

FORESTLANDS IN THE PHILIPPINES, A STORY OF DECLINE BUT ALSO OF HOPE

By Wiebe van Rij
European Co-Director
Upland Development Programme in Southern Mindanao, Philippines

DECLINE

The Philippines covers a total of 30 million HAs. Half of it is classified as forestlands, of which about 10 million HAs are timberlands that may be used for productive purposes under certain conditions. The remaining 5 million is for national parks, residential areas, civil and military reserves, lakes and ponds and for unclassified land uses.

Around 100 years ago about 20 million HAs were under original forest cover¹. Now only an estimated 1 million of old-growth forest remain². Sixty (60) years ago the population in these forestlands was not more than 3 million or 10% of the Philippine population of 30 million. Indigenous Peoples occupied the forestlands which had been their ancestral domain. They sustained themselves by consuming and selling forest products and by slash and burn agricultural practices. Latest figures show that between 20-30 million people of the present Philippine population (85 million), or between 20-35%, now inhabit forestlands³ and mainly support themselves by small-scale, often subsistence farming. It is estimated that out of the 10 million HAs of 'timberlands', 8.5 million are farmed in an unsustainable manner unfortunately, that has resulted in severe soil erosion and steadily decreasing agricultural productivity. Very low incomes and poor quality of life is therefore a common scene in the uplands. This fierce erosion has also resulted in "poverty" in terms of biodiversity in the Philippines.

Furthermore, what happens in the uplands has a direct effect on the lowlands and coastal areas. Lowland dwellers, farmers and fishermen, have suffered hugely due to the damaging effects of severe floods and siltation, which have occurred as a result of the erosion in the uplands.

A major factor for the decline of the size of natural forests is the indiscriminate and irresponsible legal and illegal logging in the past. In addition, lowland population pressure has forced people to occupy areas already cleared by loggers and increased unsustainable farming there. Another reason may be the taking over by large agri-businesses of vast tracts of gently sloping lowland areas and transforming these into plantations. This process has left many poor communities with no other option than to expand cultivation areas onto steep to very steep slopes further into the uplands.

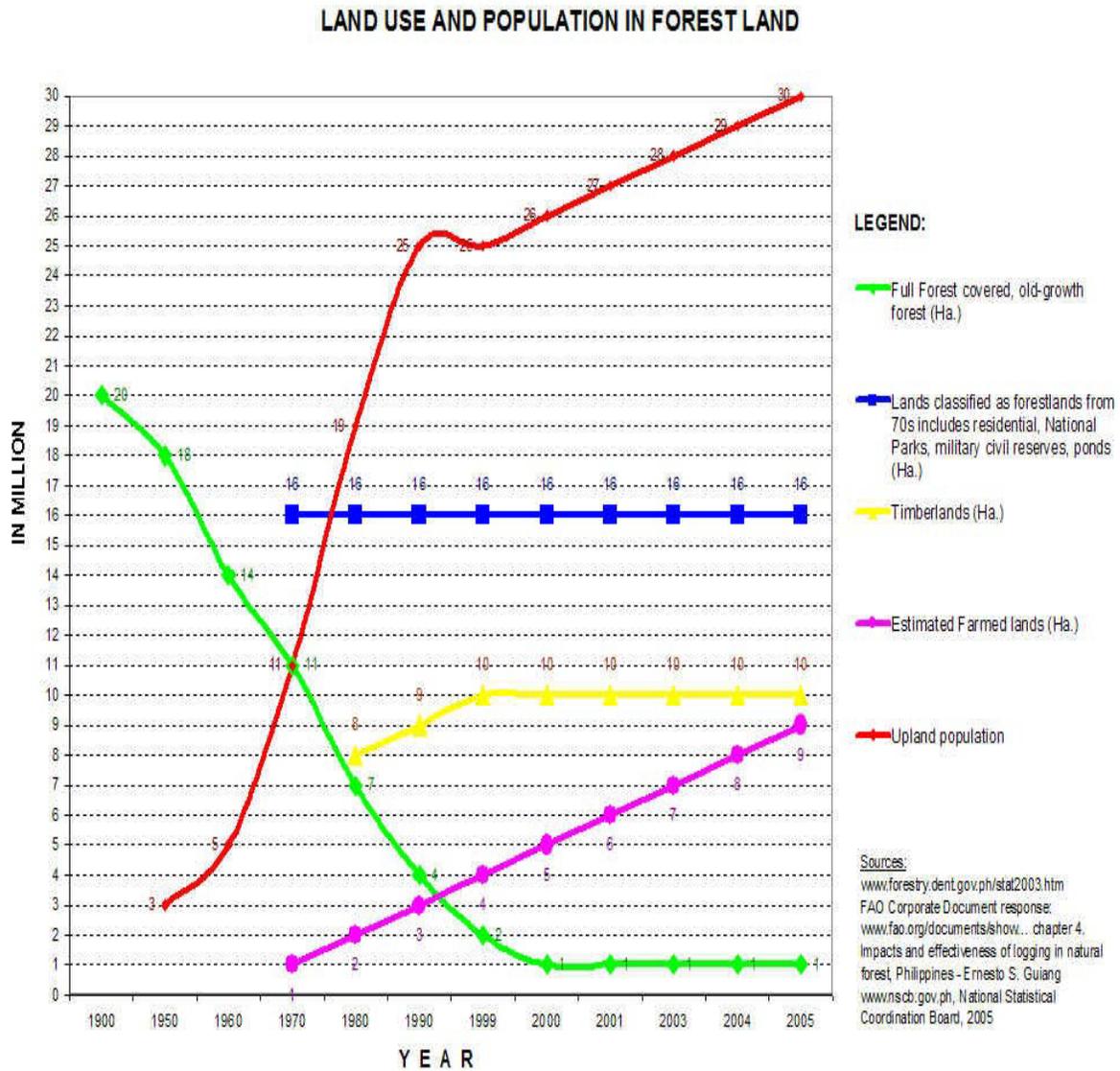
In conclusion one may say that today the Philippine upland resources base is seriously threatened and the possible near future effects are highly troublesome and should worry every Filipino. Besides the still ongoing legal and illegal logging, unsustainable farming practices inside forestlands are the main cause of depletion of the natural forest resources. Simultaneously, the same threat of natural resources depletion hovers over the lowlands and coastal areas, which are severely affected by what is going on in the forestlands.

