



RENATO DE RUEDA

Former Undersecretary for Field Operations,
Department of Environment and Natural Resources



Renato “Rene” de Rueda belongs to the batch of Filipino foresters who worked and struggled with the social forestry movement in the mid-1970s onwards, in an environment of wood-based industry development and timber-focused production in the forestry sector. After graduating from the College of Forestry at the University of the Philippines at Los Baños, Rene started his career as a professional forester in 1969 at the then Bureau of Forestry, the precursor of the Forest Management Bureau of the DENR today.

Often mistaken as a native Cebuano, Rene grew up in San Miguel, Bulacan. He lived there until he was in his 3rd year of high school in 1960. He continued high school in Los Baños and then moved on as a forestry student. Today, Rene is considered as one of the leading lights in the Philippine forestry sector. He was the DENR Undersecretary for Field Operations from February 2003 until September 2004. Rene was involved in many of the forest protection programs of the DENR and was team leader and forestry specialist of the USAID-funded Natural Resources Management Program. He keeps himself busy these days as an environment and forestry consultant. He is the National Council President of the Society of Filipino Foresters and National Coordinator of the OIKOS Society of the Couples for Christ.

Regreening the forest in the
hearts of people

Looking back, Rene remembers that only a few people were working in social forestry. “There were Mar Dalmacio, Romy Acosta, and a few junior staff. The social forestry group was a lonely group in the Bureau of Forest Development (BFD) because of the bureau’s timber bias. But during Factoran and VOR’s time (DENR Secretaries), there was new hope, a new start for social forestry.

“I am now busy helping society be more meaningful in forest conservation.” Rene is currently working with the National Power Corporation (NPC) on a “re-greening” of 250 hectares of Pantabangan watershed in North Luzon. “The NPC now has more appreciation of how watersheds should be managed.” Ninety-percent of the Angat watershed’s 60,000 hectares are still forested “but the NPC may be missing the boat if they do not tap communities effectively.” Rene recounted how the communities in Angat suffer from three prevalent diseases – lung, kidney, and stomach ulcers, all of which are attributable to lack of food or an imbalance in the diet. “This shows that those with the resources aren’t helping.”

A community he works with is gathering indigenous tree species like the *lauan* to plant and has established a cooperative. He has since sought assistance from groups like HARIBON for assisted regeneration in the area and also the Green Army (another environment group) to purchase seedlings in support of the community.

In 1975, Rene became a district officer and the forest occupancy management program was being implemented. “There was already an acknowledgement of *kaingin* as a problem, but it was more of a technical problem, not an environmental problem. *Kaingin*, at that time, was seen more as the destruction of wood. There was also no provision in the administrative orders that *kaingineros* could harvest what they planted.”

Rene participated in a BFD conference in Cebu and Edmundo Cortes was the director then. “I asked him, ‘We have this upland development program but is there no provision for the *kaingineros* to harvest the trees?’ Cortes answered me with a yes, but it was more a personal one rather than a central office position. Yet why cannot harvesting be put in place? According to the BFD, people will only move to another place again. However, Cebuanos are close to the land and they will not move so they will just cut again.”

“The community orientation of forestry was slow to progress and the programs started with the Forest Occupancy Management (FOM). The Family Approach to Reforestation (FAR) gave families access to a hectare to use as tree plantations. In 1981, the Communal Tree Farm was introduced where communities can use certain areas for tree farms with harvesting rights. CBFM is the result of years of agony developing a workable approach. The policy and programs must work with the people and the challenges they face.

Rene reiterated, “policy should anticipate demand and changes. Before, the original relationship of the forestry department was with the forest, national government and logging companies. Culture, the community and subsistence were somewhere in between. Now we are looking at forests in a different way. The forestry department can do a lot in bringing development directly to communities. Before, companies supported the construction of school buildings for communities, in which the BFD helped. However, efforts were not adequately collective, especially in increasing awareness of the holistic use of resources such as people, and the community could not sustain or offer opportunities for further education. Make people a part of production, as part of the resources in sustainable forest management.”

Rene views two scenarios for forests in the Philippines that his grandchildren will inherit. One is that “decision makers will still remain deaf and blind to seeing people as part of the forest. Forest

areas will still be denuded. Production will be minimal and natural disasters will worsen. The best scenario is an honest to goodness effort in planting trees in the hearts of people. People who help will be given benefits. Acknowledgment also must come from the lawmakers that they need to help upland people.”

