

# Community-based natural resource conflict management: the case of watershed planning in Metro Cebu, the Philippines

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## SUMMARY

Hafner, Schlarb and Pinili focus on resource and policy conflicts over the management of watersheds and water supply in metropolitan Cebu in the Philippines. As the city rapidly grows, managing its water supplies has emerged as an urgent issue. Conflicts have arisen over the city's attempt to control land use in three nearby watersheds. The case study explores the efforts of the Cebu Uniting for Sustainable Water Foundation (CUSW), Inc., a local civil society coalition seeking to address this conflict through participatory planning by multiple stakeholders.

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## GUIDING QUESTIONS

### KEY ISSUES

- What are the unique challenges to expanding stakeholder participation when both urban and rural interests are involved in conflicts over shared natural resources, such as in the Metro Cebu case?
- How can a conflict management process bridge wide geographical, cultural, political and socio-economic divisions among key stakeholders?

### CONTEXT

- How are the benefits and costs of watershed management in Metro Cebu currently distributed between watershed residents and the main consumers of water - urban residents and businesses?
- What role have overlapping jurisdictions and policy disputes among regulatory agencies played in Metro Cebu's watershed planning conflicts?

### CONFLICT BACKGROUND OR HISTORY

- Why is there a need for more reliable data on ecological change?
- Is it possible for stakeholders with a wide range of knowledge to arrive at an acceptable database for planning?

### CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND RESOLUTION PROCESSES

- What were the advantages and limitations of coalition building and water resource planning as conflict management strategies?
- How can local movements create a balanced role for themselves as strong advocates for political and policy changes, while also seeking to manage conflict?

### CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND RESOLUTION OUTCOMES

- How can a conflict management process bridge wide geographical, cultural, political and socio-economic divisions?
- How can a coalition such as CUSW engage government agencies to improve an unfavourable regulatory climate?
- What are potential alternatives in Metro Cebu for moving past the deadlock in planning for watershed management?

### LESSONS LEARNED

- How can CUSW rebuild strained relationships and overcome policy obstacles?
- Given the criticisms of CUSW and its connections to political elites, how might it better position itself to play a facilitator role?



## KEY ISSUES

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### Introduction and themes

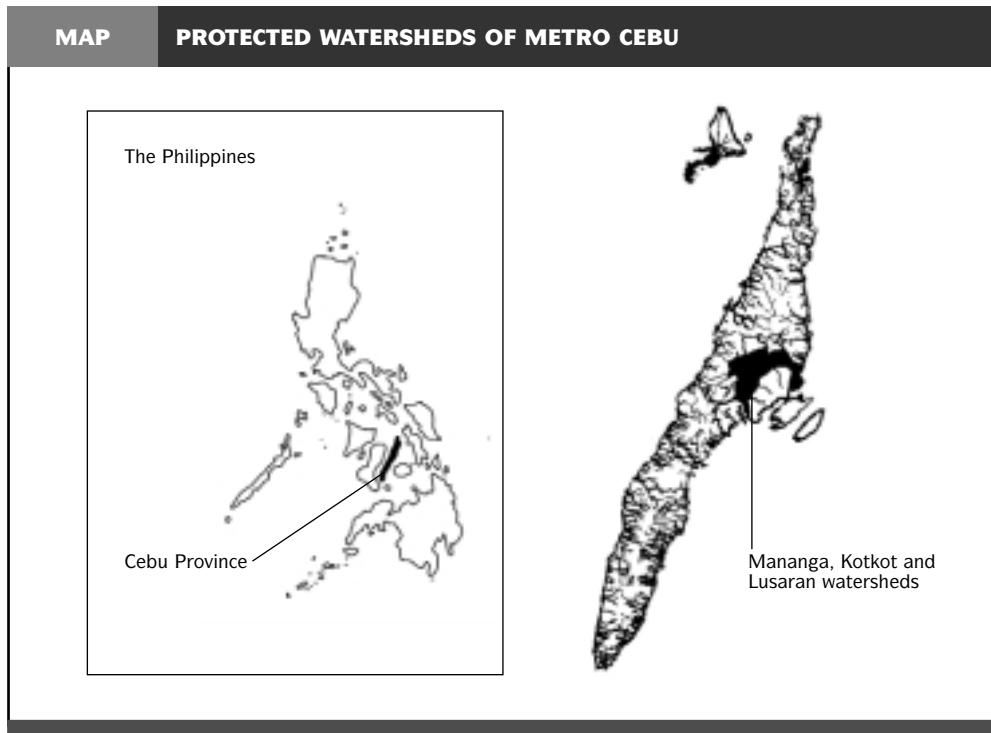
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This case study focuses on resource and policy conflicts over the management of watersheds and water supply in metropolitan Cebu, the Philippines, or “Metro Cebu”.<sup>1</sup> Located on the island of Cebu in the central Philippines, Metro Cebu is fast approaching the limits of its land and water resource base as a result of economic growth, population influx and industrial development. Rapid urban growth and persistent rural poverty have further increased the complexity and intensity of natural resource conflicts. After the detection in 1974 of saltwater intrusion into coastal aquifers, Metro Cebu’s main water source, fears of a water crisis escalated. Many policy-makers and sectors of the public consider water supply to be the most urgent resource issue facing the metropolis.

