

Book Review

Investing in the Unseen:

Cases on Biodiversity Conservation

(Sourcebook for Development Management)

Benjamin C. Bagadion, Jr.

Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2018, 183 pp.

Planet and profit, yes, but what about the people?

Benjamin Bagadion ends his impassioned preface, arguing for a new approach to teaching development management—especially natural resource conservation and management—with a moving quote from the Senegalese conservationist Baba Dioum: “In the end, we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand, and we will understand only what we are taught.” This is compelling justification for *Investing in the Unseen*, which brings together 10 cases illustrating the struggles, losses, gains, challenges, and opportunities in biodiversity conservation and management in the Philippines. Acknowledging the limited amount of cases—after all, these cases present only 10 out of the 240 protected areas (natural parks, nature preserves,

and other similar protected places) in the Philippines—Bagadion intends this book as a first step toward filling an admittedly big lacuna in development literature and scholarship in the Philippines.

Judged by this standard, *Investing in the Unseen* fits the bill. Bagadion, working closely with a group of case writers, has put together diverse cases covering different parts and regions of the archipelago (from Luzon to Visayas and to Mindanao) and illustrating a wide variety of concerns and struggles. These cases were indeed written to be used for teaching in a discursive, Socratic fashion to present as much factual and quantitative information as possible, and to present the variety of stakeholders in each location, while still retaining qualitative elements and the compelling human face of the cases.

Due to these parameters, someone looking for an in-depth analysis of these cases must look elsewhere or take on the challenge themselves—or pass on the challenge to one's students, as the case often may be. As mentioned above, these cases are primarily written for pedagogical purposes. Despite the technical terms that accompany the legal and scientific discussions of biodiversity conservation and development management (for starters, the front matter includes a list of acronyms spanning three pages of text), the cases themselves are written in a language accessible even to a layperson—or at the very least, a young undergraduate student in a university.

As a whole, the book is an interesting and promising pedagogical tool, not only for the teaching of development management, but also more broadly for ethics classes in a variety of disciplines—environmental science, business management, politics and governance, and law, among others. The individual cases present compelling starting points for ethical reflection. They provide immediacy and grounding to questions of environmental ethics that can often seem distant from students’ day-to-day lives.

In his afterword, Bagadion highlights how the book was written in view of contributing a Philippine voice to a (then-new) approach to development management—one that balances the needs of profit with the needs of people and the planet. This balanced scorecard approach (also called the “triple bottomline”) has indeed become an important part of development management, and how it is taught the world over. When the triple bottomline is applied to *Investing the Unseen*, the book comprehensively and compellingly represents the challenges and opportunities to planet and profit in Philippine protected areas. However, the people part of the equation seems to be left for the reader—whether teacher, development practitioner, student, or layperson—to fill in, putting themselves in the shoes of the people tasked to oversee and manage protected areas in the Philippines. Indeed, this seems to be an important part of the pedagogical nature of the book.

However, there seems to be a glaring omission of some key stakeholders. Nine out of the ten cases in *Investing in the Unseen* mention both the negative and positive impact of the local population on the conservation and management of protected areas. Most of these cases highlight the tension between the economic and social poverty experienced by people living in protected areas and the demands of conservation. Bagadion himself asserts in the afterword that development management must be inclusive, that “mechanisms must be put in place on the ground so that inclusive development does not end up just an empty rhetoric and intergenerational equity is recognized and incarnated on the ground.”¹ Yet we barely hear the perspectives of these people who live in or around these protected areas. One particular case, “Emmanuel Pelaez, Jr. Ranch: Growing Trees and Communities” (Chapter 7), which even mentioned how gaining the cooperation of the residents of the protected area was crucial to the success of conservation, could have particularly benefited from the local residents’ perspectives.

While there are efforts to include voices of other stakeholders in the cases, most of these voices are those of people with relative economic or social power, mainly local politicians like mayors and *barangay* officials. Even the case,

¹ Benjamin C. Bagadion, Jr., *Investing in the Unseen: Cases on Biodiversity Conservation* (Sourcebook for Development Management) (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2018), 178.

tackling “Mt. Kalatungan Range National Park: Paying for Ecosystem Services” (Chapter 5) which briefly discussed the interests of the Talaandig tribe, for whom Mt. Kalatungan is ancestral domain, was glaring in how it glossed over the complexities of ancestral domain claims in the Philippines, and in its failure to properly name and acknowledge the Talaandig tribal leader interviewed. These omissions are particularly notable because the positive value and impact of indigenous people’s practices and knowledge has been increasingly recognized in contemporary environmental conservation literature.

The voices of the poorest and least powerful, for whom nature reserves are home, are virtually unheard in this collection of cases. Yet they are the very people who perhaps are *most* invested in the unseen, who are in the best position to “conserve what [they] love.” Environmental administrators need to listen to them, too.

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