With its spaghetti of highways, its vast shopping-malls, and billboards promoting everything from Marlboro cigarettes to evangelical Christianity, much of downtown Manila looks little different from Los Angeles. In the cities of the Philippines, the American influence is paramount, and for the middle classes all the amenities and amusements of Western consumerism are readily available. But poor Filipinos inhabit a very different world.

Hernari Monares and his large extended family live in a shack made out of wood, canvas and scraps of polythene on Payatas rubbish dump. One of the older members of the family is too ill to work; several are too young. The rest spend their days picking over the surrounding mountain of refuse in search of plastic, which they sell to a junk-yard nearby. The rubbish-pickers have lived so long in this foetid environment that they no longer seem to notice the stench, or the flies which swarm across their skin.

'We sleep here, we eat here, and we get a living here,' says Hernari, whose 'hog's heaven' t-shirt is an apt description of the site. 'That's why we stay.' As a teenager Hernari worked as a farm labourer on one of the islands in the central Philippines. 'In those days,' he recalls, 'we earned eight pesos a day working in the fields. We couldn't live on that, so we came to Manila.' Until recently the family lived and worked on Smoky Mountain, Manila's infamous rubbish dump, but since its 15,000 squatters had been evicted — as part of the city's recent beautification programme — they had moved to Payatas dump in neighbouring Quezon City.

The rubbish-pickers face many problems: Hernari's five children cannot go to school, as the nearest school is too far from the dump; they must walk 400 yards to get drinking water, which costs one peso a pail; there are periodic outbreaks of cholera, dysentery is ever
right: children play in a stream, Sison village, Pangasinin province.

present, and the only health clinic in the area is open for just half a day a week. However, Hernari says that his family is much better-off here than they would be had they stayed in the countryside. On a good day they can make 100 pesos, sometimes double that, which is more than the statutory minimum wage for day-labourers in the Philippines.

Over a third of the eight million people who live in Metro Manila are crammed into slum housing, or live precariously in makeshift dwellings on rubbish dumps, railway sidings, and land earmarked for industrial development. Some of the urban poor have been here for generations; others, like the Monares family, are recent arrivals. Nearly all came to Manila in the belief that they could make a better living. This flight to the city is a perennial feature of life in the Philippines and it is a reflection not so much of the wealth that is to be found in the cities, as of the poverty and inequities which prevail in the countryside.

Poverty in the Philippines has little to do with lack of natural resources — the country is rich in minerals; has, or had, plentiful supplies of timber, fertile farmland, and lakes and coastal waters teeming with fish — but much to do with the way in which these resources are shared. Two-thirds of the rural population are landless. Tribal communities have been driven off their ancestral — and untitled — lands into remote regions where they struggle to make a living. Peasant fishing communities see fish stocks decline as mechanised trawlers take an ever-greater share of the catch.

This short book looks at the problems which stem from the unequal distribution of resources in the Philippines, and at the many-faceted struggle to put right historic wrongs. It looks at the plight of the Manobo and B’laan tribals of Mindanao and at the fishers of Batangas, at the rubbish-pickers of Metro Manila and at farmers who have lost their land to volcanic eruptions and floods; but the story it tells is by no means unremittingly gloomy. It is impossible, as an outsider, not to be astounded by the resilience and cheerfulness of the Filipino people, as they struggle to improve their lot. They are used to hardship, whether it results from bad government or capricious nature. The future is often uncertain, but people are seldom without hope.
People from some of the many different ethnic groups living in the Philippines.
The feudal past

The Filipinos, it is sometimes said, are Malays who have spent 350 years in a convent and 50 in Hollywood. The Spanish turned the Philippines into the only Christian country in Asia, while the Americans bequeathed to their one and only colony a taste for consumerism and fast food. The Spanish influence is to be found in the names of places and people, in the architecture of some of the older settlements and, most significantly perhaps, in the way in which the countryside has been carved up by the political elite. A government survey in 1988 found that of the 3,919,000 families involved in agriculture, 60 per cent were landless, 26 per cent owned under three hectares each, and less than 0.1 per cent owned over a quarter of all landholdings of 100 hectares or more. It is this skewed pattern of land ownership, stamped on the country by the Spanish, which has shaped the political history of the Philippines.

