Taking participation of villagers beyond the villages to national forest policy processes in the Philippines

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Recent initiatives in the planning of community-based forest management (CBFM) – the core forest management strategy in the Philippines – have emphasized the use of appropriate methods to ensure meaningful participation of villagers in the policy process.

Participatory approaches in the forest sector have been well developed and applied in villages throughout the Philippines for the past few decades (see Box, page 24). They have often focused on assessing the "needs" of villagers, which conveniently seem to fit the objectives of service delivery projects designed to wean the local population off the forest resources. Yet the money that has been invested in field-based projects to meet needs with alternative livelihoods has not been matched by evidence that the investment has worked. There are few indications that the approach of need-based alternative-livelihood field projects is reducing deforestation or widely improving livelihoods.

Moving beyond "needs" to opinions of villagers reveals a widespread view that the reasons for forest problems such as harvesting without permits or failure to invest resources, time and effort in forest management are found in centralized policy and policy-making processes geared to protect the trees from the people. For example, villagers frequently remark that the criminalization of customary forest use and cumbersome, time-consuming procedures for obtaining harvest permits are disincentives for villagers to manage forest resources sustainably – and even invite illegal use. At least in the eyes of many villagers, site-based forestry projects, no matter how participatory, deal with the symptoms of these problems (e.g. by providing environmental education and seedlings), but not the underlying causes.

Compared with the money spent in the forest sector on participatory approaches in villages over the past few decades, a fraction has been spent on participatory approaches in national policy processes. Methods and approaches for ensuring fair and equal communication have been widely used in forestry field projects at the village level but have not been employed at the national level. Even when villagers are invited to forest policy consultation workshops, seating arrangements, process and methods, language and jargon often conspire to exclude them from meaningful participation.

The Forest Management Bureau of the Department of the Environment for Natural Resources (DENR) – along with the College of Forestry and Natural Resources of the University of the Philippines Los Baños through its Environmental Justice Project, the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IIRR) and other partners in the Philippines – has increased efforts in the past five years to redress the balance by promoting more participation by villagers in national forest policy processes. The donor support for these efforts has come from organizations such as Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC), FAO and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

This article discusses some early lessons in process and methods, drawing on two interconnected initiatives that linked villagers to national forest policy processes in 2006. Both concerned the planning of community-based forest management (CBFM), the central forest management strategy in the Philippines. In 2006 these processes have been brought under the auspices of the Philippine National Forest Programme

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Roots of participation and the Community-Based Forest Management Programme in the Philippines

Participatory processes in the Philippines evolved in answer to the land tenure system introduced under colonization by Spain and retained under American rule (starting in 1898) and after independence in 1946. The Maura Act of 1894 required villagers and individual landowners to register their landholdings officially. Those who failed to do so were legally considered squatters no matter how long they had been on the land. Almost two-thirds of the Philippine territory was unregistered and thus legally belonged to the State. At independence, nearly 60 percent of the Philippines' land area was classified as State forest, where the government had the sole authority to allocate forest land uses and resource use rights.

Between 1949 and the early 1970s industrial timber exploitation expanded rapidly; forest products accounted for 1.5 percent of the total value of Philippine exports in 1949, 11 percent in 1955 and 33 percent in the late 1960s. Deforestation was 172 000 ha per year at the end of this period. Even though rural forest users often used secondary forest or remnants left after logging by large enterprises, officially the rural poor were often blamed for deforestation.

In the 1970s and 1980s fledgling "participatory" forestry programmes were created, often focused on educating and organizing the "squatters" and on providing employment and livelihood opportunities, with the public aim of encouraging them to protect the remaining forest resources, but also with the aim of appeasing a growing rural insurgency.

In 1995 all participatory forestry initiatives were brought under one umbrella, the Community-Based Forest Management Programme (CBFMP), which became the core strategy of forest management in the Philippines. The programme focused on organizing communities and providing alternative livelihood strategies with the aim of taking pressure off the natural forest. A handful of communities whose forests were considered to be sufficiently stocked by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) were granted utilization rights for wood products, but legally sanctioned utilization was often hindered by costly and complex procedural requirements stipulated by DENR and, more recently, by a series of national cancellations of the resource use permits in response to site-specific problems or violations.

