

## Conducting Surveys on Forestry Attitudes and Practices in Leyte Communities, Philippines: Experiences and Lessons Learnt

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A survey of forestry practices and attitudes was undertaken in four communities in Leyte, the Philippines, to improve understanding of the social and economic factors affecting small-scale forestry development. The survey had three main data collection activities – initial focus group discussions (FGDs), household interviews, and reporting and validation FGDs. A team of enumerators was selected for household interviews which consisted of both males and females, to avoid potential problems of unwillingness of people to talk with those of the opposite gender. The interviewers were also required to be able to speak local dialects (Cebuano and Waray Waray), the survey questionnaires being administered in these dialects. Various methods were used to gain the support and assistance of local government units and barangay captains. Some difficulty was experienced by the survey team in the first community due to barangay elections at the time of the survey, and the requirement by The University of Queensland Ethics Committee that respondents sign a consent form. This requirement was found to be not culturally appropriate for the Leyte smallholder communities. Offering goods at the end of the interview was found to be of limited value for encouraging participation in the survey. Provision of food and drinks were found to encourage FGD participants to express their views, but too much alcohol had a negative effect. The importance of providing comprehensive feedback to respondents and involving them and other stakeholders in development of policy recommendations was apparent. These survey experiences provide valuable insights which are not generally available in textbooks on sample surveys, and provide lessons for planning and conducting smallholder community survey into natural resource management issues.

**Keywords:** focus groups, household interviews, local dialects, ethics committee, people's organisation, validation of survey findings

## INTRODUCTION

Carrying out surveys of attitudes to forestry and aspirations for forest management in traditional indigenous communities in remote areas can present many problems for researchers. For example, Venn (2004) found that in the Aurukun community of Cape York Peninsula, Australia, it was not possible to conduct a community survey due to negative attitudes of the indigenous community to outsiders, the existence of (non-indigenous) 'gatekeepers' who considered that they were protecting the rights of the indigenous community, and traditional distrust between the many tribes which had been forced to coexist in the community. Similarly, Safa (2005) found difficulty in interviewing upland farmers in Yemen, due to lack of communications, accommodation for enumerators and road access.

A survey of forestry practices and attitudes was conducted in four communities in Leyte province. This formed part of the three-year *Smallholder Forestry Project*, funded by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR), formally titled ASEM2000/088, *Redevelopment of a Timber Industry Following Extensive Clearing*, and carried out by staff of The University of Queensland and Leyte State University<sup>1</sup>. The underlying rationale was that improved understanding of community aspirations and livelihood strategies will enable improvements in the design and operation of forestry development programs and the policy framework of governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

The survey was carried out in the barangays<sup>2</sup> of Conalum (Inopacan local government unit), Tigbao (Matalom), Poting bato (Isabel) and Rizal II (Babatngon), which had been selected earlier as focus areas for the wider research project. These four communities represent a wide geographic range in Leyte Province, as illustrated in Figure 1, and contacts had been established with each community by staff of the College of Forestry of Leyte State University (LSU). It was decided by the research team to seek participation of communities that had previous contact with project researchers for two main reasons. First, a fragile 'peace and order' situation exists in some remote areas of Leyte, with members of the New Peoples Army (NPA) active in parts of the province. While this group is not as violent as some insurgent groups operating in the southern island of Mindanao, they have been known to impose their own 'revolutionary taxes' on remote barangays where they operate, occasionally destroying infrastructure such as buses when their demands are not met. The second reason was that low education levels and lack of contact with outside agencies in remote parts of Leyte province can lead to a substantial time requirement to establish trust between 'outsiders' and community members. Such time was not available given the three-year funding period of the project.

