PHILIPPINES

WATERSHED MANAGEMENT IN NUEVA VIZCAYA

Watershed management requires the protection of natural ecosystems and management of land uses. However, where watersheds are located in areas such as peri-urban zones, population pressure, poverty, and lack of legal title to land can often mean that local populations are forced to rely on livelihood activities which damage watersheds. One example of how such a situation has been addressed is the case of Barobbob Watershed in the Philippines.

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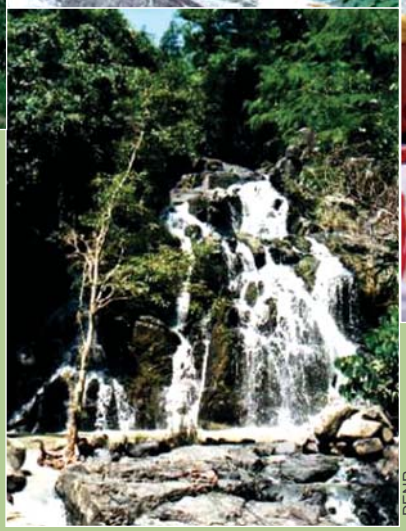

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The Barobbob watershed is a forested area of 439 ha which irrigates 400 ha of land and supplies water to 2000 households. However, the poverty and insecure tenure of illegal forest occupants within the watershed moved them to use 'slash and burn' farming as a survival strategy, leading to deforestation and frequent forest fires. Coupled with the widespread practice of illegal timber poaching, this situation led to soil erosion and a declining water supply. Campaigns against violators of forestry laws increased the number of arrests, but had little affect on conditions, only increasing antipathy between occupants on government officials.

In 1997 the provincial government negotiated with the Department for the Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the newly created 'BWOA' (a community management group for the forest) to reform the watershed management by securing the tenure of informal forest dwellers, linking new tenure arrangements with food security and conservation measures and developing a transparent and participatory system of watershed management. Detailed strategies were negotiated and written up as Agreements specifying the rights and responsibilities of residents.

The Barobbob watershed co-management shows the value of serving the interests of local people in natural resource management, allowing local residents to acts as effective 'social fences' to protect forests. Secure tenure and shared management has resulted in an end to grass and brush fires, the water supply and quality has ceased to deteriorate, and there has been improved maintenance of 11 ha of reforestation stands and 167 ha of residual forests.

This success has led to the approach being expanded to the Lower Magat Forest Reserve, comprising 24,000 ha of public forest land, and efforts are being made to disseminate information about the approach to other Provincial Governments in the Philippines through the DENR.

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