Between 2000 and 2004 a review of CBFMP was driven by reformers within and outside DENR. Revised CBFM guidelines were developed based on consultations by DENR with numerous NGOs, academics and community members. Revisions make the procedural requirements for communities to utilize the forest resources more appropriate, in terms of both complexity and cost to communities. This is envisaged to encourage more stewardship by community members over the forest resources. The revised guidelines were approved in late 2004. A national multistakeholder review of the first ten years of CBFM was conducted in 2006 and a strategic plan for the next ten years was drawn up.

(NFP) with the support of the National Forest Programme Facility. The NFP focuses on the further development of CBFM in the country.

What was interesting about these initiatives was not only the involvement of many stakeholders, but also the innovation and experimentation in methodol-ogy. Methods previously used only by professionals to deal with villagers were now used at the national level by a mix of professionals and villagers.

APPROACHES AND METHODS
Approaches and methods were developed to tackle two key challenges identified in policy processes. The first problem identified was that forest policy was often made by a few people for many, often in one-size-fits-all format, and often in offices far removed from field realities (Figure 1).

Another key challenge in forest policy processes is the need to take into account a multiplicity of perspectives on causes of forestry problems (Figure 2). Often those who are most likely to feel the consequences of forest policy, the rural poor living in and around the forest, have been the last to have a voice in policy processes. Interestingly, villagers have had little control over management decisions related to forest planting, maintenance and harvesting – much less than in agriculture, for example. Even though villagers are far more numerous, are closer to the forests and have more intimate practical knowledge of forests than most other stakeholders, they have often been excluded from important decision-making.

The initiatives discussed in this article attempted to level the playing field in communication, not only by enabling the marginalized to have a voice but also by containing the powerful. As well as seeking policy outcomes, the initiatives aimed to develop participatory policy process methodology with an aim to institutionalize processes and methods at the national level.

These initiatives gave evidence of new demands for the role of participatory forest policy researchers and facilitators, fundamentally to do with changing attitudes and behaviour resulting from different assumptions about villagers' roles in forest-sector decision-making (Figure 3).

LESSONS FROM A MULTISTAKEHOLDER REVIEW OF TEN YEARS OF CBFM
The workshop "Multi-stakeholder Review of 10 Years of CBFM in the Philippines, a Forum for Reflection and Dialogue" was held in April 2006. It was led by a non-governmental organization (NGO) and an academic department, but the design
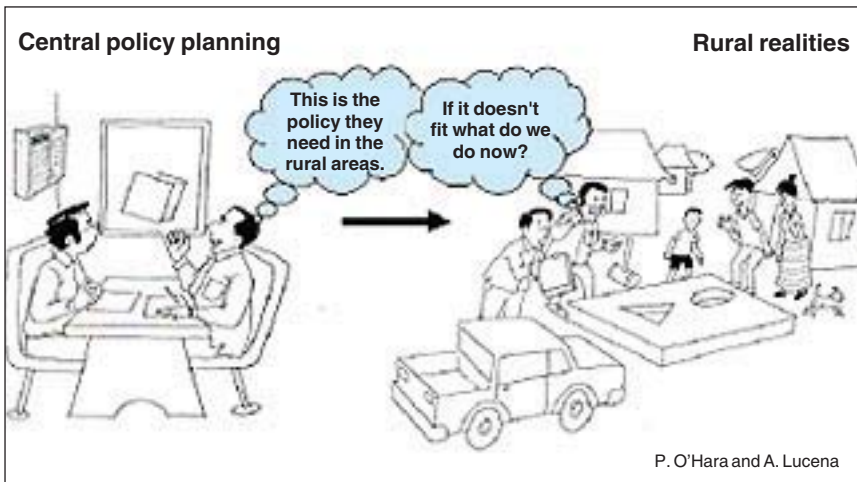
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Assumptions of policy planners in the office often do not match rural realities – and the realities sometimes change

Central policy planning — Rural realities

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and implementation included numerous government organizations, NGOs and villagers. The forum aimed to:

- give rural people a voice at the national level, to make forest policies, programmes and initiatives more appropriate for them and to advance community forestry;
- provide a platform for meaningful negotiations among all the key stakeholder groups in the forest sector in the Philippines;
- provide an example to help inspire the democratization of forest policy-making processes in the country.