This case study explores the community-based natural resource conflict management (CBNRCM) strategies of Cebu Uniting for Sustainable Water Foundation (CUSW), Inc., a local civil society coalition (see Box). In its brochure, CUSW describes itself as a “citizen’s initiative and a multisectoral movement for water resources management and watershed protection”. CUSW has been uniquely successful in the Philippine context at getting multiple stakeholders together to address complicated natural resource conflicts substantively. However, as a CBNRCM effort its approach may have serious limitations over the long term.

CUSW’s approach to CBNRCM combines two thrusts: coalition-building and land-use planning. Its experience to date highlights several themes: (1) the facilitating role in convening stakeholders and mediating conflicts; (2) effective stakeholder participation in collaborative processes; and (3) the challenges of implementing inclusive resource planning on a large scale.

1. Metro Cebu is not an official administrative unit, but is generally understood to include Cebu City, two adjacent cities and nine municipalities.



CUSW plays a dual role of facilitating public participation in, and lobbying for, integrated resources planning as a mechanism for mediating conflicts. As an “insider facilitator”, CUSW creates a forum, convenes stakeholders and attempts to mediate resource conflicts (Nacario-Castro, 1997: p. 30). CUSW builds a coalition by convening many interest groups around water resources issues and demanding greater public participation in official policy making. The CUSW role of insider facilitator contrasts with other approaches that rely on a neutral, third-party facilitator or mediator.

CUSW also has clear advocacy goals around water resources management. It seeks a secure, safe and adequate water supply for all sectors and stakeholders in Metro Cebu without privileging the interests of specific groups. Since it was founded, CUSW has openly called for an integrated water resources planning process as the best means to achieve “sustainable water”. Its members believe that an integrated resource and land-use planning process will “help rationalize different interests and serve as a mediation-conflict resolution mechanism” (Nacario-Castro, 1997: p. 16). However, CUSW’s involvement in advocacy has also significantly limited its ability to resolve natural resource conflicts.

<b>BOX CEBU UNITING FOR SUSTAINABLE WATER</b>	
<b>Founded</b>	25 January 1995 by the non-governmental organization (NGO) coalition <i>Kaabag sa Sugbu</i>
<b>Mission</b>	The achievement of a holistic approach towards the protection, management and development of Cebu's water resources including, but not limited to, central Cebu's watersheds and coastal aquifers
<b>Membership (2001)</b>	138 organizations and 82 individuals, in 23 sectoral groups
<b>Organizational structure</b>	General Assembly, Water Resources Management Coordinating Council (sectoral representatives), Board of Trustees, Working Committees and Executive Staff (Executive Director and seven paid staff)
<b>Committees</b>	Education, Advocacy and Media Liaison; Special Projects; Development Administration; Monitoring and Evaluation; Research and Planning
<b>Core operating budget (2000)</b>	Approximately US\$70 000, not including contracts and project funds
<b>Funding sources</b>	Foreign foundations, government grants and contracts, membership dues

The consequences of a dual facilitator-advocate role for conflict management are highlighted by CUSW's first major effort to integrate conflict management into a formal process of land-use planning: the Cebu City Land Use Committee (CCLUC). As a direct result of CUSW lobbying and collaboration, the Cebu City Mayor established CCLUC to develop an interim plan for land use and development in the 34 rural *barangays*, or villages, of Cebu City. The two-year planning process (1997-1999) involved CUSW, the Cebu City Government, national government agencies and civic groups. The planning area covered most of the three watersheds that are protected under national legislation.

## CONTEXT

### The context of watershed conflict

Rapid urban growth on a limited resource base characterizes the context of water resources management in Metro Cebu. Since conditions on the island do not favour agriculture, Cebu City developed as a regional trading hub around its central location and sheltered port. The densely populated urban area of Metro Cebu is currently confined to a narrow strip of coastline that quickly gives way to mountainous, inland areas. The upland areas have thin soils, minimal forest cover and heavy and irregular rainfall (see Table).