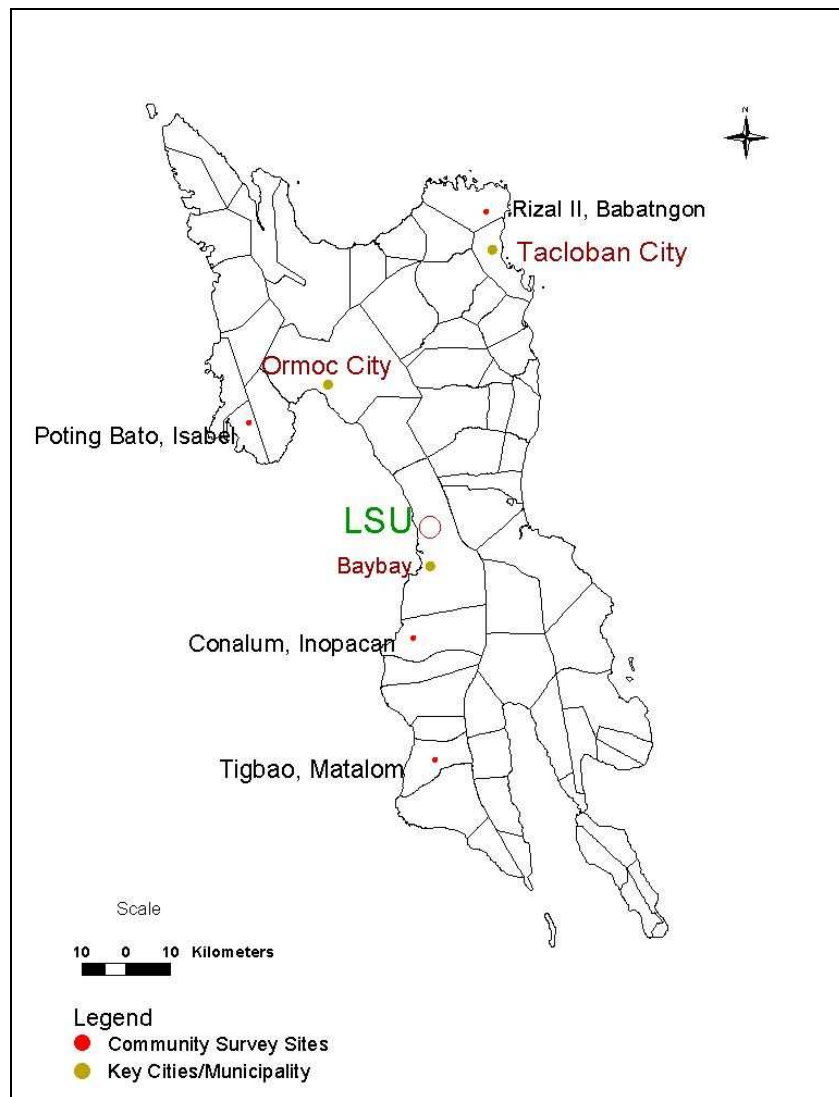
This paper examines the rationale for the choice of the community survey method, and experiences and lessons learned from conducting the survey on the forestry attitudes and practices, particularly in regard to the practical lessons that emerged from the experience. While recommendations for good practice in sample

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<sup>1</sup> The ACIAR project involved a number of research activities apart from the community survey, including establishment of tree growth trial plots, establishment of tree nursery trials, interviews of members of local community organizations formed to manage Community Based Forest Management Agreements, and interviews of nursery operators in the community.

<sup>2</sup> A barangay is the smallest area of government in the Philippines, and in rural areas usually encompasses a number of sitios, or small hamlets of dwellings.

surveys can be found in many textbooks, field experience in a major survey of low-income rural communities in a developing country revealed a variety of unexpected problems and issues which by necessity had to be responded to quickly and flexibly by the research team. The first section of the paper explains the rationale for choice of a household survey as the research method and provides an overview of the research project. The various research steps are then outlined. Experiences of the survey team are next documented, with particular emphasis on difficulties encountered and steps that were taken to overcome them. The final section of the paper presents insights concerning what the experiences offer for future survey research in similar settings.



**Figure 1.** Map of Leyte Island indicating sites for community survey

Note: The south-west of the island is a separate province (Southern Leyte).

## DATA COLLECTION METHOD

When planning data collection from the four target communities, three distinct strategies were contemplated:

1. Use of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) in which meetings would be held in communities to identify community resources, attitudes and practices.
2. A sample survey involving interviews of a random sample of households (which may be equated to smallholders) in the four communities.
3. The lead researchers taking up residence in successive communities for a period of two to three months, and collecting information by a combination of observation and discussion with community members.

