

**STAKEHOLDERS' CHARACTERISTICS AND THE FOREST MANAGEMENT ISSUES
ADDRESSED AT SAMAR ISLAND NATURAL PARK, PHILIPPINES*****Anbony D. Cuanico**

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Received 17th January 2023; Accepted 20th February 2023; Published online 30th March 2023

Abstract

This study generally tackles on the forest governance of the Samar Island Natural Park (SINP) primarily on the aspect of describing the people involved in decision – making process and the problems sought to be deliberated and resolved by the Protected Area Management Board members (PAMB), representing the various stakeholders of SINP from the year 2017 to 2021. Using a descriptive – single case study design, documented information and interviews of eighteen (18) stakeholders were solicited and analyzed qualitatively to discuss the forest management issues addressed at SINP management. Results of the investigation reveal that decision-makers are apt for the job and responsibilities required by the law; however, a disproportionate allocation of representation was observed which in some ways reduces the quality of shared solutions supposedly provided by well-represented body. Generally, the issues dealt at SINP can be classified into three categories: internal management issues, imposition and regulatory issues and policing-driven issues. While it is acknowledged that there were minimal serious problems encountered by SINP management, anecdotal evidence and undocumented report shows that undue exploitations were still unregulated which means that SINP management is still far from realizing its conservation targets. It is recommended that the management must elevate its degree of intervention to instill the principle of biodiversity conservation and protection permanently among the minds and actions of the local people with the collaboration of all concerned agencies.

Keywords: Samar Island Natural Park, Forest Management, Protected Area Management Board, Natural Park, Forest Governance

INTRODUCTION

One of the most pervasive and pressing problems that the world is facing today is environmental destruction. The world has already lost eighty-percent (80) % of its forests and continually losing them at a rate of 375 km² per day [1]. In the Philippines alone, our forest is estimated to be around 25.7% or about 7,665,000 ha of Philippines is forested [2]. Of this 11.2% (861,000) is classified as primary forest, the most biodiverse and carbon-dense form of forest. Between 1990 and 2010, Philippines lost an average of 54,750 ha or 0.83% per year [ibid,2]. Rapid urban development and progress are accompanied with large demands of resources that are mostly found in the forestlands of the Philippines. The drastic conversions of forested lands have resulted to deforestation which in turn affected the functions of the site and degraded the quality of ecosystem services [ibid,2]. This figure is quite alarming as many people still don't see the value or discount the importance of forests to humanity. Forests support our agricultural production by protecting water, control erosion and provide habitats for our flora and fauna. It is the forests that create fertile soils that become the main source for timber and forage, food and fiber. The forests are storing vast quantities of carbon which in effect help mitigate the impact caused by climate change. The current changes in world's temperature greatly impacted on our biodiversity leading to changes in species and ecosystems. Some of these changes will result in loss of biodiversity values which will present many new challenges to conservation efforts across the world. Aside from its direct benefits to mankind's physiological needs, forests are vital to social, ecological and economic well-being of our nation such that it provide us clean air and water, establish a green space for healthy living and lifestyles and

promote nourishment vital for individual health and development. Protected areas (PAs) are estimated to contain 19.6% of the world's humid tropical forests [3]. The available literature on the ecological and socio-economic impact of PAs is extensive but not exhaustive, the issues are multiple and complex and highly dependent on spatial and temporal scales. Given with this importance, the primary agency that has looked into the situation of our forests conditions, the Department of Environment and Natural Sciences, has made several initiatives to save and sustain what has been remaining in our forest reserves. Foremost to that initiative was the transfer of forest management from the national level down to the local level called devolution where participation of various stakeholders were sought and acknowledged. In particular, the Community-based forest management (CBRM) program has been implemented in 1995 as a national strategy across all plantations in the Philippines. It was here that rehabilitation was diversified and now entailed participation of local communities, giving them more room to obtain the proper benefits. There was also an increase in technical knowledge and monitoring. The central idea behind the decentralisation of natural resource management is not only to avoid the tragedy of the commons but also to enhance local social and economic conditions, thereby a promising path to sustainable forest management by definition alone. PFM has been adopted widely across the tropics since the 1980s with many countries incorporating participatory approaches into national policy [4]. The Samar Island Natural Park Management, established in 1999 through Republic Act 9999, and the largest terrestrial forests in the country is being managed through a participatory forest management. Participatory forest management is based on the hypothesis that if local people whose daily lives are affected by forest management activities are involved in decision-making, efforts can be made to maintain the integrity of ecosystems and improve the livelihood of the local people [5]. This approach enables marginal members of the local