In preparation for the workshop, research teams from IIRR and the University of the Philippines Los Baños visited villages around the country, which were carefully selected to represent the range of geographical, policy, tenure and ecological diversity. Repeated visits were undertaken to build trust (e.g. anonymity of individual views was guaranteed if requested) and limit false expectations for the initiative (e.g. study teams used public transport and avoided big spending).

At each site, study teams provided opportunities for villagers to conduct their own thorough analysis of the forest sector, free from the viewpoints and assumptions of the study team. Care was taken to ensure that many voices in the villages were heard and that the views reported represented a high percentage of villagers. These accounts were thoroughly validated and verified using many different methods. The word "need" and the use of questionnaires were avoided, as earlier experiences indicated that they stimulated bias. For example when asked about their needs, villagers tended to fish for material inputs or services rather than more fundamental changes.

The full analysis of the forest sector that was gradually developed in this way was presented in the national workshop by

2
Stakeholders have different perspectives on forest-sector problems

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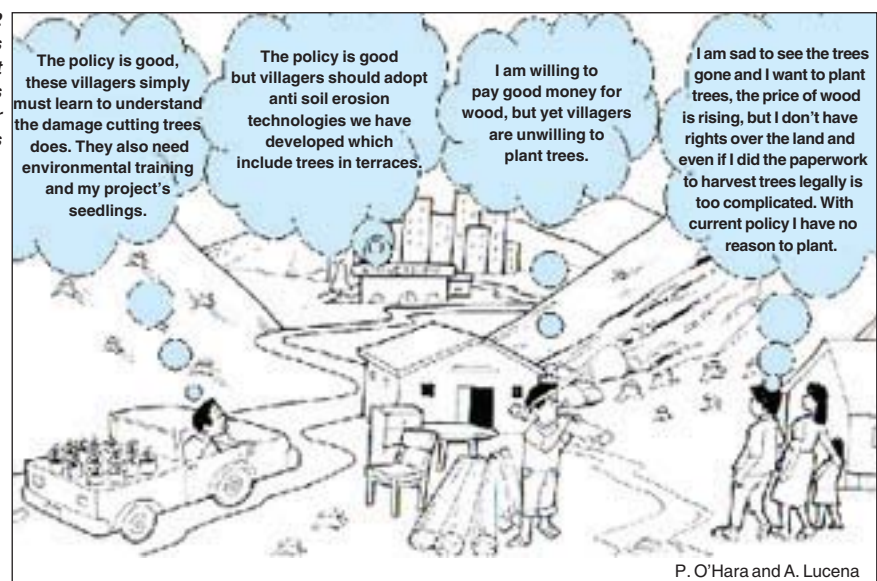
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Degrees of participation in the policy process, indicating the changing roles that a participatory forest policy researcher (or other professional) may have to play in a meaningfully participatory national forest programme

Degree of participation	Typical role of researcher	Typical assumption of researcher	Researcher's perception of role of villager
High ↑	Facilitates process where villagers do own analysis Helps design and facilitate a process where villagers and other key stakeholders can meaningfully interact Focuses on process and methods	Villagers recognize causes of forest-sector problems but lack opportunity to examine them with other key stakeholders in the sector	Can be at any level Analysis, presentation of evidence, persuading and deliberating with other key stakeholders To present opinions
Low	Gathers information from villagers and does analysis Presents analysis to other key stakeholders Focuses on content and outcomes	Villagers are the causes of forest-sector problems Villagers lack capacity to articulate causes of problems to other key stakeholders	Restricted to village level Participates by providing information to researchers To present needs

village representatives using materials they had developed themselves.

Other stakeholders – from the Forest Management Bureau of DENR, the private sector, NGOs and academia – were also invited to prepare forest sector analyses for the workshop. These were to follow the format of the presentations prepared by the villagers, for easy comparison.

