



THE ROLE OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN IN FOREST CONSERVATION IN UPLAND KALINGA PROVINCE, NORTHERN PHILIPPINES

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Abstract: *Article XII, section 14 of the Philippine Constitution expressly provides that “the State shall protect working women by providing safe and healthful working conditions, taking into account their maternal functions, and such facilities and opportunities that will enhance their welfare and enable them to realize their full potential in the service of the nation’. The provision explicitly provides the development of women as partners for nation building. In the light, women irrespective of creed, complexion, stature in life and ethnic affiliation should be groom to be in the frontline with their male counterparts for local and national development.*

In the different research situs of the study, most current community development projects have a built-in gender component. Despite the presence of strong women advocates and organizations for women empowerment, most are just written on books and other documents just to gather dust on the beams or archives. Mainstreaming the women for community development and merely getting the women to the policy-making table is not enough, more so if it comes at the cost of promoting a simplistic and often wildly considered and inaccurate scenery of gender viz-a-viz environmental protection.

This study highlights the importance of rural women in the management of sustainable ecosystem focusing on the important roles of women in environmental protection and conservation; their expectations, roles and the challenges towards more sustainable ecological and environmental friendly indigenous communities conducive for the indigenous peoples.

The research situs are the indigenous communities or villages with active women organizations engaged in forest conservation and protection in the province of Kalinga.

Keywords: *Forest conservation; Forest protection; Rural Women; Indigenous women*

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I - RATIONALE:

The fundamental argument this paper posit is that women are directly affected by the state of the environment because of the traditional roles imposed by the patriarchal system of the society to the women like, providing and preparing food; cleaning the house; washing the clothes and dishes; gathering fuel wood; fetching water; and taking care of the children. The multi-faceted roles of women lead to their multiple burdens because of society's sexist and discriminatory practices which are based on the patterns of patriarchal culture.

Women, particularly living in rural areas have special relationship with the environment. Women's environmental concerns were first highlighted in 1975, the International Women's Year, which was declared in honor of the 25th anniversary of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (Tinker and Jaquette, 1987). The "Decade of Women" also began at this time. At the end of the decade, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) sponsored a major conference in Nairobi, Kenya. One outcome of the conference was a synthesis of policies to advance women, the "Forward Looking Strategies to the Year 2000." Many of these policies were subsequently adopted into Agenda 21 at UNCED as Chapter 24, as global action for women towards sustainable and equitable development.

Forest communities cover approximately 9.4% of the Earth's surface or 30% of the total land area and function as Habitats for organisms, hydrologic flow modulators, and soil conservers, constituting one of the most important aspects of the Earth's biosphere. Historically forest meant an uncultivated area legally set aside for hunting by the feudal nobility, and these hunting forests were not necessarily wooded much if at all.

Forests are also considered the physical representation of women. The increasing integration of rural communities into the cash economy that has resulted in male migration has further entrenched women in agro-forestry work. Like any other income they earn, the women use the cash they get from the gathering and cultivation of forest products to put food on the table and meet their family's other basic needs. Unfortunately, in the development process, in programs intended for forest dwellers and users, in forest exploitation projects, the voices of women are not heard. Nor are their traditional rights to the forests respected. Yet it is they who bear the costs of forest destruction and forest-use transformation.



This presentation seeks to illustrate that the "lens" through which women's involvement in environmental action is viewed, needs to be re-focused, to bring women in, from the periphery to a central, vital role. In recognizing the importance of women as grassroots natural resource managers and conservationists, governments and international agencies stand to gain valuable allies in their efforts to conserve mountain environments.

Key to the way indigenous peoples use resources is their vast understanding, often accumulated over centuries, of site specific variables, the interdependence and relationships of the biodiversity and ecological processes. Cultural survival, which requires integrity and governance, is the means for maintaining that knowledge. The survival of local languages, with the very concepts to express understanding of fundamental processes and relationships, is key to maintenance of the local ecological knowledge and values.