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community to voice preferences, make decisions and engage in local politics by which resources are allocated and distributed [6]. This idea paved the way for a more inclusive and more sustainable way of improving the forest conditions whereby active involvement of the communities are now felt and encouraged. There were 301 stakeholders across the Samar Provinces were identified, however, since convening them all is impractical considering that it is also struggling financially to support its operations, the SINP management decided to form a flexible body who will address the shortcomings identified by the original institutional arrangement and this led the creation of Executive PAMB members. Each PAMB member is a representative of different sectors involved in the participatory forest management of SINP. Several studies have already been conducted that describes stakeholder's participation in forest resource management. Alhassan (2010) conducted a study on the collaborative system approach in Ghana. In his study, he confirmed that forest decision-making process in Ghana for participatory forestry is still top-down approach where level and central decision-makers of the FSD still initiate managerial and technical decisions for implementation by a local forestry officer with little involvement of local people [6]. The same study of Patwary (2009) depicted the situation of local communities' participation in forest management in Bangladesh [7]. He assessed the knowledge of local people about co-management of Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary [ibid, 7]. Yosie and Herbst (1998) identified some key issues on stakeholder's involvement in environmental decision making [8]. While these investigations were focused on the stakeholders level of participation, the approach of participation and issues of stakeholders participation, little evidences were found in the literature that tackle or describe the specific function or role of the stakeholder in a collaborative forest management, much more here in the Philippines. Furthermore, there is a dearth of investigations that have looked into the different issues that stakeholders in collaborative forest management are trying to resolve. Thus, by acknowledging these gaps it is imperative to explore the roles of stakeholders in collaborative forest management who come from varied backgrounds and orientations as well as the issues that these stakeholders were encountered and resolved for the betterment of forest conditions at Samar Island Natural Park.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive – single case study of the decision – making process of the stakeholders, in particular, the Protected Area Management Board (PAMB) of the Samar Island Natural Park Management (SINP). SINP was chosen as the researcher's study site since nobody has conducted research pertaining specifically to the multi-sectoral forest governance of the SINP. It was also chosen as the site of study because of the intricate organizational set-up of SINP management, considering that it is the largest natural park in the country. SINP management also involves individuals with diverse backgrounds and orientations and looking into how this multi-sectoral structure affects the decision-making of PAMB poses quite a challenge to the researcher. Since it would be difficult to convene en banc meetings of the entire membership due to the sheer number of members (301), three sub-PAMBs were created at the provincial level. The figures under the executive committee PAMB level were all considered as the key informants/participants in the study. The Executive Committee was composed of representatives from all the stakeholders of

SINP. As mandated by the NIPAS Law (RA 7586), the SINP-Protected Area Management Board was composed of the following at the time of the study: the DENR Regional Executive Director of Region VIII; the Governor of each of the three Samar Provinces; one (1) representative from each municipality/city government in territory within the protected area; one (1) representative from each barangay in territory within the protected area; seven (7) representatives from local non-government organizations (NGOs); five (5) representatives from peoples' organizations (POs); representatives from other national government agencies operating within the protected area management; the Provincial Planning and Development Officers of the provinces where the protected area is located; and the Provincial Environment and Natural Resource Officers of Western Samar, Northern Samar, and Eastern Samar. A total of 18 key informants were interviewed for this study instead of the 21 original numbers that comprised the Executive Committee (Execom) of PAMB following the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