State and church were in league from the very beginning of Spain’s Pacific endeavour. In 1565, 43 years after he had first set eyes on the island of Samar in the company of Ferdinand Magellan, the Augustinian friar, Andres de Urdaneta, returned as navigator to an expedition led by Miguel Lopez de Legazpi. The conquistadors swiftly asserted themselves and the Philippines became a Spanish colony. During the early years of colonial rule, the Spanish government evinced little interest in the country’s agriculture; rather, it saw the Philippines, with its archipelago of 7,000 islands, as a stepping stone on the way to enter the spice trade, which was dominated by the Portuguese, and as a base from which to launch a proselytisation campaign in China. Indeed, when it was suggested to Philip II that the Philippines should be abandoned on economic grounds, he retorted that he would rather spend all the gold in the Spanish treasury than see the loss of one oratory where Christ was praised.

The Philippines’ pre-Hispanic past is hazy, and has no written history, but enough is known to build up a picture of the half a million or so people whom the Spanish subjugated. There are clear arguments to suggest that Negrito tribes like the Aeta were the first settlers. Over the millennia migrants from such diverse places as the Indonesian archipelago, Indochina, and China added new blood to the Philippine stock. When the Spanish arrived the majority of people were The
hunter-gatherers and slash-and-burn farmers, and most lived in villages or barangays, which were founded on bonds of kinship and ruled by datus, as they are in the remote tribal areas today.

Two centuries before the Spanish arrived, merchants from the Middle East introduced Islam, which began to supplant pagan beliefs in some communities, especially in parts of the southern island of Mindanao. As far as the Spanish friars were concerned, all non-Christians were infidels and they immediately set about the task of converting them. At times they used force, but many Filipinos willingly espoused the Christian faith, some of whose core beliefs were similar to those they had previously held. The pagans, like the Christians, had a supreme deity and believed in life after death.

More revolutionary than their faith, in many ways, were the friars’ concepts about the ownership and use of land. Hitherto, the islanders had had no notion that land could be owned by individuals. The friars were quick to establish freehold property rights and appropriate much of the most fertile land for themselves. By 1898, when the Spanish were ousted, the religious orders owned vast haciendas.

The royal grants of land to conquistadors and friars in the early years of Spanish rule were intended to be only for unoccupied land. However, the majority of grants were used to take over settled areas as well, and as time passed many of the big estates swallowed up land which belonged to individual barangays. The idea of land as a commodity remains
anathema to most of the indigenous peoples, but it provided the opportunity for a local elite to emerge. Most were either well-educated Chinese and Spanish mestizos, or cacique, descendants of the principalia who had been involved in tax collection and government service. Many made their fortunes in plantation agriculture and by the 1850s were significant exporters of cash crops like sugar, tobacco, abaca, and coffee.

The struggle for freedom

The latter half of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of a small class of educated middle-class Filipinos: the ilustrados. The term Filipino originally meant Spaniards born in the Philippines; now it referred to all those who lived in the archipelago. Best known of the ilustrados was Jose Rizal, who was one of the founders of the Propaganda Movement which agitated for reforms and independence. Rizal was executed, but his dream of nationhood inspired the uprising in 1896 against Spanish rule.

By a quirk of fate the revolutionary war against Spanish colonial power in the Philippines coincided with the Spanish-American war which began over Cuba in 1898. The United States Asiatic squadron received an order, while in Hong Kong, to attack the Spanish navy in the Philippines. This it did, and the Spanish fleet was destroyed in the Battle of Manila Bay. The US force blockaded Manila and awaited the arrival of land troops from California. In the meantime the Spanish governor promised reforms in return for support from the Filipino revolutionaries, but the leaders of the movement, having received assurances from the Americans that they had come as liberators, not conquerors, urged their followers to support them against the Spanish. A volunteer army defeated Spanish forces and besieged Manila. On 12 June 1898 Emilio Aguinaldo declared Philippine independence.

The Americans failed to keep their word. In December 1898 the Treaty of Paris, under which the Spanish-American war was concluded, ceded the islands to the United States. The Filipinos reacted by declaring Aguinaldo president of the First Philippine Republic, and the country was plunged into another war. By 1902, when the war ended, over a quarter of a million Filipinos had been killed in one of the bloodiest of colonial encounters.
The Americans, once established, were relatively benign colonists, at least in comparison to the Spanish. They set up a school system which offered education to most of the population — today 90 per cent of Filipinos are literate — and a system of government which ensured that Filipinos were involved in the running of the country. They also separated the powers of church and state.

