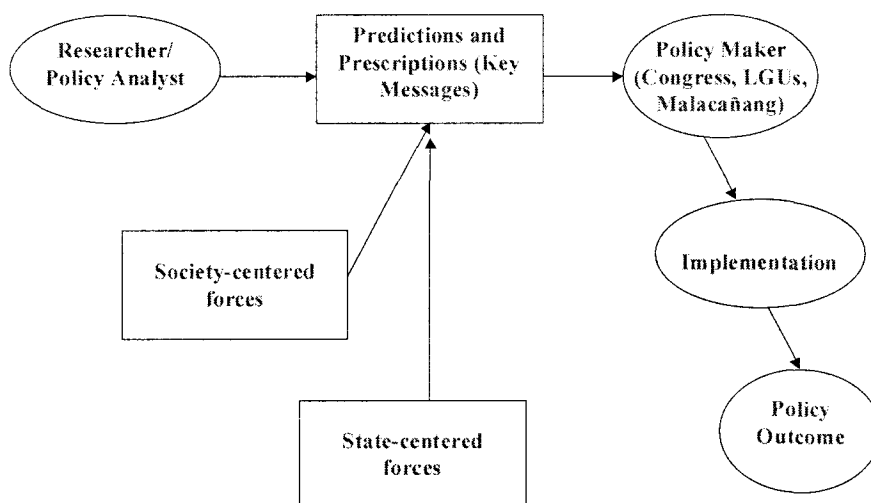


FIGURE 1

The Policy Formation Process (Modified from G. Meier, 1991)

apply to local scenarios, thereby sometimes discouraging efforts to translate them for national policy level consumption), the recent trend among some policymakers to include site-specific views “from the field” gives some assurance that such results and data may serve as inputs in policy deliberations and debates, especially in natural resource management (see for instance, Loevinsohn and Rola 1998). The question therefore may not be whether community-based knowledge and information can help shape and influence policy but *how* they can do so. In other words, the issue is how community-based water management (CBWM) research results may be mainstreamed in the overall process of influencing national water policy.

This paper illustrates the case of a community in Lantapan, Bukidnon whose community-based research and monitoring of water quality and watershed health management helped greatly in local policy decisions and

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impacts on water management. Because of said positive outcomes from which lessons may be drawn and replicated in other similar environments, the results, recommendations and courses of action from the research have been the subject of a “scaling up” advocacy program to national policy level by the project proponents in partnership with certain institutions and coalitions. The process by which this project was conceptualized and implemented – in a “loops of a spiral” model, with stakeholders’ participation and alliances, and closer researcher-policy linkage as specific instruments – is documented in this paper.

Clearly, the experience points out the importance of knowing where and how to maximize the comparative advantages of certain institutions, how to operate in an uneven playing field where institutions have diverse capabilities, and how to ascertain alternative routes by which policy-relevant information can reach policymakers and other key actors, thereupon affecting policy. Hopefully, the experience will evolve into a “good practice” approach that would help influence policy from a community-based perspective.

This paper has three parts. Part I is a description of the research- policy link with illustrations of the experience of the community-based water monitoring project in Lantapan, Bukidnon, Philippines. Part II is a documentation of the water policy advocacy process from community to national level, where strategies in scaling up are described. Part III focuses on the lessons learned.

The Research-Policy Interface: Is it Loops of a Spiral?

Not too long ago, research was quite a distance away from policy. The socio-political milieu for policymaking was not research-based but was rather dependent on vested interests propagated by various lobby groups. In addition, there was a dearth of research, especially quality research, to analyze specific policy issues. In recent times, though, some improvements came with shifts in the paradigm regarding the importance of research taking place and with more enlightened decision makers and policymakers beginning to appreciate the role of research in their deliberation and decision making process.

The Communication Challenge

While some research has been useful in policy deliberations, other research has not been useful at all. What explains this unevenness? To a large degree, the answer lies in the extent and manner by which researchers and policy makers communicate with one another. A number of issues have contributed to this communication problem (Tollini 1998), characterized by differences in “culture,” values and perspectives. An understanding of the reasons

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behind these problems and the identification of possible ways or interventions to overcome them remain a challenge in the field of communication.