There were two ways on how data were collected. Primarily, this study relied heavily on the archival documents found at SINP management headquarters and also solicited from individual participant's copies of documents provided by SINP management. The researcher collected the Minutes of the Meeting from 2017-2021, memoranda (same time frame) and the accomplishment reports to explore the varied issues that have presented to the board and discussed by its PAMB members. Other documents such as policy paper (copy of republic act, NIPAS law) primer/manual and general management plan were secured to describe if the selection of PAMB members were done accordingly and if the specific roles as performed by PAMB members were based on the guidelines set forth by the law. All of these were obtained through a formal request to the SINP management and to the PAMB members. If the documents needed were unavailable at SINP, the researcher had resorted to online retrieval of pertinent documents. On top of the documents were the interviews conducted to the participants to validate the information obtained from the primary data and also to augment the quality of presentations based on the results of the study. A semi-structured guide questionnaire largely consisting of open-ended questions was used in the interviews. After the collection of documents and transcribing the recorded interviews, the researcher had proceeded to the treatment of the data. Themes that emerged from the analysis of the content were recorded in separate form utilizing direct quotes extracted from the studies included in the analysis. A place for comments was included as a part of the table. This gave the researcher and research coder the opportunity to make additional notes to each other for further referencing. The researcher also created a coding guide that provided the research coder with information regarding each column on the coding form referring to what elements to code. This study used a qualitative content analysis in sifting and analyzing the documents as well as the verbal responses of the participants during the interviews.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Stakeholders' Characteristics and Role in Decision – Making

To answer the first objective of this study which is to identify the stakeholders who are involved in the decision - making

process of the Samar Island Natural Park, the characteristics of the PAMB members who participated in this study as well as their corresponding role and functions are presented and discussed.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Key Informants

The socio-demographic characteristics of key informants considered in this study were as follows: sex, age, educational attainment, length of service as PAMB member, and membership status. Table 1 shows the socio-demographic profile of the key informants of this study. A total of eighteen (18) key informants were interviewed for this study, each has been involved in the decision - making of the Samar Island Natural Park Management. The majority or 83% of the key informants were male and only three (3) or 17% were female. This figure reflects the largely male-dominated nature of policy-making body in forest management. Twelve (12) or 67% of these participants belong to the age bracket between 40 - 60 years old and six (6) were aged between 61 - 80 years old. This means that within the age parameter, the SINP valued seniority as advantage in the decision-making process probably because of their experiences both personal and work-related.

Table 1. Socio-Demographic Profile of the Key Informants

Socio – demographic profile	Frequency (N= 18)	%
Gender		
Male	15	83%
Female	3	17%
Age		
40 - 60 years old	12	67%
61 - 80 years old	6	33%
Education		
High School level/Graduate	2	11%
College level/Graduate	6	33%
Post Baccalaureate level/ Graduate	10	56%
Length of Service as PAMB Member		
5 – 10 years	6	33%
11 - 15 years	2	11%
16 – 20 years	10	56%
Membership Status		
Regular	11	61%
Proxy	7	39%

In terms of educational attainment, more than half (10) of the participants or 56% are master's degree holders or at least have earned doctoral units; six (6) or 33% finished their baccalaureate degrees or at least have reached at the College level and only two (2) or 11% finished a secondary education or have reached in high school. With these figures, it showed that participants involved in the decision-making at SINP were highly educated. Hyuncheolet. Al (2018) found that education can be leveraged to help enhance an individual's economic decision-making quality and that education can better equip people for high-quality decision-making for their lives [9]. Among the combined percentage for college level or graduate and those with MS or PhDs, eleven (11) of them took courses in natural science- related disciplines (e.g. environmental science, agriculture, veterinary science, biological science or biotechnology). This is highly an advantage for SINP management where science is considered as one set of vital information before making a decision, especially on increasingly complex and value laden issues. Science foundation helps decision makers improves their ability to estimate consequences and risks of decision alternatives. Thus, having a set of decision-makers who have orientation in science is expected to generate quality decision-making outcomes. In terms of the length of service as PAMB

members, the majority (10) or 56% of the informants had rendered their service as PAMB member between 16 - 20 years from the time that the SINP was declared as Natural Park in 2003. Some of these informants were even part of the team who conducted the Samar Island Biodiversity Project (SIBP), an initial requirement and the main take off leading to the establishment of the natural park. Thus, these informants had included their years in service as project coordinator even before they were appointed as a PAMB member. Meanwhile, only two (2) or 11% of informants offered their service at SINP management between 11 to 15 years and six or 33% were designated as PAMB members between 5 to 10 years. From this data, it can be deduced that a majority of the key informants were very much aware on the background and the nature of operation of SINP management considering the years spent in rendering their services as PAMB members. In terms of membership status, majority (11) or 61% of the participants interviewed in this study said that they were a regular member of PAMB, while seven (7) or 39% were identified as the official representative or proxy of an original PAMB member. It must be noted that most of these proxies came from the LGU sector, specifically of the Governors and Mayors, who were given an equally important seats and roles as stakeholders of the Samar Island Natural Park Management. These proxies, despite being present in the board meeting, were not allowed to vote during deliberations though they may make reactions and/or comments on the issues dealt by the body. Their participation was generally viewed as only to fill up the number of attendees required to reach the quorum.