TABLE	STATISTICS FOR CEBU CITY, THE PHILIPPINES
Average annual temperature	24 °C
Average annual precipitation	1 600 mm (lowland), 1 800 mm (upland)
Average annual humidity	76 percent
Temperature and elevation	-0.6 °C for each 100 m elevation
Hottest average temperatures	Approx. 28.3 °C (April to June)
Highest average rainfall	Approx. 200 mm/month (July and Sept.)
Highly sloped area*	70 percent
Population in highly sloped areas	25 percent of total (1995)
Rural population growth rate	4.4 percent per annum (1990–1995)
*Based on <i>barangays</i> at least partially above 500 m in elevation and with at least 40 percent of their area covered in slopes above 17 percent.	

Sources: CCLUC-TWG, 1998; Flieger and Cusi, 1998.

Although the martial law period in the Philippines from 1972 to 1981 suffocated economic development in Metro Cebu, the local economy has boomed since the early 1990s. Cebu's political and business leaders have successfully attracted trade and investment to support industrial growth. At approximately 1.4 million people, Metro Cebu is currently the most populous and fastest-growing urban

area outside of the Philippine capital, Manila. Despite this rapid growth, long-standing problems associated with urbanization and rural poverty persist.

Business, political and civic leaders widely agree that addressing future shortages in the supply of potable water is critical to future economic development. Currently, groundwater pumped from coastal aquifers is Metro Cebu's main water source. Because the local water utility, the Metro Cebu Water District (MCWD), can only meet 30 percent of total water demand, groundwater from private wells supplies the balance of total urban water demand. Unregulated groundwater pumping and reduced recharge resulting from urbanization have caused saltwater intrusion into coastal aquifers. If growing demand cannot be met by other water sources, the aquifer faces irreversible harm. Recent estimates point to a water deficit in 2020, even if all planned water supply projects are operational by 2015 (David *et al.*, 1998). Local water shortages seem inevitable unless MCWD regulates coastal wells and upgrades distribution systems. A water shortage in the near future remains the main motive for calls to protect the three inland watersheds – the Mananga, Kotkot and Lusaran – that could provide future sources of water for Metro Cebu.

Water supply, water quality and distribution issues vary widely among populations in Metro Cebu. Rural households get water primarily from undeveloped, seasonal springs that have high levels of biological contamination.<sup>2</sup> In urban areas, private wells serve commercial and industrial establishments and wealthier residential subdivisions. Poor, urban neighbourhoods are typically served by a communal water tap or by water vendors. Consequently, poorer households pay three to ten times more for water than residential customers using MCWD or private wells (Largo, Inocencio and David, 1998). CUSW addresses water quality and distribution issues through an active "urban poor" sectoral group and plans for rural water supply projects. The disparities in water quality and water access remain issues that are secondary to CUSW's main emphasis on watershed protection.



2. MCWD serves only portions of three of Cebu City's 24 rural *barangays* (CCLUC-TWG, 1998).



*Cebu watershed (Photo by J. Hafner)*

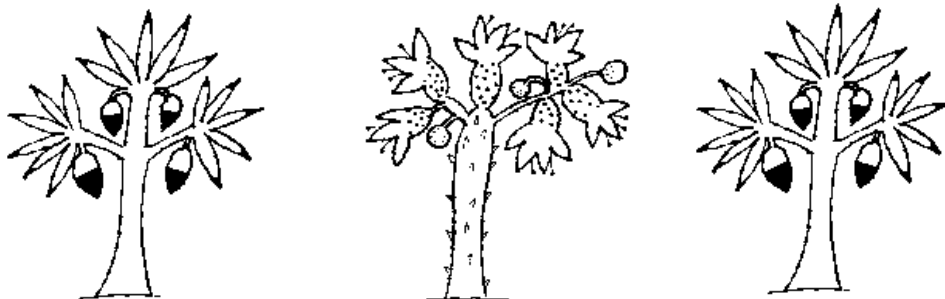
Opposing positions on the development of watershed resources are highly polarized and each position is supported by a national policy. The 1992 National Integrated Protected Area System (NIPAS) Act is biodiversity conservation legislation that provides the basis for watershed protection policies that local experts believe could maximize the quality and quantity of water for future dams. Despite innovative provisions for local management, early NIPAS implementation by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) retains aspects of the Philippines' past centralized natural resource policy. Local governments, landowners, farmers and business interests oppose the emphasis on watershed protection and its effects on livelihoods and property claims. They oppose NIPAS coverage of the watersheds based on a 1991 Local Government Code that devolved many government responsibilities to the local level. Conflicting administrative boundaries, property claims and resource access rights further complicate the local policy context for water resources management. CUSW believes resource planning can resolve many conflicts between policies and basic interests.



