Collaborative forest management in a sustainable development unit

An ITTO project in the Philippines promotes a multi-stakeholder approach to SFM

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Closed forest: Part of the SUDECOR forest management unit in the SDU. *Photo: B.D. Agaloos, Jr.*

SUSTAINABLE forest management (SFM) is the Philippine government's main policy thrust for managing the country's forests. The community-based forest management (CBFM) approach which recognizes the key role of communities in pursuing sustainable forest management is the main strategy for SFM implementation. The watershed and ecosystem management (WEM) framework promotes the use of natural watershed boundaries as integrative units for planning and implementation of sustainable development programs and projects, and ensures that management and development activities will be undertaken with due consideration of the needs and concern of all stakeholders.

These government forest policies provided the basic rationale and enabling conditions for the recently completed three year ITTO-funded project *Integration of Forest Management Units (FMU) into Sustainable Development Units (SDU) through Collaborative Forest Management in Surigao del Sur, the Philippines*. ITTO project PD 167/02 Rev. 2(F) pioneered the planning and implementation of sustainable forest management in a forest-based 'mountain to coast' sustainable development unit. It built on the gains and lessons learned from PD 35/96 Rev. 2(F) *Conservation and Maintenance of Biological Diversity in Tropical Forests Managed Primarily for Timber Production, Surigao del Sur, Philippines* and at the same time showcased on the ground the integration of sustainable forest management within the larger sustainable development framework.

The project strategy adopted was to develop an integrative planning framework and mobilize the SDU's stakeholders in planning and implementation of sustainable forest management interventions.

A sustainable development unit or SDU is a biophysical, socio-economic management setting that aims to achieve the multiple benefits of participatory sustainable resource management for present and future generations. As a biophysical unit, it covers a set of watersheds/ecosystems from the mountains to the coast and the areas in between. As a management approach, it integrates the various component ecosystems and sectors as well as programs and practices with diverse goals and priorities so that potential benefits can be optimized.

This innovative project was implemented by SUSTEC in the delineated area of East Diwata SDU. The SDU is located on the northeastern coast of Mindanao encompassing the northern portion of Surigao del Sur, a coastal province of Caraga Region. The SDU covers a total area of 325 491 hectares of which roughly 75% is classified as permanent forest lands and about 60% is still covered with forests. It consists of 61 distinct watersheds each with outlet(s) draining to the coastal area.

Objectives and strategy

The project was developed to contribute to the improvement and acceleration of sustainable forest management in the Philippines within an integrated sustainable development framework, thus addressing the factors that limit progress of the Philippines towards attaining ITTO Objective 2000. It implemented and showcased sustainable forest management at the FMU level, highlighting how the tropical timber resource base can be improved and harnessed to contribute optimally and jointly with other sectors towards attainment of sustainable development at the SDU/local level.

The project strategy adopted was to develop an integrative planning framework and mobilize the SDU's stakeholders in planning and implementation of sustainable forest management interventions *(Figure 1)*. The project strategy had four key components: 1) information, education, communication and social mobilization; 2) SDU framework formulation and planning; 3) SFM demonstration; and 4) management decision support development. It revolved around the implementation of the long-term SFM plan initially developed for the SUDECOR concession, aligned within an integrative SDU framework.

Outputs

The project produced an SDU management and development framework acceptable to stakeholders and formulated and implemented an action plan for SFM in the SDU within the project duration of three years.

An association of all types of locally-based stakeholder organizations within the SDU was organized, including representatives of indigenous and local people's organizations, forest management units, local government units, national government agencies, non-government organizations, alliances, cooperatives, academic and professional organizations, business organizations, etc. The association of such diverse SDU stakeholders was incorporated under Philippine laws and named the East Diwata SDU Stakeholders Association, Inc. (EDSSA, Inc.).