The revolution of 1896 reduced the authority of the friars, but did little to challenge the system of land tenure. The *ilustrados* who led the revolution were bent on expelling the Spaniards, not on introducing democratic reforms. As an occupying force, the United States, rather than weakening the position of the landed oligarchy, seemed to strengthen it. The only reform of significance, introduced to appease peasant unrest, was aimed at the land held by the friars, who, by 1902, had agreed to sell 90 per cent of their holdings. Instead of giving the land to the 60,000 share tenants farming these estates, the US government decided to sell it: most went to existing landowners, and at least one large block went to a US sugar corporation.

In 1935 the Philippines was granted Commonwealth status, a ten-year transitional period of self-government in preparation for full independence. The United States continued to control foreign policy, but the nation’s internal affairs were regulated by elected members in an upper and lower house. There were sporadic rural reforms, again in reaction to widespread revolts among the landless peasantry, but little land was redistributed. By the time the Japanese invaded the Philippines in 1942 the landlords were as powerful as ever. Three years of Japanese occupation caused immense hardship for the people of the archipelago: Americans and Filipinos died in large numbers, both in the lengthy and ultimately unsuccessful attempt to resist the Japanese in 1942, and in the guerrilla encounters which continued till the eventual liberation of the Philippines towards the end of 1944.
The Marcos years

The post-war history of the Philippines has been dominated, until recently, by revolt and repression. When Ferdinand Marcos was elected president in 1965, he promised to introduce wide-reaching social reforms, including the redistribution of land. He claimed that by 1969 over a third of a million share tenants would be given leasehold to the land they worked; in the end less than a tenth of that number received written contracts. During Marcos’s second term of office the government faced widespread opposition. Maoist-inclined intellectuals and a disenchanted peasantry gave tacit, and sometimes direct, support to the New Peoples’ Army (NPA), the military wing of the banned Communist Party. The Communists waged a guerilla war throughout the Philippines, and government forces were also fully occupied in Mindanao, where a Muslim group, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), was fighting for independence. Student unrest and riots in the capital gave Marcos the excuse he needed to declare Martial Law in 1972.

The Philippines slipped into a dark age: political parties were banned, freedom of speech and assembly were suspended, opponents of the regime, whether among the intelligentsia or the rural guerilla movements, were imprisoned, tortured, and sometimes murdered. Many disappeared; thousands remain unaccounted for. Some optimists hoped that Martial Law would provide Marcos with the perfect opportunity, and the authoritarian means, to redistribute land, but more land was taken from large landowners during the year and a half before the declaration of Martial Law than during the following nine years. The only landowners to lose significant amounts of land under the reforms were those whom Marcos saw as political opponents.

Since the mid-1970s, the Philippine economy had been locked into a cycle of boom and bust, with periods of growth being swiftly followed by decline and...
depression. The extravagant borrowing of the Marcos regime, coupled with low export growth, was largely to blame for this inherently unstable state of affairs. Another major factor was the heavy dependence of local industries on imported equipment, which led to constant trade deficits, financed by borrowing. During the 1970s the foreign debt rose from $2,297 million to $17,252 million. The Marcos loans did little to improve the lot of the poor. Frequently they were channelled into grandiose development schemes such as the building of the Westinghouse nuclear reactor in Bataan, which has never been used. A significant portion of the money borrowed was siphoned into the bank accounts of Marcos and his cronies.

**EDSA and beyond**

The middle classes and poor alike became increasingly disenchanted with Marcos's 'constitutional authoritarianism' and his failure to alleviate poverty, while his allies abroad, most notably the US, gradually lost patience with the dictator. In February 1986 the beleaguered president ordered a snap election. The opposition united behind Corazon Aquino, widow of former opposition leader Ninoy, who had been assassinated at Manila airport in 1983. After a violent and corrupt campaign, Marcos's Commission on Elections declared him the winner, a verdict confirmed by the National Assembly, which he controlled. The opposition also claimed victory and less than three weeks after the elections tens of thousands of Aquino supporters blockaded two military camps along Manila's Epifanio de los Santos Avenue (known as EDSA for short). Two of Marcos's most trusted military leaders, General Fidel Ramos and the defence minister Juan Ponce Enrile, sided with Aquino, as did key elements in the armed forces. On 25 February Aquino was declared president and the Marcos family was flown into exile in Hawaii, leaving behind a country burdened with debt and 3,000 pairs of Imelda's shoes.