## CONFLICT BACKGROUND OR HISTORY

The Mananga, Kotkot and Lusaran watersheds have been legally protected since they were first declared “critical” to water supply in the early 1990s.<sup>3</sup> By that time, urban expansion and road improvement had transformed the uplands of Metro Cebu. The construction of the Transcentral Highway along the island’s mountainous spine intensified migration, settlement, land speculation and commercial development in the uplands. Overall, these developments are welcome and encouraged by most local governments, rural residents and landowners. Groups allied with CUSW fear that farming practices and continued development degrades the watersheds and endangers current and future water supplies. Localized evidence to support these fears is visible in soil erosion on agricultural fields, landslides, tree cutting and contaminated springs. However, local officials have disputed many of these claims. There remains a need for more reliable data on ecological change, especially regarding the landscape-scale effects of different land uses on water yields, stream sedimentation, toxic contamination and hydrological processes.

Against a national backdrop of water crisis and approaching El Niño droughts, tensions over watershed and water-related conflicts in Metro Cebu boiled over in 1994. The media and parts of civil society attacked local officials for complacency about the water situation. Controversies related to the protected watersheds also erupted, such as controversial real estate projects, inaccurate watershed maps and the dismantling of a semi-official watershed agency. CUSW was formed during this turbulent period of public controversy.



3. Administratively, central Cebu’s three watersheds are classified as two protected areas: the Mananga Watershed Forest Reserve and the Kotkot-Lusaran Watershed Forest Reserve. In addition, there are two protected national parks.

## CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND RESOLUTION PROCESSES

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CUSW organizers did not originally found the organization to resolve resource conflicts, but in retrospect they consider the establishment of the coalition itself a conflict management method. The empowerment goals and participatory tools developed within the Philippines' community development field are consistent with existing CBNRCM approaches. Therefore, as key members of CUSW learned of CBNRCM principles and tools, the organization integrated them into coalition building and water resources planning.



*Focus group  
(Photo by  
M. Schlarb)*

### Coalition building

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In December 1994, a Cebuano non-governmental organization (NGO) network, *Kaabag sa Sugbu* (Support of Cebu), met to address interrelated concerns over water scarcity, development in the watersheds and the displacement of upland residents. *Kaabag sa Sugbu* was especially alarmed by the dismantling of the Mananga Watershed Development Authority (MWDA), a multisectoral body established in 1989 to coordinate development in the Mananga watershed. Participants created CUSW as a mechanism for establishing a technically sound and socially equitable plan for managing water resources. Its immediate goals were the formulation and institutionalization of an integrated resource management and land-use master plan (referred to as the master plan hereafter) for Metro Cebu, focusing particularly on the inland watersheds and coastal aquifers.

*Kaabag sa Sugbu* launched CUSW on 25 January 1995 at the first of several public consultations. The organizers identified 22 sectors or stakeholder groups around which to incorporate diverse positions and interests. Each sector elected representatives and prepared a position paper on watershed protection. A 12-point framework for watershed management was drawn up and ratified, based on the position papers and additional consultations in upland villages. CUSW viewed the framework as a guide for its activities and the master plan.

Three events prompted CUSW to develop a plan for better integrating upland stakeholder groups early on. First, at one of CUSW's initial general assembly meetings, elected *barangay* leaders staged a walkout to express frustration at what they felt was a lack of consultation and commitment to address the concerns of their communities. Second, the local media reported accusations that CUSW was involved in advancing the economic interests of its key backers in real estate development. Finally, after organizing further discussions CUSW recognized that the interests and positions of the upland residents were not as uniform as first assumed (Nacario-Castro, 1997).

Consequently, the CUSW leadership actively sought to engage watershed communities through identifying and involving representatives from many stakeholder groups. They sought broad public involvement at the outset to reach decisions taking diverse viewpoints into account, gathering support for policies and educating the public about watershed issues. As one CUSW member stated, "they will not create a successful, effective, high-impact proposal without considering the interests and needs of the community." The move to involve systematically a broad cross-section of stakeholders in resource policy formulation on this scale was new in the Philippines, and contributed to the coalition's rapid expansion.

Personal relationships with local and national politicians also strengthened the coalition. CUSW gains access to many policy-makers and politicians through social and professional networks. Its leaders regularly meet influential politicians and staff of government agencies, such as DENR, to coordinate watershed management policies and projects. At times, CUSW operates behind the scenes to shape compromises that avoid public disagreements. Through these efforts, key members of the political establishment remain supportive of resource planning and watershed conservation.