A medium-term action plan for sustainable forest management in the SDU (MTAP-SFM: 2006–2015) was formulated, adopted by EDSSA, and supported by the local government. This participatory action plan provides for implementation of the stakeholder collaborative framework for SFM in the East Diwata SDU for the first 10 years of its operation starting in 2006. The MTAP-SFM was developed by taking into account the SDU and WEM frameworks; hence it includes projects in all ecosystems and sectors from the mountains to the lowlands and coastal zone. It also includes EDSSA's sustainable development policy of 2006. It incorporates actions and guidelines following the ITTO criteria and indicators framework to guide all stakeholders on appropriate implementation schemes to facilitate progress towards SFM.

In addition to the two main outputs a management decision support system (MDSS) was designed for the SDU using database and GIS components. The MDSS generates data on the extent and spatial distribution of forest resources, areas of protection and production forests, potential operable forests, potential plantation and agroforestry areas, etc. A monitoring and evaluation system was also developed to monitor the progress of SDU projects, actions/guidelines and activities towards SFM using the ITTO criteria and indicators for SFM which were revised to conform to the SDU context. The project also assisted in the identification, feasibility studies, and initial funding of priority livelihood projects to be implemented by participating stakeholders.

The outputs demonstrated that Forest Management Units (FMUs) can be integrated into the SDU through a mutually agreed multi-stakeholder collaborative framework and participatory action planning.

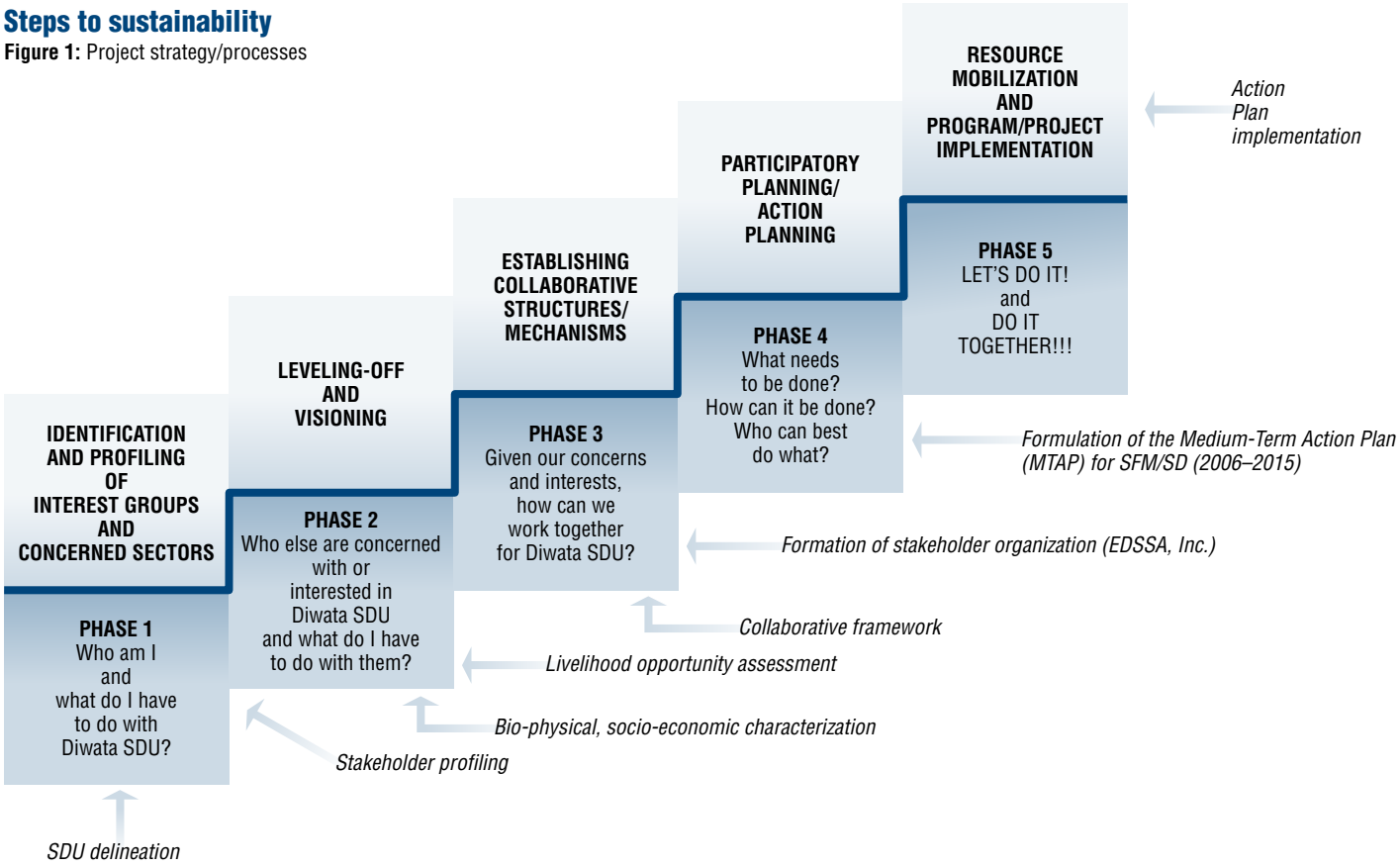
The stakeholders were provided with a collaborative framework and an action plan which will guide their future activities towards SFM in the SDU.