To make this happen will require political will and consistency. “Political will is not only applicable to mayors and LGU officers, but also to the heads of PO groups” Rene says. People have to take the initiative in the work, engage with the government and share in the responsibilities by strengthening networks and developing a stronger basis for cooperation.

“When I was dealing with farmers, we could see the changes. The attitude was more ‘We need them, they need us,’ but not at the expense of their families. There was one experience in Cebu where I felt helpless. There, I lost face with the farmers. We had a campaign with farmers in the uplands, for during the dry season, they would go to Mindanao. So instead of leaving I told them, ‘Why not plant giant *ipil-ipil* now so you will have wood and leaves for livestock?’ This was short-lived because the leafhopper pest destroyed so much. I had to face them because everyone planted *ipil-ipil*! There aswere a number of solutions and one was a biological solution, to introduce the ladybug. But this only happened after a year. The morale of the story for me was ‘Do not run away from your responsibility if you’re honest with yourself.’”

Life is full of lessons and Rene is always open to alternative thinking, from the little to the large. In Mount Iri (in Rizal), Rene was sent to check the area where there were two groups: the mineral group and the forest group. Rene was with the forest group and he got his hard-earned diploma in ecology. He dreaded the leeches and killed those that latched onto him. A Dumagat saw him doing this and told him, “Why are you killing the leech? The leech just wants to survive. You don’t have to kill it. Just throw it away.”



“People have to plant more trees for the future but must also care for them. Now literature says that most forest fires are intentional. There is a real need for patrols and the prosecution of those who illegally cut and destroy the forest. With social forestry, no one wants to listen. It pains me to see someone killed or persecuted because he is just following orders, like Raul Zapatos (one of the interviewees) and other heroes of the environment. Some NGOs only expose the venalities of the bureau, but when there are heroes, they are not acknowledged.”

Rene suffered emphysema while containing the forest fire in Southern Negros Timber Company. They commandeered all the equipment of the company. When they were setting up a fire buffer, they were already breathing the thick smoke from the forest fire. Rene was breathing hard soon after and the medical diagnosis was induced emphysema. “When you do your job right, there is danger and the people on top should know this or acknowledge that people are at risk. Benefits are important in this line of work so people can still continue to work, but our foresters do not have them.”

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Asked how to revolutionize CBFM without the support of government, Rene replies “I am worried about the present leadership because there is no support for the department (DENR). Even in agriculture, there is no support as nobody wants to be a farmer anymore. We don’t uphold the dignity of farmers and agrarian reform has not made any substantial impact.

“What can help CBFM is that we have to make the LGUs good and responsible managers of the forests. We have not trained our second and third layers in the bureaucracy. We need to strengthen the ethics committee and to put dignity back in the profession. Go after the people who ‘doctor’ their inventory and subject them to the Ombudsman.

“In the case of small tree farmers, it worked in Nueva Vizcaya because of LGU support. If you can adopt a region, adopt the good ones and work with them genuinely. Let us adopt one CBFM per region, per province and help them gain access to markets and potential investors.”

Rene sees all of these forest management efforts in relation to rural development and the need to address the poverty, the lack of services and opportunities. “In rural development, cash reduction can be a great help to rural folks, as they should not be buying food from the town center.”



JOSÉ RIZAL
National Hero
Born: 19 June 1861
Died: 30 December 1896



On 17 July 1892, Dr. José Rizal arrived in Dapitan, exiled by the Spanish government on suspicion of his involvement in the rebellion. Four years later, he left Dapitan on 31 July 1896 and sailed back to Manila, where he was executed by musketry five months later. His martyrdom sparked the revolution that ended Spanish rule in the Philippines after 400 years.

His four-year political exile in Dapitan, a coastal town at the northern tip of Zamboanga del Norte, also left an impressive and lasting impact on the town and its people that continues to this day amongst the present generation. Rizal embedded himself in Dapitan's landscape, its forests, its seas and rivers as he engaged in agriculture, fishing, and business. He maintained and operated a hospital where he practiced his medical profession as an eye doctor. He conducted classes and taught young students languages, arts, sports, sciences, and vocational courses. He developed a water system that continued to be used until the 1930s, and constructed a relief map of Mindanao. He did research and collected specimens of the biodiversity in the area.

