Symbolic violence c/ – Caravaggio, 1595
Governance and Power Relationships: Their Effect on Community Forestry Organisations and Local People in the Philippines

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Location of this research

Our work was undertaken as part of forest extension activities in the Philippines.
Highlights

• We use Bourdieu’s notion of ‘symbolic violence’ to describe the deleterious effects of unequal power relationships on governance in community forestry;

• We found that symbolic violence exerted by governments on community forestry organisations and downwards to local people was met with actual violence, causing community forestry initiatives to fail;

• Our findings highlight the importance of including local people in power and benefit sharing.
In the context of community forestry in Nepal, Ojha et al. (2009) defined symbolic violence as occurring when claims to superior knowledge are used to legitimise closure in deliberation on forest governance practices.

- Imposing policies which have been designed at a national level, at a local level without modification for local priorities and conditions;

- Using a top-down, non-participatory management style; and

- Dictating which knowledge and technology is acceptable i.e. the ‘science’ of forestry.
Methods:

• We investigated the success of the **National Greening Program**, a nation wide attempt to use communities to reforest the Philippines (field survey, casual interviews, workshop)

• We obtained a **harvesting permit** (procedures, documentation, inventory requirements, logistics) from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR)
• The NGP has been conducted nation wide (2011-2016) - 1.5 million ha, 1.5 billion trees;
• People’s Organisations (POs) have been funded by DENR to reforest and protect land;
• Typically seedlings are supplied by contractors, POs supply the labour;
• POs are funded to maintain (weed control) and protect seedlings;
• The NGP is implemented according to a strict and inflexible nation-wide regime;
• Planting targets, timelines, species, payments to contractors are all controlled by Manila.
Preparation for second year planting - newly germinated and ready-to-plant falcata seedlings

Result of first year plantings - gall rust in falcata in Mindanao
NGP Problems

- Lack of follow-up finance to maintain and protect newly planted seedlings;
- Insufficient attempt to deal with adverse claimants;
- Little skills training;
- DENR staff lack resources (e.g. transport) to manage and monitor PO and contractor work programs;
- Gall rust in high-elevation plantings of falcata (*Paraserianthes falcataria*) in Misamis Oriental.
Why did it fail?
We conducted interviews and held a two day workshop which included DENR. People’s comments were interesting.

From DENR
‘Our time frame was limited. It was all in a rush’. ‘The time allowance for the preparation of seedlings was short’, they announced it all so late’. ‘There is lack of education on planting and maintenance’.

(On using schoolchildren as volunteers) ‘It’s hot! It’s no wonder they put five seedlings in a hole and go home’. ‘There are some who fainted because of the heat. Some didn’t even get to the planting site’.
We suggest that the NGP has been implemented in a manner which is consistent with Bourdieu’s notion of ‘symbolic violence’ and (for community forestry), by Ojha et al in terms of:

• Imposing policy;
• Using a top-down delivery method;
• Dictating the science.

Symbolic violence has been met with actual violence.
We investigated the procedures required to obtain a harvesting permit for 1.5 ha of mature *A. mangium* on land managed by a community forestry group on State-owned land.
Sitio cansiso, 1.5 ha of mature mangium
Obtaining a harvesting permit took 5 months full time work by our ACIAR forester;

• An inventory of every tree was required;
• We produced the necessary five year work plan for the PO;
• The permits application progressed through five departmental offices;
• At one stage, all documents were irretrievably lost;
For farmers with:
• Limited literacy;
• Little economic and social power;
• Uncertain tenure.

- the easiest option was to illegally harvest or destroy the forest asset rather than manage it
The impossible demands (e.g. complex documentation) constitute symbolic violence which has been met with actual violence.
Comments from local people

‘The infrastructure and community halls and other benefits go to those who coordinate the committee…’

‘All of the meetings and activities transfer to the areas where the prominent families live’

When they planted those trees Mr XXXX told us we would share when they were harvested and that I could plant fruit trees here. Now you’re harvesting the trees and I’m not even told…’
In both case studies, symbolic violence from Head Office was met with symbolic violence from Local Offices which was met with symbolic violence by CFG officials which was met with actual violence from CFG ordinary members and community members –

This has resulted in policy failure
What can be done?
Precisely

For programs like the NGP

• Reduce scale;
• Increase the timeframe for consultation and preparation;
• Address social factors before attempting to address biophysical issues.

Applying government regulations

• Reduce bureaucratic ‘red tape’;
• Increase extension assistance;
• Apply a management system with a focus on review and continuous improvement.