

DECENTRALIZING PROTECTED AREA MANAGEMENT A MT. KITANGLAD RANGE NATURAL PARK EXPERIENCE¹

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INTRODUCTION

The Kitanglad Range dominates the north-central portion of the Bukidnon Plateau. It covers a total land area of 47,270 hectares located within the seven municipalities and one city of the province of Bukidnon. It plays a vital role in the socioeconomic development of North and Central Mindanao. Aside from being the homeland of the indigenous peoples of Bukidnon, it is also a major watershed providing water for power generation, irrigation and domestic use for the province of Bukidnon and adjoining provinces.

Recognizing its biological, historical and socioeconomic importance, one of the local government units with political jurisdiction over the range initiated its proclamation as a national park through Resolution No. 32, S. 1989. Thus, on December 14, 1990, Mt. Kitanglad was declared a national park by virtue of Presidential Proclamation No. 677. In 1994, it was chosen as one of the 10 priority sites under the World Bank through the Conservation of Priority Protected Areas Project (CPPAP) and became an initial component of the National Integrated Protected Areas System (NIPAS) pursuant to Republic Act 7586 (NIPAS Law) considering its earlier proclamation.

Following the processes provided under the NIPAS Law and with local interventions, Mt. Kitanglad was proclaimed a protected area under the natural park category through Presidential Proclamation 896 dated October 24, 1996. On November 9, 2000, Mt. Kitanglad finally became a full-pledge protected area when Congress approved R.A. 8978 also known as the Mt. Kitanglad Range Protected Area Act of 2000.

DECENTRALIZATION POLICIES

NIPAS Law R.A. 7586 of 1992

Decentralization of protected area management in the Philippines came only with the passage of Republic Act 7586 on June 1, 1992. . The NIPAS law provides a paradigm shift in protected area management from the national government agency through the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) to the local body known as the Protected Area Management Board or PAMB. It is a multi-sectoral body chaired by the DENR with representation from the local government units, non-governmental (NGO) or civic organizations, people's organizations, indigenous peoples through their Council of Elders and national government agencies.

The Protected Area Superintendent Office (PASU) that serves as the secretariat to the PAMB is also responsible for implementing all plans, policies and projects approved by the PAMB.

1997 Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (R.A. 8371)

The enactment of the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) sometime in 1997 is another milestone environment and natural resources management. It provides a solid policy direction that recognizes and promotes the rights of indigenous peoples, who are the primary occupants of the protected area. A certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT) is granted as title to genuine

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and qualified IP tribal communities over their ancestral lands. The title guarantees ownership over ancestral domains after the area is identified and delineated in accordance with law. The administration and management of CADT is based on traditional rights and practices. The traditional property regimes exercised by the indigenous peoples (IP) under their customary laws govern the relationships of all individuals within their communities.

To carry out the policies set forth in IPRA, the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) was created to serve as the government agency with primary responsibility for formulating and implementing policies, plans and programs identified under this law.

1991 Local Government Code (R.A. 7160)

Republic Act 7160, otherwise known as the Local Government Code (LGC) of 1991, is the landmark legislation that introduced changes in the political process and transfer of power and authority from the central government to the lower or local levels of government. The code expresses full adherence to decentralization as a matter of state policy and stipulates that local governments shall enjoy meaningful autonomy in order to attain their fullest development as self-reliant communities and make them more effective in attaining national goals. To implement this policy, the code declares that the state shall provide for a more responsive and accountable local government structure instituted through the system of decentralization. This means giving more power, authority, responsibilities and resources to local governments.

CONSEQUENCES OF DECENTRALIZATION POLICIES

As this enormous effort gets underway, the PAMB, national government agencies, local government units and the indigenous peoples communities are grappling with ways to proceed as successfully as possible. Various concerns affecting their respective program implementation are described below.

Lack of Collaboration

There seems to be difficulty in establishing a solid foundation for collaboration. Each management entity seeks to hold on to its own management regime apart from the others. Some tribal communities opposed to the PAMB arrangement tend to ignore the mandate of the NIPAS Act and hold on to the IPRA law. The NCIP, charged with implementing the IPRA law, is faced with tremendous complaints from both parties including the local government units (LGUs). Since IPRA is a new law, the organizational requirements are not yet effectively in place and most of the needed resources are not yet available. This condition resulted to a struggle among the LGUs, PAMB and some tribal leaders on whose policies should be implemented on the ground.