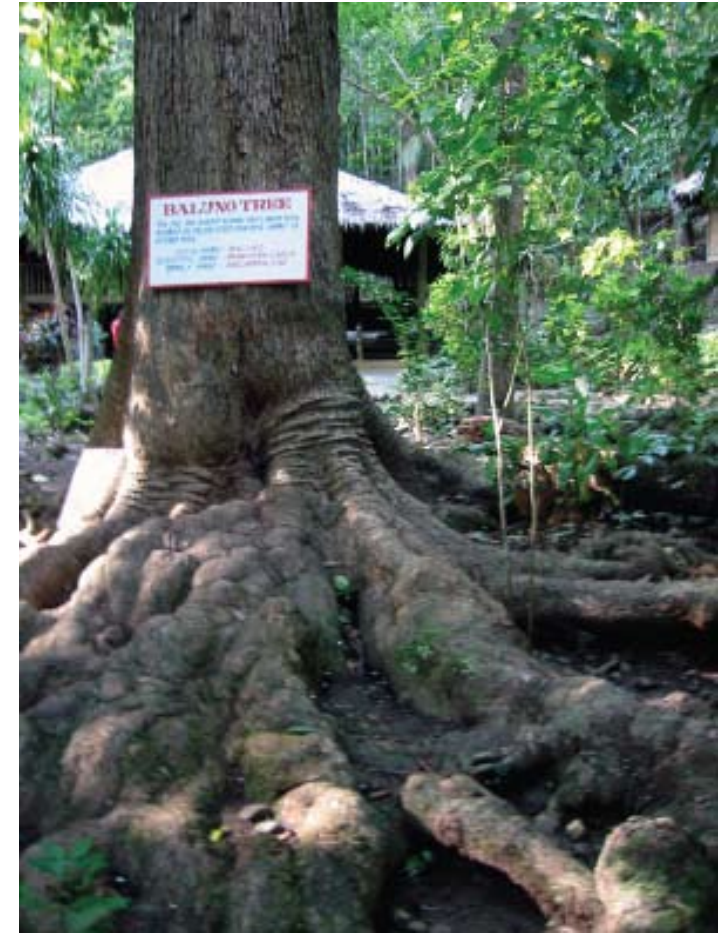
Talisay forest home

Rizal bought a 16-hectare abandoned farm by the shore of Talisay, a barrio near Dapitan, where he built a permanent home. With his students and some laborers, he cleared the area and planted cacao, coffee, coconuts, and fruit trees. Later, he bought more lands in other areas that he also planted with the same crops, including abaca. Rizal introduced modern agriculture and encouraged Dapitan farmers in the use of fertilizers, crop rotation, and farm machines. The forest in Talisay is still a forest today due to government and local protection.

A bigger project of Rizal was in an area near Sindangan Bay, in the sitio of Ponot, where he explored the idea of setting up an agricultural colony. Towards the shore, it is a vast valley of several thousand hectares. Rizal came up with a proposal to develop the area that would build on the biodiversity of the place, through integrated farming set up to benefit the displaced families in his home town of Calamba in Laguna. He believed that the area could accommodate 5,000 head of cattle and 40,000 coconut trees, and where coffee, cacao, and sugar cane could be cultivated. The Spanish government, however, rejected this proposal.

It was also in Talisay where he wrote “Mi Retiro” (My Retreat), in which he speaks of his home of exile in Dapitan and the forest around him. According to George Aseniero (one of the interviewees), “Rizal wrote “Mi Retiro” when his mother requested him to write a poem, for it had been some time since he wrote one. “Mi Retiro” is about the forest in Dapitan. He pays homage to the forests and talks about the big birds. Rizal lived in the forest and it was behind him. His house was at the foot of the hill. Where he came from, Rizal grew up next to Mount Makiling in Calamba. When he got to Dapitan, he was again near the forest.”

George prefers the free verse translation of this poem into English by the late National Artist Nick Joaquin, “even though it doesn’t conform to the strict verse and rhythmic form followed by Rizal in composing the poem. It’s an ode to nature – the forest and the sea, which is the world of Dapitan – and the consolation that nature brings to this lonely man in exile (and through it, memories of people and places now gone).”



George recommends that this poem be read together with “Un Recuerdo A Mi Pueblo” (Memories of My Town), a poem that Rizal wrote when he was 15 about his hometown in Calamba and its sacred forest and lake. “It is an adoration of nature where he talks about the ‘temples of your forest where I worship.’”

