

Sustainable and Inclusive Landscape Governance Program

ANCHORING ON LANDSCAPE GOVERNANCE

The Philippines, with 7,641 islands and over 100 million Filipinos, is positioned to act towards sustainable and inclusive development. With communities of different cultures, and organizations of varying advocacies and sometimes overlapping mandates, there is an impending need for collaborative goal-setting.

Landscape governance as a framework pushes us beyond boundaries. It encourages us to ask:

- How might governance look like if we honor ecosystem or natural boundaries, more than administrative boundaries?
- How can landscape stakeholders be part of decision-making, and work together with mandated agencies?
- How can Filipinos better understand our ecosystems, and align our development goals with their capacities?

DIALOGUES: AN APPROACH TO LANDSCAPE GOVERNANCE

Discourses on landscape governance are not new, but as time passes, resources get depleted and populations grow at an exponential rate. These discourses must be enough for people to see their different development agenda, and find ways to work towards common sustainable pathways.

With this goal, Forest Foundation Philippines and Tropenbos International developed the Sustainable and Inclusive Landscape Governance (SILG) program. The SILG was formalized through a memorandum of understanding on March 7, 2017.

The program focuses on three focal landscapes: Sierra Madre, Palawan, and Bukidnon-Misamis Oriental. As a collaborative program, it also aims to build on landscape experiences and champion best practices. It also intends to develop methodologies and tools that can help landscape stakeholders co-create and co-implement landscape governance activities.



LOOKING AT THE LANDSCAPE-LEVEL DIALOGUES

Since SILG's inception, landscape-level dialogues have been conducted to help stakeholders discuss specific issues, and provide opportunities for various sectors to agree on common positions. The dialogues allowed various groups to be more open for discussion and be more precise with their advocacies.

SIERRA MADRE

To provide opportunities for more in-depth dialogues about the Sierra Madre landscape, the discussions were designed to cater to differences in local dynamics of the landscape — Northern and Southern Sierra Madre. This was necessary because most participants found it difficult to connect the issues of the different provinces involved and to think of inter-province solutions. Most sectors are used to working within their boundaries, without much consideration of the dynamics in nearby areas.

For Northern Sierra Madre, the most pressing issues are land conversion, water provisioning function of watersheds, and pending infrastructure projects. The dialogue allowed stakeholders to discuss lacking institutional arrangements on land use and zoning, which they identify as the prime reason for agricultural expansion to forest areas. Meanwhile, the most pressing concern for Southern Sierra Madre is the construction of Kaliwa Dam. Most groups advocate not to push through with the project because of community displacements and projected flooding hazards.

PALAWAN

The Palawan landscape dialogue focused on best practices on ecotourism, the Palawan Knowledge Platform, challenges in proper land conversion, and the pending division of the province.

Palawan's communities take pride in their hyperlocal and sustainable tourism mechanisms because of their income-generating features, as well as their contribution to mangrove conservation and promotion of conservation among tourists. However, stakeholders expressed concern about land conversion from forest to oil palm plantations and major road lanes. They are also concerned about the possible adverse impacts of dividing Palawan into three provinces.

BUKIDNON-MISAMIS ORIENTAL

The landscape dialogue in Bukidnon-Misamis Oriental inspired the co-creation of their governance concept. The participants labeled their approach as lifescapes, where governance as a process anchors on people's knowledge, lived experiences, and aspirations for the landscape.

The discussions highlighted the payment for ecosystem services (PES) mechanism, a project pioneered within the landscape. While the PES mechanism has been implemented for years in certain watersheds, communities question some recent proposals, because they want to know the basis for the monetization of ecosystem services.

The discussions also included the landscape's mapping efforts, which helped organizations spatially identify new land conversion areas and other threatened areas. Like the other landscapes, Bukidnon-Misamis Oriental also faces challenges of land conversion, as forests are turned to pineapple, sugarcane, and oil palm plantations. Other topics discussed include additional projects and activities, such as the Indigenous People's governance systems and youth involvement in conservation efforts.

LOOKING AT THE LANDSCAPE FROM A NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

In August 2019, stakeholders of the aforementioned landscapes, together with those from Metro Manila, gathered at the National Environmental Dialogue to envision probable futures of the landscapes.

The National Environmental Dialogue enabled stakeholders to co-create strategies that may address landscape-specific issues, such as the increasing rate of land conversion in Sierra Madre, the possible co-management approaches for Palawan, and strengthening IP community inclusion in landscape governance in Bukidnon-Misamis Oriental.

BRINGING COMPLEXITY TO THE TABLE: SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE LANDSCAPES AS AN APPROACH

The challenge in having multi-level and multi-sector dialogues is that groups and organizations bring varying development agenda to the table. These differences can either create a greater divide or inspire synergies among the groups. The SILG advocates for different landscape governance approaches to help different sectors answer crucial questions on balancing modern development and conservation, instead of choosing between the two.

During the dialogues, the stakeholders shared stories of how they better understood the complex nature of environmental problems. The sustainable and inclusive landscapes approach is an invitation to look at the existing dynamics of landscapes, and the reality of the problems each landscape faces.

Apart from these varying intentions, forest areas are also governed by different regulatory mechanisms, as well as different groups and communities.

Another factor to consider is that ecosystems are under both natural and anthropogenic drivers of changes. As these uncontrolled interventions happen, problems in forest management arise. Conservation groups now find it more difficult to lobby for forest protection as they confront big organizations claiming authority over lands.

This reality on the ground is what brought the 2nd National Environmental Dialogue in 2020 to life. Its main aim was to bring people with varying perspectives, intentions, and advocacies together to come up with visions for probable futures. The hope was that these groups may envision futures grounded on the pillars of landscape governance, where there is a sense of place, multi-stakeholder participation, sustainable economic development, and proper management. The National Dialogue provided opportunities for stakeholders to come together and rethink the pathways they want to pursue.

To bridge the gaps between the uncertainties and the envisioned futures of convergent landscape governance, participants put forward a number of critical, and integrated pathways: conservation, policy reform, livelihoods, baseline establishment, advocacy, capacity building, and youth involvement.

These visions serve as a unifying platform for participants from different sectors to discuss their varying development agendas. In doing so, they realized that their agendas are the same, but that they fail to synergize because they leave little room for multi-stakeholder planning and implementation.

NAVIGATING CONVERSATIONS TO ACTION: FROM VISIONS TO PRACTICE, FROM DIALOGUES TO OUTCOMES

The 2018-2020 dialogues have been instrumental in bringing stakeholders together and in inspiring initial governance arrangements that aim to build landscape approaches. With the GLA 2.0 SILG program from 2021 to 2025, the focus is to facilitate and capacitate stakeholders in the landscape to design and implement Forest Landscape Restoration (FLR) in the Palawan and Sierra Madre landscapes, and at the national level. Ultimately, the program aims to contribute to the desired GLA outcomes of:

Pathway A
Inclusive governance and sustainable management of forested landscapes

Pathway B
Avoided deforestation and climate smart practices by government and private sector

Pathway C
Safe participation in social movements