

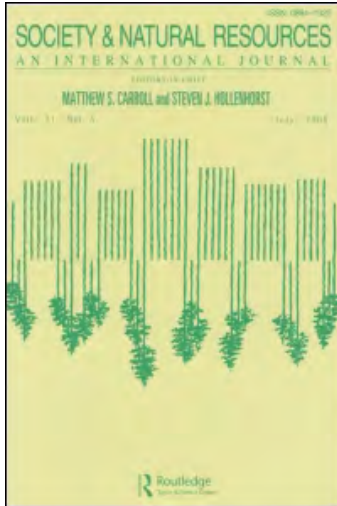
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### The Role of “Hybrid” NGOs in the Conservation and Development of Palawan Island, The Philippines

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# The Role of “Hybrid” NGOs in the Conservation and Development of Palawan Island, The Philippines

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*The rapid rise of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in the Philippines has reflected a regional trend toward the “democratization” of conservation and development on behalf of the rural poor when the state falls short. This article examines how this trend has manifested itself among the indigenous peoples of Palawan Island and how, despite best intentions, project delivery by “hybrid” NGOs—changing organizational forms with multiple objectives and functions—has often yielded unsustainable and culturally damaging outcomes. We draw on ethnographic research among the Tagbanua and Batak peoples to examine recent claims of broad NGO success in achieving community empowerment and forest conservation on Palawan. We support our argument by examining case studies in which NGOs and state failures to properly engage traditional livelihoods have reinforced outsider control over indigenous needs and aspirations.*

**Keywords** conservation, development, indigenous peoples, NGOs, Palawan Island, The Philippines

The rapid rise of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in Southeast Asia has reflected a regional trend toward the “democratization” of conservation and development on behalf of the rural poor when the state falls short (Korten 1987; Clarke 1998; Contreras 2000; Eaton 2003; Mitlin et al. 2007). Throughout the region, NGOs

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have driven political initiatives that seek to mediate local–state relations in order to mitigate, redress, and/or enhance the impacts of conservation and development (Edwards and Hulme 1996; Fisher 1997; Mercer 2002; Bryant 2005). As Fisher (1997, 442) notes, “NGOs have become the ‘favoured child’ of official development agencies, hailed as the panacea to cure the ills that have befallen the development process.” Such civil society interventions have become particularly pronounced on Palawan Island in the Philippines, the country’s last ecological frontier. With the island internationally recognized as a “biodiversity hotspot,” host to endemic species, pristine rain forest, and indigenous peoples, advocacy has grown to defend indigenous rights and the environment from exploitative development (Broad and Cavanagh 1993; Eder and Fernandez 1996; Holden and Jacobson 2006; Austin and Eder 2007). It is here that a diverse number of NGOs have concentrated in Puerto Princesa City—the provincial capital—to deliver a bewildering array of projects in community-based conservation (CBC). Most of these projects have sought to enhance conservation and reduce poverty amongst indigenous peoples by offering alternative livelihoods—a “new paradigm of growth with equity anchored on sustainable human development” (Contreras 2000, 146).

The overthrow of Dictator Ferdinand Marcos by the first People Power Revolution in 1986 opened up new democratic spaces in which NGOs have pursued the new paradigm of “participatory development.” NGOs adopted populist sentiments reflected in “sovereign and responsible citizenry,” an “exemplification of civic virtue” in a country where the ethos of governance has consisted of subversion, patron–client relations, and rent-seeking practices from corrupt politicians (Putzel 1992; Vitug 2000; Hillier 2003, 157). Many citizens were hopeful that a revitalized civil society could buffer the negative outcomes of “top-down” interventions driven by political families (Contreras 2000; Sidel 1999). A vast literature has described the potential of NGOs in the Philippines: as actors in civil society with the potential of “giv[ing] a voice to lower income groups” (Eaton 2003, 470); as drivers for redemocratization (Brilliantes 2000); and, on Palawan, as having the “unusual ability to leverage power within . . . government” to influence policy design and outcomes at the local level (Austin and Eder 2007, 365).

Despite measureable successes, however, NGO-led community-based conservation has often been rooted in strong conservation ideals and donor driven discourses—ensembles of ideas or patterns of thinking that co-produce meaning (Roe 1994)—driving market-oriented livelihood solutions that seldom yield sustainable results (Kwiatkowski 2005). This article seeks to build constructive dialogue with recent contributions to the literature that have lauded NGO efforts without, in our view, adequately considering the sociopolitical subtext of the discourse and practice that has driven such interventions (Broad and Cavanagh 1993; Eder and Fernandez 1996; Holden and Jacobson 2006; Austin and Eder 2007). We seek to engage the NGO community by arguing that in aligning their objectives with populist conservation discourse and donor demands, that is, market-oriented community-based conservation, local needs and concerns can often be misunderstood and/or misrepresented. We argue that those NGOs pursuing conservation objectives by crafting strategies discursively—drawing from and acting out multiple themes, issues and concerns—often deliver misaligned practices and outcomes that disempower indigenous peoples.