Various strengths and weaknesses of these methods – PRA, sample survey and ‘immersion’ – can be recognised (Marsland *et al.* 2001, Harrison 2002). The PRA approach (PROCESS Foundation 1996), which has been applied to forestry research in Leyte Province (Singzon *et al.* 1993), allows data to be collected rapidly, at relatively low cost. However, the community members who respond to an invitation to attend the meeting may not be representative of all community members, and the data collected is sometimes relatively superficial. Surveys are a widely-used data collection method in social sciences (Dijkstra and Zouwen 1982, Herbohn 2002). When carried out in indigenous communities, these are relatively expensive and require considerable planning and careful management. An attraction of the interview survey approach for the present study was that a number of trained and experienced enumerators who had taken part in sociological surveys in Leyte traditional communities were available for recruitment. The ethnological approach has the potential to generate high-quality information, but has high resource and researcher skill requirements. Because of the time required for researchers to be accepted by community members, it was judged that two months of researcher presence would be required in each of the four communities, and this task could not be delegated to hired enumerators. Also, difficulties would arise in terms of communication, even with an interpreter continuously present. While this approach might generate excellent demographic information, it would not necessarily provide superior information about attitudes to forestry, relative to a household survey, and survey results would be difficult to extrapolate to other communities (Marsland *et al.* 2001).

On the basis of the above considerations, it was decided that a sample survey approach would be adopted. A target sample size of 50 households in each community or a total of 200 households was chosen, as a compromise between precision and cost. This sample size was judged adequate for univariate statistics, but was obviously limited for cross-tabulations (chi-square tests) for identifying relationships between variables, particularly at the individual community level. It was further decided that the sample survey would be supported by focus group discussions.

It was decided to use a sequence of qualitative and quantitative survey methods adapted to suit local conditions, and to include a means of validating and interpreting responses (following Marsland *et al.* 2001). Focus group discussions or

interviews are used as a means of generating and testing ideas as an aid to further analysis (Berg 2004). Focus group meetings were arranged in each community prior to the survey, to introduce the project to community members, gather background data, explore issues with regard to forestry, and assist in the development of a structured questionnaire. Focus group discussions were also arranged after the survey and preliminary data analysis, so as to report survey findings to the communities and obtain their reactions as a form of validation of findings.

The questionnaire was drafted and then tested on five households in a community similar to those being surveyed. The pilot testing resulted in revision of some questions, with the most important benefit being improvements in the way the questions were framed.

## **DETERMINING THE SURVEY TOPICS AND METHODS**

The steps followed in the research are illustrated in Figure 2, and are reported in more detail in Emtage (2004). Prior to commencing data collection, discussions were held within the research group, focusing on research objectives of the broader ACIAR Smallholder Forestry Project, to identify those objectives that required information from a community survey. While the primary interest of the survey was to identify a landholder typology with respect to interest in forestry<sup>3</sup> which could assist in designing forestry support and extension programs, the needs of the wider research project dictated that the survey collect a relatively broad set of information. The main objectives were broken down into a series of key objectives, 12 of which relied directly on the generation of data from a survey of rural households, including examination of household attitudes to forestry development, sources of planting materials and participation in community organisations. Care was taken to ensure that the survey would collect information for all the required topics to avoid duplication of research effort and inefficient use of resources. This, however, led to a large questionnaire, for which interviews would be lengthy. The topics covered in the questionnaire included socio-demographics, farm resources and farming systems, present and intended tree planting and management activities, reasons and constraints to tree planting and management, community organisations and their forestry activities, and perceived development project needs.

A literature review was undertaken and discussions held with experienced Filipino researchers to assess the state of knowledge in the Philippines about the survey topics, gain insight into how to conduct the survey and develop understanding of the social and economic factors affecting smallholder forestry development. Following completion of the literature review, a research planning workshop was held to allow presentation of the findings of the review and to enable further discussion of the research methods. A high level of interpersonal contact was maintained with researchers in various faculties at Leyte State University to assist in survey implementation. In addition, the group of researchers of the LSU College of Forestry who were involved in other sub-projects in the ACIAR-funded research met regularly to discuss matters in relation to the survey and their other research.

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<sup>3</sup> The findings with respect to a smallholder typology are reported in Emtage (2004).

## SETTING UP THE SURVEY

Setting-up formal data collection activities required extensive planning and negotiations with people in positions of authority in the local government units and barangays. Letters were sent to mayors, barangay captains and relevant personnel in other concerned agencies including the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), the Department of Agriculture (DA) and the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR). The letters described the objectives of the project, the tentative schedules for fieldwork and the people to be involved in undertaking this fieldwork.