Many villagers had little or no experience of workshops, which put them at a disadvantage relative to other stakeholders. To make them more comfortable, the national language Tagalog was used rather than English, as requested by villagers in pre-workshop meetings. Although translation was still needed for some because the Philippines has many local languages, villagers found that the use of Tagalog limited the frequency of technical jargon and acronyms that could exclude them. Villagers were also invited to the venue a few days beforehand so they would feel comfortable with the place. They had an opportunity to review the workshop design (including seating, materials and timing) and to suggest

revisions when methods, purposes and processes were not appropriate or clear to them. The villagers took part in "dry runs" of all sessions and practised their presentations with peer review.

Some professionals attending the workshop resisted some of the actions intended to make the forum more comfortable for villagers. They were concerned, for example, that if English was not used the few foreign donor representatives might feel excluded from the proceedings. The simple solution was to advise foreign donors in advance to bring interpreters. Some professionals did not want to write their ideas on cards, thinking they were not needed and preferring only to talk; but villagers, having less confidence to express themselves verbally in large workshops, saw them as an important aid for expressing their views. Some villagers feared that if questions were only delivered verbally, they might fail to understand technical or academic words and be embarrassed publicly.

Examples of two of the numerous exercises used for forest sector analysis in the villages: a Venn diagram (left) is used to describe relationships among stakeholders in the forest sector; a ranking exercise (right) helps participants discuss their perception of benefits (both legal and illegal) from forestry to various stakeholders under the current policy
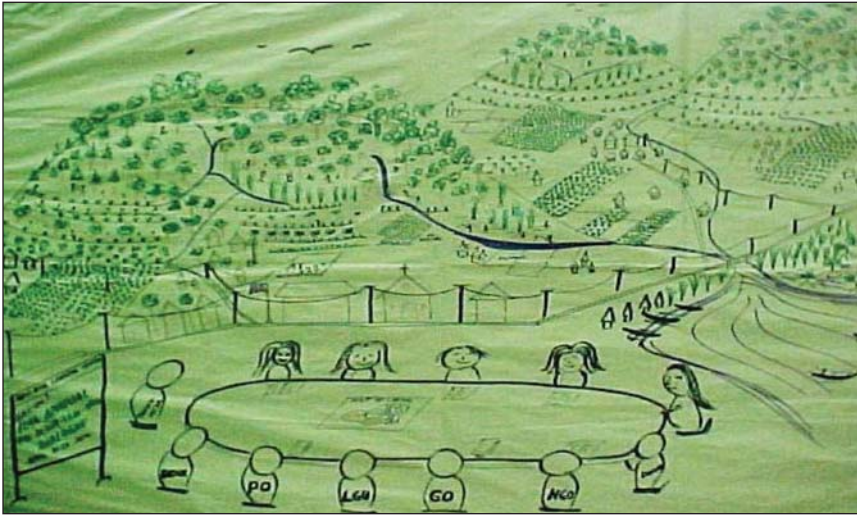
A common vision of a good future in the forest sector drawn by a multistakeholder group during the workshop highlights the agreement reached by all on the importance of involving all stakeholders in decision-making

The workshop process was designed to require little and non-dominant moderation. When it was necessary, volunteers from all the stakeholder groups stepped forward to moderate. Care was taken to ensure all stakeholder groups were represented. The workshop lasted three days and had three day-long steps: listening, debating and compromising (see Box, page 28).

Even though there were disagreements over many policy aspects in the workshop, stakeholders found much agreement about the process by which policy should be made and implemented in the future. As a direct result of the workshop, it was agreed that villagers would from now on be represented on the national steering committee for the development of CBFM and that the government would no longer make unilateral changes in CBFM-related policy, for example regarding forest use rights. It was agreed that there should be a concerted effort by all stakeholders to institutionalize participatory policy processes in the forest sector.

A SECOND EXAMPLE

A similar multistakeholder approach was adopted in the government-led workshop "National Community Based Forest Strategic Plan Update: a Consultative Workshop" in September 2006. This workshop, aimed at crafting the national CBFM strategic action plan for the next decade, was part of the Philippine NFP activities and was designed and organized by a multistakeholder committee composed of representatives of villages, NGOs, academia, donor agencies and DENR management and field personnel. The three-day workshop was attended by 90 representatives of these stakeholder groups as well as local government units and other government institutions. Villagers were represented both formally (CBFM federation representatives) and informally (those from the research sites).