While all the "ways forward" are not clear, this paper offers a starting point for the development of policy and implementation guidelines appropriate to mountain environments. It is the fervent hope of this paper that at the end of the day each agency will use these discussions to raise awareness and stimulate positive action within their own organization.

II - STUDY OBJECTIVES:

This study describes the interrelatedness of women and the environment especially the indigenous women. The first objective of this paper is to highlight the importance of rural women in the management of sustainable ecosystem.

Likewise, the study underscores the following main topics: women's perspectives on the environment; women's nature of work in the environmental protection and conservation; their motivations in working for the environmental protection and conservation; challenges encountered in working for the protection and conservation of the environment; and their roles in environmental protection and conservation.

III – PROCEDURE/METHODOLOGY:

Field studies took place between March to June 2013. In addition to participation, observation of forest resource use practices through staying in the villages, 3 semi-structured interviews were carried out amongst women living in the villages located at the periphery of community centers or along national highways. The interviewees have been selected using a snow-ball technique.



The women interviewed aged 20 to 52 years and all belonged to the villages where government reforestation initiatives are implemented, on-going or completed.

In order to reduce the pitfalls associated with this method, the sample has been completed with a number of women randomly selected in the households of the villages under study. The interviews (30 to 45 minutes and usually done every evening only) consisted of structured and semi-structured components.

The data obtained from individual interviews have been complemented and the validity has been checked by carrying out two group interviews. These interviews consisted of 6 participants each, selected among the women not previously interviewed. This was done to validate previous responses.

The research sites are the following: The Malyawan Cooperative of Lower Tanudan, its members are mostly women have embarked on agro-forest activities (citrus, narra and gmelina) and the Maling Women Association with their gmelina re-forestation and vegetable production. The Buscalan Women Weavers of Tinglayan have come out with their integrated agro-forest project in coordination with the local government unit. The Manangol women group has also embarked in agro-forest development centering more in vegetable production to maintain their satellite vegetable market. The Gawa-an Indigenous Women Organization of Balbalan, is one of the active women's organizations in the municipality and it had embarked on agro-forest programs. To date they are on a livelihood program of producing banana and kalamansi soap. Basao Grassroot is also on reforestation using the traditional trees abounding in the locality as reforestation stocks. The Minanga Women of Sabangan, Upper Tabuk is also included because of their active involvement in agro-forest programs. They are currently involved in coffee beans production. It was organized by the Mandiga-Ob-obbo, WAND, a pioneering women organization in the province which has numerous pro-environment programs, including livelihood programs, women capability and capacity building programs and women empowerment.

In one field study, an older woman said that "it is easier to mobilize the women in the villages because there is less power play and the women are always present in the village". Interested politicians are indeed eyeing and giving more recognition to the "*kababaihan*" as one of the engines for village development, it is hoped however, that it is genuine and not merely for political convenience.



The study leader being conversant of the dialect of the villages, help a lot in the conduct of the study especially in the recording of interview results.

IV - RELATED LITERATURE:

The study was anchored on the theory of Vandana Shiva (1998), which places a high premium on “feminine principle” as a source of life. Women, according to her, are the original givers of life and caretakers of environment, and it is the western patriarchal development strategies and western science that have displaced the feminine principle and victimized women, non-western people and the environment. Shiva further argued that the marriage of patriarchy and capitalism had subjugated women to the environment.

In the same manner, Bina Agarwal (1993), also expressed the victimization of women in political, economic and gender terms. For her, patriarchy and the process of satisfaction and privatization impoverish women and render them the hardest hit by environmental damage. Similarly, the feminist theory asserted that patriarchy is the main cause of women’s oppression, subordination and abuse.

Both Shiva and Agarwal asserted that women should be the central actors in environmental management. This is because of their closeness to the resource base due to their daily survival tasks and their being caught in the mainstream of environmental degradation. They believed that being the privileged caretaker of the environment is the key to women empowerment. Women are propelled to actions more conducive to environmental protection and regeneration.

Among the Subanen of Zamboanga, both men and women are involved in rice cultivation. The men know that they have taken-care of the more back-breaking tasks such as plowing and harrowing. But both men and women plant and harvest rice and clean out weeds. They have survived because of these unwritten working principles and system of cooperation (Mudai, 2006).