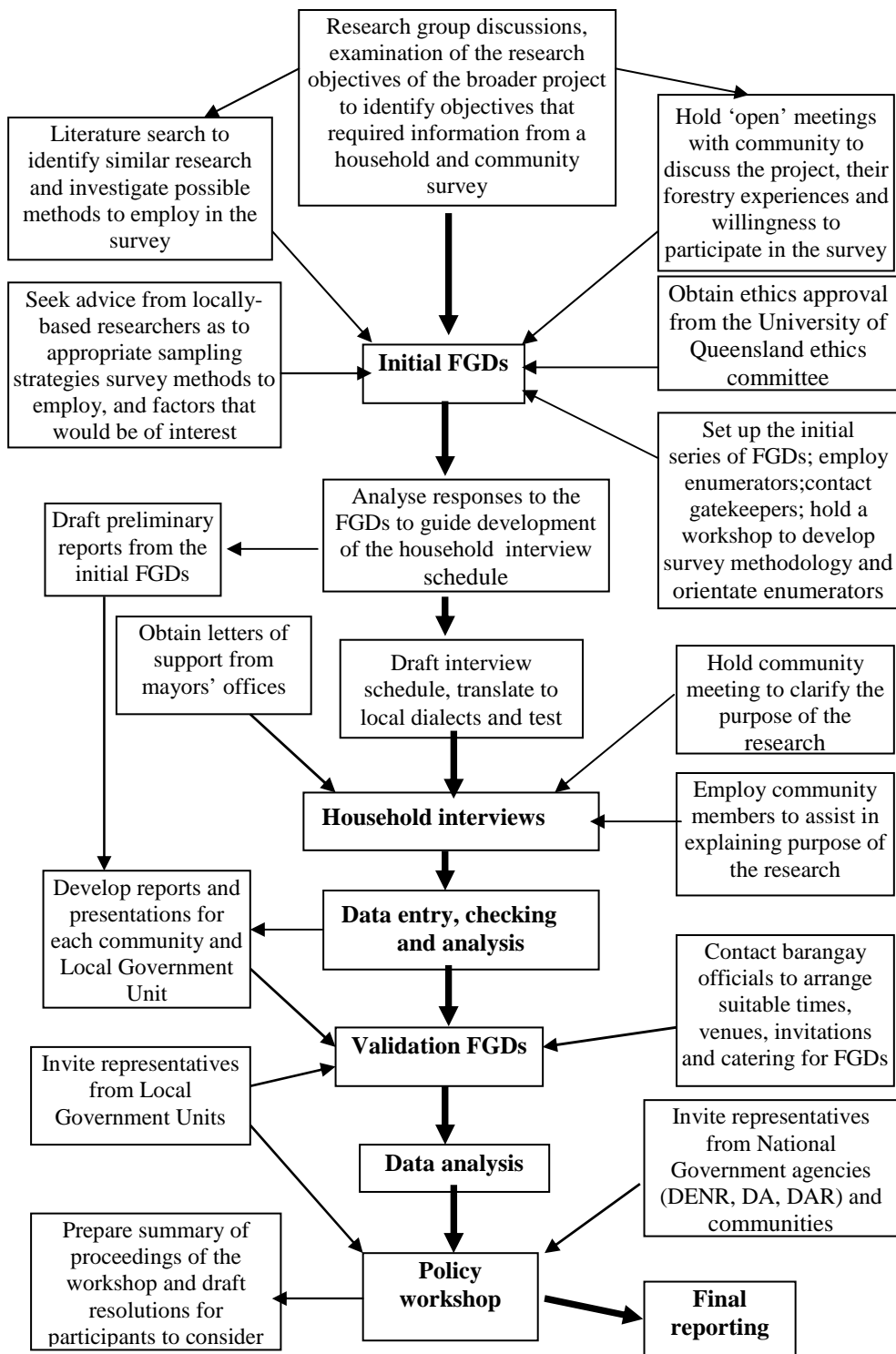
The letters sent to LGUs and barangay officials by the research team established 'official' contact with the communities, and were followed by personal visits to the local officials by the project team for further discussion about the research project and proposed fieldwork in each municipality and barangay. The permits or certification provided by the LGUs and barangay officials were used as proof of authority to collect information from individual households, and for the purpose of gathering secondary data. Permits or certification for the legality, authenticity and honesty of the project were thus secured from concerned agencies prior to the first fieldwork, in this case the initial focus group discussion (FGD). Although these processes seemed to be tedious, they were important in gaining support from the LGUs and other concerned agencies. Initial contact between the overseas-based researchers from The University of Queensland, Australia (UQ), and the communities that eventually participated in the research was facilitated by faculty members of the LSU College of Forestry involved in the Smallholder Forestry Project.