¹ www.nscb.gov.ph, National Statistical Coordination Board, 2005
FAO Corporate Document response: <http://www.fao.org/documents/show....chapter 4. Impacts and effectiveness of logging in natural forest Philippines – Ernesto S. Guiang>

² <http://forestry.dent.gov.ph/stat2003htm>

³ Extrapolation from the figures in the FAO publication chapter 4. Impacts and effectiveness of logging in natural forest: Philippines – Ernesto S. Guiang

LAND USE AND POPULATION IN FORESTLANDS



The table above shows the horrendous “attack and destruction” on the Philippine forest over recent decades, particularly during the 1970’s and 80’s when more than 10 million HAs were cut down. In other words about 80% of the remaining forest was decimated in a few years only.

HOPE

In 1999 the EU entered into a project agreement with the Government of the Philippines with the aim of reversing this declining trend and to design ways and means to shift from unsustainable to sustainable resource management in the Philippine forestlands. The project was called Upland Development Programme (UDP). Although implemented on Mindanao, the 2nd largest island of the Philippines, UDP also intends to set an example on how forestlands in other parts of the country could be best preserved.

By now the UDP has developed a replicable model for Sustainable Upland Development (SUD), which has been tested and applied in various Regions of Mindanao. The SUD model has the scope of stopping erosion due to bad farming practices, to increase productivity on farmed uplands and to protect remaining forest pockets.

THE SUD MODEL

The SUD Model is barangay based⁴ and is implemented through a participatory community-based approach involving all other stakeholders⁵. The model consists of 4 schemes:

1. Land Use Based Barangay Development Planning (**LUB-BDP**)
2. Upland Agricultural Extension Delivery for introducing Diversified Farming Systems or DFS⁶ with upland farmers (**UAED-DFS**)
3. Barangay Forest Protection and Management (**BFPM**)
4. Labour-Based Routine Barangay Road Maintenance and Repair (**LBRBMR**)

The **LUB-BDP** is the basis for all development interventions as it defines the land use in and medium term development direction for the barangay. This must be done participatory with all concerned parties⁵ to maximize the chances for compliance. In the land use plan forestlands, agricultural lands and other appropriate land use classifications are locally delineated to ensure regulated land uses at barangay level. It is instrumental in maximizing the chances of preventing further encroachment into forested lands. It also sets the framework for support to agricultural development in upland areas that have been assessed as suitable for farming in the agreed land use plan.