Cory Aquino saw out her term of office and survived six attempted coups. Her government went some way to improving the civil rights record of the country, but insurgency continued in the countryside, the economy stagnated, the poor remained poor, and the landless, for the most part, remained landless. Aquino restored democracy, albeit with a strong military flavour, but she failed to satisfy the clamour for social change. 'After Aquino took over,' recalls a Catholic priest who works among the indigenous peoples of Mindanao, 'there were such high expectations of reform. We believed that the indigenous people would at last be given control over their ancestral lands; that agrarian reforms would give land to the tillers. But it never happened, so the struggle continued.'

In 1992 Fidel Ramos won the presidency, following a surprisingly peaceful election. Confronted by the very problems — debt, poverty, insurgency, and corruption — which his predecessor had failed to tackle effectively, he declared that his main aim was to turn the Philippines into a 'tiger economy', capable of competing with powerful neighbours such as Taiwan and Malaysia.
Liberalisation, deregulation, and the introduction of incentives for foreign investment have been the principal tools of reform, which has been carried out under the slogan Philippines 2000.

The slogan has certainly been a success — it is emblazoned across school roofs, road signs, car number plates, and city gateways — and economic indicators suggest that in certain respects the country is catching up with its ASEAN (Association of South-East Asian Nations) neighbours. GNP rose by 7 per cent in the first half of 1996, and inflation declined to single figures. In 1995 there was a 30 per cent increase in export growth, and debt-servicing fell from around 40 per cent of export receipts in the late 1980s to 13 per cent by 1996. The Philippines is no longer on the list of countries with a major external debt problem, although the overall debt stock continues to rise in absolute terms, and the spiralling consumption of mainly imported luxury goods by the middle classes, coupled with widespread tax evasion, results in a high current account deficit. However, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), whose three-year programme of reform ends in 1997, has expressed itself more than happy with the Ramos government’s achievements in attracting foreign investors and bringing about relative economic stability.

Ramos can also point to some success in the field of social reform, and he has achieved what many believed impossible: a peace settlement with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), the largest of Mindanao’s Muslim separatist groups. Since 1972 over 100,000 people have died in the fighting; with the advent of peace comes the prospect of development.

But what of the poor? How have they benefited from Philippines 2000? They remain, for the most part, marginalised and dispossessed. Thirty-five per cent of the country’s rapidly expanding population — 68 million in 1994 — live in absolute poverty. Fifteen million have no access to health care; 20 million are without sanitation and 11 million have no access to clean water. During Ramos’s rule, the Philippines has fallen 16 places, from 84th in the world in 1991 to 100th in 1995, on the Human Development Index drawn up by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). A third of Filipino children below the age of five are underweight, which is a higher proportion than is found in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Zaire — three of the poorest countries in the world.

People living in the port area of Manila are worried that they might be evicted from their houses to make way for industrial development.
Antenatal clinic. Many women do not receive adequate antenatal care, and maternal mortality is high as a result.

below, right Mothers and their children at a health class in a slum area of Manila.

below The proportion of babies born underweight in the Philippines is the same as in Niger, which comes bottom of UNDP's Index. Unlike other 'Asian tigers' such as Singapore and Malaysia, the Philippines has failed to translate rapid economic growth into government spending on education and health. Consequently, the benefits of economic success have failed to reach the majority of people.