The PAMB's initiative to consider protected areas priority activities in their investment plan has helped to gradually consolidate the LGUs and DENR concerns. The PASU that serves as the PAMB secretariat is mandated to market protected area plans to potential service providers including the LGUs, who responded positively. NCIP and the DENR on the other hand have already come up with a joint memorandum on issues affecting their operations. Though not all of the concerns are being addressed, this conveys to implementers that both agencies are harmonizing their programs and policies.

Overlapping Area of Management Responsibilities

In most cases, the aim to accomplish a single vision is constrained by political and methodological hurdles. Management regimes in the context of NIPAS Act, IPRA and even local governments have long held limitations within their specific mandates and geographical jurisdiction. NIPAS concerns are bounded by their geographic scope. The IPRA recognizes that ancestral domain management has both geographic and cultural components. Likewise, the local government has its own geographic and administrative limitations. In most cases, these three management entities experience overlapping management responsibilities because protected

areas are often claimed as ancestral domain, and some parts of the ancestral domain are definitely within the municipal territory. There is a chain of responsibility and command which has to some degree resulted in a conflict of interest and isolation.

The passage of the Mt. Kitanglad Act institutionalized partnerships among the government agencies that have responsibility over the protected area through PAMB. The constraining factor is that national government agencies have not harmonized their priority programs resulting in uncoordinated priorities on the ground. The PAMB is challenged to ensure participation by each member in its decision-making process to ensure their support for all decisions. The result is encouraging but the pace is slow as both organizations have different structures and the people working need time to understand the essence of collaboration.

Government agencies, it seems, are gradually understanding and appreciating the importance of partnership in protected area management. The challenge PAMB is facing at the moment is to learn and understand customary practices and traditional rights of the indigenous people as some of the tribal leaders are already impatient and have taken bold steps to fully implement their indigenous knowledge systems (IKS). Initiatives to stimulate discussion failed, hence PAMB resorted to implementing programs with “friendly” IP communities to prove that the government is supporting their interest. Expectedly and through time, both parties will soften and understand the intricacies of the situation.

REVIEW OF THE ACTUAL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECENTRALIZATION POLICY

Major Accomplishments

The Mt. Kitanglad protected area is fortunate enough to have been considered as one of the 10 priority sites under the World Bank-funded Conservation of Priority Protected Areas Project (CPPAP). The project pilot tested the decentralization provision of the NIPAS Law for seven years. The project began in 1994 and ended in 2002, and identified five major accomplishments contributing to the implementation of the government decentralization policy:

- 1. Issuance of Presidential Proclamation No. 896 Proclaiming Mount Kitanglad Range as a Protected Area.** In accordance with the NIPAS Law, in 2000, the Philippine congress set aside Mount Kitanglad as a permanent protected area through the passage of Republic Act 8978. The law is a product of social legislation because it involved the participation of local stakeholders in drafting the law, in public hearings and in floor deliberations of congress. The Mount Kitanglad Act is the first protected area law passed by congress after the passage of the NIPAS Law in the year 1992. The protection and management mechanism stipulated in the Mount Kitanglad Act provides both the legal basis and principles for management of the park.
- 2. Preparation and Approval of the Mount Kitanglad Protected Area Plan.** The preparation of the management plan was coordinated with the concerned government offices, local communities and tribal experts with knowledge of the culture in the area. The plan was made available for public perusal at the Protected Area Superintendent Office with the approval of the management board. The plan was also deliberated and endorsed by the legislative councils of 28 *barangays*, 7 municipalities and the city before it was accepted for deliberations and approval by the provincial and the regional development councils. Upon the final approval of the DENR Secretary, the plan is now ready for implementation by the local management board.
- 3. Creation and Operation of the Protected Area Management Board (PAMB).** The Mount Kitanglad PAMB became operational in 1993 through the initiative of the DENR regional office. The absence of a budgetary allocation for organization and for conducting meetings, coerced the municipal mayors to sponsor meetings at their own expense. Thus, the venue revolved around the city and seven municipalities. Building trust and confidence became

critical for harmonizing the various perceptions and backgrounds, particularly those from the LGUs, DENR and NGOs.

