

Managing watersheds to achieve people-centered water and environmental sanitation

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This paper clearly illustrates the experience of the Philippine Watershed Management Coalition (PWMC) in promoting on-ground people-centered watershed management which could be an important input towards the realization of a people centered water and environmental sanitation. It is intended to share first hand experiences on collaborative efforts among watershed stakeholders in the area of advocacy and capacity building as a means of achieving watershed management at the same time moving towards water resources protection/conservation and environmental sanitation. It also stresses the importance of making watershed management a people-focused approach.

Introduction

In a country like the Philippines, where 70% of the total land area falls within watershed, the importance managing watersheds for water and environmental sanitation cannot be overemphasized. Literally, everybody lives within the watershed. Watersheds play a very vital role in sustaining ecosystems and as the primary source of freshwater. Thus, it is an important input in achieving water and environmental sanitation initiatives. As an integrated ecological system, watersheds management necessitate the adoption of an approach in which the complex interrelationship between the development of natural resources, the integrity of the ecosystem, the quality of the watershed environment and the interactions among stakeholders have to be understood and properly addressed. The management of watersheds is crucial to the survival of people as they influence and shape the watershed areas. They are the major actor in watershed management, their actions largely influence and affect the integrity of the watersheds. To be effective, management of watersheds must be viewed from a holistic approach, that is, managing watersheds under the principles of integrated water resources management.

Taking it a step further, the Philippine Watershed Management Coalition (PWMC) advocates for a people –centered management of watersheds, that is, managing watershed not only for the conservation of flora and fauna but more importantly, it is also focused on people, women and men stakeholders, how they live, their interrelationships with each other and the environment. how the men and women stakeholders use, access and control the resources within a particular watershed for their survival and how these could contribute towards attaining the objectives of water and environmental sanitation.

In Philippine context, the watershed management could be characterized as predominantly a government function

with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) as the mandated agency to oversee the management and protection of watershed areas. This has been the institutional arrangement until 1991 when the Local Government Code (LGC) was enacted. With the LGC in placed, management of small watershed areas, those that cover about 50 square kilometers or 5,000 hectares was devolved to local government units (LGUs) the management. However, despite this provision, only a few local government units had a hand in managing local watersheds, mainly because watershed management is an expensive endeavor, not to mention the limited capacity of LGUs in the technical aspect of managing watersheds.

The Philippine watershed management coalition (PWMC) and people-focused watershed management

Conscious of the need to sustainably manage watersheds and cognizant of the fact that government alone cannot effectively carry out the task of managing watersheds, the Philippine Watershed Management Coalition (PWMC), a group of committed individuals, mostly graduate of the Program for Development Managers- Watershed Management Course of the Asian Institute of Management (AIM) came into being. The graduates became the convenors. The convenors felt that there was a need to create a network in order to know more about a relatively new frontier—the watershed as the unifying and planning unit for natural resources management. Thus, the birth of the Philippine Watershed Management Coalition (PWMC), initially composed of 23 watersheds with members coming from government agencies, local government units, academe, NGOs and peoples organizations. At the core of the Coalition is a network of watershed management teams which complement and sus-

tain one another. This was necessary for such networking arrangement reinforces each others

As a formally organized group but with a loose structure, the Coalition is governed by a working Board of Trustees drawing support both from the Board of Advisers and Resource Institutions. Under it are watershed clusters with each composed of watershed management teams which in turn is made up of watershed management practitioners. The watershed management practitioners are individuals who are involved in one way or another in the implementation of watershed management activities. Thus, at the lowest level of the Coalition are men and women stakeholders in the person of government workers, members of the academe, NGOs, LGU personnel and the civil society at large.

The vision of the Coalition is to build and strengthen a responsive body of individuals and groups working together for the protection and rehabilitation of watersheds across the country. It aims to develop a well informed constituency at the same time promote local environmental governance. The Coalition is regarded as: avenue for continuing education in the area of watershed management and related efforts; a platform for discussing and responding to broad-based issues related to the management and development of watershed; a support and lobby group for on-ground implementation of watershed activities and a resource for participatory action researches for the effective management of watersheds

As an agent of change, the Coalition is governed by IWRM principles relevant to the advancement of watershed management in the Philippines. It strongly advocates: that people should always be given preferential option and that people participation in all watershed management activities be pursued; encourage the co-management of watershed by stakeholders by building their capabilities and transforming them into partners; and support to local government units by strengthening local environmental governance.

