

Embracing complexity



Today's environmental issues and challenges call us to act now, and these situations also compel us to embrace complexity. Landscapes in the Philippine are not simple issues of land use. They are not a straightforward challenge of changing cultures. Nor are they simply threatened by the changing climate. These issues, no matter how different in nature, are intertwined. But it is only when landscape stakeholders acknowledge that their problems are complex, can they start thinking of pathways that could provide them with options to address and manage issues at a landscape level.



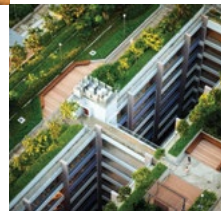
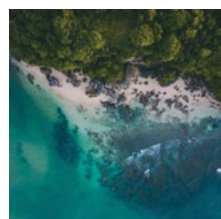
One facet of embracing complexity is to acknowledge that different landscapes have varying local situations, available resources, political contexts, and problems. The National Environmental Dialogue (NED) in July 2018 provided a space for stakeholders from various sectors and levels to discuss the current situation of our country's landscapes, and what we are doing on different levels to address these realities.



NED 2018 opened discussions on eight thematic areas:



1. The forest and climate interface
2. Water and agriculture
3. Sustainable cities
4. Integrated coastal resource management
5. Green bills and the environment code
6. Ancestral domains, indigenous peoples and traditional knowledge
7. Multi-stakeholder management
8. Communities, livelihoods and sustainable enterprises



Thematic areas: Issues and recommendations

As a starting point, NED 2018 provides an overview of the landscape thematic areas, and recommended actions to be taken by stakeholders.



Forest and climate interface

Forest landscapes are continuously threatened by extreme conditions brought about by climate change, coupled with pressures and drivers of change brought about by communities in forest areas. In this light, participants of NED 2018 recommended a fast tracking for the passage of green bills, and to create a forest and climate change alliance.



Water and agriculture

The Philippines continues to rely on the agriculture sector, and there was a clear call to address the challenge of developing mechanisms to sustainably supply the nutritional demands of the growing population. Four action points were proposed: (i) use research and science-based information to develop practices, (ii) create a knowledge management platform, (iii) review the environmental impact assessment process, and (iv) start working together.



Sustainable cities

As cities continue to grow, and become home to ever more inhabitants, it is imperative that (i) national agencies and stakeholders work together to plan their development path, (ii) the government puts in place a comprehensive review for issuing permits for green buildings and renewable energy projects, and (iii) invest in research especially on hybrid energy schemes for small islands.



Integrated coastal resource management

Coastal areas catch the impacts of other activities in the landscape. NED 2018 participants suggested the following action points to start working on conserving our coastal resources: (i) ensure that legal instruments are in place, (ii) formalize national and local organizational structures, (iii) increase multi-stakeholder participation, and (iv) continuous capacity building platforms and financing mechanisms.



Green bills and the environment code

Having green bills and environment codes is one thing, but it is another to get these legal mechanisms implemented properly in different local settings. As such, NED participants deemed it crucial to: (i) Identify enabling mechanisms already in place, (ii) reshape policies and bills with the help of academic institutions, and (iii) have regular multi-stakeholder dialogues to advance discourses on green bills.



Ancestral domains, indigenous peoples and traditional knowledge

Indigenous peoples offer critical testimonies of how living in harmony with the environment can provide sustainable mechanisms for both humans and nature. However, with current pressures and drivers, indigenous communities now face challenges in living in their environments and using traditional practices. As such, it is necessary that: (i) development and sustainable plans are in place to support indigenous communities, (ii) capacity building platforms are provided to indigenous communities especially to support increasing confidence to engage in discourses, and (iii) enabling mechanisms are in place to secure the tenurial status of indigenous communities.



Multi-stakeholder management

Working together is required to move the needed commitments and actions in the necessary directions. No matter how hard working together can be, it is a major pillar to securing sustainable and healthy landscapes. To foster a nurturing environment for multi-stakeholder management, NED 2018 participants recommended the following: (i) ensure legally-binding agreements are in place, (ii) conduct integrated and science-based planning and programming, (iii) devise sustainable financing mechanisms, and (iv) continuously expand different networks



Communities, livelihoods and sustainable enterprises

Environments can thrive on their own, but people who live in and around them depend on resources to sustain their ways of living. In this light, NED 2018 put forward possible mechanisms to ensure that livelihoods are sustained without compromising the quality of the environment. These were: (i) conduct resource assessments and put in place permit issuance protocols, (ii) conduct research and trainings on branding and marketing, (iii) expand networks, and (iv) involve landscape stakeholders in discussing option for improving community livelihoods.

Working together to rethink ways to address complex landscape issues

The discussions for each thematic area provided both national and local contexts of landscape efforts, key players, and issues. Emerging landscape challenges included a: (i) lack of concrete and proactive multi-stakeholder platforms and mechanisms, (ii) need to localize policies, strategies, and plans, and (iii) need to tap research to enhance lobbying and advocacy activities and provide a solid basis for green bills. Each of these issues varies, depending on the local situation, but looking at them offers insights on how at a landscape level, there seems to be patterns in the aspects and issues that stakeholders overlook over the course of time.

Landscape governance as an approach is not at all new. Some institutions call it a 'watershed management' approach, others call it 'ridge-to-reef management'. Landscape governance emphasizes the creation of open and regular spaces for stakeholders from various level to come together and talk about their landscape issues, discuss in depth how these came about, and think together how they can address them.

Landscape governance puts forward five strategies to address landscape problems.

- (i) Nurturing multi-level stakeholder management.
- (ii) Facilitating landscape planning from forests to coastal areas.
- (iii) Implementing landscape-level research and programs.
- (iv) Creating integrated information systems for enhanced learning and communication.
- (v) Encouraging learning from landscape experiences, and translating information and knowledge to concrete environmental management strategies and practices.

Currently, landscapes in the Philippines can benefit from the many best practices that already exist at local level. Cases to learn from include local stories of community-based sustainable tourism, community-based natural resource management, and indigenous knowledge systems and practices.

Climate change, although seen as a threat, can also be used as an opportunity for landscapes. With a 'new normal' presented by climate change, national and local agencies can start working together to revise development and land use plans. This revisiting of opportunities can provide insights on how past practices have not been effective, and what can be done in the coming years to make improvements.

At this point in the process of landscape governance, it is imperative to emphasize the need for solid and proactive partnerships and working mechanisms among national government agencies, academic institutions, civil society organizations and local communities.