4. **Issuance of Tenure Instruments to Qualified Tenured Migrants and Interested Indigenous Peoples.** After community organizing and strengthening, 13 people's organization within the protected area were awarded a Community-Based Forest Management Agreement (CBFMA). As a CBFMA holder, the community is entrusted to manage approximately 6,000 hectares of forestland within the Buffer Zone Area in a sustainable manner. The PAMB and other government agencies, in collaboration with other institutions, assist the community in the preparation of their natural resources management plan, organizational strengthening and implementation of sustainable livelihood development projects. Resource utilization/extraction based on the approved framework and utilization plan is allowed within the CBFMA area.
5. **Establishment of the Protected Area Trust Fund-** A Mt. Kitanglad trust fund was established for purposes of promoting sustained financing of the park. To date at least 1 million pesos (US\$20,000) have been generated from the visitors' entrance and land use fees. The PAMB will decide on the allocation of the fund, which is limited to park protection and community livelihood development activities.

Community Participation

Organization of the Mount Kitanglad Council of Elders

PAMB, with support from the Kitanglad Integrated NGOs (KIN) has assisted tribal communities in identifying and establishing their Council of Elders (CoE). The creation of the CoE is not only mandated under existing laws but it is an inherent community structure that needs to be enhanced to meet the increasing demands of time. The process of identifying and affirming the respective chair of each CoE started at the community level as suggested by the tribal expert in the locality. In a series of tribal congresses, tribal leaders and representatives discussed their commonalities and using their traditional practices confirmed and identified a tribal representative to the PAMB.

The elders bring the concerns and interests of the IP communities to the PAMB. Likewise, they serve as advisers and experts in formulating policies that are in harmony with their customary rights and practices. They are responsible for transmitting information to the indigenous communities that are non-PAMB members. As desired by their elders and as provided under the PAMB manual of operation, they two-weeks advance notice of the agenda for PAMB meetings, which gives them time to discuss relevant matters with their members.

The CoE plays a major role in protected area management, particularly in planning, decision-making in resource access following their traditional practices, boundary conflicts and in the recognition and respect of their customary rights and practices. The elders identify and determine genuine Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) and their differences from one village to the other. A ritual requirement that varies from one entry point to the other is an example of tribal differences that were considered in the formulation of PAMB policy on the matter. The CoE is also responsible for the review and endorsement of any traditional livelihood project proposals before the PAMB can take any action.

One of the challenges faced by the council of elders is the proliferation of tribal leaders and other educated members of the tribe who are seemingly working to control the IP activities in the park. To remedy the situation the chair of the council of elders was tasked to go around the park's seven municipalities and city to conduct cultural mapping and identify genuine IP leaders who could play a representative role in the PAMB. The PASU, NCIP and the local government units assisted the chair in this activity.

After the termination of the World Bank project in 2002, funding for the CoE operation ceased, except for limited activities attached to the PAMB annual work plan. Thus, it is difficult at for the IP representatives to perform their tasks with the PAMB and within their communities. The

respective LGUs have committed to support their work, but not all of them have the capability to deal with government processes before any assistance can be made available. There is also the added challenge to increase the elders' negotiating and speaking capabilities so that they can hold their own with other PAMB members during discussion. Other service providers outside of the government agencies are presently negotiating to pool their efforts and resources to address this concern.

Organization of the Kitanglad Guard Volunteers (KGV)

The KGV is the community-based park protection arm of the CoE and the PAMB. They serve as the tribal guard "*alimaong*" based on the tribal community structure already existing before Mt. Kitanglad became a protected area. They become members of the KGV only after they undergo a ritual performed by the elders and are deputized by the PAMB. In addition to enforcing the tribal justice systems, they enforce policies passed by PAMB and guard against prohibited acts pursuant to the Mt. Kitanglad Act. Thus they become protectors of the natural resources of the park and guardians of the living customs and traditions.