However, George notes that “the English translation of “Un Recuerdo A Mi Pueblo” is not as good as the “Mi Retiro” translation. Perhaps the translator imposed upon himself the formal structure of the original and the poem comes out sounding cramped, with none of the freshness of the 15-year-old Rizal’s expression.

“A Mi Pueblo” (Calamba, at the start of his life) and “Mi Retiro” (Dapitan, at the end of his exile) form one continuous piece. In the first, nature is a cradle; in the second, it is home and repose for a weary soul. The forest of Makiling and lake of Laguna, and the sea and forest of Dapitan were, in Rizal’s life, just one and the same in the end. This is the human face that the forest personified.

George further shares that “Rizal also attempted to write literary pieces about the forest. He re-told through prose, ‘The Legend of Mariang Makiling,’ the romantic legend of the lady in the forested mountain, again presenting another human face of the forest near his home in Calamba. This romantic movement, the re-telling of myths and folklore, was Rizal’s way of communicating the truth in the myth: that people exist in the forest, and all the sadness and tragedy of Mariang Makiling was a reflection of their own sad fate.”

“Another literary work that Rizal wrote was “Un Recuerdo,” an unfinished short story, or perhaps a fragment of an abandoned novel. The story tells of a young man who by chance meets an alluring girl in the forest. The forest is the setting, very much in the style of Romantic literature.”

George’s admiration of Rizal and the impact of Rizal’s legacy in Dapitan will always inspire him as he works on the development

planning of Dapitan. “My youthful experience of the forest was always that of Rizal’s home, and I consider this sacred because of the man who had lived there. For me, the forest always had a human face to it. And it was always ‘Rizal’s Forest.’”

“For Rizal, life in Dapitan was life in the forest. People call Rizal an *ilustrado* (the enlightened that had access to education during the Spanish times). But in his four years in Dapitan, he was away from civilization. There were times he was depressed because he felt he did not fit in there. His years in the forest were experiences that not many of his contemporaries had. One of his descendants, a most revered patriarch, Francisco Lopez, asked us on his birthday to read poems and excerpts from “Mi Retiro.” He told us, ‘One thing I ask from the Asenieros of Dapitan, that together we keep alive the sound of the brook, let us just keep that sound going.’ I said it is quite a tall order. He knew what he was asking – to preserve the entire ecosystem.”

My retreat (*Mi retiro*)

(A translation from the Spanish by Nick Joaquin)

Beside a spacious beach of fine and delicate sand
and at the foot of a mountain greener than a leaf,
I planted my humble hut beneath a pleasant orchard,
seeking in the still serenity of the woods
repose to my intellect and silence to my grief.

Its roof is fragile nipa; its floor is brittle bamboo;
its beams and posts are rough as rough-hewn wood can be;
of no worth, it is certain, is my rustic cabin;
but on the lap of the eternal mount it slumbers
and night and day is lulled by the crooning of the sea.

The overflowing brook, that from the shadowy jungle
descends between huge boulders, washes it with its spray,
donating a current of water through makeshift bamboo pipes

that in the silent night is melody and music
and crystalline nectar in the noon heat of the day.

If the sky is serene, meekly flows the spring,
strumming on its invisible zither unceasingly;
but come the time of the rains, and an impetuous torrent
spills over rocks and chasms—hoarse, foaming and aboil—
to hurl itself with a frenzied roaring toward the sea.

The barking of the dog, the twittering of the birds,
the hoarse voice of the kalaw are all that I hear;
there is no boastful man, no nuisance of a neighbor
to impose himself on my mind or to disturb my passage;
only the forests and the sea do I have near.

The sea, the sea is everything! Its sovereign mass
brings to me atoms of a myriad faraway lands;
its bright smile animates me in the limpid mornings;
and when at the end of day my faith has proven futile,
my heart echoes the sound of its sorrow on the sands.

At night it is a mystery! ... Its diaphanous element
is carpeted with thousands and thousands of lights that climb;
the wandering breeze is cool, the firmament is brilliant,
the waves narrate with many a sigh to the mild wind
histories that were lost in the dark night of time.

'Tis said they tell of the first morning on the earth,
of the first kiss with which the sun inflamed her breast,
when multitudes of beings materialized from nothing
to populate the abyss and the overhanging summits
and all the places where that quickening kiss was pressed.

But when the winds rage in the darkness of the night
and the unquiet waves commence their agony,
across the air move cries that terrify the spirit,

a chorus of voices praying, a lamentation that seems
to come from those who, long ago, drowned in the sea.