B. Stakeholder's Role at the Protected Area Management Board

Table 2 presents the PAMB members categorized into different sectors who perform various functions inside the SINP management.

Natural Resource Management (NRM) Services Sector: In SINP, the NRM Government Sector was composed of the following: the DENR Regional Environment Director; three (3) Provincial Environment Natural Resource Officers (PENROs); and a representative from the Office of the Provincial Agricultural Services (OPAS). Under this sector, its primary role involves direct control and participation in the implementation of environmental policies, programs and projects of the SINP management. The Regional Executive Director (RED) served as the Chairman of the PAMB and spearheaded the DENR operations in the entire region. The PENROs were responsible for the site-based implementation of environmental programs and policies at their respective provinces. Stakeholders from this sector almost perform the same responsibilities and these include the following: to develop regulatory or administrative policies adherent to national laws and policies; to enforce these policies; putting management plans into action; sourcing out funds and efficient budget distribution to all its projects and programs and finally, to assess the success and failures of its implemented programs. The relative power of these stakeholders to influence the natural resource management mostly esteemed from the formal law.

The Local Government Unit Sector (LGUs): Under the local government unit sector, there were seven (7) PAMB members interviewed for this study and were involved in the decision making at SINP management.

Table 2.

Stakeholders' group	Composition of the sinp pamb executive committee	Membership role	Specific function
NRM Government Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Regional Executive Director of DENR Region VIII • PENRO Eastern Samar • PENRO Western Samar • PENRO Northern Samar • OPAS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PAMB Chairperson • Member • Member • Member • Member 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enacting legislations (proclamations, regulations and directives) • Enforcement of NRM policies • Managing development plans • Administration of natural resources • Funds allocation and distribution to NRM programs and projects • Monitoring and evaluation
Local Government Unit Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eastern Samar Governor • Northern Samar Governor • MLGU Eastern Samar • MLGU Western Samar • MLGU Northern Samar • BLGU Eastern Samar • BLGU Northern Samar • NGO Eastern Samar • NGO Western Samar • NGO Northern Samar • PO Eastern Samar • PO Western Samar • PO Northern Samar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-chairperson • Co-chairperson • Member • Member • Member • Member • Member • Member • Member • Member • Member • Member • Member 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enacting local legislations (resolutions, ordinances) • Enforcement of national & local NRM policies • Administration of local natural resources • Financial assistance
Non-Government/ Civil Society Sector		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Member • Member • Member • Member 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy • Lobbying • Technical Support

These PAMB members were comprised of the following: two (2) Provincial Governors; three (3) Mayors; and, two (2) Barangay Captains. These two Governors served as co - chairs in the PAMB and presides in the council whenever the chairman is absent during PAMB meeting. The LGU sector role was tasked primarily to share the national agencies the responsibility of ensuring the ecological protection at their own respective jurisdictions. The presence of the local chief executives in the PAMB could either strengthen or support the policies made by the national government agencies and as an independent local government could create policies on livelihoods, environment and basic services beneficial to their constituents. PAMB members from LGU sector were also encouraged to include in its annual budget plan in funding the SINP programs, especially those that will both benefit the SINP management and LGUs. Furthermore, it was part of their responsibilities to provide technical support to local communities in developing and implementing ecotourism livelihoods. Their role in the SINP was highly acknowledged, however, this was not transformed into the actual performance of their functions. For instance, there was a minimal participation of the PAMB members from LGU during PAMB meeting and instead sent its representatives on their behalf. Their perennial absences on the deliberations of vital issues in SINP tended to affect the quality of decisions made by the board which, in turn, may have a direct and indirect effect to the conservation efforts of the SINP as a whole. Their lack of enthusiasm stemmed over an issue of power and authorities relegated to LGUs in managing the natural park. As mandated by the law, local chief executives don't have any control or could not make any decisions as freely as they can on how to utilize the resources within their jurisdictions without the permit of the SINP management.