KGV do not necessarily perform actual foot patrolling works. Instead they go about their daily business but are aware of what is happening within their midst. They report any destructive activities within the park to their *barangay* chairman who is provided with a communication system for assistance. So far our KGVs have tremendously minimized negative activities and effectively monitored park activities and biodiversity trends. In cases where perpetrators are local outlaws and /or neighbors of the KGVs, their services are limited to gathering appropriate information only. This is in order to safeguard them and their families from harm, as most of the violators are vindictive the moment they are brought to court and/or their source of livelihood is stopped. The PASU office whose personnel are paid by the government then assume the responsibility for conducting investigations and prosecutions of the violators.

To sustain the operation and provide support to our volunteers, the provincial government has allocated 1 million pesos every year to support their activities and provide incentives to performing members. Likewise, the provincial vice-governor covered their insurance benefits while the municipal/city government and some private companies have provided them logistic support such as raincoats, flashlights and other such equipment.

The challenge to strengthen the tribal communities and its structure includes sustaining the operation of the KGVs. Also, there is a need for a continuous awareness campaign to political leaders so that there is assistance from the local government to the volunteers. One of the problems brought to the CoE by the KGVs is that they are treated as rivals to the guards organized by the tribal leaders who are opposed to PAMB operation. There is now a greater pressure for the NCIP, the government agency tasked to implement the IPRA law, to guide and mediate the conflicting interest of our natural resource protectors.

Organization of the Federation of People's Organization

There are at least 84 people's organizations formed within the 48 *sitios* of the park. This includes women, porters and CBFMA associations. Each organization was awarded a livelihood project based on proposals submitted to and approved by the PAMB. Performing organizations were awarded with additional projects on a large scale. One of the terms and conditions under a livelihood support project is the protection and management of the remaining park resources. The people's organizations are the main arm of the PAMB in carrying out its programs, projects and other park activities involving community participation. Linkages have been made and the federation that was established is fortunate enough to be recipient of a FAO and forthcoming World Bank project through the Department of Agriculture. Some LGUs and other institutions have also directly linked with the park's people's organization for joint project undertakings. Mostly these are livelihood, social research and soil conservation farming.

Roles of Other Stakeholders in Support of Decentralization

Local Government Units

After the completion of the World Bank CPPA project, the local government units assumed the responsibility of sharing funding requirement to implement activities in the approved management plan. A total of 6.7million pesos (US\$134,000) were allocated for CY 2002 and 2003 from the concerned city, municipal and provincial governments. They also supported training and similar activities at the community level. The municipal and city chief executives and the provincial vice-governor personally attended PAMB meetings to facilitate easy and immediate decision-making.

National Government Agencies

The DENR provides the overall supervision of the park through the PAMB. The NCIP assists IP communities in asserting their rights and the exercise of traditional practices, and the process of applying for ancestral domain title within the park. To date at least seven applications have been received. The Department of Agriculture provides training and promotes sustainable upland farming systems including the provision of planting materials. The 28 *barangays* are presently the targets in this program with the establishment of one demonstration farm per *barangay*.

Companies Benefiting from Park Resources and Potential

Private companies have paid their resource-use fee, which accrue to the park trust fund. The same shall be used to sustain park operation and livelihood proposals of the local communities. The private companies likewise support the annual gathering of the tribes, the Aldaw Ta Kitanglad Celebration.

EXPERIENCE AND MAJOR ISSUES AND PROBLEMS OF DECENTRALIZATION

Experience

NIPAS law implementation in Mt. Kitanglad Protected Area started sometime in the year 1993. For almost 10 years of implementation, hereunder are the actual experiences from the affected communities as follows:

Misrepresentation. People living in the *barangay* proper and/or those close to politicians were chosen to represent the local communities in the management board and LGU committees but not in the true sense advocate for them. This is perhaps why some of the decisions made for the IP and/or local community did not address their concerns and gain their support. In some cases these representatives did not gain the trust and confidence of the communities due to mishandling of funds and other similar acts. It is hoped that the cultural mapping initiated by the CoE chair will address this issue by bringing in new representatives that have been identified and fully endorsed by the concerned communities.