Among these problems, according to Tollini (1998) are:

- a) *Differences in focus.* Policymakers and researchers interpret problems in different ways. For instance, policymakers are inclined to treat the symptoms while researchers look for the cause. To bridge this difference, both policymakers and researchers will have to closely collaborate in all stages of the process of finding a solution to problems.
- b) *Differences in objectives.* Researchers and policymakers respond to a different set of incentives. Scientists look for recognition from their peers whereas policymakers need legitimization from their constituency. Moreover, the two parties look for different types of information in fulfilling their respective objectives. A constant dialogue between them can thus reduce this difference and the resulting communication barriers.
- c) *Different degrees of urgency.* Policymakers often have to decide even without data. Researchers, on the other hand, find answers by testing hypotheses, a process which usually takes a long time. At the same time, their time frames differ widely. The mandate of policy research is to predict scenarios so that solutions to future problems are readily available to policymakers.

Unfortunately, this model of complicated programming may not be available or feasible in developing countries.

d) *Distance between the research station and policy-making arena.* Researchers and policymakers live in different worlds, and opportunities for interpersonal contact are few. This, gap, however, has considerably narrowed as members of the academe are often invariably appointed to executive department positions and executive officials usually return to or choose to join the faculty ranks in universities. As Tollini (1998) further observes:

If researchers and policy makers would collaborate, they will discover how much they would have in common. They will see how science can enrich policy, and how relevant research can be, if supported by good policy. This will take time and involve costs, but costs of learning to communicate and collaborate are a decreasing function of time spent working together. In other words, once the results in terms of better policy analysis and enhanced policies become apparent, the easier it becomes for researchers and policy makers to work together.

Despite the difficulties in closing the gaps in the above differences, the problems are not entirely insurmountable. The current paradigm of participatory research and participatory policy analysis is said to help in bridging this gap between research and policy.

Experience in Bukidnon, Philippines

What was the experience in this regard in Bukidnon?

The study done in Bukidnon investigated the initiatives of an emerging local institution formed out of a project activity known as the Sustainable Agriculture and Natural Resource Management Collaborative Research Support Program-Southeast Asia (SANREM CRSP-SEA)¹ in providing community-generated water data for local policy and action (please see Deutsch *et. al*/2001a and 2001b, and Deutsch and Orprecio 2004 for details). The study revealed that local people with sufficient training were in a position to monitor the state of their own water resources. Such monitored information was used for local policy and governance.

The Study Site

The municipality of Lantapan, Bukidnon, Philippines, is the headwater of four big river systems which supply water to the Manupali-Muleta Watershed. The four main rivers are the Alanib, Maagna, Kulasihan and Tugasan Rivers which in turn supply water to the much bigger “Rio Grande de Mindanao.” In recent years, however, deforestation and soil erosion have been perceived as contributing to the dwindling water supply from these rivers which are the primary source of water supply for power, irrigation and domestic use. The restoration of the water supply is therefore of great concern to the local government of Lantapan and the communities within it. In addition, because of the acknowledged contribution of these upland water bodies to the whole of the Mindanao island, more value is given to the proper management of these resources.

The Water Watch Group

One of the earliest projects undertaken by the SANREM CRSP-SEA in its pilot site of Lantapan was a community-based water quality monitoring project. This aimed to facilitate the development of water quality and watershed assessment measures and capabilities by local communities and to provide physico-chemical data that could be used in adopting policy meant to improve water quality (Deutsch *et. al*, 2001a and 2001b).

To implement the project, a group consisting mostly of volunteers from among the community citizens, including the native tribe (*Talaandig*) members and migrant farmers, was set up. The group’s task was to monitor the quality of water in the four big river systems originating from the Lantapan area. For them to be able to do this, the group members were given training in water quality monitoring and principles of watershed management.

Originally called the Water Watch Group or *Tigbantay Wahig* in the Binukid dialect, the core group of these water monitors then proceeded to form a people’s organization (The *Tigbantay Wahig*, Inc.) and incorporated themselves as an officially recognized non-government organization (NGO) in 1995. Since then, the *Tigbantay Wahig’s* monitoring results have been regularly disseminated to community members, educators, and local policymakers. Their data and the work

that they have been doing helped alert local policymakers and other stakeholders in the area on the state of their water resources, thereby moving them to action to address said issue. The challenge at this time is how to mainstream this community-based organization in the formal structure of governance of water resources.

Tracing Lantapan's History in Local Water Resource Policy and Governance

What is the role of the *Tigbantay Wahig* in Lantapan's policy and governance of its water resources? To better understand this, it is best to trace Lantapan's history in this field.