Then do the mountain ranges on high reverberate;
the trees stir far and wide, by a fit of trembling seized;
the cattle moan; the dark depths of the forest resound;
their spirits say that they are on their way to the plain,
summoned by the dead to a mortuary feast.

The wild night hisses, hisses, confused and terrifying;
one sees the sea afire with flames of green and blue;
but calm is re-established with the approach of dawning
and forthwith an intrepid little fishing vessel
begins to navigate the weary waves anew.

So pass the days of my life in my obscure retreat;
cast out of the world where once I dwelt: such is my rare
good fortune; and Providence be praised for my condition:
a disregarded pebble that craves nothing but moss
to hide from all the treasure that in myself I bear.

I live with the remembrance of those that I have loved
and hear their names still spoken, who haunt my memory;
some already are dead, others have long forgotten—
but what does it matter? I live remembering the past
and no one can ever take the past away from me.

It is my faithful friend that never turns against me,
that cheers my spirit when my spirit's a lonesome wraith,
that in my sleepless nights keeps watch with me and prays
with me, and shares with me my exile and my cabin,
and, when all doubt, alone infuses me with faith.

Faith do I have, and I believe the day will shine
when the Idea shall defeat brute force as well;
and after the struggle and the lingering agony

a voice more eloquent and happier than my own
will then know how to utter victory's canticle.

I see the heavens shining, as flawless and refulgent
as in the days that saw my first illusions start;
I feel the same breeze kissing my autumnal brow,
the same that once enkindled my fervent enthusiasm
and turned the blood ebullient within my youthful heart.

Across the fields and rivers of my native town
perhaps has traveled the breeze that now I breathe by chance;
perhaps it will give back to me what once I gave it:
the sighs and kisses of a person idolized
and the sweet secrets of a virginal romance.

On seeing the same moon, as silvery as before,
I feel within me the ancient melancholy revive;
a thousand memories of love and vows awaken:
a patio, an azotea, a beach, a leafy bower;
silences and sighs, and blushes of delight ...

A butterfly athirst for radiances and colors,
dreaming of other skies and of a larger strife,
I left, scarcely a youth, my land and my affections,
and vagrant everywhere, with no qualms, with no terrors,
squandered in foreign lands the April of my life.

And afterwards, when I desired, a weary swallow,
to go back to the nest of those for whom I care,
suddenly fiercely roared a violent hurricane
and I found my wings broken, my dwelling place demolished,
faith now sold to others, and ruins everywhere.

Hurled upon a rock of the country I adore;
the future ruined; no home, no health to bring me cheer;
you come to me anew, dreams of rose and gold,

of my entire existence the solitary treasure,
convictions of a youth that was healthy and sincere.

No more are you, like once, full of fire and life,
offering a thousand crowns to immortality;
somewhat serious I find you; and yet your face beloved,
if now no longer as merry, if now no longer as vivid,
now bear the superscription of fidelity.

You offer me, O illusions, the cup of consolation;
you come to reawaken the years of youthful mirth;
hurricane, I thank you; winds of heaven, I thank you
that in good hour suspended by uncertain flight
to bring me down to the bosom of my native earth.

Beside a spacious beach of fine and delicate sand
and at the foot of a mountain greener than a leaf,
I found in my land a refuge under a pleasant orchard,
and in its shadowy forests, serene tranquility,
repose to my intellect and silence to my grief.

Memories of my town (*Un recuerdo a mi pueblo*)

When I recall the days
That saw my childhood of yore
Beside the verdant shore
Of a murmuring lagoon;
When I remember the sighs
Of the breeze that on my brow
Sweet and caressing did blow
With coolness full of delight;

When I look at the lily white
Fills up with air violent
And the stormy element



On the sand doth meekly sleep;
 When sweet 'toxicating scent
 From the flowers I inhale
 Which at the dawn they exhale
 When at us it begins to peep;

I sadly recall your face,
 Oh precious infancy,
 That a mother lovingly
 Did succeed to embellish.
 I remember a simple town;
 My cradle, joy and boon,
 Beside the cool lagoon
 The seat of all my wish.

Oh, yes! With uncertain pace
 I trod your forest lands,
 And on your river banks
 A pleasant fun I found;
 At your rustic temple I prayed
 With a little boy's simple faith
 And your aura's flawless breath
 Filled my heart with joy profound.