Limited Funding Support. While the law mandates proper representation of communities in the PAMB, most of the time they are constrained due to limited funding support for their effective and meaningful participation. This includes support for transportation, consultation, getting feedback and capability development. The PAMB has taken up this issue with the LGU chief executives who sit on the board. Presently only 1 percent of the LGU Internal Revenue Allotment is set-aside for the IPs. The challenge is to increase their capacity to access this allocation following the processes required by the local government units.

Insensitivity to the Local Culture. The local community representatives have found it difficult to actively participate in the discussion as most of the members speak English during meetings. The local dialect or "*binukid*" is seldom used as most of the members and the PAMB secretariat themselves cannot comprehend the dialect. The PAMB manual of operations is not necessarily in harmony with the local culture. Tribal communities decide by consensus while the PAMB decides by majority vote. Most of the meetings are conducted in the *barangay* proper and seldom in the *sitio* where most of the park occupants reside. If they do attend meetings, they do it for compliance because of their limited comprehension. They perceive DENR personnel as forest law enforcers who run after them for investigation, hence they shun away from attending

meetings called for by the DENR. They usually abide with decisions even against their will as they do not want to be branded as “rebels.”

The PAMB has recognized their concern and taken the following steps:

- It is mandatory to speak *bisaya* not English during PAMB *en banc* meetings. The majority of the IP representatives speak *bisaya*.
- Increased the number of IP representatives to the PAMB chosen based on their customary practices.
- Adopted community and/or cultural mapping to determine a local community’s location and features.
- Engaged the services of the elders in project monitoring and information dissemination.
- Enforced tribal justice system before forestry laws.
- Performed cleansing rituals in every activity undertaken with the community. This is to ensure their trust and support.

Unequal Opportunity for Livelihood Projects. Livelihood projects are usually awarded to the *barangay* community members and only in a very limited manner to the protected area residents. This is because some of the communities are not included in the park census and registration; they perceive the census as a way for them to be identified and bring them to court. Further, most of their area does not qualify for livelihood criteria as it is very remote and will have difficulty in monitoring. If they are lucky enough and are included, they find difficulty in withdrawing funds from the bank because of lack of identification and their signatures varies from one to the other.

Opportunity to Increase Knowledge and Interaction. IP representatives who are already working with the PAMB have found their participation as an opportunity to increase their understanding and view of the other side of development. Their interaction with the other park stakeholders has given them an opportunity to befriend them and gain courage to educate partners on the importance of their customary practices. Gradually they find their initiatives rewarding, as most of the decisions pertaining to IP concerns have been favorably acted. This includes PAMB resolutions and *barangay* ordinances. The field exposures and cross-visits with the other PAMB members have increased their perspective in viewing developmental strategies in the context of partnership. Decentralization of protected area management requires participation from the different sectors and groups. This venue provides an opportunity for our stakeholders and members to meet tribal communities from the other side of the park. The annual celebration of the “Aldaw Ta Kitanglad” (the day for Kitanglad) is a two-day gathering of almost 800 people who are stakeholders in the park. The activities are suited to the IPs’ customs and traditions when they gather together in important occasions. This gives elders an opportunity to educate the younger generations and non-members of the tribe.

2. Major Issues and Problems

No Equitable Sharing of National Wealth. There is no equitable sharing of revenues derived from the national wealth. Only national and local government units have a share through their annual Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA). No funds are directly allocated to the IPs because of their tribal structure and are instead channeled to the *barangay* treasurer. Should there be funds for the IPs from the LGUs, it is usually in terms of project implementations, which to them are not their priorities.