Others have voiced similar concerns for the Philippines and other countries in Southeast Asia (Gauld 2000; Bryant 2002b; Li 2002, 2007; Kwiatkowski 2005).

While NGO practitioners and state planners have heralded devolved initiatives, such as community-based conservation (CBC), as a panacea for achieving forest conservation and poverty reduction, critical scholars have considered it to be as problematic as coercive conservation (Cooke and Kothari 2001; Li 2002, 2007; Brockington 2007; Musumali et al. 2007). The effect of community-based conservation redesigning institutions and offering livelihood support in socially and culturally incompatible ways parallels (and often reinforces) earlier resource use restrictions (Dressler 2009). Since NGO-led CBC has worked to revive indigenous institutions according to foreign conservation ideals, attempts to “model” livelihoods and implement projects in predefined ways have neglected indigenous lifeways and exacerbated pre-existing inequalities (Mosse 1997; Cleaver 2002). Growing skepticism over community-based approaches has been due to inadequate assessments of just how aspects of CBC can “connect” with indigenous cultures and livelihood strategies. Philippine scholars have argued that the populist discourses of devolved conservation have led to “ideological rearrangements” of complicit partnerships (Contreras 2000, 147) within and between NGOs and the state. Reflecting the power structures of society, the outcomes of these partnerships have produced various forms of environmental governance—usually those with greatest popular appeal—that have managed local sentiments and livelihoods in line with market-based solutions for conservation (Fisher 1997; Bryant 2002a). The discourse of the latter approach has distorted and stylized issues pertaining to poverty and empowerment<sup>1</sup> (Chossudovsky 2002; Walker et al. 2008), producing interventions that have crafted or modified livelihood outputs for markets, replacing or stabilizing “traditional” resource uses.

Our article first describes how and why NGO movements arose after the fall of Ferdinand Marcos and how, on Palawan Island, these movements have produced “hybrid” NGOs (Austin and Eder 2007) that draw on discursive strategies: new or changing organizational forms with multiple objectives and functions drawn from a variety of perspectives, ideas, and techniques. While the form and function of NGOs are the product of co-constituted “spheres of life,” where policies, process, and practice reflect multiple realities, we maintain that many “on island” begin with several set, overlapping objectives (Haraway 1991; Latour 1993). It is these objectives that undergo or are affected by “improvised performance” that continually draws from other fields, situations, and circumstances “as part of an ever-changing and hybrid whole” (Lewis 2003, 325). While these NGOs can be initially differentiated by overarching motives, their function(s) become increasingly discursive as they draw on populist policies—often out of political and economic necessity—which further define project designs and outcomes. The fact that NGOs have continually adjusted to changing circumstances and populist sentiments, in both policy and practice, has often produced “ill-targeted” interventions.

Building on Austin and Eder (2007), we then consider the origins and outcomes of NGO “hybridity” on Palawan by focusing on those organizations involved in conservation and development among the island’s indigenous peoples, namely, the Tagbanua and Batak. We offer differing interpretations of two case studies to show that, as NGO-led projects have drawn on discursive strategies, misaligned objectives can bypass local needs and concerns. Thereafter, we discuss and draw conclusions on the reasons for and implications of “hybrid” NGO interventions on Tagbanua and Batak livelihoods in central Palawan. We draw on case-study material from ethnographic research conducted from 2001 to 2008. Research methods included

50 interviews, surveys, and participant observation with government officials, NGO staff, and each indigenous community in Palawan Island. We validated our data by looking for consistencies and contradictions in different responses, by identifying contradictions in project design and outcomes, and by tracing and comparing policy objectives with local outcomes.