Beyond water resources planning, CUSW aimed to play a mediating role. It attempts to occupy the "middle" ground between the extremes of NGOs and grassroots groups that seek radical structural reforms such as land reform, and the political and business establishment that supports the status quo regarding economic growth and policy. Described by one CUSW member as "pluralist", this approach is thought to provide a stable, multisectoral coalition within which

to develop resource management and conflict resolution strategies relevant to particular sectors. The coalition's position in the political centre has also limited its ability to broaden public involvement. Groups unconvinced that it is wise to collaborate with national government criticize CUSW for focusing more on policy and planning than on grassroots organizing and strong political advocacy. In response, the CUSW leadership has reached out to former allies, but opposes taking actions that are thought to deviate from a focus on water.

### **Planning focus**

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CUSW's immediate planning objective is to formulate a master plan that deals explicitly with Metro Cebu's water resources and related resource conflicts. Recognizing that compromises will be necessary, CUSW envisages a master plan that reduces conflicts by identifying and addressing, to the greatest extent possible, the concerns of all stakeholders.

The CUSW emphasis on planning stems in part from a belief that more knowledge about resource uses and their ecological effects will lead to an "equitable and objective solution". A belief exists that the scientific facts will persuade the public – but primarily government and political leaders – of the need for watershed protection. A main activity of CUSW has been the consolidation and expansion of ecological and socio-economic data. Members with specific expertise have collected relevant data for CUSW and through government contracts. A related goal is to institutionalize the master plan under the jurisdiction of one official body that would coordinate all concerned agencies, ensure implementation and monitor and evaluate compliance with the plan. In cooperation with the staff of the sponsoring lawmakers, CUSW's legislative committee drafted two bills to create a water resources development authority for Metro Cebu.

#### ***A land-use planning experiment***

Early on, CUSW utilized its cooperative relationship with the Cebu City Mayor to advance resource planning by urging the creation of an official multistakeholder body: CCLUC. This 17-member ad hoc advisory committee included representatives from national government agencies (five), NGOs (two), universities (three), businesses (two), city government (three) and *barangay* government (two). The CCLUC goal was to draft land-use guidelines for the rural areas of Cebu City, an area covering more than 62 percent of the protected watersheds, and for the upland *barangays* outside of the protected areas. The CCLUC process was to facilitate working agreements between government agencies at all levels around land-use planning alternatives. Its responsibilities included formulating interim land-use guidelines, evaluating the consistency among existing policies, and recommending resource management and rural development guidelines to

the appropriate government bodies. While the entire CCLUC did not see conflict management as part of its mandate, CUSW allies on the committee sought to integrate conflict management into the resource planning process.

The mayoral order establishing CCLUC stipulated the formation of an 11-member Technical Working Group (TWG) to help the committee formulate the interim land-use plan. Composed of land-use planners, hydrologists, social scientists and development professionals, the TWG compiled a vast quantity of data relevant to the planning area. It analysed existing and new data to formulate guidelines for sustainable land use and assist CCLUC in drawing up appropriate policies and plans.

CUSW urged and facilitated the direct representation of upland residents on CCLUC through participatory rural appraisal and planning (PRAP). The TWG orchestrated the PRAPs to gather input from upland and urban residents on social, economic and ecological concerns. The PRAP included both spatial and programmatic planning for community resource management, land use and zoning. The TWG staff did not directly include any upland residents, but *barangay* leaders participated in PRAP training and selected the PRAP participants in their respective communities.

## **CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND RESOLUTION OUTCOMES**

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CUSW is a politically influential coalition. However, its efforts have not yet resolved the major water-related resource conflicts in Metro Cebu. The CUSW approach to CBNRCM remains challenged by traditional and emerging social divisions defined by class, wealth, language and economic alliances, which block access to formulating policy agendas and objectives. Representatives of many sectors, including upland stakeholders, are actively involved with CUSW, but the coalition is still composed primarily of urban-based professionals, civic leaders, NGOs and government agencies. With a few exceptions, the participation – and influence – of more marginalized groups such as tenant farmers, the landless and the urban poor remains largely indirect. Initial attempts at resource planning have not substantially eased the major conflicts over watershed management.



### **Coalition building: status and analysis**

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Power relationships are highly unequal in Metro Cebu. Widespread rural poverty, a divisive political climate and strained relationships between groups and agencies provide an unfavourable backdrop for building trust. A main challenge to expanding the CUSW coalition is rural residents' mistrust. CUSW has had to confront this legacy of rural mistrust of urban dwellers, government agencies and other "outsider" groups. Against this backdrop, emphasizing watershed protection and technical planning with the goal of defending less powerful social groups has generated suspicion and maintained certain inequalities.

