

## Why Eco-governance?

One of the key ingredients of the Philippine's strategy for sustainable development lies in the localization of environmental and resource management initiatives at the local level. In this context, the key stakeholders and actors to achieving localization are the local government units and their local communities. The country's MTPDP has identified the strong role to be played by LGUs and local communities in achieving sustainable development and poverty alleviation. The country's Philippine Agenda 21 has clearly identified the key role played by LGUs and communities in the operationalisation of sustainable development initiatives at the local levels. Through the LGUs and local communities working in partnership and governance arrangements sustainable management of local resources may be achieved.

The Local Government Code (RA 7160) provided the legal framework for eco-governance to LGUs and local communities. Subsequent laws expanding LGU roles and mandates over local resources and environmental systems further strengthened this. Laws such as the NIPAS Act, Fisheries Code and Ecological Solid Waste Management Act expanded and refined the LGUs mandate on managing their local resources in various eco-systems levels, i.e. coastal/marine, protected areas, mineral resources, solid waste, wildlife, upland/forestry and urban ecology.

The effective management and governance of these resources does not end with the passage of the necessary legislation and policy environment identifying and pinpointing responsibility and accountability in the management of these resources. Effective management and governance of these resources and eco-systems require a multi-level and multi-disciplinary approach and processes notwithstanding the necessary political will to pursue these mandates. Likewise, effective and sustainable eco-governance is a continuing learning process that engages LGUs, local communities, civil society groups, private sector organizations in a dynamic process of learning and doing.

Over the past decade, many foreign and donor-assisted projects have poured resources to support the decentralization process and the piloting and experimentation of new modalities and approaches to managing local resources in the various eco-systems. These projects have achieved notable project successes and experiences that provided not only capacity building and technical assistance to LGUs and local communities but also necessary policy reforms, management modalities and resource mobilization arrangements.

However, these experiences and lessons have yet to achieve a critical mass of practice and localization to generate a strong foundation for effective eco-governance at the local level. Information and exchange of innovations and experiences achieved in eco-governance at various eco-systems have yet to be popularized much more adapted and localized by a potent number of LGU and community practitioners. Continuing technical assistance, skills upgrading and capacity building for LGUs and local communities demand a more specialized and focused skills towards effective management of their specific eco-systems. These include establishment and development of local environmental benchmarks and indicators, resource use and planning parameters, local allocation decision-making mechanisms.

Similarly, limitations in LGU finances and resources to sustain eco-governance initiatives have restricted the potential for replication and scaling-up of successful eco-governance approaches by LGUs and local communities, beyond existing community/barangay level activities. At the same time, national and local policy inconsistencies remain in the forestry/upland, coastal/marine and protected area/biodiversity systems that hamper full realization of governance initiatives in these sectors.

But despite these limitations, effective governance of the environment and natural resources largely remain in the hands of LGUs and their local constituencies. Global and local experiences have acknowledge the critical importance of LGUs and communities in the effective

and sustainable management of local resources and the environment. Thus, sustainable eco-governance will remain a relevant part of the country's drive towards delivering effective governance to local people as well as sustaining initiatives towards improving the quality of life of people. In the end, eco-governance is meant to push further the operationalisation and localization of sustainable human development initiatives in the effective management of local resources and the environment through local institutional structures and stakeholders led by LGUs and local communities.