In the early days, water was a free resource which people simply obtained for their needs from the numerous rivers, streams and waterfalls found in the area. There were no conflicts as people could have all the clean, pure water that they needed. Management of water resources was largely in the hands of the indigenous people (IP) who made use of water for both their basic needs and their many customs and rituals, vestiges of which may still be seen in the traditions being kept by them.

In the 1970's and the 1980's, however, massive deforestation resulted in the opening of new lands for agriculture. The market forces that came when agriculture was intensified in the early 80s eventually led to water conflicts between lowland rice farmers in irrigated areas and upland vegetable growers in Lantapan. Households likewise increased in number as a result of the influx of migrants. This led to intense competition in the use of water. Unfortunately, at the local level, there was no institutional structure to manage water conflicts, thereby worsening the degradation effect of water resources.

Meanwhile, on the national level, an enabling law to settle water conflicts was established with the promulgation of the Water Code of the Philippines (Presidential Decree No. 1067) on December 31, 1976. Among the underlying principles of the Code is that all waters belong to the State and cannot be the subject of acquisitive prescription. This stipulation runs counter to the customary law of the indigenous tribe in the study site which had, by that time, become a source of serious conflicts that could jeopardize the economic development in the area.

Following the State law, people can apply for a water permit for the use of the resource beyond household needs. Minimal fees are charged in order to obtain a “water right,” which gives one the permit to acquire water. However, these fees and water laws in general are not observed in the upland areas (Rola, Deutsch, Orprecio and Sumbalan 2004) especially because the regulatory agency handling this is a national level agency with no physical presence in the uplands. What is therefore needed is an institutional innovation that can put more value on the data generated by the water watch group and help properly manage and govern the use of water in the area. It is to be noted that until the 1990s, no local institution governed the water resources in the rural places of the Philippines. It was only with the enactment of the Philippines’ Local Government Code (LGC) in 1991 that local governments became enforcers and implementors of national environmental laws. However, whether this decentralization is a better structure for environmental governance or not still remains to be seen (Rola and Coxhead 2004).

How has Lantapan coped with these newly bestowed powers on local governments? How can these new powers affect water management by customary rule in the study site, where water in the land of the indigenous tribes is culturally considered as belonging to them? How can water conflicts arising from economic growth be resolved? And how can the degradation of water resources in the area as shown in the monitoring of the *Tigbantay Wahig* be addressed? To date, lack of funds, lack of local capacity, and the incomplete devolution of functions resulting in a lack of local institutional structure constitute some of the constraints for local governments such as that in Lantapan, to do a good job in the management of water resources (Rola, Sumbalan and Suminguit 2004).

To partially address this lack of institutional structure for water governance, the town mayor established the Lantapan Watershed Management Council (LWMC) in August 2001, largely in response to the *Tigbantay Wahig’s* advocacy to save the rivers from being degraded. The LWMC is a multi-sectoral group composed of representatives from the Lantapan agribusiness sector, NGOs, people’s organizations, members of the municipal legislative council, and the provincial level agencies. The water indicators gathered by the water watchers were critical in the mayor’s estimate.² Responding to the pressure to address what could turn out to be a major

environmental crisis, the mayor began negotiating with the implementors of local conservation and environmental protection program in the municipality.

Eventually, the results of the community- based water monitoring work was used by the municipality in coming up with the Lantapan Watershed Management Plan (LWMP 2002), that was approved by the Sanggunian Bayan in September 2003. This Plan highlighted a watershed- based water management strategy. Members of the LWMC have expressed commitment to undertake some of the environmental management activities stipulated in the Plan.

Challenges of Local Policy Reforms

As seen in this case study, a local water watch group was formed mainly to monitor the state of the water resources in the community and to report the findings to the local government. The local government, on the other hand, used the data to design a watershed management plan (Lantapan Watershed Management Plan 2003).

This plan is now waiting for implementation funds. Among the identified sources of funds are the better-off communities in the lower watershed who benefit from the water coming from the upper watershed. The current mayor has always made his suggestion known, i.e., that municipalities protecting headwaters should have a share in the revenues that lowland communities derive from watersheds. This, according to him, is also one of the reasons why there is a need for the immediate revision in national policies regarding watershed management planning and wealth-sharing, as provided in the LGC.³ This is basically the essence of a watershed approach to resource management.