The first step taken to secure the participation of the communities was to hold a series of 'open' meetings, one in each community, facilitated by the barangay and Peoples' Organisation officials.<sup>4</sup> During these meetings, the nature of the ACIAR UQ-LSU research project was described. The researchers took the opportunity to discuss the community and smallholder forestry activities taking place in each community, and where possible answered questions from the community members regarding forestry regulations, tree management and the proposed activities of the research team. Each of the communities subsequently agreed to participate in the research project.

Prior to fieldwork, it was necessary to engage enumerators, including six to work on the initial FGDs, and 10 to conduct the household interviews. The positions were advertised on notice boards at LSU. The applicants were interviewed by a panel of College of Forestry staff, with questions about their language skills, previous experience in working with communities and on surveys particularly, other work experiences, and education qualifications. Applicants were also asked to write a short paragraph describing their ideas about forestry to provide an indication of their writing skills. All enumerators had previous work experience in conducting social science surveys and community organising work in rural communities in Leyte Province.

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<sup>4</sup> People's Organisations (POs) existed in all four communities, having been established by Community Organisers (COs) to enable participation in Community Based Forest Management (CBFM).



**Figure 2.** Activities undertaken for the survey

Following discussions between the research team and other experienced LSU researchers, it was decided that during the household interviews the enumerators would work in teams of two, with one male and one female on each team so as to avoid potential problems of unwillingness of respondents to talk with those of the opposite gender. A further requirement for the teams was that one member should have qualifications in agricultural science and the other forestry, so as to allow the teams to best interpret the responses.

## **CONDUCTING INITIAL FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS**

The series of initial FGDs in the four communities was conducted in the last week of July 2002 and the meetings were attended by an average of 20 community members. Participants were selected by the barangay captains according to the criteria specified by the researchers, namely that the participants (1) had lived in the barangay for at least 10 years, and (2) included representatives from the Senior Citizens, Farmers, Zone and Sitio Leaders, Barangay officials, and the Sangguniang Kabataan (Youth Sector).

The participants (key informants) proposed by the barangay captains were given official letters of invitation from the research team, delivered by the captain. The meetings took place over a full day. Participants were divided into two groups in the morning session to form more manageable group sizes, thereby avoiding excessive arguments among participants and the potential for one or two individuals to dominate proceedings. Each group was assigned specific tasks to complete, allowing a greater number of activities to be completed during the day. Mini-workshops conducted by the groups expedited completion of the activities. During the afternoon session, the results were presented to the whole group for verification of information obtained. There were six topics or activities covered by the initial FGDs, namely community mapping, community history, reasons for and constraints to tree farming, strength-weaknesses-opportunities-threats (SWOT) analysis, annual activity calendar, and list of characteristics of various well-being categories.

The study team provided lunch for the participants. This was done to avoid them from going home at noon and to ensure their attendance for the afternoon session. The food bought by the project was prepared and served by local folk organised by the barangay officials. A moderate quantity of tuba – a locally produced low-alcohol red wine derived from coconut inflorescences and frequently made available on social occasions – was also provided during or after the meal. This added to the enjoyment of the occasion, and contributed to the readiness of participants to speak up and comment on the topics of the workshop. Some difficulties arose in one FDG when, following lunch, the husband of the barangay captain wanted to drink rum with the Australian study leader. Not wanting to offend the person the study leader had a few drinks with the man at his house while the rest of the study team continued the FGD activities. After about one hour, the study leader proposed that they return to the FGD to assist proceedings, thinking that the rum would be left behind. Instead the man brought the bottle to the meeting where he finished it, becoming argumentative and even abusive, and interrupting discussions.



## THE HOUSEHOLD INTERVIEWS

The questionnaire for householders was originally prepared in English and was then translated into the local dialects of Waray Waray (for eastern Leyte) and Cebuano (western Leyte) to facilitate understanding between the respondents and enumerators. Use of the local dialects facilitated delivery of questions and gathering appropriate information from respondents, especially because not all enumerators could speak these dialects even though they could understand them. Responses during interviews were recorded in dialects, and were translated to English before data entry for analysis by SPSS.

The team of 10 enumerators and the field supervisor travelled by hired van from Leyte State University to each community, and set up a rented house for one week to conduct interviews. The team contacted the barangay captain upon arrival in each community as a courtesy call and in order to obtain a list of all the households in the barangay for use in selecting sample households. To select the 50 households, the number of households in the community was divided by 50, and systematic selection conducted. For example, if there were 200 households in the community, the first household on the list and every fourth household thereafter was selected, and the head-of-household interviewed.