The custom laws defend the rights of women, because it is they who give life to people when still in their wombs. The reproduction of human beings is determined by the existence of women. That is why they are to be loved, cared-for, protected and their rights respected (PBS, 2010).



V – SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES

Activities/Target Date	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July
1. Title Conceptualization	→						
2. Tasks identification and distribution	→						
3. Research sites identification		→					
4. Identification of key informants			→				
5. Interview session- 1st round				→			
6. Interview Session – 2 nd round					→		
7. Interview Session – 3 rd round						→	
8. First Synthesis Session						→	
9. Writing the First Draft of the paper							→
10. Review and writing of the 2nd Draft							→
11. Review, revise and final paper							→

VI - FINDINGS:

Nature of indigenous women's work:

Women have vital role in conservation and management of sustainable eco-system. Since time immemorial women are traditionally involved in protecting and conserving their natural resources in mountain areas. With their extraordinary skills and traditional knowledge, women have proved how land, water, forest and other natural resources can be used and managed. They have their own devised system and ways to sustain and manage the resources which are the basis of survival for their families and communities (Tyagi, 2011).

The women are the herbalists and ritualists. The indigenous of the upland villages of Kalinga being task as mothers to rear the children are the first medical attendants of their children when they are sick. They are force to seek alternative indigenous medicines available in the locality like herbs and the like in order to give immediate and temporary relief to the sick child. They gather the needed medicinal plants available with the help of other older women make the concoction and give it to the child. In the process, the younger women gradually



know the medicinal plants and the ways to prepare while the older ones unknowingly are transferring the skills. These processes will make the transfer of the knowledge and skills gradual and yet permanent. Through their practical experiences and managerial skills they have acquired immense knowledge of the various types of plants, grass, medicinal plants, kind of fuel wood and various species of fodder plants. They know better than any scientist that what grass, herbs, shrubs, trees are best for them and should be planted to maintain a balanced ecosystem and well being of their families and communities. They always prefer a mixed forest which can meet their demands of fuel, fodder, fruits and food as well as maintains the bio-diversity of the mountains. They are perfect in making an optimum use and conservation of natural resources.

In the mountain clearings, the men and women are involved in the cutting of trees, burning the dried trees in the swidden farm, cut the remaining undergrowths, removed the weeds with the use of the special farming tool made of metal (*landok*) crafted by a local blacksmith, and plant the seeds. Planting the kaingin, for instance is mainly done by women. In the whole process of the kaingin farming, women are involved from the very beginning – cutting of the trees (*uma/ga-at*) to seed planting (*usok*), harvesting, and finally to storing. The women's task is extended to drying the bundles of palay, pounding, cooking and finally serve the cooked food to the members of the family. It is farther extended in many cases to dish washing.

Aside from these swidden farming tasks, the women prepare and serve the food and wash the dishes. At the closing of the day, the woman will also look for something to cook as viand for dinner. She may get vegetables in an old clearing, go to the river to gather shells, look for bamboo shoots and other possible wild or planted vegetables to complete what will be served for the dinner. The population pressure has increased male migration, which in turn adds to the women's work load. In effect this means that women's responsibilities extend from the household duties to working in the fields as well. A destructive chain reaction emerges. The burden is doubled when the man finds work outside of the village or even to farther places.

The cycle will be repeated over and over for the whole life span of a woman. Finally, when "SHE" retires, there is no retirement pay neither a benefit. There is little sigh of relief, for at that time, "she" will be either brought to the home of the aged or confined in a little cubicle



in “her” daughter’s or son’s house and visited once in a while. In her final resting place, all might be forgotten.

Women’s perspectives on the environment:

Indigenous women, like any indigenous men know of only two parts of their cosmic world, the sky (*langit/ngato*) and the land (*luta/pita*). Land is where the mortals dwell and the sky where the immortals are, including Kabunyan, the supreme god. The spirits (*anito/ngilin*) dwell on the surrounding environment, in the forest, bodies of water, spring, fields, and even on trees. In the whole duration of the field study there was no mention of spirits living in animals. It is then presumed by the researchers that indigenous peoples in their mountain villages do have beliefs on spirit of animals. Animals instead are butchered to appease spirits.