In another development, through the initiatives of a SANREM Principal Investigator (Dr. Antonio T. Sumbalan) based in the province, a Bukidnon Water Policy Forum was held in March 2004, in partnership with the private sector. During the meeting, it was emphasized that water supply needed especially for agribusinesses will not be sustainable in the long run if the upper watershed will not be managed properly. Because of this information, the private sector pledged several millions of pesos for the sustainable management of the mountain range (Mt. Kitanglad) that contains the headwaters of the several watersheds in Bukidnon and other provinces in Northern Mindanao.

Thus, it was wise for the local government to seek the collaboration and participation of both the public and private sectors in a broad range of eco-governance initiatives. It was also wise for the local government to realize it complements the work of the water watch group in the community. To what extent this relationship can be formally institutionalized though depends on enabling laws both at the national and local levels.

Relevant research results for national policy

Because a number of the findings that came out from the research had implications for policy at the national level (i.e., revision of certain provisions in the LGC and other enabling laws, use of a watershed-based approach to water resource planning and management, among others), it was only appropriate that a strong desire to bring this information to the national policy level began to take shape.

Moves to put this into fruition then commenced. And as can be gleaned in the next section, this process was facilitated by the interactions and alliances with other stakeholders and actors in the policymaking process. Indeed, the research- policy links are loops of a spiral where each loop represents a level of interaction and partnership with certain groups and entities espousing a similar cause of influencing policy decisions. This is exemplified by a participatory mode of policy analysis where said groups all help in the shaping of policy.

The experience in Lantapan can be replicated in other sites thereupon showing the need to continuously validate methods and fine-tune policy as information becomes available. This in turn constitutes several other loops of a spiral in the research- policy link.

What were the lessons learned from the CBWM research results and local advocacy that can be scaled up and out of Lantapan? Three of these come to mind, namely: a) there is, in fact, surface water degradation in upland municipalities in the pursuit of economic development; b) there is inherent interest, willingness and ability of local people to monitor their own resources and to talk to policy-makers, and c) there is a need for an institutional setup at the local level to manage water resources.

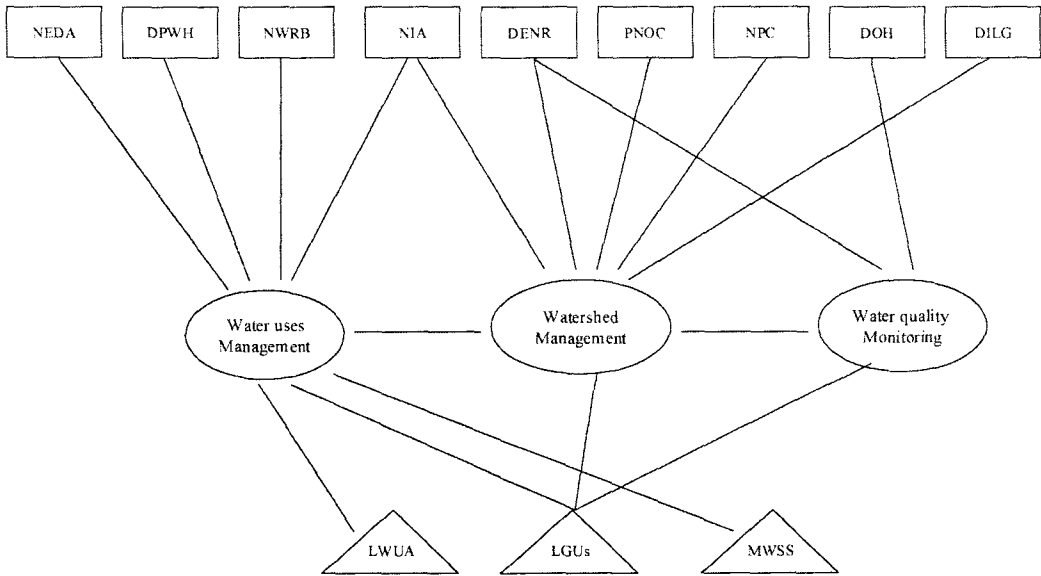


FIGURE 2
Major institutions involved in water resources governance

From Community to National Level Policy Advocacy

Why is it important for results in local research in water to reach national policy makers? The reason for this is that while the Philippine legal framework allows some dichotomy in terms of functions and jurisdictions in water resources governance by national and local government units (LGU), the LGU decisions and actions are bounded by the powers at the central level (Elazegui 2004). In the Philippines, water governance is complicated by the fact that multiple institutions are involved (Figure 2). At most, nine national level agencies govern water resources, their use and quality. The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the National Water Resources Board (NWRB) are the major institutions that influence watershed and water-related decisions and actions.