### **The Post-Marcos Rise of “Hybrid” NGOs on Palawan Island**

After years of martial law under Marcos, the 1983 murder of Ninoy Aquino—Marcos’s best-known political opponent—set off a wave of social protest culminating in the “People Power Revolution” that instated Cory Aquino as President in 1986. These years were characterized by democratic revival leading to the proliferation of diverse NGOs and people’s organizations (POs) (Clarke 1998; Eaton 2003). Cory Aquino initially embraced NGOs in political process, assigned human rights lawyers and NGO leaders to government, and with constitutional amendments in 1987, supported the devolution of authority to the subnational level. Tripartite relations between the state, NGOs, and POs soon ran under the Local Government Code (LGC 1992) (Bryant 2005). Pressuring the state to remain a democratic constituency, diverse NGO coalitions soon tapped new Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) policies and the LGC to tackle environment and development “holistically” through, for example, facilitating ancestral title and community-based conservation among indigenous uplanders (Dressler et al. 2006; 2009). Some considered this political outcome as a radical restructuring of the development discourse of the time—a new humanistic, populist consensus had emerged (Brilliantes 1994; Eaton 2003). However, while NGOs were no longer considered a threat to state bureaucracy, new tensions arose as NGO–state relations ebbed and flowed through the presidencies of Ramos, Estrada, and Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. As NGOs tackled the rise in deforestation and poverty, many saw state–civil society relations return to their pre-Aquino status of the traditional elite controlling political process and structure. This engendered what Bryant (2001) has called “critical engagements”: While NGOs would cooperate, they also reserved the right to disagree with issues that state agencies mishandled.

International funders soon supported diverse NGO interventions in socioeconomic development, environmental protection, and poverty alleviation (cf. Hilhorst 2003). As the “last frontier,” Palawan’s forests and indigenous peoples soon became the twin beacons of conservation and development. For many years Palawan’s contiguous tropical forest and endemism were subject to indiscriminate logging by Marcos’s cronies. In response, the then “environment-first” NGO, the Haribon Foundation, initiated a successful but controversial and divisive campaign for a 25-year moratorium on commercial logging on the island (Vitug 2000; Broad and Cavanaugh 2003). Facilitating the campaign on Palawan in 1989 was the new provincial chapter, Haribon-Palawan, which further pressured the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) to accept the proposal for the moratorium (De la Paz et al. 2005); DENR officials resisted vociferously, advocating for selective harvesting and criticizing both Haribon offices.

In the process leading up to what proved to be a successful moratorium on commercial logging in 1998, Haribon Palawan staff were labeled “communists” and pressured by the Philippine National Police (Bryant 2005). In time, Haribon shifted its focus to social and environmental advocacy, in part, through

community-based conservation. As one director noted, “We previously only dealt with single wildlife management issues, but moved into interrelated environmental and social issues.”<sup>2</sup> Similarly, as the Palawan chapter focused on both the environmental and human rights challenges of the island, it sought autonomy from the central office in Manila. Citing strategic differences, the Palawan chapter soon became an independent organization pursuing a hybrid agenda of social advocacy and environmental conservation for the “last frontier” (De la Paz et al. 2005).

Meanwhile, in Puerto Princesa City, various NGOs surfaced from the advocacy networks forged during days of protest and activism at universities in Manila. With offices already located in Luzon or the Visayas, branch offices were established in Puerto Princesa City; these “extra-local” NGOs included those with a paralegal “indigenous rights” function (PANLIPI—Tanggapan Panligal ng Katutubo Pilipino, Legal Assistance Centre for Indigenous Filipinos); “environment-first” agendas (Environmental Legal Assistance Centre [ELAC] and Haribon Palawan); and “rural farm technology” initiatives (Palawan Centre for Appropriate Rural Technology [PCART]) (Dressler 2009). Moreover, various local and indigenous NGOs/POs surfaced through the support of church-based networks, including, for example, the Tribal Filipino Apostolate (now the Indigenous Peoples’ Apostolate) and NATRIPAL<sup>3</sup> (the United Tribes of Palawan), respectively (Pinto 1999; Dressler 2009).

By the mid-1990s many of these organizations soon realized that diversifying their mandate and organizing themselves as a consortium would enable them to access the DENR’s new Departmental Administrative Order no. 2 (1993) and, later, the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (1997) for the preparation of ancestral domain claims (McDermott 2000; Dressler 2009). In doing so, the consortium of NATRIPAL, PANLIPI-Palawan, and the TFA started the initiative “Community-based Conservation and Enterprise Program (CCEP) for Indigenous Communities in Palawan,” under a broader multi-layered thematic program strategy: the 4Ks, “*Karapatan, Kabuhayan, Kapaligiran/Kalikasan para sa Katutubo ng Palawan*,” referring to “Rights, Livelihood, and Environment/Nature for the Indigenous Peoples of Palawan (Pinto 1999).<sup>4</sup> Shifting from specific foci to a hybrid strategy drawing on multiple themes and objectives, the consortium built on the belief that indigenous peoples’ (*katutubo*) empowerment rested in a *mélange* of tenurial security, resource rights (*karapatan*), and livelihood opportunities (*kabuhayan*). The project’s overall goals supported the capabilities of NATRIPAL, its federation, and its local associations of indigenous peoples in Cabayugan, Kayasan, Campung-Ulay, and Punta Baja on Palawan (Pinto 1999)—with the former two being the case-study sites of this article.