As an "insider facilitator" CUSW is not considered a credible convenor by all parties. Some CUSW members feel they have not been informed about important decisions and positions taken by the coalition. The public accusations that its advocacy for watershed protection has hidden motives, such as in real estate development, have coloured public support of CUSW. The validity of these accusations remains contested; however, since the suspicions remain so firmly entrenched in the public eye, CUSW may not be considered a fair mediator in the future.

Whatever its technical merits, the emphasis on watershed protection in CUSW positions and activities remains the primary obstacle to its facilitator role in planning, mediating conflicts and expanding the coalition. The CUSW policy agenda has included specific policies for watershed protection as the primary solution to Cebu's water supply problems. This alienates many people, both poor and wealthy, who have direct interests in the watershed areas. Since upland political leaders walked out of the inaugural CUSW meeting in 1995, their frustration over being excluded from agenda setting has persisted. *Barangay* officials tend to ally with city politicians, who have interests in large landholdings, real estate development or commerce. CUSW seeks to weaken the control of a well-established alliance of political and business elites on policy actions or inactions. This has shaped its views of what constitutes the "common good" *vis-à-vis* the water supply and watershed management. At the same time, several environmental NGOs and peasant organizations have criticized CUSW for what they see as a "non-confrontational" approach towards government officials and policies.

The CUSW agenda for watershed protection has yet to address convincingly and concretely the principal concerns of upland communities. In CCLUC focus groups and CUSW assessment workshops, upland participants identified livelihoods, land tenure security and resource degradation as their primary concerns. Watershed protection is seen as a threat to resource tenure and livelihoods by landowners and farmers, despite the assurances of CUSW to the contrary. Its close connections to politicians and government raise fears that CUSW's activities and agenda differ little from past policies and practices benefiting elites at the

expense of rural communities. For example, several peasant groups who oppose the expansion of public land classification and demand radical change in resource policy do not participate in CUSW. These grassroots organizations see rural poverty, land tenure and resource conservation as part of an exploitative and elitist system that includes CUSW. Unless they are brought into the dialogue, they will certainly oppose watershed management policies that fail to increase resource security and meet basic needs.

Representatives of several rural development NGOs and farmer groups do participate in CUSW, but they have little direct role in agenda setting and the design of decision-making processes. Upland stakeholders have not become involved because of communication barriers (i.e. the use of English and technical terms), formal meeting formats and high opportunity costs for participating (i.e. time, lost income). The role of sectoral representatives to CUSW and to CCLUC has also been problematic. *Barangay* officials have difficulty attending meetings in the urban centre and participating continuously because of electoral turnover.

To address these issues, CUSW and CCLUC formulated strategies for making the planning process more accessible to upland communities, including moving meetings to upland venues, holding debriefing sessions to raise awareness, and holding meetings in the local dialect. Nevertheless, the emphasis on planning retains many top-down aspects familiar to rural communities. Unequal access to information, agenda setting and decision-making power maintain existing power imbalances among social groups within the existing planning approaches.

These outcomes appear predictable in retrospect and may ultimately undermine CUSW's short-term success at managing many resource conflicts. Yet CUSW has created political space for dialogue where none existed before. Its organization of stakeholder groups and engagement of government and politicians have provided a forum for managing specific conflicts, such as those related to real estate development in the protected areas. The project and educational work of CUSW members has also eased tensions between DENR and watershed residents so that dialogue can occur.

### **Planning focus: status and analysis**

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The outcome of the CCLUC participatory planning process has been mixed. The process encountered challenges common to most large-scale planning processes: budget and time limits, inadequacy of data and lack of cooperation from government agencies. Some TWG staff and CCLUC members expressed concerns about inaccurate, insufficient and invalid data. Land-use maps, for example, were unverified and borders were unmarked. More conclusive data on the impacts of reforestation, pesticides and land uses are still lacking. Major questions remain

about how the information can be consolidated, whether the data are acceptable to all stakeholders and how they will be used. Most critically, a clear official mandate or process to initiate a comprehensive planning process remains absent.<sup>4</sup> The tight budget, short time frame and limited government agency cooperation placed further constraints on data collection. Overall data limitations still hamper the development of a watershed plan.

The primary obstacle to the PRAP's implementation was a lack of consensus on the need for greater participation. The TWG coordinator and other staff with community organizing backgrounds favoured greater stakeholder participation. However, other TWG staff remained unconvinced of the value, validity and accuracy of participatory tools. Scepticism towards participatory planning and conflict resolution arose from concern that the average citizen lacked the expertise to participate effectively in decision-making. Budgetary constraints and political considerations also limited stakeholder participation.

