

Integration of Environmental Management to Local Policy Makers' Priority Agenda: The Bukidnon State University Experience

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ABSTRACT

The Bukidnon State University (BSU) signed a memorandum of agreement with Tanggol Kalikasan (TK), an organization of lawyers and environmentalists. One of its aims is to jointly promote sound environmental governance utilizing lessons learned in Protected Area Management in the province. BSU upholds its commitment to extend services for the environment, thus cater the venue of the Institute of Environmental Governance (IEG), in partnership with other agencies to conduct capacity development that will guide local policy makers on the integration environmental governance as part of their priority agenda. The training design addressed the variability of the educational status of the province' local environmental key players and likewise, formulated the environmental entry plan among local policy makers. Result of the initial implementation identified some challenges that include among others, the absence of platform to increase public access to environmental information, aggressive, coordinated and collaborated environmental law enforcement, sustained financing for environmental management and governance and increasing the number of champions to impart knowledge to the remotest part of the locality where the action is. Initial result of the assessment revealed that, local policy makers recommended and recognized the need to make mandatory the creation of the Municipal and City environment and Natural resources Offices and inclusion of environmental protection as part of the devolved functions down to the barangay level in the local government code.

Keywords: environmental management, local policy makers, priority agenda, institute of environmental governance,

INTRODUCTION

The forest land in the province of Bukidnon is continuously declining in terms of its economic and environmental aspects. Forest destruction by timber poachers and conversion of forest land for agriculture is going on and is rising to an alarming level, leaving our forest cover way below the desired 45% cover to sustain its services. Such decline and destruction are largely contributed to the inadequate and poorly implemented environmental laws and policies which sometimes lead to the rapid exploitation of timber from old growth and natural forests. Thus, Acosta (2001& 2003) called on the government and challenge the

academe and other agencies to be more aggressive about measuring the efficacy of program and policies on a range of environmental concerns.

Collaborative efforts among academe, non-governmental organizations and local government units have to be pursued to achieve good environmental management in local governance, economic growth and prevent damage to environment and natural resources. In 2006, Bukidnon State College (BSC), which was recently converted into Bukidnon State University (BSU) on May 15, 2007 by virtue of RA 9456, responded the challenge by signing an agreement with Tanggol Kalikasan (TK), a Non-Government Organization (NGO) and become partners in helping local policy makers and upland volunteers increase their capacity to sustainably manage natural resources within their respective jurisdiction.

Bukidnon State University-Institute of Environmental Governance (BSU-IEG) was established to help meet the challenge of providing the much needed capacity that will enable local executives and local policy makers, integrate environmental management and better perform their mandate. This idea was thought of due to the devolution of government powers accompanying the passage of the Local Government Code of 1991 (R.A. 7160). Among the devolved functions are those that pertain to the environment under the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), solid waste management, management of communal forest, integrated social forestry, control over small scale mining and related functions for the protection of the environment. Fisheries management and regulatory functions in municipal waters have likewise been devolved to local governments (TK, 2006).

In the case of the local policy makers, they are specifically tasked to “enforce laws and regulations relating to pollution control and protection of the environment”. Indeed, with the passage of the local government code and other relevant environmental legislations, increasing power and responsibility on the environment have been passed or granted to local governments. These powers and responsibilities under the laws further broaden the role of local government on the environment aspect of governance. However, the fact that powers and functions have been devolved does not necessarily mean actual transfer of capacity and integration of environmental program to the annual investment plan of the respective Local Government Units (LGUs).

The Institute of Environmental Governance (IEG) is the strategic response to ever-increasing demand for training and capacity development needs of local governments. The institute will cater to two levels of local government units. Level one (1) is designed to serve the needs of Barangay Officials while level two (2) will cater to the needs of the Municipal and Provincial Officials.