The five teams of two enumerators worked simultaneously in the same community, with day-to-day activities managed by the field supervisor.<sup>5</sup> The research team brought their own cooking and dining utensils, and prepared their own food. The enumerators were paid a total of 500 Philippine pesos per day, comprising 300 for wages and 200 as a field allowance<sup>6</sup>. Domiciling the enumerators in the communities enhanced the development of rapport with community members, and enabled further investigation of important issues related to forestry attitudes and practices through both direct observations and informal discussions with the people, usually late in the afternoons when they returned from their fields and until dinner.

If the householder could not be contacted then the adjacent neighbour either to the left or to the right was contacted as a replacement. If, for example, the household on the left was not available or unwilling to participate in the interview, then the house to the right was chosen. Each team of enumerators was instructed to attempt to carry out two interviews per day. This small number was due to the long and detailed questionnaire which covered a great number of topics. Further, considerable time was required to explain the purpose and nature of the research to the respondents, and to build rapport with them. The household interviews were run from August to September 2002, and a total of 203 usable responses was obtained.

The enumerators enthusiastically answered most questions about the survey raised by potential respondents. Unanswered questions were referred to the field supervisor for his consideration where in most cases the field supervisor could provide an opinion to concerned potential respondents without seeking advice of the team leader.

In most cases the entire household was present at the time of interview, including adult males and females and often children. The presence of other household

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<sup>5</sup> The team leader, who had been present for two months in setting up the surveys, conducting initial FDGs and testing the questionnaire, decided not to take part in interviews (not being familiar with local dialects), and returned to Australia.

<sup>6</sup> US\$1.00 = PhP50.00, approximately.

members during the interview helped in the recall of important information which the household head could not immediately provide.

Upon interview completion, each household was offered a package of goods. It was initially believed that giving a small gift to respondents would have a positive impact in terms of encouraging other farmers to actively participate in the survey. The rationale of giving the gift was to provide compensation for the time the respondents allocated for the interview.<sup>7</sup> The types of presents were selected in line with the basic needs of households, and included two packs of instant noodles, one can of sardines, one face towel and a pencil.

### **Problems and Remedies in the Household Survey**

When setting up the survey, as well as the communications and approvals secured from mayors and barangay captains, the study team made personal courtesy calls to some barangay officials, particularly the barangay chairmen. In three of the four communities, every household that was contacted agreed to participate in the interviews. However, two major difficulties arose before interviews could commence in the first community. Elections had recently been held in this community, and a new barangay chairman had been elected. The timing of the survey was unfortunate because the incumbent chairman was due to hand over their position midway through the week in which the interviews were being undertaken. Support and opinion of the people towards the study was divided because of this situation, such that obtaining a list of households from barangay officials and their endorsement became complicated, thereby impeding passing the information regarding the survey to potential respondents.

Obtaining respondents' signatures as part of the ethics requirements presented another difficulty. The University of Queensland Human Ethics Committee requires that for projects in which surveys are conducted the researchers must provide information about the study and have participants sign a consent form. A section of this form (Figure 3) sets out the voluntary participation of the potential respondent and provides a place for a signature. Other sections of the form include a summary of objectives or purposes of the research, persons (in the Philippines and Australia) to be contacted for questions about the survey that were not answered by enumerators and the field supervisors, and The University of Queensland ethical paragraph (informing that ethical clearance has been provided by the university). This survey information and consent form was given to potential participants for them to read. If they were unable to read, the enumerators read the information to them.

Many suspicions arose among residents in the first community about the survey.<sup>8</sup> Even with a clear explanation on the objectives and strategy employed by the research, great resistance to cooperating in the survey was experienced. The requirement for signing the form coupled with giving of goods after the interview

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<sup>7</sup> An approach adopted in a survey of smallholder attitudes to forestry by the Ministry of Agricultural and Rural Development in Vietnam (associated with another ACIAR project and including similar questions) was to pay respondents an amount equal to the wage for one day of farm work, to compensation for lost time in tending their crops (Harrison 2004).

<sup>8</sup> This was the same community in which the initial FGD was disturbed by drinking, and which, according to subsequent analysis of the socio-economic data collected, experienced the highest incidence and depth of poverty of the four communities surveyed.

had heightened their doubts. The apprehension of some of the people discouraged others from participating in the survey. According to reports from key informants and actual observation, the cause of suspicion was misinformation and the similarity of the research methods to the activities of the New People's Army (NPA) – a communist insurgent group – in recruiting new members. A round-table discussion with the incumbent chairman came up with the following suggestions to overcome the problems:

1. Provide written notice to the barangay officials and residents that the study team has been given clearance by the LGU to proceed with the survey and that the former are requested to support actively the research project and particularly the household interview. This notice was secured from the mayor's office.
2. Obtain written approval from the chairman-elect to proceed with the survey.
3. Conduct a focus group discussion with the incumbent and newly elected barangay officials, purok leaders<sup>9</sup> and other interested community members to discuss issues regarding the research methods and strategies and find solutions on how to proceed with the survey.