The consortium worked with the provincial DENR to support livelihood enterprise developments, among others, as the basis for delineating ancestral domain claims in Cabayugan and Kayasan (McDermott 2000). The CCEP program supported the ancestral domain claims’ objectives by assisting indigenous members gain access to and use of nontimber forest products (NTFP), enhance NTFP commodity values (e.g., rattan), and curb the encroachment of migrants upon ancestral lands. Unfortunately, however, despite extensive networks and technical expertise, adding value to harvests and improving the terms of trade for indigenous NTFP collectors was one of several market-based interventions that had failed due to insufficient attention paid to local political relations and, in other cases, the importance of swidden (Dressler 2009; Novellino 2007).

As NGOs and government networks expanded, certain NGOs and government officials adopted and exercised strong conservationist ideologies in Puerto Princesa City (Novellino 1999, 2000, 2003). The lingering notoriety of Palawan politicians, who were no strangers to logging, was now attached to the green principles of certain NGOs. Environmentalists, policymakers, and even business people soon all embraced the paradigm of “sustainable development,” often crafting “personal NGOs” to pursue “their” cause (Bryant 2002b). In time, while state actors often co-opted NGOs to implement and support their own forest protection policies, other NGOs often needed the tacit approval of government legitimacy to carry forward objectives without excessive “friction” (Bryant 2001; 2005). NGOs soon expedited project design and delivery by taking advantage of existing political/institutional spaces within/between themselves, government, and donor-driven priorities (Novellino 2007). Whether NGOs opposed or sided with state interests depended on their relationship with politicians and the potential outcomes of policies and projects.

Such “networked” collaborations ensured NGOs and state objectives converged in implementing local and “extra-local” agendas, where project design was (and still is) based on preconceived notions of what indigenous livelihoods are, or should become, through “development.” This has been particularly the case with community-based conservation, where planners have often targeted indigenous livelihoods on the assumption they needed to be intensified. Hence, livelihood interventions have been geared toward sedentarizing agriculture to produce “more with less” for emerging markets supported by NGOs and/or provincial agencies. Most projects have “outcome-based” priorities, where objectives and funding conditions assumed “tangible results” in support of intensification. As Mosse (2005) notes, such “official” strategies and judgments have given authorized meaning to project outcomes as intended success, which, in our case, has been linked to “addressing” notions of shifting cultivators being impoverished, uneducated, and resource degrading.

Related to the frequently misaligned practices of many NGOs is the morass of government-defined and donor-conditioned legislation that has negatively affected project implementation—laws that have influenced the discursive strategies of NGOs. Designing and implementing creative laws for indigenous rights and conservation—the Strategic Environmental Plan (SEP Act 1992), National Integrated Protected Areas Strategy (NIPAS 1992), and IPRA (1997), for example—have connected with the assumed legitimacy and popularity of certain management approaches at the national and international level. As we show next, “hybrid” NGOs and state agencies charged with implementing overlapping laws, zones, and projects have added to an atmosphere of total confusion. Indigenous communities have had to make sense of new laws, multiple programs, and projects with objectives that often conflict with their lifeways (cf. Resurreccion 2006).

## **Two Case Studies of NGO-Led Environmental (Mis)Management**

While we acknowledge that our case studies are not representative of all NGO actions, the cases that follow here clearly encapsulate how the recent influx of interventions has created negative impacts because of misfits with indigenous lifeways and livelihoods.

### Case Study One: NGOs and Government Approaches to Swidden

Our first case study illustrates how both NGOs and government agencies have pursued similar CBC policy and practice to support related conservation discourse. In doing so, they have implemented projects that have indigenous peoples using forests and cultivating swidden according to Western notions of “sustainability.”

When Fidel Ramos took over the Aquino presidency in 1992, the DENR sought to reforest 600,000 hectares in five years throughout the country’s upland areas. What remained unclear, however, was exactly how much of the target area consisted of indigenous swiddens under fallow (Novellino 2007). In the same year, the replacement of shifting cultivation with alternative livelihood practices had become the cornerstone of DENR and NGO-driven community forestry programs (Novellino 2007). Most projects sought to stabilize and sedentarize swidden systems irrespective of whether being practiced by migrants or indigenous peoples. While not universal, many migrants cultivated larger swiddens with less diversified, shorter fallows en route to intensified production—often referred to as “incipient” or “partial” swiddens—whereas many indigenous peoples cultivated smaller, diverse, longer fallowed swiddens as “integral” systems (Conklin 1957; Eder 1997; Dressler 2009). Integral swiddens are often linked to customary practices, religions, and worldviews, and can produce variegated landscapes (Conklin 1957).