To have an effective and functional project, there is a need for the implementers to be aware of the environmental issues and concerns and priorities of the local policy makers. BSU-IEG then conducted the Training Needs Assessment (TNA) from the different municipalities in the province for them to design trainings relevant for the local policy makers being the prime movers in the protection of the environment. Training design for the capacity development of local policy makers was finalized after knowing their felt need in their respective areas. Thus, this study aims at identifying, designing trainings, analyzing issues

and concerns of local policy makers on environmental governance and generating concrete relevant policy recommendations.

Issues

Varied issues were noted during the conduct of the study. These issues were shared by the participants who were mostly barangay officials, chairs of the committee on environment and the Kitanglad Guard Volunteers (KGV). In this paper, they are called local policy makers. They identified issues by area of concern based on the broader spectrum of environmental management.

Generally, for Protected Area (PA), the following issues were noted: lack of funding to sustain the conservation of the biodiversity, environmental education for the preservation of endangered species in the PA, increase financial assistance to sustain the operation of the Mt. Kitanglad Guard Volunteers. Peace and order condition in the area is also a problem that hinders patrolling works among the park volunteers (Mirasol and Saway, 2005).

Another prevailing issue in the protected area is the issue on climate change and carbon sequestration that has created pressure to them due to increased demands for forest preservation. Selling of land in the buffer zone of Mt. Kitanglad still exist despite its proclamation as a protected area, thereby contributing to forest denudation and unregulated collection of species within the park.

In terms of watershed, there is seemingly poor implementation of watershed management plan formulated in the provincial and municipal levels, as most of the barangays are still on the process of formulating their respective barangay watershed development plans. Evidently, there is scarcity of water during dry months and over supply of water during rainy days. Limited understanding of watershed management issues and the unpredictable nature of many natural and human -induced events, including land use change and development trends, contribute to uncertainty of management decisions and research development (R & D) outcomes. Forest encroachment and expansion of intensive agriculture and unsustainable farming practices are only few examples of the many complex issues confronting the uplands (Garrity, et al. 2002).

In the area of ecological solid waste management, there is a need for cooperation among various sectors of the society. Likewise there is a limited program for information dissemination and environmental education related to solid waste management.

Results

Training Design

Based on the result of the training needs assessment (TNA) conducted, a training design was formulated. The design effectively considered the selection of participants that gave emphasis on the local officials and volunteers actually engaged and showed interest in environmental governance. Some 100 local policy makers and forest protection volunteers participated in the two trainings conducted. They were local policy makers and kagawads who chair

the environment committee from the barangays of Malaybalay City and from the buffer zone of Mt. Kitanglad Range Natural Park. The medium of instruction is “bisaya” which was widely used among selected participants to ensure deeper understanding and open communication among the participants.

The methodology was participative and collaborative in nature ensuring active participation of participants in the whole duration of the training. The TNA and other data collection were made during the Protected Area Management Board (PAMB) en banc meetings since most of these local policy makers are members of the PAMB and Association of Barangay Council (ABC) meeting as in the case of the Poblacion Barangay Chairs. Focus group discussions (FGD) and Focus Group interviews (FGI) with the local policy makers and other respondents were done. The same methods were also done with the DENR PENRO and CENRO, city and municipal officials to validate the issues raised by the participants during the training.

Inputs from local experts include those presented by the Protected area Superintendent (PASU) of Mount Kitanglad Range Natural Park (MKRNP) and at the same time the Community Environment and Natural Resources officer (CENRO) of Malaybalay City; Chair of the Development Communication Department of Bukidnon State University, Legal Officer from the Provincial Office of National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), Barangay Captain of one of the barangays in the buffer zone areas who was also a 1996 Gawad Saka Awardee by no less than President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and an environmental lawyer from Tanggol Kalikasan.

Major topics

Topics discussed include, 1) Local Environmental Situations; 2) Basic Ecological Concepts; 3) Community-Based Forest Management Framework and RA 7586, the National Integrated Protected Area System (NIPAS) Act; 4) RA 9003, the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act ; 5) Watershed Management; 6) Agroforestry; 7) RA 8978, the Mt. Kitanglad Act 2000 8) Concepts and Principles of Sustainable Development; 9) Sustainable Agriculture and Organic Farming; 10) Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA); 11) Relevant Environmental Policies; and 12) Basic Enforcement Skills. These topics were discussed with varied forms of techniques like workshops, demonstrations and lectures making the participants fully engaged in various activities. Enough time allotment was given for the open forum for the local policy makers to clarify vague areas regarding the topics and for them to share their ideas related to the topics. After a series of interaction, evidences show that local policy makers have exerted efforts and gave priorities to environmental governance and have taken action by putting up projects like tree planting, nursery, rainforest restoration and watershed protection in their own barangays.