Civil Society Sector: Recognized as important stakeholders of the SINP - PAMB, the civil society sector was mandated to have a seat in PAMB at least 25% of the total numbers of stakeholders of SINP management. Based on the SINP Manual of Operations (DENR, n.d), there must be seven (7) representatives from local NGOs and five (5) representatives from Peoples Organizations (POs).

However, the civil society sector was underrepresented in the governing body containing only 8 members instead of 12 based on the requirement set by NIPAS law. The composition of the current seats for civil society sector are as follows: three (3) NGO members – having one (1) representative for each province and three (3) members from the People's Organization represented also by one per province. The three (3) representatives from the NGO came from a diverse background belonging to the following types of organization: religious organization, an empowerment-oriented organization, and environmental organization. Despite its differences, they all basically performed the same roles inside the SINP. First, the primary role of the civil society sector inside the SINP was to actively advocate for environmental protection and ensuring the sustainable development of the covered communities. Based on interviews, the NGOs were considered as one of the leading forces behind the establishment of the SINP. In fact, the indignation over the rapid loss of the forests and the degradation of resources had spurred various NGOs in the Samar Island to launch campaigns and protests in the 80s, and eventually led to the proclamation of SINP through the executive order signed by then President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. Aside from the advocacy role, these NGOs were expected to take the lead in lobbying the policy - makers and government agencies to take legal measures and actions in addressing environmental concerns. In fact, since 2003 the SINP management had been endorsing the SINP Bill to Congress so that the management can already maximize and sustain its operation. This initiative was led by an NGO representative, together with other government officials and religious Catholic dignitaries, particularly the Bishops of the 3 Samar Provinces. Finally, the NGO at SINP was also working to provide technical support either through empowerment services such as organizing capability-building programs or conducting livelihood trainings for women. In general, the devolution of managing the protected area through the SINP management has enabled various sectors to participate directly in the decision-making process. Their roles and participations were recognized not just only in compliance to the NIPAS law but the necessities to place each sector to have an equal opportunity to speak in the council and share responsibilities in taking care of the forests.

Table 6. Summary of Issues deliberated by PAMB Members from CY 2017 – 2021

Types of issues	Description	Example of Problem/issue addressed	Number of cases rendered by the pamb members Year					Total
			2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	
Related to Management Planning & Operations	Takes into account issues related to the distribution and management of forest resources, project planning & assessment, fiscal affairs, and administrative services.	Proposal of Ecotourism Plan for the Province of Samar; Rates imposition for the use of ecotourism services; Work proposal and financial plan for the utilization of SINP Integrated Protected Areas Fund (IPAF)	3	5	8	3	2	21 (35%)
Related to Forest Access and Granting Permits	Delves on issues regarding the request of any individual/agency to conduct a developmental project, or a special activity (e.g. research, sports activity) before granting an official entry permit to operate inside the natural park.	Permit to operate a road construction and rehabilitation project by Millennium Challenge Corporation; the Maydolong – Basey Road Construction; Permit to install a potable water system of the Municipality of Calbiga, in Western Samar; and permit of the construction of hydro-electric power of IRAYA corporation and Taft Hydro Energy Corporation (THEC)	9	4	4	1	2	20 (34%)
Related to Forest Resource Use	Issues on the use of forest resources within protected areas.	New application or renewal of Rattan Cutting Permits and the Almaciga - Tapping Permits (ATP)	4	1	-	2	2	9 (15%)
Related to illegal activities and threats in the Park	Refers to the problems identified at SINP regarding wildlife management, the control of species, ecosystem vulnerability and foreseeable danger caused by man-made activities.	Reported Incidence of Indiscriminate gathering of forest products, practicing kaingin system and wildlife hunting and poaching inside the protected area	-	2	2	1	4	9 (15%)

C. Forest-related Issues Addressed by the Protected Area Management Board

This section presents the findings of the second objective which is to find out the forest-related issues that are decided upon by the stakeholders, in this case, the PAMB members. The data gathered to answer this question are based on the minutes of the meetings from the year 2017 to 2021 and are validated through the interviews made with the key informants. As mandated by NIPAS act, the PAMB is the sole-decision making body in the Samar Island Natural Park. Each PAMB member is given the authority to participate in the discussion and in resolving various issues concerning the management of the natural park. This section presents the problems and/or issues deliberated by the PAMB members from the year 2017 - 2021. A description for each issue category and corresponding examples are provided (Table 3) to describe the variations of issues encountered by the PAMB members. Also, the number of cases rendered by the stakeholders each year is presented in order to highlight what specific year do PAMB members are able to encounter or address the problems the most.