Confined by the allocated agricultural lands as agreed upon in the barangay land use plan, the Upland Agricultural Extension Delivery for introducing DFS (**UAED-DFS**) aims at establishing and/or improving the extension service delivery to upland farmers. It works to strengthen extension delivery through the active involvement of a network of players particularly Local Government Units (LGUs) and their Municipal Agriculturists (MAs) and Agricultural Technicians (ATs) and barangay and sitio extension workers who are farmers and members of the barangay community. The establishment of learning sites/ model farms is another important activity under this scheme.

⁴ A barangay is the lowest level of government headed by a barangay Captain and a barangay council as legislative body. Members and Captain are elected officials.

⁵ The upland barangay community, the local government unit at the barangay level (BLGU), the local government unit at the municipal level (MLGU) and their national support agencies and civil society groups in the barangay

⁶ Diversified farming Systems or DFS promoted by UDP is an approach that integrates different kind of crops on a farm on sloping lands i.e. short-medium and long-term crops, depending on what the proper location is for such crops. The DFS integrates appropriate soil and water conservation measures also such as where to do contour farming and where (agro)-forestry is the appropriate technology to preserve productivity of agricultural lands

The adoption of DFS, when properly done, will increase farm productivity and income, and hence reduce the need to open up more lands, particularly in forested areas. Concrete benefits from the application of this scheme include increased agricultural production and income for farmers, and minimized land degradation.

The Barangay Forest Protection and Management scheme (**BFPM**) was designed in combination with the DFS scheme to address the ongoing destruction of the remaining forests in the uplands caused by the expansion of inappropriate farming and similar unsound practices on steep slopes and in critical watersheds. It aims to protect the remaining forests and to reforest certain areas not suitable for agriculture. The strategy is to empower and assign responsibility to the barangay local government and community to co-manage the natural resources within their barangays with support from the DENR and NCIP⁷. The scheme includes the identification, delineation and declaration of a site as a protected/reforestation zone. The formation of a barangay forest protection and management team together with the deputation of representatives from the BLGU and community as barangay forest protection officers, is also included.

This scheme will result in preserved forests, improved water sources and river systems and in increased commitment and enhanced capacity of the local governments and communities.

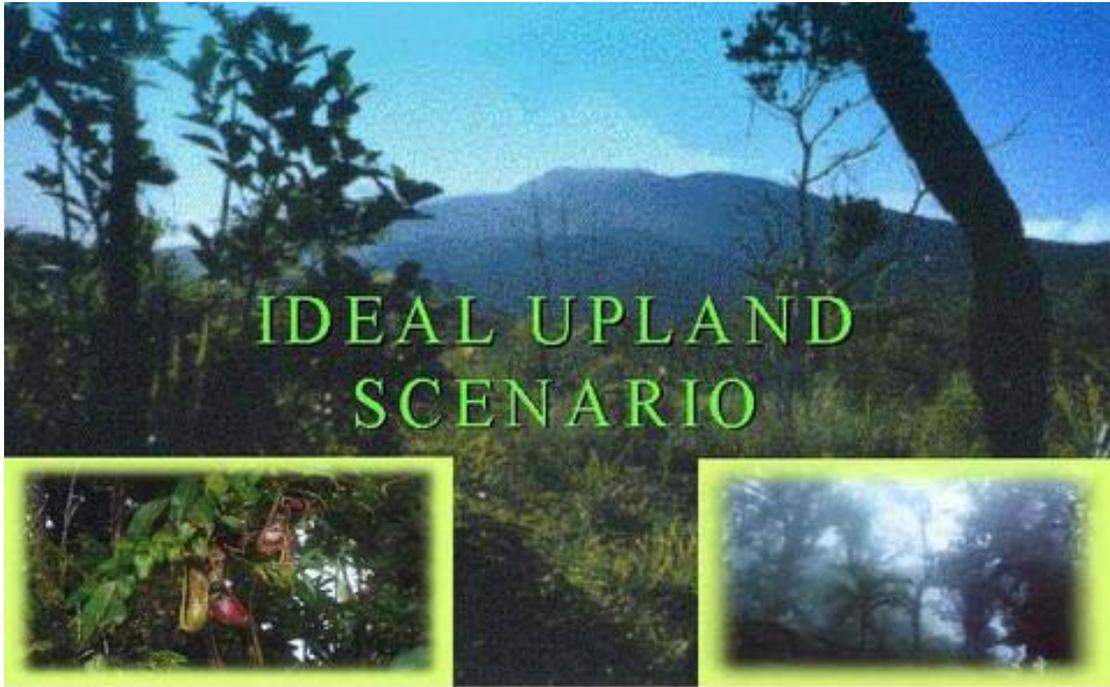
Likewise the Barangay Forest Protection and Management scheme, the Labour-Based Routine Barangay Road Maintenance (**LBRBRM**) also involves a partnership between the community and its local government. Well-maintained roads are a basic condition to spur development and reduce poverty however maintenance of roads in the uplands of the Philippines has been severely neglected. This indeed has hampered sustainable socio-economic development of millions of Filipinos.