In general, the forum adopted a process of listening, debate and analysis, and compromise similar to that used in the workshop held the preceding April. However, methods were selected to suit the workshop's objectives, e.g. to develop a written strategy document which would guide CBFM policy.

During the listening part, representatives of the different stakeholders, including villagers, had the opportunity to speak about their CBFM experiences and observations as well as their perceived challenges and prospects for CBFM in the next decade.

For the analysis portion, the participants were divided into three major stakeholder groups, namely villagers, government and support groups (i.e.

NGOs, academia, local government units and donors). Each group clarified its vision of CBFM in the next ten years and stated expectations of the roles of the different stakeholders in achieving this vision.

During the compromise stage, all the outputs of the different groups were presented in a plenary for deliberation among all participants. The output of this deliberation was a synthesis document for the national strategy for CBFM implementation for the next ten years. The strategy was projected on the wall and extensively debated line by line until consensus and compromise were reached on the wording. Where disputes remained, processes were considered to tackle the disagreement in the future. All stakeholder groups felt a high degree of ownership over the document at the end.

It was mutually agreed that this strategic plan will not be a blueprint, which was a key criticism of previous plans, but will be revisited on a cyclic basis by multistakeholder groups at the regional and national levels. Revisions will be made based on the practical experiences of all stakeholders involved in its implementation. Unlike previous plans for the forest sector and for CBFM in the Philippines, this plan puts a strong emphasis on process (Figure 4).

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON THE INITIATIVES
Villagers lack opportunity, not capacity

When the process and methods were designed to be more appropriate for villagers, they did not need encourage-

Workshop process: listening, debating, compromising

Prior to the April workshop, the process and methods were discussed extensively with stakeholder representatives, especially with villagers. Ownership, general consensus and clarity concerning the process were seen as essential. In the workshop the programme was discussed clearly, posted on the wall in the local language and regularly referred back to by the moderators (volunteers from all the stakeholder groups present).

Workshop programme

SWOT analysis

LISTENING

All stakeholder groups, including the villagers, had an equal opportunity to present their opinions and the justifications behind them. No interruption was allowed; any feedback had to be written on cards and pinned on boards so that the presenter could read it afterwards. Each group was given time to digest the feedback (with villagers given assistance in deciphering acronyms and technical terms).

To synthesize all the main points, a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis was carried out according to different themes. Participants could write their contributions on cards, with different colours for each stakeholder group, anonymously if they so chose. Interestingly, what some stakeholders saw as strengths others saw as weaknesses.

Fishbowl debate

DEBATING

Based on the SWOT analysis, which remained posted for reference, all stakeholder groups prepared position statements relating to key policy barriers in the forest sector. A "fishbowl" debate – so called because of its shape, an outer ring of chairs with the "fish" in the middle – was organized to provide space for all groups to state their positions and to justify them. Time cards were used to keep time, and continual shuffling of speakers allowed all stakeholder groups equal time to present, justify and argue their points without face-to-face confrontation. Each participant could have three minutes to justify his or her point and would then stay in the centre of the fishbowl while it was debated. Anyone else who wanted to make a point could take a vacant chair in the centre and speak for up to one minute, and would then return to the outer ring to free up the central chairs for others. The justifier could respond after each point. Everyone was treated equally in the debate, director or villager.