Indigenous peoples always ask permission from the spirit of a tree before felling it. They kill a chicken and offer first to the dweller. Even hunters of wild animals always offer the liver of their catch to the spirits. Hunting is not even done everyday, for the spirits of the forest (*adog de kakkayu*) and of the wild animals (*singkuwa da kakkayap*) might get angry. In their anger, illness, plague and even death might visit the family. The indigenous people called it *ngangasa*. The spirits might also make a curse, a curse of the spirits, then there will be locust or rodent attacks or even draught (*angag*), famine (*inggi*) will come and people will suffer. Indigenous women fully understand that when there is locust or rodent attacks, food shortage or famine will follow. They also pretty-well know that when the bamboo bears fruit, famine is just around the corner. The women start to save food, they do not sell the palay or pounded rice anymore.

Indigenous peoples consider the forest as the source of life. The forest is the depository of their food, materials to build their shelter and to protect their plantations and as a natural protection from the forces of nature. Most of the things they needed are sourced out from the forest. Spring (*bubus/chusik*) for water supply; wild animals (*laman, ugsa*); wild fowls (*aggitalun*) for their meat; trees for their houses and firewood; rattan (*kulayut, dekot, bikal*); bamboo; vines (*iklid,kaliwat*) for tying (*galut, siklat*), and a number of forest products. The mountains and forest are protection against the forces of nature and natural barriers against strong winds and typhoon. Getting more than one’s needs from the forest or in bodies of water is a taboo (*paniyaw*).



The western concept of capitalism has drastically changed the old code of gathering from the forest and fishing from the bodies of water. People have found a new practice of gathering more than they need and sold it in public markets at prices so low, a price so low that it is not enough to compensate the source of the goods.

Women motivations in working for the environmental protection and conservation:

The progressive awareness of their capacities and their role will allow women to express themselves within the community in a more effective way. Talking in public allows them to acquire more confidence and self-esteem. Attending village meetings represents for the women a giant step since most of them leave their home only for work purposes. Nevertheless, for most women this process of leaving their households to attend the meetings has not been easy. In many rural societies, attempts to control women's movements outside the home further constrain their autonomy (Agrawal, 2001).

The involvement of women in community decision-making gives them the self-confidence to become partners in local governance and development. The awareness level will also increase that move them to form organizations or join one to put into effect their goals and objectives for village improvement and development and finally make their voices heard.

It is common knowledge throughout the world that the growth of technology and the processes of commercialization, industrialization and globalization affect men and women differently. The world realizes, clearly today that real development cannot take roots if it bypasses women, who not only represent half of the humanity, but represent the very kernel around which social change takes shape.

Women by the nature of their family tasks dictate that the environment must be cared well so that they will not have the hard time local and locating food sources. When water depletes, the women are forced to carry clay-pot on their head and look for a spring to fetch water for the family. When the available vegetables are gone, they venture far to look for some to complete the food display every meal time. When the firewood is gone, the women are pushed to farther forest to gather firewood to let the fireplace aglow for the food to be cooked. All these and more give more power to the women to conserve the forest and the surrounding environment as well.



Challenges encountered in working for the protection and conservation of the forest:

The Kalinga village women are on a forward movement for an environmentally sound and sustainable quality of life, the problems, challenges and issues are multi-faceted. However, women in Kalinga villages are playing a crucial role in the protection and conservation of their environment. Women in the Philippines, in general have brought a different perspective to the environment debate, because of their different experience base. Poor women's lives are not compartmentalized and they see the issues in a broad and holistic perspective. They understand clearly that economics and environment are compatible. Their experience reveals to them that soil, water and vegetation, necessary for their day-to-day living, requires care and good management. Environmental degradation is related not only to the biosphere alone, but to the social sphere as well.