In the early 1990s, Haribon-Palawan executed the basis of the DENR’s swidden policy among the Tanabag Batak, a group of “traditional” swidden cultivators of central Palawan (DENR 1991, 1996). Part of Haribon-Palawan’s strategy to promote “sedentarization” was to implement activities supporting food self-sufficiency through communal gardening, irrigation systems, pilot wet-rice plots, and sloping agricultural techniques. Its first attempt had failed. In 1994, a second attempt was made to support Batak livelihoods by developing 2 hectares of paddy rice, which also collapsed because upland soils could not retain sufficient amounts of water (Novellino 1999). Corroborating Batak sentiments in 1997, the project’s consultant wrote: “Some of these activities were not requested by the beneficiaries but were strongly suggested by the project. It therefore came as no surprise that ‘the introduction of the two paddy rice plots failed’ and that this was ‘because the technology [was] not appropriate to the Batak (motor pumps . . . use of fertilizers and pesticides, use of oxen, etc.)’” (Bech 1997, 13).

Haribon-Palawan’s approach was no different from government-sponsored projects aiming to “stabilize” indigenous cultivators. In fact, in the Haribon–IUCN Final Project Report (Haribon-Palawan and IUCN 1996, 23), we learn that a project objective was to “shift from *kaingin* (swidden) to sustainable upland agriculture.” The report reveals, “Over 500 rattan wildlings were collected from natural sites at each of the two Batak *sitios* . . . and that several hundred rattan saplings were planted in cleared fallows near the villages.” In this case, rather than support livelihoods and conservation objectives, the reforestation of fallow fields has often forced indigenous farmers either to open up more forestlands or to clear areas of shrubby bushes and weeds, which have degraded into barren grasslands (Novellino 1999). While not a sole causal driver of “sedentarization,” the associated influence of planting perennial crops in swiddens reminds farmers not to burn the same plots.

The 1994 implementation of a Puerto Princesa city government ban against shifting cultivation soon emerged to indirectly support IUCN and Haribon-Palawan’s alternative livelihood campaigns. Compared to recent interpretations of



all NGOs unanimously countering this ill-conceived ban (Austin and Eder 2007), select NGOs responded slowly against the city's ordinance.<sup>5</sup> This slow response, in turn, forced a United Kingdom-based NGO, Survival International, to act "independently" against the ban in favor of the indigenous communities that it had adversely affected. With the anti-swidden policy in place, Batak and Tagbanua rice yields fell dramatically, causing them severe hardship. As a result, they had little choice but to increase their collection of forest products for sale to compensate for the loss of agricultural production, depleting select nontimber forest resources. While the swidden ban violated the DAO 2 (1993) leading up to the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) of 1997, the same environmental NGOs in support of the IPRA were initially quite silent about the ban for fear of ruining their post-electoral relationship with the city government (Novellino 1999). Only then had Survival International's campaign resulted in a partial lifting of the ban.

The campaign itself was never picked up by some local NGOs, who, after being questioned by the city mayor on whether they were behind the campaign, had denied any involvement with it. In a letter to Survival International dated 28 March 1996, the city mayor (of Puerto Princesa) admitted that "the farmers (including the tribal groups)... were adversely affected by the policy," with assistance to soften the impact of the ban including "cash-for-work programs... rice subsidies, and permanent mechanisms such as the carabao (water buffalo) and tractor pools." Regardless, however, the affected communities suggested the rice supplies were insufficient and that hundreds of people had faced hunger (Novellino 1999). Only as a result of Survival International's campaign, effectively bypassing local NGO networks, did the mayor allow indigenous communities to cultivate small swiddens using controlled burning methods.