In the final stages of drafting the interim plan and land-use maps, the CCLUC process broke down. The committee officially dissolved amid controversy after eight committee members opposed the draft guidelines. Some committee members made public accusations about manipulated maps, fabricated data and violations of committee processes. In response, the mayor appointed a five-person task force to salvage the process. Composed of four CCLUC members and one facilitator, the task force submitted joint suggestions regarding changes of wording in the document. However, task force members remained divided over commercial and residential development in the uplands, and DENR jurisdiction over private lands and local government zoning.

The Cebu City Government issued the interim land-use guidelines bit by bit in May 1999, and blamed the delay in producing the four-volume report on a heavy workload. CUSW members accused the CCLUC chairperson, an influential Cebu City councillor and landowner, of manipulating the report. The CCLUC process ultimately ended amid public controversy, leaving the basic questions about watershed management policies and the relationship between local and national policy jurisdictions unresolved.<sup>5</sup>

Lobbying for a watershed authority to oversee a master plan has involved CUSW in additional political struggles and has created tension with some members.

4. Former President Estrada pledged 10 million pesos (P) for the master plan, in addition to the P3 million each pledged by the Cebu Provincial Government and the Cebu City Government. The Cebu City Government has released the first tranche of P500 000, but the Provincial Government and the national government have yet to fulfil their promise. It is not clear if and when CUSW will get the P10 million pledged by ex-president Estrada.

5. DENR recently filed a court case challenging Cebu City's jurisdiction over zoning ordinances within the protected watersheds. Although CUSW decided not to join the lawsuit, some of its members did sign on.



Existing regulatory agencies and local municipalities view another legal body as a threat to their authority. MCWD, for example, opposed the first watershed authority bill because it transferred MCWD assets and responsibilities to the proposed watershed authority. MCWD also believes that the scope of water distribution and regulation is too broad for a centralized authority. Institutionalization of a master plan has led to a jurisdictional struggle with some of CUSW's key supporters.

From the outside, CUSW's approach to managing resource conflicts appears questionable. The emphasis on a master plan and the protected watersheds may turn out to be both politically and technically misguided. To have an impact on the water supply problem, the proposed framework for watershed protection requires many other complementary policies that are equally controversial. Moreover, CUSW's emphasis on watershed protection under NIPAS and DENR allows little room for compromise. This position and specific policies that CUSW has proposed hampers its ability to convene and directly involve the broadest cross-section.

## LESSONS LEARNED

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The CUSW approach highlights several lessons common to large-scale resource conflicts and important to the broader field of CBNRCM. As rural areas of Southeast Asia become increasingly integrated into growing urban centres, these lessons will become progressively more relevant to the theory and practice of CBNRCM in the region.

**Conflict management and large-scale resource-planning.** CUSW has approached conflict within a planning framework. A watershed management framework can help disentangle and manage interrelated natural resource issues and conflicts. But CUSW's approach to watershed management so far has accentuated the divisions in interests and political strategies between some traditional social alliances and emerging coalitions within civil society. The challenges of facilitating greater grassroots participation in lengthy and highly technical planning processes have also been great. At an operational level, facilitators held different perspectives on how to approach conflict management, such as mediation, litigation, legislation, capacity building, stakeholder involvement or scientific studies. However, the subordination of conflict management to watershed protection and planning goals left little opportunity for compromise, and ultimately led to deadlock in resolving conflicts. Building support and commitment for a larger planning effort is a slow process that is not appropriate for what many feel is an urgent environmental situation. From this perspective, CUSW's political strategy to support national legislation on watershed protection is understandable.

**The role of scientific information.** CUSW approached the land-use planning process believing that gathering technical data on water and the watersheds would lead committee members to make decisions independent of their personal and political interests. Despite the CCLUC outcome, CUSW and its allies still expect that the scientific information will support their position on watershed protection. Although technical knowledge may be crucial to managing some resource conflicts, the experience of CCLUC highlights its often indecisive role in reaching decisions through consensus.

**Advocacy and facilitation.** Many stakeholders do not see CUSW as a fair facilitator because of its advocacy for resource planning. Its strategy of defining water resource issues in terms of watershed protection limited the range of “valid” issues. As a result, the issue of water supply has dominated the policy agenda, overshadowing the interests and needs of upland communities. This has marginalized some groups and limited their ability to participate in agenda setting later on. Although they are a general concern, water-related conflicts are universally divisive.

