
Philippines: A new approach on forests in Palawan

Palawan is an island of the Philippines, located in the Western part of the archipelago and surrounded by the South China Sea and the Sulu Sea. As a result of the democratic process started in 1992, the local government, in agreement with local communities and the private sector, cancelled existing logging concessions, and new legislation was issued banning all commercial logging on the island.

The Philippines used to be densely covered by tropical forest, but nowadays only 3% of the original area is still standing. Forest destruction and degradation in this country has been the result of unsustainable industrial logging carried out by private companies --mostly aimed at export markets-- with support from vested interest within the military and relevant officials during former President Marcos' times. A logging ban proposed in November 1999 was never implemented, since the government argued that this would mean a loss of revenues for the treasury (see WRM Bulletins 27 and 28). Under such circumstances, the case of Palawan is to be highlighted.

The territory of Palawan still bears the scars and open wounds from years of logging, including the siltation of lagoons and the death of coral reefs. Much has already been lost here and large stumps mark the site of what was once a dense forest of massive, ancient trees. Philippine parrots, once common, are now rarely found. However, this island has managed to escape ecological collapse, by ending logging before the island had been totally deforested.

Now the challenge for them is to find new and sustainable ways of producing and living, with the aim of reverting a process of social and environmental destruction. The creation of jobs by eco-tourism is one of the priorities for the local government, based on a spectacular natural environment that is now protected.. Locally-based resource management and ecological restoration activities in the forests and coastal ecosystems could also mean an effective diversification and activation of the island's economy. If these efforts are successful, Palawan can become a much needed example for the protection of the Earth's remaining rainforests.

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