On the other hand, based on the Local Government Code (LGC), the LGUs can also perform watershed management functions, although subject to DENR supervision and control.

Provinces and municipalities implement community-based forestry management (CBFM), social forestry, and watershed projects. The water quality monitoring

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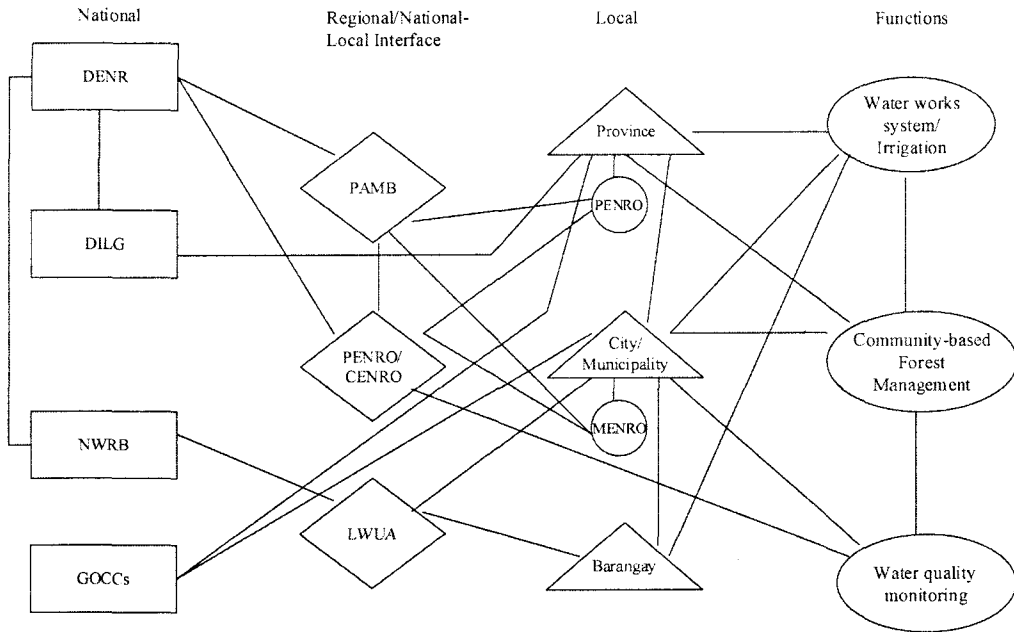


FIGURE 3
National-local government interface in water resources governance

function is at the discretion of the water districts and the LGUs. The DENR-Environmental Management Bureau (EMB) sets water quality standards. The LGUs also have a role in the multipartite monitoring team (MMT) formed within the Environment Impact Assessment System, also under the DENR. This dichotomy of functions necessitates a strong interface between national and local institutions in water governance (Figure 3), and highlights the need to bring to the national level, local level water policy initiatives.

National Advocacy Strategies

Reaching out to the national level to make the results and insights from the community-based research known and to hopefully be able to eventually influence policy is not an easy task. It requires a dissemination and advocacy strategy in which the parties whose decisions are important in addressing the issues on hand, are reached. They are to be informed of the key and critical points within a reasonable period of time to ensure the timeliness of the information and an efficient use of resources.

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The project team adopted three major strategies.

One, was to personally visit concerned executive department offices and brief some of their key officials and staff on the findings and insights of the community-based water management research. *Two*, was to partner with a national level institution with a clear understanding of the research process and links to policymakers. And *three*

was to forge alliances with broad-based coalition advocacy groups with strong links to civil society and grassroots organizations in order to help build up a constituency for advocating the key results and recommendations of the research.

Briefings for Concerned Executive Department Offices

The project team arranged a series of meetings with key officials and technical staffs of certain executive department offices whose areas of work are in line with the subject matter and issues taken up in the community-based research. The objective of the meetings was purely for information dissemination: the conclusions and insights gathered by the research from the field are shared with central-based offices. At the same time, the interactions offered the opportunity for the project team to validate some of their work results, standards and methodology with the offices concerned.