Saw I God in the grandeur
 Of your woods which for centuries stand;
 Never did I understand
 In your bosom what sorrows were;
 While I gazed on your azure sky
 Neither love nor tenderness
 Failed me, 'cause my happiness
 In the heart of nature rests there.

Tender childhood, beautiful town,
 Rich fountain of happiness,
 Of harmonious melodies,
 That drive away my sorrow!
 Return thee to my heart,
 Bring back my gentle hours
 As do the birds when the flow'rs
 Would again begin to blow !

But, alas, adieu! E'er watch
 For your peace, joy and repose,
 Genius of good who kindly dispose
 Of his blessings with amour;
 It's for thee my fervent pray'rs,
 It's for thee my constant desire
 Knowledge ever to acquire
 And may God keep your candour!



COMMUNITY LOGGERS



We met up with a group of log rollers along the way who shared with us openly about their activities in the area. This group takes over once the grass cutters have done their work in plantation areas, but they also work in natural forests. They are log rollers and Bislig in Surigao del Sur is their destination.

Before cutting, they pay the local New People's Army (NPA) in the area PhP5,000 per truckload. Then they must have something for the barangay captain, the local/municipal police, the Municipal Environment and Resource Management Officer (MENRO), the DENR Community Environment and Resource Management Officer (CENRO), the DENR Provincial Environment and Resource Management Officer (PENRO), the local politico, sometimes the Mayor, the Administrator, the military, the DENR officials in the area, the municipal police per town (especially for the round logs), the mobile group of the Department of Transportation and Communications (DOTC) and the PENRO of the local government.

The present area where they are operating is owned by a datu. They also call themselves *pakyaw* or labor for hire. They handle around 500 cubic meters and the average income of a log roller is PhP150 daily per person. One truckload per week is around 30 cubic meters. They usually get cash advance to buy rice to eat.

Community logging on the roll

To gather the *lauan* requires a five-man team. After cutting, they roll the logs from steep areas to flat areas. The buffalo group (*birada*) drags the logs to the loading point, which is the roadside or the plantation road, not the highway.

The loading group (*kargador*) then loads the logs onto the waiting 10-wheeler trucks and this costs PhP3,500 per truckload. The procedure involves relay loading. They half load the truck, then they download to better roads. Then the truck goes back to get the other half. Loaders get free meals.

Then it's on to the checkpoints, which costs them PhP200,000 per truckload. Once they finish with all the checkpoints, the net income will be PhP50,000, to be divided among the group. Most of the money will be splurged on liquor.

The price of log rolling ranges from PhP200 to 400 per cubic meter, depending on the distance and cost of the buffalo. For the loading of *lauan*, the price range is PhP3,000 to 5,000, and incorporated in this is the cost of loading and unloading if it is a relay loading operation. The rollers return to normal farming and underbrushing when they are not log-rolling. These are usually young men, 18 to 25 years old.

The average income of a buffalo owner is PhP300 to 400 per day. A buffalo can drag a log up to about 80 cm in diameter and about 2 meters long.

The log rollers are organized for the truck loading. They find it easier to work during the rainy season as they do not get tired as easily because it is cooler. But the rains worsen the roads for the trucks. Also, during the rainy season, there is no need to cool off the buffalo. If it is very hot, they need to rest the buffalo after two trips for 15 to 30 minutes.





When the truck goes out on the highway, they use DAO-04 (Departmental Order) and this costs PhP75,000 per package. They refer to a local “Lord of the Rings” who ensures that they will not be caught and will be protected with papers and documents. In the area being cleared, the datu wants to use DAO 04 because he gains from this. He now has a motorbike. The kidnapping of the DENR official Cris Kuizon in 2003 was in relation to the lifting of DAO 04, which suited this style of local logging.

For chainsaw cutting, the datu is the financier. This costs PhP1.00 per cubic meter – for the tree owner, the operator and his assistants, the helper, and for the gasoline used for the chainsaw.

Then there is also the “holder” or the financier, so that they can loan cash. This financier also provides the protection and the papers. The contacts of the financiers are the armed middlemen. A shotgun costs PhP3,000 with magazine.

The financial calibrations and allocations are very exacting in resources, skills, time and money. These are the ways of a world that is transient for labor, but has a long tradition in local resource extraction in collusion with bureaucracy. “Everybody” finds some level of livelihood, but there is no local investment or sustainability – and the forests continue to disappear.

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