The PWMC experiences in watershed management

For the last four (4) years since its formation, the Coalition is fast gaining grounds in the area of watershed management. Basically, its accomplishment and experiences are focused on: advocacy and awareness building through intensive information, communication and education campaign; creating and harnessing partnerships; and building of capacities of watershed stakeholders. These are important in attaining water and environmental sanitation for how can water and environmental sanitation efforts be effectively carried out when watersheds are not properly managed.

From the initial 23 watershed clusters with less than 100 Coalition members in 1998, the membership of the PWMC has increased to 300 mostly local government units, the academe, quasi public organizations, peoples organizations, NGOs and government agencies. For the past years, it has co-sponsored conduct of watershed photo exhibits in the different watershed clusters and also in Metro Manila. At the

cluster level, similar exhibits are held where people from all walks of life can view these pictures for free. In addition, film showing watershed initiatives and best practices also formed part of the IEC campaign to educate the different watershed stakeholders. Water conservation, water sources protection and environmental sanitation are regular topics in its advocacy and information campaign. There are also information caravans which brings the photo exhibits to different schools to enable school children, especially those in the grade schools and secondary levels to be exposed to watershed management activities. As part of the watershed advocacy, visits to watershed areas are also being organized by watershed clusters such as Eco Walks or Eco Tour which end in tree planting activities. These are especially designed for students and as well as local residents wherein they are given a half day or one day tour of their local watersheds. The main objective is to educate students, especially those from highly urbanized areas and also the local or ordinary citizen on the importance of the watershed and the need to protect these areas. Moreover, in partnership with the academe every last Saturday of June is declared as Philippine Arbor Day where tree planting is being done within watershed areas. To help the Coalition members to effectively spread the news about watershed conservation and protection, and environmental sanitation, an IEC framework was developed and adopted by the members to serve as guide for its members in developing effective IEC materials. A Watershed Magazine is also being published by the Coalition to facilitate exchange of information and experiences among members in the promotion of watershed management initiatives. In keeping with information technology and in order to reach a broader area of constituency, the Coalition is maintaining a virtual office and a website (www.philwatershed.org.ph).

Another area of focus of the Coalition is the building of partnership with watershed stakeholders. PWMC assumes an active role of a facilitator to help create and operationalize partnerships among watershed stakeholders. These partnership building has paved the way towards creation of a stronger bond among watershed stakeholders such as the formation functional Watershed Management Councils, ensuring a local mechanism for the management of watersheds. At present, Coalition has successfully created such partnerships and similar mechanisms to promote local watershed management initiatives at the community levels. Examples are: the Bukidnon Watershed Protection and Development Council and the Iloilo Watershed Management Council.

The other area of concern that the Coalition is actively pursuing is institutional and individual capability building in the area of watershed management within the framework of IWRM. Cognizant of the needs of local watershed stakeholders, in particular, local government units, non-government organizations, civil society and even government workers, the Coalition has embarked on capability building initiatives such as conduct of watershed management training programs, workshops, conferences as well as series of round table discussions. Participants are provided with knowledge

on areas such basic skills on watershed planning and management, water and watershed policies, and environmental sanitation which could help them in addressing watershed management issues and problems. These capacity building programs are conducted in coordination with Resources Institutions, government agencies and the academe. Examples of these activities were: the conduct of the policy workshop on water and watershed, the training on localized watershed management intended for local government officials and planners; conduct of Tree Farmers Congress wherein the role of tree in watershed management was highlighted as well as the roundtable discussion on promoting rain water harvesting and environmental sanitation. In 2002, the Coalition conducted a symposium and training on water security through partnerships focusing on topics such as benefits of partnerships, strategies on effective partnerships and the role of local government units in water security were thoroughly discussed.

Key Lessons Learned

Based on the experiences the Coalition, various lessons can be learned: it clearly showed that creating partnership at the community level focusing on local stakeholders is vital in watershed management. It is a key factor in ensuring that a people centered water and environmental sanitation are achieved. Involvement of local stakeholders should also be

backed up with empowerment and advocacy efforts. Its not enough that communities are given the chance and empowered to manage their watersheds but a sustained advocacy campaign focusing at the local community should be a continuous process. In addition, building their capabilities as local manager of watersheds should be given importance and strengthened at all times. It should be recognized that transforming local population as responsible managers of watersheds necessitate a support system such as empowerment, a sustained information and advocacy campaign, and building up capacities—all these are important ingredients of partnerships in watershed initiatives, thus ensuring achievement of people-focused water and environmental sanitation program.

References

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