Related to Management Planning and Operations: Analysis of documents revealed that one of the top issues deliberated by PAMB was related to the operation, distribution, and management of resources of the Samar Island Natural Park. As Table 3 shows, twenty-one (21) cases or a total of 35% from the all cases accounted within a given period were related to management operations of the SINP. By management operations, these covered issues aiming to maximize the nature and function of SINP as well as improve its conservation efforts of SINP through a thoughtful consideration on policy planning and directions, strategies and programs as well as in handling its fiscal affairs. One example of this management operation issue addressed by PAMB member was a proposal of one local government unit to invest in ecotourism project and recreational activities inside the protected area. Standards and conditions were set by the PAMB members before the said project was approved. Considered as one of the strategies of SINP for its biodiversity conservation effort,

the SINP management arrived at a decision which requires individuals or groups who wished to conduct a recreational activity (e.g. *spelunking, trekking and mountain climbing*) to secure an approval of the management board before they may be allowed to hold such activities. Part also of the issues raised under the management operation category of the SINP was pertained to the fiscal affairs of the management. It is stipulated in the NIPAS Act of 1992, that one of the functions of PAMB is to “recommend to the Secretary reasonable fees to be collected from government agencies or any person, firm or corporation benefits from the protected areas” [10]. In fact, several PAMB meetings within that period were centered on the discussions about rates imposition for SINP resource facilities use (e.g. rent for the eco-lodge, swimming pool, payment for torpedo rides and an entrance fee of various ecotourism sites). Moreover, PAMB members had also invested much time in dealing with their financial affairs. For instance, the PASu had presented a proposed work and financial plan for the utilization of its SINP Integrated Protected Areas Fund (IPAF) which was usually subject for the review and scrutiny of the PAMB members. The decisions made by PAMB were acted upon based on the guidelines of the use and disbursement of the IPAF under NIPAS act. It must be noted that among the various issues addressed by the PAMB, it is not surprising that much of the issues dealt with by any organization should focused on its productivity and optimization of the organization resources for its continued delivery of mandated functions and survivability.

Related to Forest Access and Granting Permits: Another type of issues addressed by the PAMB was related to the request of any individual, groups or organization to have forest access inside the SINP and conduct developmental activities or build a permanent construction. As Natural Park, the law mandates that activities are forbidden to conduct within the core zone areas but allowed in the buffer zone subject to the approval of the PAMB. The PAMB members were tasked to carefully study, scrutinize and approve or reject all requests from an individual or institution; whether it's a private or government entity, to conduct a construction activity in the natural park.

There were 20 cases deliberated and resolved by the council from the year 2017 to 2021. Most of these requests that passed through the PAMB originated from the Department of Public Works and Highways, who usually secure permit from SINP management to undertake construction activities to be built within the forest. Some of these developmental projects include the construction of farm-to-market roads, national road rehabilitation and other government infrastructures. Part of this permit was to ensure that the design, material and actual field work passed the standards and conditions set by the park management. While the SINP management concurred that roads were essential, particularly farm-to-market roads, they would like to ensure that activities to be conducted by DPWH should be planned out and implemented well in such a way that it would not pose further threats to the ecological integrity of SINP. Lastly, the PAMB members had also taken up issues on granting a permit to an individual or entity requesting to conduct research studies inside the natural park. The NIPAS act also gave the PAMB the authority to decide on matters relative to conduct scientific studies inside the natural park by any individual or group. A PAMB deliberation was actually held before it grant permit to the requesting parties where certain requirements were often asked from the proponents before they may be allowed to enter the park. One notable observation from this table was the fact that there were a decreasing number of forest issues addressed by PAMB under this category particularly during the time of COVID – 19 pandemic.