Similarly, the ambiguity of the DENR toward indigenous people's swiddens has been apparent in the notion of *dati kaingin* (literally, "old swidden"), which, from a DENR perspective, referred to those swiddens without tree cover and used repeatedly over the years. DENR officials in Palawan have insisted that present swiddens cannot be expanded, and that swidden farming should only be allowed in *dati kaingin*. This view was confirmed by a former DENR employee: "If the people are making *kaingin* in an area that is already *kaingin*, this is not prohibited. But if they have to cut more forest, even if this has been growing through fallow cycle, this is forbidden; unless the DENR issues them a permit to cut trees" (Novellino 2007).<sup>6</sup>

NGO perspectives on swiddens have been similar, with one ELAC staff member having stated<sup>7</sup>

We embrace the populist view. This is in line with the DENR view that *kaingin* will be allowed only in those areas that are not classified as forest. ... to make *kaingin* in secondary forest is not allowed. The populist view of conservation is one that allows tribal people to have their rights but not totally or, at least, not in the way they would like to. ... Burning eradicates everything, be it old growth or secondary growth.

Indigenous views on these matters often differ markedly from those of "environment-first" NGOs and the DENR. For Elisio, a Batak in his forties<sup>8</sup>:

The coastal forest is forever gone. The migrants have substituted forest trees with other plants (cashew, etc.). But for us, this is not a good idea.

When we make a swidden, we like the forest to grow back, because we depend on it. If you walk in our fields under fallow (*lumun*) you'll see a lot of plants. The foresters call them weeds. In reality, many of these weeds are the seedlings of wild trees. As you can see, the forest is growing back!

Members of indigenous communities who have complied with environmental NGOs' and government demands for permanent cultivation, countering harassments from *Bantay Gubat* (forest watch), have begun to convert swidden edges into “agro-forestry” plots—one step before sedentary agriculture. However, because of poor tending and pruning, fields that have been planted with tree crops have failed to generate any significant extra income. In the meantime, these indigenous communities will have continued to clear forest plots (old fallows and secondary forest) for upland rice in less accessible locations. One possible outcome has been envisaged: The conversion of swiddens into permanent orchards has reduced the number of fallow fields under rotation, reducing the length of the fallow period and swidden yields, gradually increasing the permanence of deforested areas. As more areas lose the capacity to support forest, indigenous communities will suffer malnutrition, and pressure on NTFPs will grow (Novellino 2007). Evidence thus suggests that many environmental NGOs (e.g., Haribon-Palawan) do not directly oppose the city government and DENR's anti-swidden measures, further demonstrating how such actors follow similar conservation discourse.

### Case Study Two: Zoning Tradition and Livelihood

Our second case study examines how certain NGOs and government officials have implemented livelihood projects in the buffer zone of Puerto Princesa's flagship protected area, the Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park (PPSRNP). We show how the management of each zone indirectly supported NGO objectives of introducing livelihood alternatives that seek to stabilize or eradicate swidden among Tagbanua and Batak.

In the late 1990s, the expansion of PPSRNP from 3,901 ha to 22,202 ha engulfed the ancestral domain claims of the Tagbanua and Batak in 1997, promoting community-based conservation within them for years thereafter. In particular, after devolving the management of the national park from the DENR to the city government of Puerto Princesa in 1993, various programs supported community-based conservation in the newly expanded park buffer zone of 1999. In this zone, city managers and NGO staff hoped that community-based conservation would solve the long-standing livelihood struggles and competing claims over land and nontimber forest products that had arisen between migrants and indigenous peoples.

Few indigenous peoples were empowered, however. With NGOs having secured the ancestral domain claim and the park now encasing the former, Tagbanua and Batak participated in livelihood projects under conditions of sustainability. Preferential resource rights became subsidiary de facto claims to land and natural resources as defined by two key laws: the Strategic Environmental Plan (SEP) and the National Integrated Protected Areas Act (NIPAS). Each law had decentralized park management under the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development,<sup>9</sup> the city government, and the DENR, respectively, with NGOs also implementing livelihood projects in the CADC.

The city, its managers, and the NGOs aligned themselves with the Strategic Environmental Plan's management zones. The law's zoning system, known as the Environmentally Critical Areas Network, prohibited agriculture and commercial resource uses in the "core zone." Next, "traditional use zones" engulfed the Tagbanua and Batak ancestral domain claims to "stabilize" traditional activities, such as swidden, on marginal lands, and "multiple use" zones wrapped around these areas to accommodate intensive agriculture on prime lands. The NIPAS Act's zones were similar to and overlapped with the SEP's zoning system in lowland and upland areas of the national park (NIPAS Act 1992). Despite the NIPAS Act, expanding and managing park boundaries as buffer zones still fell under the SEP, as management had been devolved to the city government (Dressler et al. 2006).

Multiple use zones allowed for permanent agriculture among migrant farmers, with projects supporting paddy rice by maintaining nutrient inputs, high-yielding seeds, and market outlets for rice sales. Portions of the buffer zone covering migrant farmland imposed far fewer restrictions on their livelihoods, with government officials working closely with migrant farmers, implementing organizations and projects for wet rice production. Migrants, who already benefited from paddy rice cultivation, now expanded production through community-based initiatives. Few Tagbanua and Batak cultivated in this zone (Dressler et al. 2006).

