INSTITUTIONAL MAPPING OF NGOs AND CATHOLIC CHURCH ORGANIZATIONS WORKING IN THE FIELD OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT IN PLARIDEL AND SAN RAFAEL, BULACAN, PHILIPPINES: ASSESSING OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATIVE WATERSHED MANAGEMENT OF THE ANGAT RIVER BASIN

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Statement of Research Focus

After some preliminary research, it became evident to me that the Catholic Church has and continues to play a strong role in civil society in the Philippines. In the last two decades there has been a growing concern, particularly by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), to engage people of faith to care for their physical environment. On July 5th, 2000, Orlando B. Quevedo, the Archbishop of Cotabato, released a pastoral letter for the CBCP website entitled, “Water is Life” which stressed the importance of environmental responsibility and the protection of watersheds and aquifers. In the letter, Archbishop Orlando explained that, “water means life and life is God’s greatest physical gift to us” which is what initially inspired me to ask the question, “Are Catholic Church organizations in Bulacan province playing an advocacy role in watershed management? If so, are there opportunities to engage the Catholic Church in collaborative management models and policymaking with the local government?”

As a student researcher, involved in the Angat River Basin international partnership project, I am interested in assessing opportunities to enhance the capacity of local Catholic Church organizations and religious leaders to contribute to collaborative governance and climate adaptation in the Angat region. At the moment, there are few non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and government programs advocating for environmental management within Bulacan. To remedy this problem, I would like to conduct an institutional mapping of Catholic Church organizations working in the field of environmental management within two municipalities in Bulacan province. For purpose of comparative analysis, I have chosen Plaridel and San Rafael to gather useful insights into two areas found within the region.

The intention of this research will be to first assess what NGOs and Catholic Church organizations are active in providing advocacy and/or environmental management in Bulacan and second to look for opportunities where bridges can be made between the local government and those already active in watershed management. Based on academic literature and the stance of the CBCP, the hypothesis is that the Catholic Church organizations are the ones most involved in water activism. The research methods used to affirm or refute this hypothesis will be mainly qualitative in nature: including a combination of semi-structured interviews, participant observations and conversation analysis along with some basic quantitative data collection of groups engaged in watershed advocacy.

The research gathered from this assessment will be useful in providing the Bulacan Provincial Government with a better idea of how and why the Catholic Church may be a key stakeholder in governing the Angat River Basin. As research in this field suggests, religious organizations often have high levels of social capital due to commonalities in belief shared amongst members. In tapping into
these social networks, the local government in Bulacan may have success in working with Catholic Church organization to engage civil society on watershed management.

**Keywords:** Faith-based organizations, sustainable development, public sphere, policy environment, collaborative watershed management, capacity building, religion.