For many of the poor, Philippines 2000 remains little more than government rhetoric. For others, the policies it promotes are heaping further hardships on lives already made precarious by poverty, by the ravages of nature — 24 million Filipinos, mostly the poor, were affected by cyclones between 1991 and 1995 — and by the inequities of land distribution. Philippines 2000 may be creating a tiger of the country, but for many life is still ruled by the laws of the economic jungle, where the rich and powerful prosper, and the poor languish in obscurity.
Talk to any of the older fishing people along the coast to the south of Manila and they will tell you the same story. ‘Twenty years ago,’ says one in Lian, a small village on the edge of sugar-cane country, ‘we could get 20 or 30 kilos of fish every time we went out to sea. Now we’re lucky to get three or four kilos.’ Further south the people of Salong have seen their catch decline just as dramatically. In the words of one of the leaders of its women’s group, ‘There have been weeks go by recently when we haven’t even caught a scale.’ A similar tale is told by many of the freshwater fishers in the Philippines. In the early 1970s the men of Cuenca used to catch up to 7,000 tawiles, one of Lake Taal’s delicacies, on each trip. Now they often return with none at all.

Philippine fishing villages are the stuff of tourist brochures: colourful bancas, the traditional outrigger canoes, push out to sea from long sandy beaches; bamboo huts with pretty flower gardens are clustered about sandy alleys lined with coconut palms, bananas, and other fruit trees. But the picturesque scenery conceals a multiplicity of problems.

There are an estimated one million working fishers in the Philippines with some 4-5 million dependents. Of these 100,000 are paid labourers working on commercial fishing-vessels. Another 200,000 or so are employed in aquaculture, mostly prawn farming; and the remainder — 700,000 — are artisanal fishers who ply their trade in small boats.

Traditionally the coastal zone has been seen as the last frontier: marine resources were perceived as belonging to no-one, and therefore exploitable by all. When
communities inland faced destitution or hunger — through typhoons, crop failures, whatever — they would often decamp to the coast to try their luck. Coastal communities were often part-time fishers: it was the land first, the sea second. The older men of Lian and Salong recall that a single fishing trip used to yield enough fish to feed a family for several days: they could afford to be farmers who fished, rather than full-time fishers, as most are now.

The reasons for declining catches fall into three main categories. First, the large-scale commercial sector, including foreign fleets, has taken ever-greater quantities of fish. Second, industrial pollution, siltation, and clearance of coastal mangrove forests have impoverished the marine ecosystem. Third, the artisanal fishers themselves have adopted destructive methods of fishing.

The failure of protective legislation
In 1975 the nation’s disparate fishing laws were brought together and updated in a single Fisheries Code, or Presidential Decree (PD) 704. The code divided the sea into two zones: the 7-kilometre municipal zone was reserved for artisanal fishers, the waters beyond for commercial vessels over three tonnes. PD 704 was designed to bring about an increase in production for export. Consequently, it favoured commercial fisheries and aquaculture. Under the new code Marcos also gave foreign fleets from Japan and Taiwan equal rights with Filipinos to fish the country’s commercial waters. These rights were reciprocal, but Taiwanese fleets were in a far better position to exploit the Philippines’ fish stocks than the relatively under-capitalised Filipino fleets were to exploit Taiwan’s already overfished waters.

Trawlers frequently flout the law and fish within municipal limits and coastguards have neither the capacity to apprehend them, nor, it seems, the will to impose the law effectively when they do. Coastguards often accept cash or a crate of fish from trawlers which are fishing illegally and turn a blind eye to their activities.

In 1918 over 450,000 hectares of mangrove forest fringed the coast. Less than 140,000 hectares survive today. Mangroves have long been felled for fuelwood but PD 704 hastened their destruction; vast tracts were cleared during the 1970s and 1980s to make way for prawn farms. The loss of mangroves, which are important spawning grounds for many species, has had a serious impact on fish stocks. A hectare of mature mangrove can yield 100 kilos of fish, 75 kilos of shrimps, and 25 kilos of crab, as well as good quantities of shellfish and sea cucumber, every year. When converted to fish-ponds, the same hectare would provide only a month’s paid work to a fish-farm worker. The profits from prawn-farming go to private investors, and foreign exchange is earned from exports.

Such was the centralised nature of the legislation that those municipalities which opposed the clearances were unable to introduce their own protective ordinances. However, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) has recently introduced legislation which prohibits the cutting of mangroves. This is not uniformly enforced, but the pace of mangrove destruction has decreased.