After this debate a secret ballot with different-coloured voting slips for each stakeholder group was held on the position statements and results were displayed for discussion. It was then easy to identify which points were close to consensus, and which were so divergent that they could only end in "agreeing to disagree".
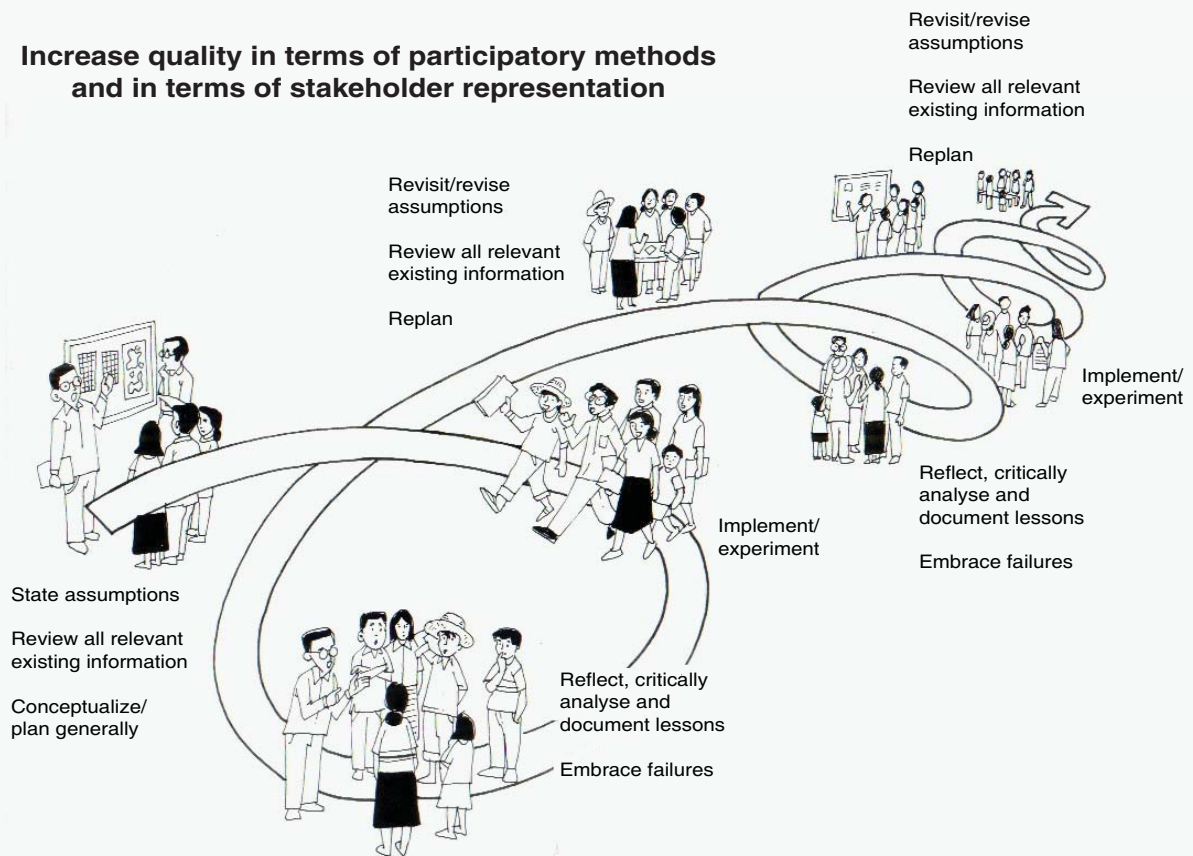
COMPROMISING

The final step was for small multistakeholder groups to struggle to find compromise or accommodation and to develop and agree to joint recommendations for tackling issues of divergence in a constructive way.

Increase quality in terms of participatory methods and in terms of stakeholder representation

Revisit/revise assumptions

Review all relevant existing information

Replan

Implement/experiment

Reflect, critically analyse and document lessons

Embrace failures

Revisit/revise assumptions

Review all relevant existing information

Replan

Implement/experiment

Reflect, critically analyse and document lessons

Embrace failures

State assumptions

Review all relevant existing information

Conceptualize/plan generally

4
An iterative learning and action guide for a participatory NFP process

ment to take part in policy processes. Although their confidence and contributions improved with practice, it was clear that the main barrier to participation by villagers in policy processes was lack of opportunity, not lack of capacity. When participation was noticeably lacking, the process or methodology was usually at fault; changing it restored full participation.