Participation in the survey is voluntary. You do not have to participate in any way if you do not wish to, and if you decide to participate you may choose not to answer any question or decide to withdraw from participation at any time. If you decide to withdraw from the project then all information you have supplied will be destroyed.

If you do decide to participate in the survey, all information you supply will be kept strictly confidential. Your name and address will not be linked to any of the answers you may give us and all responses will be kept in a locked and secure place.

A community meeting will be held following the collection of results from this survey to report to the community the survey findings. The College of Forestry at LSU, Visca, will hold copies of the complete research report.

Agreement to participate in the survey

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in the survey understanding that this agreement may be withdrawn at any time,

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_.

**Figure 3.** Excerpt from the information form given to respondents to the household interviews

<sup>9</sup> A *purok* is an administrative zone in a barangay composed of several households (not less than about 10).

The study leader was briefed about the problems encountered in the field and accepted these suggestions. In addition, he suggested that the signature on the consent form and the presentation of goods following the interview could be omitted if these were the sources of the difficulties encountered by the enumerators. He also emphasised to the study team that regardless of whether signatures were obtained, any participation must be voluntary and the confidentiality of the responses must be ensured. It was decided to proceed with the interviews in the absence of signatures. One enumerator team had an interview with the respondent in side view, and after concluding the interview the respondent quickly disappeared. In another case, there was disagreement between a husband who did not want to participate in the survey, and his wife who thought he should participate. The husband subsequently agreed, and became more relaxed when he found the pack of goods on the table. These scenarios reveal two different attitudes, both signifying the effects of misinformation and low literacy levels in some communities.

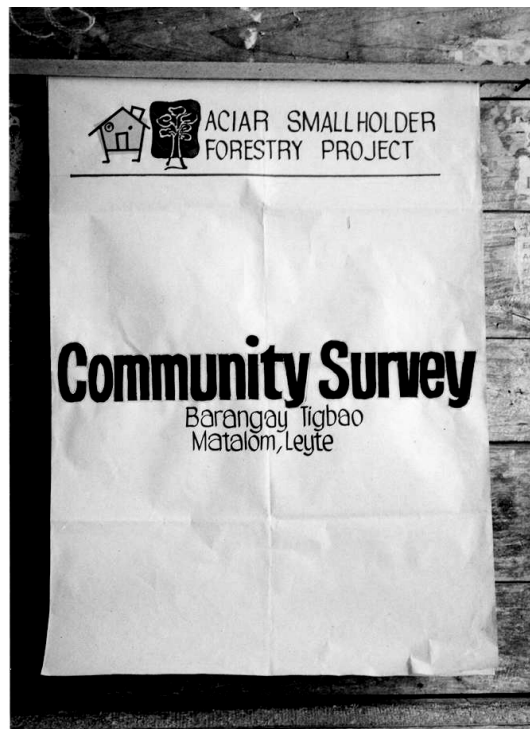
The procedures developed for the first community were then applied to the remaining three communities, where no major difficulties arose. The reluctance of smallholders to provide signatures reveals that the procedures required by the UQ ethics committee are not culturally appropriate for the Leyte community surveys. While provision can be made to vary the approach in such remote, low income, low education and culturally distinct communities, immediate practical solutions are required to solve unexpected difficulties during fieldwork.

The use of field guides (members of the barangay council hired to assist the survey and paid 200 pesos per day) were found to be of great assistance in the survey, particularly in locating target households, introducing the enumerators and explaining the purpose of the research.

## **FINAL FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS**

The final focus group discussions were designed to present and validate findings arising from the community survey and were held in each of the four communities during March 2003 . Unlike the initial FGDs, the final FGDs were each attended by about 50 participants including representatives of the youth sector, senior citizens and barangay officials, and also some survey respondents. The reports on survey findings were hand-written in local dialect, on 32cm x 92cm (portrait) Manila paper fastened across the top to a 2cm x 4 cm x 34cm wood strip (see Figure 4). The report for each community was approximately 18 pages long and contained information about:

- the purpose of the study;
- methodology used;
- results including socio-economic characteristics of households; farm and farming systems;
- present and intended tree planting and management including the species used and preferred trees intended for harvest, trees intended for sale, functions of trees and tree registration with the DENR; and
- information on household involvement in community organisations, and community economic development priorities.



