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Social Watch Philippines

# My Boho1 Experience

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**IT WAS IMPRESSIVE WHAT I SAW IN BOHOL THAT MEMORABLE** day in April 2005: the governor leading a pack of buy-ins to the project localizing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). I wondered, with a group of champions like that, how can your project fail?

I was there to represent Social Watch Philippines, a coalition of NGOs monitoring the implementation of commitments (eg MDGs) made by government to advance an equitable social development. As a partner in this project I thought this is it! This is the kind of result we in Social Watch have long wanted to see in our advocacy—getting into the mainstream.

But of course my feeling was somewhat guarded. I had been involved in advocating the localization of Agenda 21 immediately after our campaign in the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio. First we succeeded in getting a presidential EO creating a body like the Philippine Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD). A robust localization campaign

followed. There were many buy-ins among LGUs too, at least in few provinces led by Palawan. By 2002, and ten years from Rio, the assessment of progress, though mixed, leaned on the negative. It was a big letdown.

I hope Bohol will make good at meeting its own obligations in the MDGs. It's not far behind, to begin with. In Social Watch classification by Quality of Life it ranks 22<sup>nd</sup>. What that suggests, at least, is that Bohol has what it takes (eg rich natural resources, attractive ecotourism possibilities) to achieve poverty reduction and other development targets.

The April 22 launch was my first time in Bohol. On landing I already had a feeling this is one place I would readily like and come back to anytime. As far as my eyes could see, there was still broad forest cover. I had a chat with a couple of environmentalists doing biodiversity conservation along the coasts.

I did a tour of the Lombok River. I wondered why we did not include it in our list of awardees for river conservation in our National Rivers Summit, a major event during our Earth Day 2005 commemoration. Here's one rare case of a resource under heavy tourism pressures but still managed well. Partnership involving local government, citizens, private enterprises, and tourists, among other users, seems to be working there.

Bohol must preserve its environment if only to reduce its vulnerability to climate change. The flood tragedy in Jagna should be a wake up call.

The Bohol MDG project should and can be a model for the rest of the country.





## About the author

Isagani R. Serrano is Senior Vice President and Board Member of the Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement (PRRM). He's written for CIVICUS the following: *Civil Society in the Asia-Pacific*, 1994; *Humanity In Trouble But Hopeful* in CITIZENS, 1995; *Profile: Philippines* for CIVIC INDEX, 1997; *Coming Apart, Coming Together* in Civil Society at the Turn of the Millennium, 1999; *A Global Citizens' Commitment*, 1999. A community organizer, educator, writer, guitarist, 'farmer', and political prisoner for seven years during martial law in the Philippines. Trained in education and literature, community organization and development management. Holds a Master of Science in Environment & Development Education (MSc in EE/DE) from the South Bank University-London.