It has been observed that decision-making in reforestation program like community-based forest program and other reforestation initiatives are participated in by mostly male members of the community. It is still considered improper, from a cultural point of view, for women to attend meetings where the male presence is predominant.

This is in accordance with the lower status of women within these village societies. The opinions expressed by the men at the time of the meetings are generally considered as the expression of the whole household. The concept of patriarchal tendencies still transcends and permeates the inner fabric of village decision-making process, a process that has been carried from the Spanish regime and further nurtured by the Chinese patriarchal decision-making extended family.

It has often been the case that women are marginalized in community-based conservation projects, the benefits being enjoyed by the more accessible and powerful members of the communities – the men (Goldman, 2003, Agrawal, 2001, Locke, 1999).

The village women, as the forefront in food gathering, preparation and serving should not be left to the back-ground in processes that centers on environmental protection and conservation, rather they should be on the forefront side-by-side with their male counterpart in a coordinative, cooperative and complementary relation. Until then environmental conservations and other ecological programs especially forest conservation and protection will be far-fetch.



The emigration of male-farmers from the villages not only caused changes in the domestic structure and in domestic roles but also affected the division of work and the ways of using the work-force. Some village male-folks would find spare jobs in the centers and cities as miners, drivers, carpenters and other odds jobs to augment the meager family income, especially when they send their children to school. The result was a considerable increase in farm work for women thereby resulting in less availability for domestic tasks and care of children. The women in the absence of husbands had to take on greater responsibilities. These households directed by women were especially vulnerable to seasonal tensions in the poorest segments of the farming population and their survival depended entirely on their access to the resources of the collective property or the small farm the women can afford to cultivate.

Some activities were transferred on to aged people and to young girls. This last aspect had important repercussions on future fertility and on the level of education. As their younger sisters assumed these functions inside the family, the elder girls were pushed to get married or to find work in the city. In their innocence, not counting the low level of education they have, they are prone to sex syndicates, prostitution, abuse and eventually ended to teen-pregnancy. Returning back to the village means additional family member to care for, needing additional food on meal time and additional expenses in case of illness. The problems multiplied and compounded at the back of the leaning woman who's already "bowed" by the weight of family responsibilities.

Women's solutions to protect and conserved the forest:

The mandate of the Local Government Code of 1991 created a breathing space not for local governance but for the women in general. The Code provided a strong legal basis for the establishment of non-government organizations, people's organization and other sectored groups as vital partners of the government in nation building and to be represented in all local government units' councils.

The mandate has awakened the spirit of women liberalization from household bondage to active community members. The organization of women through women organizations – KALIPI (Kalipunan ng Liping Pilipina), Mothers' Associations and others- have crystallized women power into a single voice for recognition.



The KALIPI of the villages have gone far by empowering women to be partners of men in village decision-making, planning, and implementing village development plans. Some women organizations have gone as far as engaging in re-forestation, livelihood programs and implementation of community ordinances. Most of the active indigenous women organizations are taken as sources of respondents for this study. These women organizations are actively engaged in agro-forest activities of their own in their respective villages.

It is a common and traditional practice among indigenous peoples that they do not cut or fell the whole tree when gathering fuel-wood, they only cut the branches (*tadaw*) needed. They only cut the trees for fuel-wood, those that cannot be used as construction materials for their houses. Tree species good for lumber are instead pruned and allowed to grow and flourish.

Women even plant indigenous tree species that are good as construction materials. They plant the trees in the *imong* – a hillside or *apa- a* mountainside use for planting trees good for lumber or round-post.

Women roles in forest protection and conservation:

The Philippine Constitution recognizes that the Filipino women contribute greatly to human development. As mothers at home they are in full-duty in the rearing and upbringing of the children. They also contribute to the economic development of the family and country as well. It is simple justice that they be given due recognition by the state and a legitimate share with men in leadership and in major decision-making process at the levels and in all spheres of human activity. Enough laws have been enacted for the protection of women in general and there is even a commission for women protection against domestic violence, but there is no law crafted specifically mandating the government to give monetary incentives or benefits to women engaged in activities for environmental protection and conservation. A law crafted along this subject, will address two impending problems of unemployment and women empowerment. The mother for instance, will become an income earner and contribute to family income and in the process of working with environmental related activities, they will be empowered.