Action planning

After a series of presentations, an action planning workshop culminates the three and two-day capacity development trainings last August 19-20, 2006 and April 21-22, 2008 respectively. The result of the consolidated action

planning exercises showed that in the areas of CBFM, Protected Area, Forest Protection, Watershed, ESWM and Environmental Management were identified by the participants as projects/activities to be implemented in their respective barangays. They also identified persons responsible to these projects/activities and the assistance they need from the national and local agencies. Among the identified agencies, these were the DENR, Department of Agriculture (DA), BSU, multi national corporations such as Del Monte Philippines and DOLE. On environmental management, the participants stressed that the integration of Environmental Governance to their respective Annual Investment Plan should be included.

Action Plan Implementation

1. Ten (10) local policy makers conducted echo training among their councils and other key workers in their respective barangays. The City Planning Coordinator and concerned CENRO served as their resource persons.
2. Five (5) other local policy makers requested the CENRO to discuss RA 9003 during their barangay assembly.
3. Seventy three (73) barangays created their barangay solid waste management committee and passed ordinance on ESWM as mandated under sections 21 and 23 of RA 9003.
4. Twenty Eight (28) local policy makers within the MKRNP organized a meeting with the PASu to discuss their powers and functions being a PAMB member and strengthened the operation of their forest protection volunteers by way of the deputation order issued by DENR and solicited 28 cellular phones from SMART Communications for their respective barangay volunteers.
5. The City Government of Malaybalay assigned student summer job workers to work in the barangay nursery upon representation by the concerned local policy makers. Based on report submitted to the City Planning Office, some 18 thousand seedlings have been raised out of the barangay nursery operation.
6. Upon report from the barangay volunteers, CENRO record shows that some 1,460 bd. ft. of lumber has been confiscated for violation of forestry rules and regulation.

Challenges

1. Needs further collaboration and mechanisms to increase our monitoring with participants particularly on the implementation of their action plans.
2. Absence of platform to increase public access to environmental information, aggressive, coordinated and collaborated environmental law enforcement.
3. Sustained financing for environmental management and governance.
4. Increasing the number of champions to impart knowledge to the remotest part of the locality where the action is (local policy makers of

- Mt. Kalatungan, and the rest of the barangays of the province).
5. Refresher training for law enforcers such as from the DENR by environmental lawyers such as from TK and the like institutions.

CONCLUSION

1. Capacity Development program increased local policy makers' knowledge to respond to their mandated functions and put them into action.
2. Entry plans formulated during the training is a good shopping list for the local policy makers in the formulation of their annual investment plan.
3. Establishment of mechanisms for effective linkage with the national government agencies such as the DENR and the concerned office in the City/Municipal Government increase awareness among local policy makers in the barangay level and push them further to identify programs and activities that will address environmental sustainability.
4. Better understanding of the devolved functions and experience in the implementation thereof, increase the capacity of our local policy makers to recommend policies for the effective implementation of the environmental programs

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Local policy makers recommended and recognize the need to make mandatory the creation of the Municipal and City Environment and Natural resources Offices and inclusion of forest law enforcement as part of the devolved functions in the barangay level under the local government code.
2. Law or Policy that will police LGU's for not implementing their enacted land use and zoning ordinance. (Irrigated area converted to banana plantations, poultries established within the head water source, etc.)
3. Pricing water used for agricultural industries to support environmental protectors in the upland.

Policy Enacted As Response to Recommendation

1. Inclusion of the City Environment and Natural Resources Office in the recently approved organizational structure of the City Government of Malaybalay.

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