CUSW’s advocacy for watershed protection has limited its ability to facilitate dialogue that leads to compromise. Advocates of watershed protection argue that the availability and accessibility of potable water is directly tied to the possibilities for continued economic development in Metro Cebu. Thus, CUSW believes deeply that its position is “right” because it is supported by laws, valid technical information and a broad coalition. Within the Philippine context, generating a citizen’s voice to hold politicians accountable and address environmental issues also gives CUSW’s mission a moral tone. The strong ideological commitment of CUSW’s core membership to watershed protection leads to a conflict management approach that fundamentally alienates some stakeholder groups and does not allow compromise. Without mechanisms for building trust and agreements on mutually acceptable processes, the compromises needed for managing resource conflicts are extremely hard to find.

**Legacies of mistrust.** Resource conflicts in Metro Cebu are strongly influenced by longstanding relationships between social classes, rural and urban groups and social alliances. The history of rural Cebu, and social and institutional biases against upland people in the Philippines, create mistrust of government and outside initiatives among upland residents. Consequently, CUSW’s emphasis on cooperation with government agencies and policies undermines its efforts at conflict management. The emphasis on watershed protection policies is viewed with suspicion by rural residents and seen as another “resource grab” by the government, wealthy people who live in urban areas and politically influential families. A recognition is growing in Metro Cebu that sincerity, projects and more participatory approaches cannot overcome the mistrust and inbuilt power relationships among groups and rooted in societal inequalities. These power imbalances are a universal feature of natural resource conflicts. However, personal and institutional differences in power are likely to be greater and more complex where local resource conflicts span large areas undergoing rapid change.

**Evaluating and adapting CBNRCM.** Finally, this case study illustrates the need to assess and adapt conflict management approaches in a way that is appropriate for a local setting. The consequences of the CUSW planning strategy and its use of stakeholder participation, in particular, highlight the potential dangers of translating general principles and “best practices” of CBNRCM into specific strategies. The resource and political complexities of Metro Cebu suggest that stakeholder participation and consensus-based decision-making will not occur simply through awareness raising, education and good facilitation. Even if more powerful players give up power, cultural and institutional barriers will still block the stakeholder participation considered necessary to manage resource conflicts.

However, developing “best local practices” for conflict management requires a reassessment of the relevance of many assumptions behind specific, often widely accepted, CBNRCM practices. For example, the perceived weaknesses of CUSW’s approach to conflict management can only be evaluated usefully in light of the local political context. Full and timely participation in a large-scale planning process by upland and other disenfranchised groups may be impossible in Metro Cebu’s current political and policy context. With complementary policy reforms, a watershed management body might provide an institutionalized mechanism for greater local control and public participation. CUSW is one of several initiatives in Metro Cebu whose approach is based on the principles of conflict management (Nacario-Castro, 1997). However, local norms of participatory democracy and the mechanisms for decentralized decision-making are still taking shape in the Philippines. Consequently, creating an incentive for collaborative policy dialogue requires political force that constructively opposes traditional political alliances and raises their public accountability. The mix of political power, confrontation and facilitation may have been necessary to create political space to express stakeholder interests and address resource conflicts. Local conflict management efforts can never strictly conform to external models of conflict management and political organizing. Their norms and principles are best used critically to inspire local CBNRCM efforts.

## **CONCLUSION**

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CUSW’s approach to facilitation and advocacy is problematic for short-term conflict management. A central role for watershed protection in water resources planning is justified. But specific aspects of CUSW’s agenda for watershed protection and its alliance with DENR limits its effectiveness as a convenor, facilitator and mediator among all stakeholders. In addition, key groups of stakeholders, some of whom oppose many watershed protection policies, have little ability to influence the agenda of the coalition, and therefore little incentive to partic-

ipate directly in decision-making. Despite greater stakeholder involvement in policy-making, personal and institutional differences in power remain important obstacles to CBNRCM in Metro Cebu.

CUSW activities remain consistent with its original goal: holding government and politicians accountable for responding to the water situation with foresight, technical competence and public input. In five years it has rallied an impressive group of supporters and successfully challenged well-established interests for influence over the policy agenda. Despite its setbacks, CCLUC was a groundbreaking effort in land-use planning in the Philippines because of its scale and local government support. Even reluctant collaboration among political, government and NGO sectors on local policy is rare. It is very possible that CUSW's approach may eventually create the conditions in which other complementary approaches to conflict management could be introduced and adapted.<sup>6</sup>

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6. In 1998 a five-year bilateral assistance project started with the objective of establishing a stakeholder board for environmental management in Metro Cebu. The project adapts its approach and processes directly from a North American experience with large-scale river basin management. At present, CUSW participates as a stakeholder in this project.