Among the interactions made were:

1. Seminar at the Environmental Management Bureau of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (EMB-DENR), November 2002

The EMB-DENR is the regulatory arm of government for water quality. Its main function is to monitor water quality, especially of the point source pollution type of

establishments. No effort is done to monitor non -point source pollution, which is admittedly a difficult task. The EMB-DENR welcomes new water quality monitoring technologies as long as there is an in-depth study on their accuracy and cost-effectiveness vis-à-vis the current methods used by EMB. Said new technologies are welcome because the EMB feels that the indicators currently in use need to be modernized.

During the meeting, the team of SANREM economic and water monitoring project presented their research results on water quality monitoring to the staff of the EMB. The team's visit to the EMB was welcomed by the EMB precisely because it was indeed also exploring possible new methodologies that it could adopt for its water quality monitoring work.

At the same time, since the meeting served as a sharing of information, it raised a number of issues useful to the project team for refining its method of interaction with the key actors and stakeholders in the field. The issues raised included the following: 1) conversion of SANREM "water watch" water quality indicators to DENR standards; 2) cost- effectiveness and in-depth study of water quality monitoring technologies; and 3) coordination with the EMB Regional Office in Region 10 and the Central Office.

The EMB participants suggested that coordination with the EMB-Region 10 staff would be helpful because it is the regional office that endorses recommendations to the central office for consideration on a national scale and it is also doing its regular water monitoring. This piece of information was a welcome suggestion for the project team because in order for the CBWM strategies to be adopted at the national level, the project could have early on collaborated with the local agencies for more validation in similar areas and conditions. Moreover, the flow of information should have come from the state-aligned agencies rather than from the communities, thereupon facilitating the process of recommending the adoption of the project's methodology and indicators.

The project team also learned that in water monitoring, authority is given to provincial governments. EMB organizes a multi-sectoral committee to monitor water quality, whose activities are sanctioned by the provincial government. DENR provides the overall technical guidance. Because conflict resolution is also done at the local government, further advocacy can be focused at the provincial level through this committee.

2. Visits to the National Water Resources Board (NWRB)

The purpose of the visits to the NWRB was to understand the limitations of the current water code and the potential contributions that the research team's work can provide this agency. During the visits, information about several bills being deliberated in Congress on water resource management was provided the team. The most important one was the Clean Water Act, which was eventually passed into law in March 2004. The team was also informed that a reorganization of several water agencies was on-going. For the experts at the NWRB, the solution to the impending water crisis was more of demand management rather than a supply problem. The focus in their regulatory function is about water allocation mechanisms. NWRB is also now pursuing the amendments in the Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) of the Water Code.

3. Visit to the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG)

The other office the team visited as part of its national dissemination and sharing activity was the central office of the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), specifically the Water and Sanitation Division. During the discussions, the DILG staff informed them about DILG's familiarity with Lantapan because it was previously a recipient of the World Bank Rural Water Supply Program. The team also learned that out of 1,500 municipalities in the country, there are over 600 water districts which are located in urban areas and peripheral semi-urban areas. This implies that the remaining municipalities not covered by local water districts depend on the local government-managed waterworks⁴, or none at all, if the structure is not present.

Partnership with the PIDS on Policy Advocacy Activities at the National Level

From community-based research, the SANREM team formally partnered with the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) for the national level advocacy activities. The PIDS is a government institution attached to the National Economic and Development Authority. Its main function is to do research and advocacy on economic and development issues. The SANREM project's alliance with the PIDS was made to secure its help in the dissemination of the project

results at the national level through its links with various policy-related agencies and the legislative branch.

PIDS has a comparative advantage in doing so -- it is nearer the center, i.e., it has institutional links with both the executive and the legislative branches of government. It also has several avenues for policy information dissemination and advocacy. A PIDS partner-member of the SANREM team, for instance, liaised with members of the staff of senators and congressmen who sponsored major bills on water like the then pending Clean Water Act. The team also met with various technical working groups involved in the drafting of said bill in order to brief them on some of the key findings and recommendations of the project research which may serve as inputs in the strengthening of the bill. Some of the project research's findings on the watershed-based strategy for water management were introduced as possible insertions in the bill's provisions. Another involvement was the participation of a PIDS-based project partner in one of the preparatory task forces in charge of preparing the position paper for the DENR-NWRB-NEDA – a National Conference on Water organized by the DENR-NWRB-NEDA in March 2004. Here a water management agenda was endorsed to the President of the Philippines.

