

Mapping Philippine Agro-Ecological Zones (AEZS)

COMMENT 4

I. Initial impressions

Whenever I review a paper, I usually start by checking the literature cited or references used in preparing the report under review to see how substantial the research had been undertaken on the topic at hand, which is on agro-ecological zones. To my surprise, there were 27 articles listed in the references section, of which nine were from online version of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, accessed on 2 August 2011 and these referred to the nine different types of soils! Of the remaining 18, eight were from peer reviewed journals and the remaining 10 were from online sources. Of the 10 online sources, five were databases of international organizations (two from FAO and one each from CGIAR, ITC and NASA). The remaining five online sources were papers from conference proceedings (2), progress report (1), background paper (1) and guidelines (1).

Four of the articles in the reference list are n.d. or no date. However, a few minutes of checking led to know when three articles were published (see below) while a four article with n.d. led me to believe that that entry has somehow been jumbled as it represent two entries listed as one (Scharenbroch Bryant, n.d.) and another article by which is about an online compendium by www.itc.nl , an organization based in University of Twente, The Netherlands.

There were two documents cited in their report which were not in their list of references. These were the DENR ESSC (1993) report (see page 7, Table 1) and the PBCPP (2002) report (see pages 9, 14, 15, 17, 26, 29, Figure 3, 6, 7, 8, 11, 14).

Also glaringly absent was any reference to the Bureau of Soils and Water Management of the Dept of Agriculture (www.bswm.da.gov.ph), which when I checked their website contains a lot of information that would have been useful in preparing this report. There is no explanation why BSWM data were not used.

Based on the quality of publications they referred to in preparing the report and how they went about using these references do not inspire confidence.

II. Substantial Review

Looking at the report, it relied heavily on four papers (see pages 4-6 of the report): Quiroz et al (2001), Patel (2003), Pariyar and Singh (2004) and Sebastian (2009), which they erroneously cited as Harvestchoice (2009). The first three papers pertained to the GIS side of AEZ, while the fourth paper proposed some revisions on how Global AEZ's were arrived at.

It is interesting to note that in the report, the year Patel's and Pariyar and Singh's papers were published could not be identified. However, it took me about 10 minutes to locate the papers and find out when these were published. Also, these two papers were presented in

conferences and published online as conference proceedings. How much peer-review these two papers got remains undetermined. The third paper by Quiroz et al (2001) was published as part of a 1999-2000 progress report of the International Potato Center (CIP or the Centro Internacional de la Papa). Again, the level of peer-review this paper had received is uncertain. The fourth paper by Sebastian (2009), which as I mentioned earlier was erroneously cited as written by Harvestchoice, described some corrections they made in the preparation of the Global AEZs, again the level of peer-review is uncertain.

While peer review is one measure by which to determine the quality of a publication, being cited by other publication is another measure. However, I wasn't able to make this determination whether these four publications by which the report was heavily based on were highly cited.

To reiterate, based on the quality of publications they referred to in preparing the report and how they went about using these resources do not inspire confidence.

Another major issue is the determination of the basis by which they used 100 meters and below as the basis for determining what is lowland? (See page 7, Table 1 and last paragraph). They cited the DENR-ESSC (1993) publication, which I pointed earlier was not in their reference list, as the basis for doing so. But I was able to retrieve the said document and could not find any reference to 100 meters above sea level or lowland. It begs the question: what was the basis for using 100m and below as cut off for defining lowland.

These two issues are important issues in determining the quality of the report because these two issues are the foundation by which the report stands or falls. Subsequent pages of the report (pages 8-29) are dependent on these two issues. Any organization that has good GIS facilities and practitioners could have produced this part of the report. The difference would be how substantial information is used to guide their development of an ecology-based spatial framework for an alternative HDI analysis. Unfortunately, they were not able to do so based on the reasons I cited above.

Finally, reading the last part of the report on page 25, again creates the impression, for the lack of a better word in English that is best expressed as "bitin"!

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