Target not only the marginalized but also the influential
It is clear in hindsight that earlier efforts to empower only the marginalized through capacity building while neglecting the powerful were naive. Strategies (both formal and informal) are thus

needed to involve different stakeholders. Working with environmental NGOs and journalists, for example, proved important, as their pressure on politicians in the past has often resulted in simplistic top-down quick-fix policy solutions which derailed movement towards more democratic forest policy processes in the Philippines. The workshop organizers also channelled considerable effort into obtaining support (verbal and written) for both the process and the outcomes from influential participants such as the current and former DENR Secretaries, a provincial governor and important donors. The support of the DENR Secretary was quickly captured in a media release which included all of the major workshop outcomes and was reviewed by all stakeholder groups before its circulation. The participatory methods used in the workshop ensured that high-ranking

participants and vocal NGOs did not dominate the process.

Match methods to purpose and context
All methods were developed to match purpose and context. Spontaneous adaptations were a common feature. Effective facilitation required continual experimentation and practice and, very importantly, appropriate feedback mechanisms from all involved.

Representation
Because these initiatives often had a strong influence on national policy, they invited continual questions of which stakeholder groups should be involved, how effectively they were represented and who had the right to make the decisions. Current practice in the Philippines is to mix formal authorized representatives of stakeholder groups with more

randomly selected or volunteering members, and also to link subnational and national processes. Representation is not perfect but is far better than in the policy processes of a few years ago. Continual experimentation with representation is a key thrust of planned processes.

Professionals in the forest sector need participatory approaches

Professional practice has often been neglected in the focus on changing the practice of villagers. These and similar initiatives demonstrate that participatory approaches are not only appropriate for villagers. Getting professionals to practice and not only preach them is a key challenge in advancing participatory forest policy processes.

Participatory policy processes are about provoking feelings, not only about sharing information

Feelings were less evident in previous policy processes where researchers presented villagers' positions impassively on their behalf. In the participatory workshops where villagers interacted directly with policy-makers, feelings tended to come into play much more. On occasion tempers were lost and tears were shed. Expressions of both guilt and empathy came to the fore which seemed to lead to a greater sense of accountability. The expression of feelings and the creation of new relationships among stakeholders may have been as important in creating policy change as the evidence presented and should be taken into consideration in the design of interactions. For example, the fishbowl debate method stimulates constructive confrontation but precludes destructive arguments. Social events are also an important way to build informal links and stimulate respect and partnership.

CONCLUSION

Interest in multistakeholder processes is growing within the forest sector in the Philippines, especially among villagers who see them as an opportunity

that they never had before to influence policy. Through the workshops, stakeholder groups have quickly expanded their role from policy review only to policy formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The focus has as much to do with process as with outcome and follows an iterative learning approach. Ownership of the process among stakeholders has proved to be integrally linked with ownership of the outcomes.

Participatory or multistakeholder policy processes are not only a matter of getting a group of stakeholders together in a room. They require methods that give the marginalized a voice so that power imbalances in communication are eroded and domination by the powerful and articulate is avoided. With the many agendas, interests and perspectives involved, it has proved important not exclusively to target consensus, but also to provide room for compromise and disagreement.

The experiments in participatory policy processes have not been easy. Some professionals have resisted trying new approaches because of the chance of failure, and some have had to be convinced that villagers could meaningfully interact with high-level decision-makers on forest policy. Risk-taking and experimentation are essential.

The rewards of these efforts in policy formulation have begun to show. The authors have seen the impact of changes in a few lines of policy that represent the first steps towards giving villagers throughout the Philippines the encouragement they need to invest in forest management. For example, as a direct result of evidence presented by villagers during the participatory policy processes in the past few years, the work plans required for commercial forest utilization in CBFM are now to be prepared every five years instead of annually as before. This means that villagers now spend less time on paperwork and that delays in plan approval are not as disrup-

tive to utilization as they were before. Furthermore, if the paperwork necessary for utilization rights is not approved by DENR in a number of days, it will now be automatically approved, so the onus is on DENR to act quickly.

Yet in addition to the concrete policy changes, the less tangible but important new relationships and greater accountabilities among stakeholders should also be seen as key outcomes of these policy processes.

The goal in the Philippines in the next few years is to institutionalize participatory policy processes by putting the processes themselves into policy. Within this policy will be regulations regarding quality control parameters, to ensure that even if key personalities change the processes will remain.

It is hoped that these lessons from experiments in more democratic policy processes will generate lessons of relevance for other countries. ◆