1. Water Resource Management Policy Forum

Initial SANREM work with the PIDS was the holding of a water resource management policy forum⁵ in August 2002 to disseminate the CBWM research results within the context of the national concerns on competing uses of water, water policies and institutions, and watershed-based water resource management strategy.

The forum discussed to what extent the watershed health is factored in, within the water policy and water governance framework in the Philippines. The discussions revealed that there are already many laws providing the legal framework for water governance in the country such as the Revised Forestry Code, Water Code and the Local Government Code. However, there seems to be not much understanding of these laws, much more so of their impact on watershed health if implemented on a broader scale. Thus, the forum participants concluded that the water crisis in the Philippines is probably a crisis of governance.

The empirical study that was contributed by the SANREM research team was powerful in illustrating the consequences if nothing is done at this time to improve

the current water policy and governance in the country. Another important outcome of the forum was the coming together of professionals who were interested in the same cause but who had not gotten to talk to one another. A potential impact of this activity is the recognition by policymakers of watershed as the basic unit of water resource planning for a more sustainable water resources management. Though this is already a pronounced policy of government (Acosta 2004), in reality, this is not being implemented.

2. Other PIDS-led dissemination and advocacy activities

For information dissemination, meanwhile, PIDS has a number of outlets that are regularly distributed to the top leadership in both the executive and legislative departments of government. For the SANREM partnership, it produced a folio of policy notes, editorials in the major dailies, and other media forms that focused on some of the key findings of the SANREM community-based research results on water. For additional advocacy activities, there was a briefing held at the Congress, just after the Clean Water Bill was enacted, with the researchers of the project briefing the Congress staff on some points that may be useful in the drafting of the Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) for the newly passed Clean Water Act.

Forging Alliances with Other Partners- The Philippine Watershed Management Coalition

Aside from a partnership with the PIDS, the project also established links with NGOs. This link came later though as the SANREM SEA project team worked further to crystallize the type of information it wanted to push for in a nationwide advocacy program.

When the team was completing the manuscript of the newly-published book, *Winning the Water War*, the team wanted to assess the reason why, despite the fact that the watershed approach is fully recognized and supported by the Philippines' Department of Environment and Natural Resources, the said approach is not being implemented on a wider scale.

To carry out the assessment, a study was conducted to focus on the elements present or absent in various watersheds which affect the implementation of the watershed management approach. In order to make the local and national decision

makers and other stakeholders aware of the reasons that either lead to the success or failure of the watershed approach, the project team decided to present the results of the case studies in a road show.

Thus, a series of 3 fora entitled “The Realities of Watershed Management Approach in the Philippines”⁶ was held in various points in Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao. One of the objectives of the forum series is to be able to reach as many of the stakeholders and decision makers as possible in different areas in order to stress the relevance and importance of initiating watershed management efforts.

To be able to do this, the project team deemed it necessary and strategic to partner with institutions and advocacy coalitions that already have established networks in different parts of the country. Hence, for the two succeeding fora in the Visayas and Mindanao, the project team linked up with the Philippine Watershed Management Coalition (PWMC), a broad-based coalition group made up of professionals from both private, civil society and government sectors advocating the adoption of the watershed approach in managing water resources.

In the various regional fora, local organizations became partners, with participants coming from varied backgrounds. Many of them represent people’s organizations/associations like irrigators and farmers groups; business clubs; the League of Municipalities; local government units in the region as a whole; the representatives of government agencies like the DENR, National Power Corporation, National Irrigation Administration, Department of Agriculture, Department of Health, Department of Energy, Department of Public Works and Highways, Philippine Information Agency, and the NEDA; local water districts; environment and natural resources officers; multisectoral bodies such as that of the Iloilo Watershed Management Council and Protected Area Management Board (PAMB); and academic/research institutions. The regional fora resulted in a snowball effect of information dissemination about water and watersheds.

The lesson gathered from this exercise is the importance of networking in policy advocacy. An earlier decision to partner with a broad-based advocacy coalition group proved to be a good move. The Philippine Watershed Management Coalition (PWMC), an established association of professionals from both private and public sectors whose advocacy was the promotion of the watershed management approach in the country, had a wide network of contacts all over the country, especially in the

Visayas and Mindanao areas. As such, it became easier for the project team to organize and invite relevant and multi-stake sectors for the fora. The partnership likewise easily opened doors for contacts and was also very critical in helping the team reach the relevant audience.

