

# UNIVERSITIES AS CATALYST OF COLLABORATIVE WATER GOVERNANCE IN THE CORDILLERA HIGHLANDS OF NORTHERN LUZON, PHILIPPINES<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

Collaborative water governance is argued to enable greater adaptability in the face of climate change and critical issues associated with water scarcity and pollution of rivers. Using Ansell and Gash's (2008) framework, this study analyzed the application of collaborative governance in addressing the management of water in the Balili River watershed, a critical watershed in the Cordillera highlands of Northern Luzon, Philippines. The study area exhibits a water management scenario characterized by multiple use and trans-boundary conflicts, multi-layered decision-making and strong socio-economic and cultural dynamics. Collaborative governance was catalyzed by universities in the Balili River watershed who served as conveners and provided science, information and knowledge which are critical inputs in decision-making.

The Water Governance Project of the University of the Philippines strengthened the leadership of the academe in initiating the planning activities, mobilizing the local governments and activating awareness and public participation. The sharing of knowledge by the universities laid the foundation for collaborative governance anchored on trust and social capital. Engagement, shared motivation and capacity for joint actions have led to concrete and meaningful actions by stakeholders. Evolving and potential adaptations are considered to complete the dynamic and evolving nature of collaborative-adaptive water governance in a highland setting like the Cordilleras.

**Keywords:** adaptive-collaborative water governance, water pollution, Cordillera highlands, Balili River System Rehabilitation Coalition, Water Governance Project

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