**Figure 4.** Example of typical visual materials of the survey report for final FGDs

Results were presented in a descriptive format using measures of central tendency (means, medians and modes) and some percentages, such that they were readily understandable by farmers and community members. The final FGDs were conducted by the study leader together with the research officer (who served as field supervisor), a research aid and a field assistant. The research officer, who speaks both local dialects, made the oral presentations of the reports. Most comments and clarifications made by FGD participants focused on the tree registration and harvesting aspect and few on development priorities. These comments were in agreement with the survey results and highlighted the importance of constraints to tree farming and tree registration (a mandatory process before permission for logging can be obtained from the DENR).

#### **POLICY WORKSHOP**

While the FDGs met the Ethics Committee requirement of reporting survey findings to the local communities, and provided feedback and confirmation of the survey findings, a forest policy workshop was also conducted for Leyte Province after the final FGDs. This was considered necessary to clarify issues arising from the community surveys and FDGs, and to provide input to government policy, particularly in the light of concerns expressed by survey respondents about difficulties in gaining tree registration.

The policy workshop was attended by representative of the DENR, Region 8 (including Community Environment and Natural Resources Officers or CENROs), the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), local government units of each of the four municipalities (Babatngon, Isabel, Matalom and Inopacan), and selected barangay officials and key informants from each survey community. The policy workshop was held in the LSU College of Forestry.

Activities in the policy workshop included a report of the survey results by the study leader and discussion sessions. The participants were divided into three groups, namely representatives of DAR, DENR regional office and CENROs, local government units (Department of Agriculture and Sangunian Bayan Members<sup>10</sup>), and barangay officials and farmers. The workshop examined clarifications to land tenures policies, tree registration requirements and regulations and their implications for forestry development, understanding and roles of LGUs in relation to land tenure policies, barangay officials' and farmers' perceptions on how to improve land tenure policies, tree registration and harvesting, and livelihood strategies to support communities during the establishment phase of small-scale forestry development. The proceedings of the policy workshop were distributed to all workshop participants for their comments and considerations and have been prepared as a report.

## **CONCLUDING COMMENTS**

Surveys are widely used for data collection in the social sciences, and it is sometimes believed that conducting a survey is simple and the work of enumerator is relatively easy. The experience in the community survey undertaken during the UQ-LSU ACIAR Smallholder Forestry Project reveals that this is certainly not the case, particularly for surveys in traditional rural communities where communication difficulties arise and outsiders are treated with suspicion. The pressing forestry issue of timber harvesting from public land coupled with the low literacy level obviously created difficulties for investigating attitudes and practices in tree farming in the four rural communities. The coincidence of survey timing with change of barangay captain also created problems, even though the survey had been delayed to allow for some expected changes in administration. Clearly, politics may in one way or another affect the support and participation of smallholders in survey work. Notwithstanding this, discussions and negotiations involving the local leaders (municipal and barangay level) may improve the situation. Permits and notices are prerequisites before any fieldwork. Gaining the approval of locally relevant gatekeepers, in this case the Local Government Units, was clearly more important in providing confidence to both enumerators and respondents than were the reassurances provided Universities as institutions. The LGUs had been consulted prior to the conduct of the FGDs and household interviews, and their approval for the project was obtained verbally, but it was not until written approval of the project was obtained that the suspicions of some members of the community were allayed.

Signing agreements to signify that the farmer has voluntarily participated in the survey is not interpreted the same way in rural communities in the Philippines as it is

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<sup>10</sup> Sangunian Bayan Members is a Filipino term for municipal council members.

in Australia. This requirement is likely to create resistance, especially when the purpose of the fieldwork is not clear. Extended discussions about the nature and purposes of the project involving as many people from the community as possible are highly recommended to avoid misinformation. Offering some cash or goods at the end of the interview does not guarantee the participation of other farmers. It is suggested that if gifts are given, it should be clear that the reason is neither to gain authentic participation nor to compensate the time allocated for the survey, but rather as a token for their participation.

The need to provide comprehensive feedback to smallholders providing information became apparent in the survey. Not only is this a desirable practice for informing respondents of the main findings, as required under ethics clearance, but it is also important for validation of findings and for generating an input to government policy.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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