Confusion on Some Provisions of the IPRA, NIPAS and the Local Government Code. The above-mentioned laws have not been subjected to grassroots consultation. This resulted in misunderstanding and conflict between some IP communities and government agencies. The strong recognition of the IPs unwritten (customary) laws are prone to abuse by some educated tribal leaders to advance their interest. This leads to confusion among tribal leaders and other stakeholders of the park when to apply customary law and the criminal justice system. In some instances, this is the source of conflict and in fact created factions from among them. The NCIP, which is supposed to guide the IPs towards the smooth implementation of the laws, is

preoccupied and can no longer address all of the office's demand. Some private companies benefiting from park water resources perceive FPIC requirement from the local people as an opportunity for them to be exploited. This is because there are no clear parameters what the community can demand. On the other hand, others perceive it as an opportunity to work with the community to ensure sustainability of their operation, provided it is reasonable and within their capacity.

Taxation is a common confusion between the PAMB and LGUs as both have mandates to collect revenues in the same area. Another issue is who should manage the park after an ancestral domain title is awarded to the IPs. Will it be the PAMB as mandated under the Mount Kitanglad Act or the Council of Elders as provided under the IPRA law? The issue of taxation is addressed with the passage of the Mt. Kitanglad Act. The DENR and NCIP have drafted a joint memorandum instituting mechanisms to harmonize perceived conflicting provisions of the above-cited laws.

Limited Funding Support from the LGUs to the IPs. The government, particularly the local government units who are recipients of the IRA, have until now no concrete plans to improve the life of the IPs and ensure their effective participation in local governance. This is evident in the IPs' inability to formulate their respective ancestral domain management plan, due to lack of funds, skills and technical resources. This concern has been emphasized by its head claimants and some tribal communities, particularly those that are opposed to the PAMB arrangements. Some IP groups, however, are not supporting the idea. What is important for them is the trust and confidence that should be acquired first before any support and further collaborative action. Due to the absence of the ancestral domain management plan (ADMP) supposed to be formulated by the tribal communities, it is now very difficult to commence the so-called harmonization of the protected area and the ADMP plan. This is one of the initiatives agreed by the NCIP and the DENR to harmonize the interest of the IPs and other stakeholders of the park.

Different Interpretations and Conflicting Views of Some Important Provisions of the IPRA law. The whole area of Mt. Kitanglad Range was claimed and applied for by three tribes under a unified Ancestral Domain Title (CADT) in 1995. The unified CADT application encountered a lot of apprehension and conflicting interpretations of the IPRA law hindering the government from taking timely action. Some of the problems encountered include overlapping claims and opposition raised by other tribal communities. The claim has not been acted on since it was submitted 10 years ago. Out of frustration and perhaps loss of confidence in the government agencies, some IP leaders are no longer on talking terms with the government. As reported previously, some of the frustrated leaders have started organizing their own tribal guards and strengthened their campaign for Free and Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) enforcement. Likewise, they have openly manifested their intention to boycott participation in the protected area management until such time as the CADT claim is awarded to them and other customary regulations are settled.

Worst is that projects and activities of the local communities who are not supporting their cause are being blocked for implementation. While this does not cause so much impact on the ground, since the concentration is only in one of the eight local government units' political jurisdiction, certainly this move will divide the position of the tribe. Further, researchers, government projects, visitors and private companies are required to submit reports to their leader despite necessary collaboration and processes carried out by the local leaders. The question raised therefore is that there is inequality of rights among local tribal leaders. The PAMB, after the opposing party put down its initiative and closed the lines of communication, decided to concentrate its effort on communities that are supportive to the government programs. Likewise, the NCIP has also prioritized these communities. The PAMB and other concerned groups are hopeful that in time all parties will understand and accept the policy direction and exercise the true intent of the IPRA law.

RESULTS OF DECENTRALIZATION

Enhance Forest Protection Works and Natural Resource Management

Decentralization has reduced pressure on the forest and its natural resources and effectively improved forest law enforcement. This is due to the presence of the community-based forest protection volunteers and the issuance of tenure instrument to qualified peoples organization. Likewise, tribal leaders became responsible and directly answerable to the management board for any form of unsustainable natural resource extraction. Further, due to the participation of most of the stakeholders to the PAMB, there is an increased awareness and a process that promotes checks and balances. Likewise, there has been significantly reduced fire occurrence and area damage due to fire from 103 occurrences recorded in 1998 to only 12 in 2003. Based on 21 biodiversity monitoring reports and focus group discussion from and among trained local monitors, there is an increased number of wildlife species.