The progress towards women's full participation in environmental governance at the local level will probably be slow and incremental, building upon women's autonomous social



movement organizing. To generalize gender equity in environmental governance in the future, the key will be to uncover 'ways in which women can institutionalize the few bargaining strengths they have, and in working out leverages and incentives that would ensure a voice and space for the most marginalized groups within decision-making processes' (Woodford-Berger, 2004). Inclusion of women in the management of natural resources is compelling because such participation has the potential to lead to greater empowerment both within women's households and in the public life of their communities. The popular environmentalists' terms like "Mother Earth" signify a direct relation of the environment with the women. As the "Earth" being the host to all living creatures including people, the "woman" is also the "bearers" of life, the one whom life begins – in the womb and the one who sustains life through her tender loving care.

The women manage the household affairs and her environmental protection and conservation roles range from proper household waste disposal; minimizing firewood use; and the kind food serve each mealtime.

The women as the first teachers of the children can inculcate at an early age appreciation and love for nature; proper waste management and conservation of the remaining natures' gift to mankind.

If every school children and their parents plant and adopt a tree, there will be enough trees to construct beautiful houses when the child has his own family and if every pre-school child conserves a tea-spoon of water a day, he will have a pool to swim when he reaches the age that he can swim. Hence, if every woman in a household is empowered by tradition, culture and law to be an active village-builder, there will be no sons or daughters without trees and with-out pools. The world will be cooler then.

CONCLUSIVE REMARKS:

Present finding indicate that women have vital and changing roles as environmental resource managers. Yet they face significant constraints in access to resource including land, labor, credit and other income opportunities. Gender differences and gender relations in household dynamics, resource organization and other socioeconomic factors can play a part in explaining and impacting on bio-physical conditions. This needs to be recognized for sustainable environmental management.



Indigenous women know exactly their surroundings – their environment - and they are capable of managing the same. They perfected the use of the grasses, trees, shrubs, weeds as immediate and temporary remediation for illness and pains. They also know how to propagate and protect these grasses, trees, shrubs, and weeds for their sustainability for the use of the next generations.

The indigenous women are well aware of the degrading forest reserves in their surroundings. That awareness when harnessed will be a spring-board for a more dynamic and meaningful women participation in rural development, program development and implementation, policy making and implementation, village decision-making and all aspects and facets that women could be partners.

The indigenous women can be active members of the community with the organization of the different women organizations and can be good partners in environmental promotion activities for they are most of the time in the village.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Government through the Local Government Units should strengthen the federation of women organizations with necessary financial supports. Federating is not enough but giving more “in law” for the women organizations to be strengthened is a social justification for the long time they have been relegated to the background.

The Indigenous People’s Right Act should be “righted” to give more chances to indigenous women to be recognized as to their rights and economic contributions. The IPRA which is tailored for the indigenous peoples of the country should be revisited to introduce specific provisions for women participation in indigenous communities’ development and to give more impetus to the reality the law was enacted.

The Local Development Councils of the LGUs should enlist the participation of the women groups in community- driven development programs to empower the women of the communities to actively participate in governance by identifying their own community or village needs, planning, implementing and monitoring projects.

Gender Advocacies for Development should be strengthened, making its implementation mandatory in the Local Government Units and re-focusing some of its programs on women capability and capacity building for environmental protection and conservation. Along this line a GAD Team in each province or municipality should be organized to give meaning and



spirit and implement the GAD programs. Further, women advocates should monitor the 5% GAD fund from the 20% development fund of LGUs and evaluate how the funds are being utilized for women advancement.

It is high time for the Philippine Congress to give more spirit and meaning to Article II, Section 14 of the Philippine Constitution by crafting more specific laws for women in environmental protection and conservation giving monetary incentives and benefits or supports to indigenous women or indigenous women groups engaged in environmentally related activities or programs.

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