Traditional use zones were directed at Tagbanua and Batak by stipulating that land uses retain dominant forest cover in the uplands. This zoning restriction permitted, for example, rattan collection and swidden cultivation on a limited scale for fear that such harvests would destroy forests. As described earlier, the recent NGO-coordinated "Community Development and Mobilization for Forest Development and Protection" near Kayasan illustrates how projects have tried to steer indigenous livelihoods away from swidden and toward more "lucrative" sedentary ventures. In 2003, a memorandum of agreement was signed between the EC (European Commission), the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), the SGP PTF (Small Grants Program for Operations to Promote Tropical Forests), and the newly organized Tagbalay Foundation to finance the project to develop the ancestral domain title among the Batak and Tagbanua, and to provide alternative livelihood opportunities. From the project's start, community members cried foul in that the prominent Tagbanua person chosen by the mayor of Puerto Princesa (and chairman of the Tagbalay Foundation) had misrepresented their interests. Nevertheless, the Tagbanua leader signed the agreement in Manila on behalf of the local indigenous communities. As a result of limited consultation, female community members received the unusual livelihood support of Eri-Silk Production without local consent. Few of the women had any interest in rearing "worms."

Drawing on foreign examples of silkworm production, the project invested considerable energy in educating and training indigenous women in rearing Eri-silk worms. Despite such investments, however, women refused to bring the rearing cages and silk worms to their respective households to pursue family-based silk production. Rather than invest in a new activity with uncertain economic outcomes, the women abhorred the worms and preferred to continue their daily subsistence activities in swiddens. As a result, production of quality cocoons and finished products remained scarce and most of the project material was abandoned. Despite its failure, Tagbalay staff represented the project as a success. For instance, before the UNDP delegation's visit to the project area in 2004, project staff had asked Batak and Tagbanua women to gather in the rearing house and act as if they were

spontaneously engaging in Eri-silk yarn weaving and knitting. In addition, as part of the “human showcase,” knitted scarves and placemats were set on display, each containing a tag indicating state of origin: “Product Maker: Bayatao-Kayasan Women Beneficiaries.” In reality, after the departure of the foreign delegation, most women interviewed admitted that they had not produced the scarves on display, but that project staff had purchased them from elsewhere. At the time, local communities decided not to expose this reality for fear of retaliation.

The evidence of each case demonstrates how “hybrid” NGOs and government actors have continued to define how indigenous peoples should pursue new sedentary market-oriented livelihoods in predefined zones. Certain NGOs have implemented numerous projects in these zones with limited consultation, predefined objectives/ideals, and assumed outcomes.

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

Paralleling the rapid rise of NGOs in Southeast Asia, the proliferation of NGOs on Palawan has represented recent attempts to democratize conservation and development for indigenous livelihoods and forest conservation. Palawan NGOs have increasingly taken on state responsibilities, when flexible project delivery is called for and local users should support community-based conservation (Bryant 2001, 2005; Hilhorst 2003). Our case studies are just a small sample of the interventions that have often supported and acted on populist interpretations of what traditional livelihoods, particularly swidden, should eventually become: sedentary, intensified livelihood pursuits.

Our cases have shown that as “hybrid” NGOs draw on multiple themes, issues, and concerns in line with conservation ideals espoused by government, particularly “community-based” discourse, they have reinforced the need for indigenous livelihoods to stabilize and sedentarize. As NGOs have supported livelihood interventions in line with strong conservation ideals, they have delivered projects with predefined objectives and expected outcomes that bypass the nuances of indigenous lifeways. It is for this reason that discursive NGO strategies, drawing on externally conceived ideas, have created short, expedited projects that often fail to support indigenous livelihoods. Local government and “hybrid” NGOs have promoted a common conservation discourse that, while liberating for some politicians, has produced adverse impacts locally. After two decades of “community-based” interventions, few projects have supported the core features of indigenous livelihoods, such as swidden systems, instead creating new commodities (e.g., silk scarves) or controlling “older” production. Moreover, the fact that politicians can create their own NGOs for resolving conservation and livelihood issues without local credibility renders the efforts of long-standing NGOs less legitimate (Fisher 1997). When state and NGO networks/agendas become “too close for comfort,” interventions become mutually supportive, rendering the latter’s cause “illegitimate” (Edwards and Hulme 1996). However, even those NGOs that have worked with local communities for decades have produced discursive agendas and projects rooted in national design and foreign concepts.