Outputs and Impacts

A number of actions/decisions seem to have resulted from this series of fora. In an Iloilo town, for instance, the participants drafted a tentative program of action. This was based on the case study's recommendation for the possible adoption of the environmental services payment scheme among certain watershed communities in the Visayan region. The said program is being proposed to the Iloilo Watershed Management Council (IWMC), the multisectoral and multilayered structure tasked with the management and protection of the various watersheds in Iloilo province.

The Davao City Council, which handles the advocacy and promotion of the watershed management approach in Davao City, plans to make use of the case studies under the SANREM policy project and the various lessons from these in their continuing IEC and advocacy of the approach. Hopefully, this watershed management consciousness will develop not only in Davao City but also in the entire province of Davao.

Lastly, the PWMC has adopted for its 2004 annual conference the theme "Toward a Watershed-based Water Management Approach in the Philippines," based on the SANREM policy project and case studies. The conference will be held with the provincial, city and municipal leagues of the Philippines and hopefully, the approach and case studies may provide them with bases for comparison and work. This national conference is usually attended by local officials nationwide as well as officials and representatives of institutions and agencies involved in water management and governance. All these collaborative projects are evidence of the snowballing effects of the SANREM. In addition, the PWMC has also featured popular versions of the four watershed case studies of the SANREM policy team in its regular advocacy magazine entitled *Watershed*.

Hopefully, all of the above efforts shall lead to a wider recognition, appreciation and implementation of the watershed approach in an integrated water resources management program for the Philippines.

Lessons Learned

What lessons can be drawn from the entire research–policy interphase activity? The following are some of the more significant ones.

- a) Community-based efforts for policy should be based on quality empirical research. It is noteworthy to mention that the field level study was powerful in pointing out the failures in water policy and governance.
- b) The research must have some local impacts. The field research moved the municipal government into action because of the clarity of the impact on the area. In addition, other local people attested to the fact that the research was helpful. This helped in articulating the cause at the national level because it made the research more credible.
- c) Partnerships forged with institutions known to have integrity, credibility and good links with the policymaking processes ensure better chances in reaching key officials in the policymaking institutions. PIDS' reputation as an independent think tank is beyond doubt and its strategic position in government to influence policy – with its board chairman being the head of the country's foremost socioeconomic planning unit of the country – was helpful.
- d) Alliances with more stakeholders, i.e., NGOs, with national level agencies who do technical work, regulatory and development agencies, regional development officials, and other members of academe, provide a wide reach for the project in the country. The decision to collaborate with the Philippine Watershed Management Coalition, an NGO, is perhaps one of the best moves that the project has made. In fact, the broad-based membership of the Coalition enabled the team to touch base with a lot of groups and sectors interested and involved in water issues, in particular with the watershed approach to water resources management
- e) And finally, there is a need to create more champions and to act with passion. The NGOs are a passionate group and they will carry the ball, even if the academics move on to other areas of research.

Notes

- 1 SANREM CRSP-SEA brings together researchers from universities and specialist institutes in the Philippines, the U.S., and other countries as well as the International Agricultural Research Centers (IARCs) to work with farmers and other natural resource managers, communities, civil society institutions, and government agencies at local and national levels in the search for the means by which upland communities will be enabled to make better natural resource management decisions. The project is funded primarily by the US Agency for International Development (USAID).
- 2 The indicators included levels of total suspended solids, levels of *E Coli* bacteria and the patterns of stream flow.
- 3 One good example is the provision in the LGC entitling local government units a share in the proceeds from the use of national wealth. In practice, however, the water district directly remits its revenues to the National Treasury rather than to the local governments (as provided in Sec. 293). The revenues are then allocated back to the local government units in the form of the Internal Revenue Allocation (IRA).
- 4 But LGU managed water systems are not very successful. They were not sustainable because of poor finance-generating capability and lack of preparedness of LGUs to manage the systems. Water fees are usually subsidized and are usually too low to cover even operating and maintenance expenses.
- 5 The papers presented during the forum, together with Four more Solicited Papers, are now published in a book entitled, *Winning the Water War: watersheds, water policies and water institutions* (PIDS/PCARRD, Makati, Philippines, 2004).
- 6 Its objectives were: 1) To bring to the attention of the local and national decision makers the realities on the ground in adopting the watershed management approach as shown in the experiences of the four case studies; 2) To highlight the lessons to be drawn from the experiences of said case studies; and 3) To encourage/challenge stakeholders in various watersheds to undertake further action in managing and protecting their watersheds and water resources.

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