There were two reasons seen for this decline: first, the COVID 19 hindered PAMB members to convene for a PAMB meeting and thus all project proposals were held in abeyance. Second, this was the time when government funds were directed to the containment of the spread of virus. As most of the development projects were proposed by DPWH, this could have led the latter to divert its activities. But the fact that several projects allowed and granted with permits within the given time period was huge enough, still it could not patch up the forestlands lost. Several studies have attested that road building projects will increase access to the forests and will attract migrants in search of land and livelihood. In many other areas, logging roads built within forest areas speed up deforestation and endangers biodiversity and climate stability [11]. Furthermore, the construction of dam inside the SINP will cause the disappearance of many ecosystems and drastic modification of others with the loss of forests and important species of flora and fauna bound to forest habitats. Apart from the environmental impacts on forests and biodiversity, dam construction has also wrought health hazards and human rights violations through “forced resettlement” of people and in dealing with resistant and opposing stakeholders [ibid,11]

Related to Forest Resource Use: In contrast with the issues presented above which tackles on the request for access and to undertake a developmental project, another common issues addressed by the board was on the utilization and control of its forest resources. Specifically, these issues were focused on whether or not to grant a permit to extract the forest resources particularly non-timber forest products such as Ratan and Almacega Resin, which were allowed inside the protected area. Typically, whether the request was for renewal or as new applicants, requestor must obtain a permit from SINP management. For permit renewal, the license holder would have to comply with the Environmental Impact Assessment System and, as a prerequisite to that, secure a PAMB clearance

by showing that extraction of the resources was compatible with the SINP Management Plan. Furthermore, the management had to conduct a technical validation and ground validation first before issuing the said the Rattan - Cutting Permits (RCC) and the Almacega - Tapping Permits (ATP). These were awarded to the applicants upon the deliberations of the PAMB members with corresponding tenurial dates or expiration of contract as well as its royalty fee dues. There were a total of 9 cases or 15% out of the total 59 cases resolved between the year 2017 to 2021 were dealt with by the board on the various requests by any individual or entity pertaining to the utilization of forest resources inside the SINP. This figure showed that there were only a few entities who ventured into making business out of the forest products which could provide a positive development for the forests to rest. However, this study did not go beyond in determining whether those who were granted with permits operate in a large scale forest extraction. What was clear is that several evidences showed that non-timber forest products (NTFP) extraction continues to drive forest degradation in many forestlands of the Philippines including SINP. NTFP gathering and harvesting provide additional cash income for many rural households within and nearby forestlands in the Philippines. Belcher et al. (2005) study shows that uncontrolled competition for NTFPs in open access areas often leads to overexploitation of resources resulting to declining resource bases as well as negative impacts on biodiversity and the ecosystem [12].

Related to illegal activities and potential threats in the Park: This category pertains to the issues or problems raised by any PAMB member or from individual complainants regarding the prohibited activities that might have been observed or witnessed inside the natural park, or the foreseeable danger to arise caused by man-made activities and the ecosystem vulnerability of the protected area. Illegal forest activities are defined here to include all illegal acts or violations committed by any individual or entities that compromised the conditions of the forests such as logging without authorizations and/or required plans, logging in excess of permitted cut, operating without a processing license, illegal transport of illegally harvested timber, smuggling timber, wildlife hunting and poaching and practice of kaingin system. Based on the documents provided by the SINP management office and the interviews with the key informants, PAMB was able to deliberate and resolve several cases pertaining to illegal extractive activities inside the natural park. Normally, whenever the SINP management received reports of illegal activities, the SINP management would often refer these concerns to police authority for further investigations. However, if the implications of the illegal activities or operation were on a large-scale capacity or if it would generally affect the entire community, the SINP management usually was the one would interfere and tried the issue. One instance by which PAMB members deliberated an issue related to illegal forest activities happened when the authorities confiscated and apprehended a volume of logged trees which believed to have been extracted from the natural park. This incidence caused an alarm to the management knowing that they lacked the capability to monitor the vast - sized area of the park, especially at the core zone, where most of the illegal activities usually occurred. Also, part of the responsibility of the SINP management was to ensure the safety of the communities residing inside the park. As a natural park, it was not spared both from human threats and natural calamities. PAMB members can also decide on matters that can overlap