In the mid-1980s, artisanal fishers still accounted for three-quarters of the total catch. By 1992 their share had fallen to 39 per cent in terms of volume and 33 per cent in terms of value; by comparison, aquaculture accounted for 39 per cent of the total fisheries income and the commercial sector for 28 per cent. The artisanal fishers themselves are partly responsible for the decline in fish stocks, and many of them recognise this.
A survey of 100 fishers in Danao Bay, in northern Mindanao, posed the question: ‘If you experienced a decline in catch, what would be the reason for this decrease?’ Thirty-two cited the fact that there were too many fishers; 18 blamed dynamite fishing and the use of poison; 16 thought the use of small-mesh nets was to blame; only 14 blamed commercial fishing vessels. Small-mesh nets caught juvenile fish; dynamite and poison destroyed coral reefs, which, like mangroves, are important spawning grounds; and, most poignant of all, too many people were now going after the same fish.

However, the situation is far from hopeless. Over the past decade, experience has shown that local communities, given the will and the means, can manage their marine resources in a sustainable fashion.

**A model for the future?**

Fifty years ago there were over 800 hectares of mangrove in the 2,279-hectare Danao Bay. Today a quarter of the original mangrove forest survives, and much of this has been degraded. During World War II Japanese soldiers used explosives to kill fish. The practice caught on and much of the bay’s coral reef has been destroyed as a result.

In 1991 the Pipuli Foundation — Pipuli means ‘put it back’ — decided to set up a marine protection programme in Danao Bay. From the outset it saw this as a community venture and enlisted the support and help of the mayor, village priests and the fishers themselves. In July 1991 a municipal resolution led to the establishment of a 70-hectare marine sanctuary with a 25-hectare buffer zone. Nine of the 11 fishers who operated fish corrals within the sanctuary agreed to move, were hired as guards, and helped to delineate the boundaries by sinking bamboo stakes into the sea bed. The two fishers who opposed the scheme were given substantial compensation to move out.

Within the sanctuary are two small core areas, one is pristine mangrove forest, the other a depression rich in coral. These serve as fish hatcheries and are off-limits to all, including the project staff. Fishing is not permitted within the sanctuary. In 1993 diving surveys found 48 species of fish and 28 species of invertebrate.
macrofauna, including sea cucumber and shellfish of commercial value. Two years later the biologists found 85 species of fish and 75 species of macrofauna in the same area. The density of fish had also doubled outside the sanctuary.

Arjan Heinen, a Dutch marine biologist, has been working in the bay since 1994. ‘Figures like these don’t convince the people at all,’ he says with a wry smile. ‘What does is the testimony of other fishers who now see a rise in their catch.’ In 1995 the sanctuary was enlarged to 239 hectares and it is now recognised by the government as a protected area, Baliangao Wetland Park.

**Saving the mangroves**

‘Back in 1965, when I was a young girl,’ explains Laida Agan, ‘there were a lot more shellfish and sea cucumbers in the mangroves of Danao Bay than now.’ She attributes the decline to over-exploitation. ‘Too many people are collecting now,’ she says frankly, ‘and some of the methods used are destructive.’ Instead of probing the mud with a knife, some collectors plough through it with large implements, destroying the juvenile shellfish and other sea life.

Laida was one of the first to get involved with Pipuli and she did much to convince her fellow collectors that they needed to safeguard the mangroves. Sixty shell-collectors and fish-trap owners have formed a co-operative, KATUMANAN, and with Pipuli’s help they have drawn up a Mangrove Stewardship Agreement (MSA). Destructive methods of collection will be banned and the forest will be zoned for different activities. Since 1995 members of KATUMANAN have been planting mangroves. ‘If we don’t,’ says Laida, ‘they’ll eventually disappear.’ It is difficult to establish new mangrove plantations; crabs and shellfish damage the seedlings, and even well-rooted young plants can be destroyed by monsoon winds. Replanting is a labour-intensive operation.
requiring genuine community involvement if it is to be successful.

A number of income-generating projects have also been established, the most important of which involves ecotourism. In 1995 five cottages, a staff house, a kitchen and dining hall were built on a small island which can only be reached by boat or by a long walk on raised platforms through a mangrove forest. During the first year well over a thousand visitors were received at the centre. Many were school children who had come on day visits to learn about the marine wildlife. Although a long way off the tourist track, and difficult to reach, the bay’s natural beauty attracts local and foreign tourists, who are charged a modest fee for food, accommodation and boat hire. Visitors who do not use public transport must pay an extra 25 per cent as a ‘carbon tax’.