Discursive conservation interventions have supported and implemented more “stable” forms of agriculture through livelihood alternatives that modify and/or replace swidden systems that are often integral to indigenous cultures and lifeways (see Haribon-Palawan’s paddy rice irrigation and “sustainable” agroforestry scheme

in Kayasan-Bayatao through a local PO's 5-year CADC work plan [Haribon-Palawan and Kayasan Community Tourism Association, Inc. 2007; SATRIKA 2008], and the European Union-funded Palawan Tropical Forestry Protection Programme [PTFPP], introducing tree crops in swidden fallows, currently also pursued by City Agriculture, PTFPP 1997). Although devolving rights over ancestral lands through the mentioned laws should grant Tagbanua and Batak secure tenure, in reality, devolution has drawn indigenous communities further into the populist discourse of community-based conservation and related commodity markets. Indigenous peoples now experience an influx of short-term consultations, motives, physical interventions, and, effectively, closer surveillance of swidden destined for intensification. Such actions reflect what Li (2007, 17) refers to as the "excess of interventions"—actions that cannot be easily reconfigured into planning.

Those NGOs that have followed such an approach to conserve natural habitats and support indigenous aspirations have failed to do so because their intent, concepts, and designs have bypassed the nuances of indigenous livelihoods, worldviews, and ecosystem changes. Certain "hybrid" NGOs have even "reconfigured" project failures into success so as not to risk poor evaluations by donors. Despite the evidence of the anthropogenic influence on forest composition, some Palawan NGOs have neglected to understand how swidden practice, such as fire and long fallow periods, has produced diverse ecosystems, which they could support (Margalef 1968; Brosius 1981; Rai 1982). Unfortunately, project planners have continued to support community-based interventions that stabilize swidden according to green political priorities and management criteria.

Such NGO knowledge and motives have been drawn from the received wisdom of swidden being a degrading, primitive system in "demise" (Dressler 2009). While scholars have long since exposed the ignorance of such views (Conklin 1957; Dove 1983), using livelihood projects to drive intensification remains a clear priority for local and regional planners. Constructing and applying such popular misconceptions through projects among indigenous peoples reflects strategies that prejudge the success of interventions with expected outcomes (Mosse 2005). The outcomes of hybrid NGO policy and action have reflected the fact that project rationalizations often occur before, during, and after implementation to justify the legitimacy of actions dictating what indigenous peoples and their livelihoods should become. While neither the Tagbanua nor Batak likely desire a completely "sedentary" existence, as their seasonal mobility partly suggests (Magcale-Macandag and Ocampo 2005; Novellino 2007), NGOs have often supported the conversion of swidden fields into permanent agriculture (Wadley et al. 2006).

While we acknowledge that the NGO lobby has supported indigenous rights and community-based conservation on Palawan, NGOs could increase their capacity to work with indigenous peoples in a transparent, accountable, and participatory manner so that interventions better support indigenous culture and self-determination. Long-term and sustained engagement with indigenous livelihoods could ensure that diverse knowledge, cultivation systems, and species are valued for their capacity to buffer uncertainty. Rather than relying on externally packaged, populist agendas in conservation and development, transparent engagement that values existing livelihood systems can ensure that indigenous peoples identify those livelihood priorities in need of long-term support.

## Notes

1. We define empowerment as “the process of enhancing an individual’s or group’s capacity to make purposive choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes” (Alsop and Heinsohn 2005, 5).
2. Interview, project director, Haribon Foundation, April 2, 2004.
3. NATRIPAL, Nagkakaisang mga Tribu ng Palawan, is a People’s Organization but functions as an NGO. NATRIPAL represents a province-wide federation of 57 or more local associations in 13 out of the 24 municipalities of Palawan (Pinto 1999).
4. Running under the USAID-funded Biodiversity Conservation Network, the hypothesis behind the CCEP strategy was that “if local people directly benefit from a *business* that depends on the biodiversity at a given site, they should have the incentive to act to protect it against . . . threats to its destruction” (Biodiversity Support Program 1999, 2).
5. Apparently, however, one NGO sent a letter directly to the mayor requesting that the ban on burning be lifted.
6. Interview, former DENR Official, now PCSD, 11 May 2004. Puerto Princesa City.
7. Interview, ELAC, 11 May 2004, Puerto Princesa City.
8. Interview, 15 July 2005, Palawan Island.
9. The PCSD is a unique government body formed by Republic Act No. 7611 with a mandate for the protection of the environment within the province.

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