Impacts

The main impact of the project is providing the necessary model and participatory approaches to strengthen the forestry sector's input to integrated watershed and ecosystem management. It initiated a paradigm shift among participating stakeholders. The SDU paradigm favors

Steps to sustainability

Figure 1: Project strategy/processes



integrative thinking and made stakeholders realize how their interests (FMUs, ancestral domains, CBFM areas, etc.) were interrelated in the pursuit of sustainable development.

The stakeholders were provided with a collaborative framework and an action plan which will guide their future activities towards SFM in the SDU. They received management information/ tools and learned how to use C&I for forest management, monitoring and evaluation. They were assisted with identification and feasibility studies on priority livelihood projects and provided with seed money to start some priority collaborative projects. In short, the SDU and its various stakeholders were adequately provided with an institutional and management roadmap of the way forward to SFM through collaborative management.

Conclusions and recommendations

The project has demonstrated that FMUs can be effectively integrated within the larger SDU context through collaborative forest management amongst all key stakeholders. The development objective to have an integrated sustainable development framework to improve and accelerate SFM in the Philippines has been initiated at pilot scale at the East Diwata SDU. The progress towards SFM and sustainable development is a long-term and dynamic process which is reflected in the MTAP for SFM spanning 25 years. Priority livelihood projects have been identified and started initial operations. On-going and future projects by stakeholders supporting SFM can make use of the actions and guidelines in the action plan. The MTAP for SFM has initiated positive moves towards SFM. It needs to be internalized at all levels of the stakeholder organizations, including incorporating it into their operations plans.

The SDU paradigm has proven an effective integrator of the bio-physical and socio-economic dimensions of SFM and sustainable development and an effective instrument for mobilizing stakeholders to organize themselves within a collaborative framework and undertake participatory action planning aimed to attain SFM.

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The activities of the project should be replicated in adjacent forest-based SDUs and in other types of SDUs in other parts of the country. It can also be used as a model by other ITTO tropical timber producing members in emerging approaches to integrated watershed management linked to sustainable development as espoused by FAO and other international organizations and processes.

Technical assistance remains necessary to train all stakeholders in implementing the MTAP-SFM. Such assistance will strengthen the gains achieved by this ITTO-funded project. The key elements for a follow-up project include:

- capacity-building on SFM within the SDU paradigm;
- appropriate micro-enterprise support/micro-financing in poverty stricken areas;
- technical assistance and funding of collaborative livelihood projects, e.g. agroforestry, wood waste utilization, etc.; and
- adequate financial support for EDSSA, including identification and implementation of revenue generating projects for the association.

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