The project has some way to go before it can be considered an unmitigated success. Dynamite fishing and other destructive techniques are still used by some in the waters outside the wetland park, and the new system of mangrove management is in its infancy. However, much has been achieved during a short time: fish stocks have increased; a competent and dedicated team of local people now manages the park; education programmes have convinced the vast majority of fishers that their future depends on sound and sustainable management. According to Pipuli’s community organiser, Billy Marata, approximately half of the fishers were opposed to the sanctuary when it was first mooted. Now very few are not supportive. Community-based coastal resource management may be a dreary-sounding mouthful, but it is evidently an idea whose time has come.

**above** Baliangao wetland park, a successful community initiative.

**left** Billy Marata, Pipuli community organiser, inspecting newly-planted mangrove seedlings.
Fishers in search of a fair deal

The First Fisherfolk Unity Congress should have been held in December 1989, but some of the delegates were caught up on EDSA in the pitched battles which followed an attempted coup. 'We had to delay it for a month,' recalls Delfin Carlos, laughing at the memory. Then in January 1990, 300 fisher leaders turned up at the reconvened congress and we agreed that what we needed most was a new Fisheries Code.' Delfin became the deputy coordinator for NACFAR, the National Coalition of Fisherfolks for Aquatic Reform, and since then he has observed with oscillating emotions of hope and despair the passage of various bills through the House of Representatives and the Senate.

The Philippines has a bicameral system of government similar to the United States. The Senate, the upper house, has 24 members who are elected nationally, and the House of Representatives has 204 congressmen elected at district level. Legislation must be approved by both houses before it is submitted to the president.

During the Eighth Congress, which ended in 1992 (congressional elections are held every three years, presidential every six), a fisheries bill was introduced. 'The bill was pro-fisherfolk,' explains Delfin Carlos, 'but there were too many key people against it.' Among opponents of the bill was the chairman of the Committee on Food and Agriculture, Pablo Garcia. He and other senators with interests in commercial fishing and aquaculture were opposed to those measures which appeared to favour artisanal fishers. For example, the bill proposed that coastal fisheries should be locally run by resource management councils (RMCs); it also proposed the extension of municipal waters from seven to 15 kilometres, and a moratorium on the
conversion of mangrove forests to prawn farms. Garcia and his allies managed to stall the bill’s progress and it failed to reach the president by the end of the congress.

‘So we were back to square one,’ says Delfin Carlos, ‘and we had to start lobbying all over again.’ During the Ninth Congress (1992-1995) the bill made even slower headway; again, vested interests, especially on the Agriculture Committee and in the House of Representatives, were largely responsible for its lack of progress. However, there were some tangible gains. President Ramos issued an executive order which paved the way for the creation of municipal resource management councils. This, according to Delfin Carlos, though a diluted version of what NACFAR was campaigning for, was a move in the right direction.

Following the failure of the bill to become law during the Ninth Congress, NACFAR decided to change tack. It has subsequently spent less time lobbying senators and congressmen and more in organising mass rallies and campaigning for change through the media.

Social reform?
President Ramos has shown a greater interest in the problems of artisanal fishers than his predecessor, and he has promised that a Fisheries Code will be passed before his presidency ends in 1998. The Fisheries Code is part of Ramos’s Social Reform Agenda (SRA), which can be seen as a codicil to Philippines 2000. It was clear within a year of its introduction that Philippines 2000, the neo-liberal strategy for economic reform, was doing little to help the majority of poor Filipinos. The Social Reform Agenda, which was formalised in 1994, was intended to improve social conditions in areas which were untouched by Philippines 2000 strategy. Critics point out that it does not involve additional spending, rather a redistribution of the existing budget. The term Social Reform Agenda is also misleading: yes, it does include social reforms — the Fisheries Code, if enacted as the artisanal fishers hope, will be precisely that — but it also finances activities and organisations which can scarcely be considered reformist. For example, 70 per cent of the national police budget is categorised as SRA money.

However, for all his reformist rhetoric, Ramos remains a trapo politician. ‘Trapo’ is an abbreviation of traditional politics — it also means a dirty rag — and it is used to define a system which relies on patronage, feudalism, and the old boy network. A new Fisheries Code will become law. That much is certain. But trapo politicians may still manage to water down proposals which would give local communities, and the fishers themselves, the power and the means to manage their own resources.