Livelihood Assistance and Fund Generation Strengthened

Livelihood assistance is made available to the local communities, as this has been included in the protected area management plan. The PAMB has brought in local and foreign institutions to help implement socioeconomic activities provided under the approved plan. Since decision-making has been passed down to the local stakeholders, this promotes more equitable distribution of benefits and effectively identified the target beneficiaries particularly those living within the buffer zone. Budgetary allocations from local government units have been made available to the park, revenues generated out of the park operation accrue to the park's trust fund, and linkages with funding institutions have improved.

Enhance Multi-Sectoral Participation and Collaboration

Decentralization provides an opportunity for the local stakeholders to take part in all decision-making processes and governance of the protected area through the PAMB. The creation of PAMB promotes an atmosphere of collaboration and is a good ground where conflicting issues can be resolved. What is left unresolved to date is the issue of the unified ancestral domain claim. This is because the head claimant refuses, out of frustration, to bring the issue to the PAMB for discussion and the failure of some concerned offices to know and understand the interest and intention of the claimant. An effort is now underway to open line of communication to the majority of the IP leaders who are supportive to the government programs and the identification of the genuine tribal leaders of the park through cultural mapping. This effort has the support of the local government units, DENR, NCIP and the chair of the council of elders. Meaningful participation, awareness and partnership from the local communities and other stakeholders of the park is a continuing challenge to ensure the effective enforcement of policies and projects on the ground.

Proliferation of Tribal Leaders and Misunderstanding Among Them

The strong recognition and respect to the authority of the tribal leaders as espoused by the PAMB has caused the unprecedented proliferation of tribal leaders. There are also instances where a leader is tempted to use his power and authority to entice people from outside to own land within his territory at a price. Genuine leaders in some cases are also struggling for power and the usual loser is the uneducated over a schooled member of the community. Personal interest, greed for power and positioning to corner project assistance from funding institutions as the guise of customary rights and protection of the interest of the IPs are the common front of struggle. There is therefore a challenge to codify genuine customary practices so that these cannot be abused and used to exploit others.

No Administration Fund for the CoE

The sad reality is that there is really no fund allocated to sustain the operation of the CoE despite their very important role of promoting peace and order, planning, education and decision-making. They are very dependent on the LGUs and other government agencies for support and that their decisions are always tainted with impartiality.

Local Government Role in Protected Area Management Strengthened

The chief executive of each of the local government units down to the *barangay* level is a member of the management board. This arrangement gave them an opportunity to know firsthand information and become part of the planning and decision-making process in park management. Through this the LGUs were able to consider protected area plans in their respective annual investment plans and the resource allocation to implement the priority programs of the park. Since 2002 at least 6.7 million pesos (US\$138,000) have been allocated to the park from the LGUs. Presently, all the municipalities and 28 *barangays* have approved their respective forestland use plan and the watershed management planning framework. On the ground, the tribal leaders and *barangay* captains are accredited as PAMB point persons, hence forest management is within the reach of the people. They can decide on matters of boundary conflict, resource access for domestic use, visitors' entry, disaster preparedness and recommend volunteers for deputation. *Barangay* ordinances are being passed to complement PAMB policy if necessary.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Park management can be implemented successfully by changing the locus of decision-making from national agencies to local levels emphasizing multi-sectoral participation.
- Decentralization is not mainly the domain of the local government. The main essence of decentralization provides for participation of stakeholders such as NGOs, local communities, tribal groups and complementary projects. It should promote local empowerment.
- The Kitanglad experience points out that decentralizing park area management does not merely mean devolving responsibilities previously concentrated within the national bureaucracy such as the DENR. It involves the devolution of decision-making authority to various stakeholders.
- There is no ready template in protected area management. Our experiences demonstrate that sensitivity and recognition of cultural tradition and local knowledge as well as flexibility to negotiate with various stakeholders can sustain many of these local initiatives.
- Genuine and good community leadership produces effective community involvement and a good result. Therefore, the process of identifying leaders is a very critical undertaking in the area of decentralization.
- National government agencies need to harmonize laws with conflicting provisions in order not to divide the community.

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