



# **Devolution of forest management and the Alangan Mangyan women**

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## **Summary**

This paper is divided into six sections. Section 1 presents employment of women in the agricultural and rural sectors. Section 2 briefly discusses the study site, Barangay Paitan, while Section 3 traces the evolution of forest management in Paitan. The productive and reproductive roles of women are discussed in Section 4. Section 5 presents the impact of devolution on women's political, social, and economic well-being. The final section summarises the findings and presents the recommendations. This summary seeks to cover the salient points and the commentary focuses on Forest Management and Rural Women's Employment.

It is essential to the understanding of the author's perspective to know that her definition of devolution goes beyond the local government definition or local government code (LGC) that pertains in the Philippines. It is based on a wider definition found in the literature and is taken to mean the shift of power away from the State to local communities and by means of which effective resource management is a result of proximity to the source of decisions. Hence the study examines whether the State propelled devolution policy has empowered women politically and brought about social and economic improvements.

The study took place among the Alangan people of Paitan, an area in the lower foothills of Naujan, Oriental Mindoro, where the area slopes steeply into the Halcon mountain range. Figure 1 gives the location of the study area. The area has a high infant mortality rate, attributed by women to the young age at which girls are married, but which is compounded by the lack of basic health services and poor hygiene. Superstition promotes reliance on traditional health practices. Living accommodation is a one-roomed hut,



Figure 1: Map of Luzon, The Philippines



raised off the ground on stilts, and made of bamboo and cogon grass. Common crops are coffee, bananas, and coconuts, although other crops are grown; pigs, goats, and poultry are common livestock. This brief will cover first the findings on the evolution of forest management, rural women's employment, and, finally, the impact of state-promoted devolution in the Philippines.

### **Forest Management**

The area has a strong church presence and the Roman Catholic church has been active in the area since the 1950s. It was this presence that brought the Alangan together into a settlement, helped with introduction of new crops, health services, education participation in the market economy, and so forth. Although the Alangan complied to all this, the basis of this compliance was that they continue with their tribal laws and traditions. The church was also instrumental in helping the Alangan understand the state requirements for devolution in terms of forest and land resources. Nevertheless the tribal laws prevailed and thus, in Paitan, there has been a *de facto* devolution running concomitantly with the *de jure* devolution introduced by the state. The researcher sees this as one reason for the adjustments the Alangan made and their opening up of spaces for forest and forest resource management. A brief



Plate 1: An Alangan Mangyan house

history of the process is given in Box 1. Plate 1 is a picture of a typical dwelling.

#### Box 1: History of forest management in Paitan

Before 1950, state intervention consisted of surveying forest boundaries, and part of the ancestral domain became a reservation, subdividing ancestral land. The Bureau of Lands issued land patents, to non-Mangyans mainly, by 1955. The local people protested and in the 1980s, the government granted Forest Occupancy Permits with individual stewardship contracts for 25 years to Paitan residents. In 1987, the SANAMA (Samahan ng Mga Nagkakaisang Alangan Mangyan, Inc.) was organised and registered as a legal entity, recognised by the government. It engaged in reforestation, established a rattan plantation, and awarded rattan cutting licenses. In 1990, SANAMA applied for and received a Community Forest Stewardship Agreement under Integrated Social Forestry provisions. As an Indigenous Cultural Community (ICC), the Alangan applied for and received a Certification of Ancestral Domain Claims (CADC) in 1997. Two years later, they applied for a Certificate of Ancestral Domain. At the time of the research, they were still waiting to hear about the status of their application.

### ***Rural Women's Employment***

As in most Asian countries, in the Philippines as a whole, women in the agricultural and rural sectors are heavily involved as unpaid family workers. From 1998 to 2001, the proportion of women working in this category was more than twice that of men employed in the agriculture, forestry, and fishery sector. But, as in other Asian countries, women's work is not considered productive because they receive no payment.

There is a marked division of labour in what is known in the literature as reproductive work: reproductive work refers to household activities, and here it is seen that women bear a disproportionate amount of the load for fuel and fodder collection cooking, child care, and health care. Women contribute equally (compared with men) in terms of farm work, but weeding, harvesting,

drying, storing, and marketing are predominantly looked after by women. Besides the crops already mentioned, there are varieties of crops for subsistence (cassava, yam, and upland rice for example) and different varieties of fruit (banana and rambutan, for example) Crops grown for purely commercial purposes are strictly looked after by men. Traditionally they are swidden farmers, but following the introduction of a church mission in the 1950s there is more settled agriculture in terms of practice.

The women are industrious and make plates out of vines and various types of rattan basketwork for fruit marketing and for gift items. In the 1990s they also began to make certain items of furniture and the nuns (Servants of the Holy Spirit) running the local missionary have taught them beadwork for small jewellery items. The nuns have also taught them food processing.

It is by and large a subsistence economy and women are not heavily clothed or adorned, wearing simple skirts and wrap-around blouses made from pounded leaves. Nevertheless the women are looking at different economic options and introducing new products to exchange for cash in the wider market.

## Conclusion

By and large the state-initiated devolution had no impact on women per se. As an ethnic group, however, the general solidarity among the Alangan and other Mangyan tribes enabled them to establish a legitimate presence in traditional tribal areas. So, insofar as government and church interventions enabled women's capacities there has been a certain amount of human resource development. But there has been no change in the political empowerment of women, and by that no positive influences on their economic or social well-being. The marginal changes that have occurred have been brought about by the church mission and NGO groups (the Upland NGO Assistance Committee-UNAC) in the area; and these had been assisting them prior to government interventions. In terms of economics, the one glimmer is a 25-year rattan concession granted by the government which enables the production of handicrafts. Training is carried out in a Livelihood Centre which is part of a Low Income Upland Community Project (LIUCP) that takes care of infrastructural projects mainly (suspension bridges, rural access roads, bridges, and so on), but the main training given for women was dress-making, and attendance was negligible. Hence there are really no specific programmes targeting women.

Reasons for poor impact include the pertinent fact that devolution was applied across the board, and no adjustments were made to the special characteristics of different areas. In other areas where devolution occurred women were very visible in reforestation, but these women received incentives and compensation for their labour. The Alangan, on the other hand, are very



ethno-centred and cling to their traditional mechanisms, which are male dominated. In order to improve the situation, the author recommends the following.

1. Gender-disaggregated data pertaining to forests should be collected and analysed to determine the needs, attitudes, aspirations, and perceptions of both men and women before formulating, planning, and executing forestry programmes.
2. Women's access to education, extension, training, credit and appropriate technology should be improved.

Women should have access to information as well as education to improve their knowledge, skills, and opportunities for making decisions affecting their development and welfare.

