

## **Participatory monitoring in the Philippines**

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These reflections on participatory monitoring methods are from a four year project implemented from 1994 to 1998, in Mindanao, Philippines. I worked within a team of young Filipino scientists and with a small village on the Pantaron range. We used a variety of methods that combined community mapping with simplified scientific survey methods. The project/process was supported by the Biodiversity Conservation Network, as part of an Asian wide support to link biodiversity protection with economic enterprise and participatory socioeconomic monitoring ([www.BCNet.org](http://www.BCNet.org) or [www.BSPonline.org](http://www.BSPonline.org)). We did not implement things as expected and reinterpreted their narrow academic approach. Our experience sought to understand existing biodiversity relationships and strengthen them, as such we linked biodiversity conservation to livelihood stabilisation and local institutional strengthening. Monitoring was part of the institutional strengthening element.

The community mapping methods used allowed people to choose their own symbols, colours and decide the features drawn. We first asked people in the village to map a broad understanding of their resources. From this we understood basic resource use patterns, management units and who took responsibility in the village for each unit. This map also identified names of places, rivers and the stories that went with them. From this activity, we took three directions. One looked at biodiversity, second rattan biodiversity, and third women's biodiversity.

The general biodiversity assessment was done in two phases, first they mapped their forest and land use types, which we then spot surveyed with them to understand how they defined their five types. They identified indicator species and a soil classification system that coincided with their forest classification system. Initially we trained them to conduct transects that would monitor standard, height, breadth, altitude of species which linked to their classification system. Because most people had experience with logging they could estimate the height and breadth of trees so accurately we did not need to use the instruments, they were used by our staff as a check.

The surveys were an opportunity for the villagers to share experiences about their forest, the logging and the degradation and how it made them feel. They were also able to share what plants were used for, and stories of their place. The villagers decided the priority of activities, which for them started with understanding the rattan as they wanted to get a rattan license to re-assert lost control for their forest. The government agency requires a plan based on inventory data. However, before the survey we talked with the cutters, and they drew a community map of rattan distribution in their forest. They ranked the micro catchments according to abundance, ranging from 1 to 5 and within each rank they assessed relative quality from highest to lowest and the type of rattan growing, whether large or small size. We designed a simple transect method to minimise edge errors and called it the snake transect. The survey data that the trained villagers collected related to size of rattan, species, regenerative stage and the pole length. It also related to their catchments and their forest classification system. They used the maps to ensure that they never surveyed the same place twice, and as their micro catchments were a natural unit, we ensured that at least every one was surveyed within the overall minimum survey density for NTFPs in the Philippines, the same used by government foresters. On analysing the data we found that the community map of rattan abundance correlated very well, and the community had data they could use to get their rattan data. We used their names for the species, all 25 of them which they identified using the same features used by professional botanists, only about 15 species are officially documented for that area.

We did not pay for their time, we just provided a days rice for their family. The villagers were the ones to decide who among them were the experts and would therefore lead research teams, they organised it so that all kinship groups were represented in the various rattan survey teams and they decided how much time they could give for this activity. They gave one day a week, consequently we

had several teams so that we could conduct three surveys a week. The survey took two years to complete.

The biodiversity surveys continued after the rattan survey had finished. The groups changed slightly as they also included hunters and those that knew the trees. They mapped the fauna distribution as traps. Each species has a specifically designed trap or method for capture and they do not put the traps in areas where they are not going to get the animals. So their symbols were traps and capture methods, not animals. Community mapping for the plants extended to medicinal plants, and all those plants used within their daily life, as well as the trees. We trained them, or rather, by this time the village team leaders were training the newcomers, and the method designed was a 3 Km vertical transect with a cluster of four quads coming off it every 50 meters. The transect related the trees to altitude and their forest classification system, the quads monitored all other plant species, as well as their regenerative capacities. We only managed about three of these in distinct horizontal forest transitions. Time was constrained by the time availability of the villagers.

The information they gathered was sufficient to confirm their indicator species, and forest classification system that related to altitude and species composition. It also provided them with data for a community forest management agreement that would provide them with security of tenure for their forest, which is nearly 3,000 hectares. With the women, the process was different because as their community map showed they had a different set of resources they used and used different areas of the forest. Common resources had been identified on their general map. They had no previous experience of resource depletion unlike the men, who saw the difference the loggers and cutters made to their forest resources. They had lost control of access to their forest when the government had given rattan and logging licenses to outsiders. We chose one resource, a sedge that was used for weaving mats and marketing. They identified areas on their map of their resources but they did not want to survey them, instead they cut the sedge in response to the market demand. They knew its 3 year regeneration cycle and felt they could just cut it. Soon market demand outstripped the sedge production, and then they realised they would have to plant more, so they would need to survey it. The point is we chose a robust resource for them to learn why they needed to survey, monitor and manage it, so that these skills could be used for other less robust species.

Things we did not do because we ran out of time and money, was to link locally chosen hunting limits to faunal regeneration capacities. With the introduction of the gun hunting methods had changed and we were only just beginning to start to get an understanding of hunting relations with animals and for them to think through what some of the consequences of over-hunting would be in terms of rattan and forest species regeneration. They knew the roles of various animals to forest species regeneration, but had not collectively considered consequences. Unfortunately we were also not able to train them in simple analysis techniques; many had to learn their numbers before they could do the documentation on the surveys.

Much of the data, stories and results from these surveys went into 6 books that taught their children how to read and write in their own dialect. They were arranged thematically so the results and stories went into either the book on culture or environment as part of their locally developed curriculum. I worked with a team of young but very capable Filipinos that knew the local dialect fluently and came from a variety of backgrounds, a biologist, agriculturalist and forester, at that time my speciality was land and water management.

This is the only place that this data was published because Environmental Science for Social Change, the organisation I worked for during this time, was not supported by the donor to publish. There was a hidden assumption from the donor that the only ones capable of designing methods and analysing data were the scientists at BCN Washington who had designed the original framework. 'Young Filipino scientists were not considered capable and certainly not villagers, some of which could not read or write very well'. We were just supposed to hand over our data and let Washington analyse for us. Needless to say, we refused to provide species lists, and raw data, only our analysis.