

**THE CENTRE FOR DEVELOPMENT STUDIES
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
FLINDERS UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA**

**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN THE
PHILIPPINES**

By

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**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the Master of Arts Degree
(Research)**

SEPTEMBER 2006

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ABSTRACT

Community participation takes place when community members act together as subjects. It is argued here that community participation empowers when community members take decisions, or negotiate an equitable share in making the decisions that affect them. However, since participation takes place within a network of power relations it is not necessarily empowering but can take a range of forms from enforcement to empowerment, whereby empowerment may involve not only willing cooperation, but also resistance to outsider project objectives. This thesis explores these issues through a study of how people in three Philippine upland communities participated in soil conservation and livelihood restoration projects initiated by three different NGOs.

The principal aim of the study was to identify and examine the changing discourses of development and participation held by the NGOs and by the members of the subject communities. The development discourses revolved around socio-ecology, described as the relationship between the culture and society of Filipino subsistence smallholders and the ecological units of their local environment. The failure of this existing socio-ecology under the pressure of increasing population density on a limited upland resource base was the stimulus for change in the study communities. The thesis compares the NGOs' practice of engaging with the communities with their discourses of participation, and examines the importance of the relationships between the NGOs, government agencies and the communities for the success of the projects.

The study identified several key factors in the empowerment of subject groups. Firstly, the need for a discourse that enables them to embark on socio-ecological change. For the Filipino communities examined here, the discourse of sustainability was validated by enabling the restoration of their livelihoods. Secondly, outside agencies, either NGO or government, may be needed to catalyse community change processes. Thirdly, the subjects need leaders who have the vision and skills to work for the desired livelihood and social development outcomes. Training activities of livelihood restoration proved highly significant in expanding women's political space that led to opportunities for them to take up leadership, as well as giving capacity-building training for existing and future leaders which helped to equalize gender relations between men and women.

Fourthly, the policy and program initiatives of host government agencies can synergize with community and partner agency activities at several levels, including resourcing and building the capacities of leadership.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. Hayward". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "R".

Signed:

Date: 22 September 2006

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My deepest thanks are due to my supervisor Dr Susanne Schech at the Centre for Development Studies for her unwavering encouragement, critique and great patience. Further I thank and commend the interest, dedication and cooperation of all the staff at the Mindanao Baptist Rural Life Centre, Central Mindanao University and the Mag-uugmad Foundation for their arrangements, moderation, discussions and feedback which have all contributed to this study. My fieldwork travel and research costs were supported by grants from the Flinders University of South Australia. Finally, I want to express my appreciation and admiration for the thoughtfulness, candour and wit of the many men and women of the communities of Bacungan, Columbagon and Tabayag who joined in the discussions which were the basis of the study.