The primary objective of this scheme is to institutionalise routine road maintenance with local governments through contracting out the maintenance of vital barangay roads to community organizations. Under the contract, well-trained, permanent road maintenance labour crews are assigned and provided with hand tools to do the maintenance activities. In addition the local governments provide, on an ad hoc basis, equipment and material support should there be heavy damage due to e.g. natural disasters, which cannot be handled by the crew on its own.

By keeping these crucial roads in a passable shape, the communities will benefit from the resulting mobility to and from their barangays. Possible benefits are increased agricultural production, improved access to economic opportunities and services, and increased commitment and capability of the community-based organizations and their local governments in taking up and owning their development programmes. In addition the scheme creates direct employment and an influx of income as the wages paid to the maintenance crews are most likely spent within the local economy. The effect of the latter is the creation of additional employment and economic development in the barangay and municipality concerned. It is also cost saving for LGUs. There is a tendency among LGUs to buy heavy equipment through borrowing at often taxing loan-servicing costs. Switching from the present practice of damage control, equipment based, ad hoc maintenance to a regular labour based maintenance scheme, saves fuel costs and reduces investment in heavy equipment. As fuel, oils and spare parts have a very high import component in the Philippines, in macro-economic terms the labour-based approach also saves scarce foreign exchange earnings.

For more information see: www.saveuplands.org

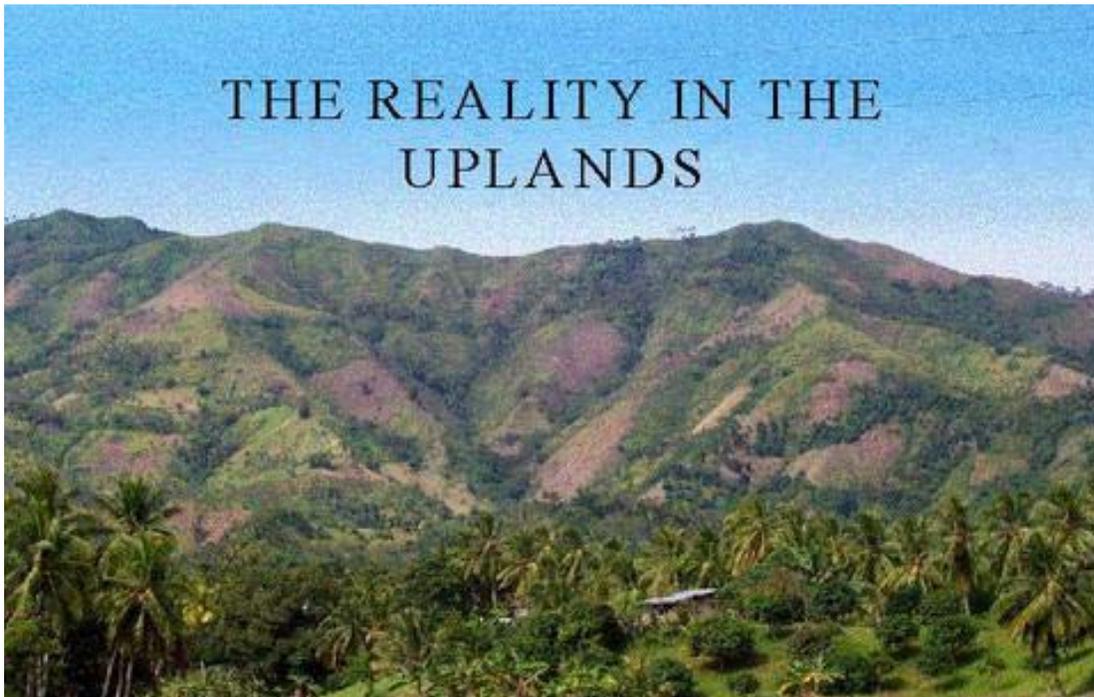
⁷ DENR, Department of Environment and Natural Resources. NCIP, National Commission for Indigenous Peoples



IDEAL UPLAND SCENARIO

How it was:

Beautiful forest, bio-diversity, permanent cover



THE REALITY IN THE UPLANDS

How it is:

Massive unsustainable upland farming



How it can be with proper extension services