the function of the LGU, especially if it involves the safety of its people. For instance, the PAMB tried to resolve an issue concerning an impending threat to the local community. One Barangay had complained about the danger posed by the erosion of the river banks which caused to sink the bridge and believed to be partly contributed to the floods in that area. The PAMB resolved the issue by preparing a resolution and coordinated the DPWH for the latter's immediate action. Similarly, the PAMB also received a complaint from an individual regarding the illegal entrance of some individuals to a cave, believed to have been used as a shelter during a typhoon. PAMB members were able to argue about the prospects of using the cave as an evacuation area. The manner by which PAMB members resolve this matter was based on human and ecological perspectives. From the standpoints of those who were against it, the PAMB members had resorted to an idea that a cave was sensitive to a human touch leading for the discolorization of stalagmites and stalactites and eventually caused for its death. It was also noted from the arguments that allowing people to make use of the cave would set a bad precedent as people will become more accustomed in entering the cave every time there would be a calamity. These assertions made by those who against this proposal, however, were rejected pointing out that the preservation of life should come first before the preservation of the cave. In the end, it was agreed among the PAMB members to set guidelines on how the cave shall be protected and used during calamity.

It is worthy to note that SINP management tried only nine (9) illegal activities or 15% of the total issues deliberated within the span of 5 years. Although this number is small compared to other issues resolved by PAMB, it is difficult to assume that forest exploitation inside SINP was not that severe. One PAMB member pointed out the vast size area of SINP seemed impossible to monitor all the forest activities especially so that the management also had limited number of forest rangers and personnel serving as caretakers and in-charge of apprehending potential violators. According to the informant, this number does not totally reflect to what is happening inside the SINP as there were many unreported incidences of illegal logging and timber poaching, with the former referring to cutting of trees in a large area at one time while the latter refers to cutting one or a few trees in small patches.

In an interview with an informant from the civic society, they have raised concerns on the several reports regarding the incessant collection of wood fuels for residential and commercial purposes. Perception by the key informants is that forests are vulnerable as sources of woodfuel for the increasing populace largely dependent on wood. While many residential fuelwood users get their supply from damaged trees, branches, tree tops, other logging wastes and agricultural residues, charcoal makers prefer to use green wood (freshly cut) of any available hardwood because of their wood-burning quality. Fuelwood and charcoal trading thrives because of local market demands. Charcoal trading is a common source of cash income for many subsistence farmers in many areas, and the forests continue to be vulnerable to forest degradation because of poverty and increasing market demand for wood fuels coupled with weak forest law enforcement and lax monitoring of the gathering, production and use of wood fuels. Woodfuels use contributes to forest degradation because they are and will continue to be the primary energy sources for rural households as well as some industrial users in developing countries [11].

Conclusion

1. The Samar Island Natural Park is established and managed with broad-based stakeholder participation. On one hand, the SINP management partially complied with the mandated composition of its PAMB members and rightfully chosen its members based on merits, however, there were lack of numbers sitting in the board for NGOs/POs making it still under-represented.
2. It is observed that the body is highly dominated by elite groups/sectors composed of highly educated individuals and less of the numbers are coming from the civic group society. This disproportionate allocation and participation of members is in some ways reduces the quality of shared solutions supposedly provided by well-represented body.
3. Decisions made at SINP could have been addressed more tangibly have the identified PAMB members are religiously attending the actual decision-making. The perennial tardiness of some of its members particularly from the LGU sector affect the quality of decisions made and are tantamount to lacklustre and poor collective judgment of its members.
4. Generally, the issues dealt at SINP can be classified into three categories: internal management issues, imposition and regulatory issues and policing-driven issues. Since most of these issues are derived from internal management issues, recognizing these issues means that SINP management is in serious business of improving the quality and efficiency of its mandated functions and services.
5. While it is acknowledged that SINP management is still genuinely committed to nature conservation, it is far from addressing its problems due to the significant numbers of forest extractions and violations recorded inside the SINP. Allowing to conduct extractive industries and large-scale activities sends a wrong signal of its biodiversity conservation effort and contradicts the very nature of protecting a natural park which by definition prohibits the settlements, occupancy or any form of exploitation.
6. Although there is little presence of illegal activities inside the SINP based on records, this does not mean that SINP management is successfully tracking, monitoring and protecting the park from potential threats as there were many undocumented reports of undue forests exploitation. Due to its vast size area and the lack of manpower monitoring the forests, its conservation efforts are unlikely to be achieved.

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