The Social Reform Agenda has at least given non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and coalitions such as NACFAR an opportunity to influence government policy and legislation, and these groups are now consulted as a matter of course by the committees responsible for drawing up new legislation.

Below Danao Bay CBCRM programme coordinator, Aida Laranjo.
Between the devil and the deep blue sea

The Philippines 2000 initiative is described by the government as a 'massive drive for industrialisation', a drive in which foreign investment plays a crucial role. To achieve the goal of NIC (New Industrialised Country) status by 1998, the government has established eight export-oriented 'growth points', or regional industrial centres (RICs). The largest of these, and the flagship of the government's economic policy, is the CALABARZON, an acronym which combines the names of the five participating provinces: Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal and Quezon. The provinces lie to the south of Manila and they encompass a mixture of prime farmland and spectacular uplands, major lakes such as Taal and Laguna, and a lengthy coastline which is densely studded with fishing villages. The government is encouraging industrial development in the RICs by financing large scale infra-structure projects and by providing incentives for domestic and foreign investors.

The small market town of Calaca occupies an area of flattish land to the north of Balayan Bay. The road into town goes under a white arch which is painted with golden letters that read: CALACA 2000 — Investment Paradise. IT'S RIGHT IN BATANGAS. The town itself is a sleepy backwater and shows little evidence of recent investment, but the government's export-oriented policies are already changing the face of the surrounding countryside. New industrial complexes are being constructed on the coastal farmland, together with roads and factories. However, for many
communities it will be paradise lost, not found: scores of fishing families in villages near Calaca are threatened with eviction as a result of the new developments.

The dispossessed

Among the largest of the 36 new industrial developments in Batangas will be a power plant at Calaca and an aluminium smelting plant which is being developed by Bacnotan Consolidated Industries. Land prices in the Calaca area have rocketed. In 1990 a square metre of land cost 75 pesos or less; now land fetches between 300 and 400 pesos a square metre. Local elites have successfully speculated on the rising price of land, buying it when it was less than 100 pesos a square metre and selling it for 300 pesos or more.

The 20 or so members of the women fishers’ association in Palikpikan frequently meet in the tiny, open-sided church at the heart of their village; there they discuss their problems and draw up plans to improve their standard of living. In the early years the association was primarily concerned with problems of poverty, ill health, and so on. The women set up a credit scheme and many have taken out low-interest loans to establish small businesses, such as fish-vending and pig-rearing. They have also taken on responsibility for cleaning the sandy streets, which are prettily lined with flowering shrubs, and, more recently, for evaluating the threat posed by industrial development.

In 1995 a plot of land beside the fishers’ dwellings was sold to Makati-Agro, which intends to build grain silos, warehouses, and a small port facility. Soon after the site was sold, the women heard that a powerful local landowning family was claiming ownership of the land where they lived. ‘We always thought that this land was government property,’ explains Tessie Lopez, ‘but now we’ve been told that a member of that family is claiming it.’ Her husband, who died recently, was formerly the barangay captain, and unlike many village women, Tessie has the confidence to tackle municipal officials. When she investigated the claim to the land occupied by the fishers she found that the land was untitled. However, the family had made a tax declaration for the land in preparation for claiming the title.
Alberto Marcial, whose family has lived in Salong for over a century. 'The mayor has told us that many people are coming here looking for land,' says Tessie. 'and we fear that we’ll be evicted.'

In Salong, a short distance down the coast, 31 families received eviction notices in 1995. They occupy 18 hectares of land between the cane fields and the beach where they keep their bancas, and until recently they believed it was theirs. 'I’ll get straight to the point,' says Alberto Marcial, a rugged-featured old man with close-cropped grey hair. 'Our major problem is ignorance of the law. Our families never bought this land, but my ancestors have been here for over 100 years. I thought we owned it. Now we find that someone applied for the title in 1970.'

Feudal landlords are well aware of how to use the law to their advantage. They do not even need to buy the land, but simply to lay claim to it. In 1994 the local landowner who had applied for the land-title approached the fishers and offered to sell them the land, at 370 pesos a square metre. 'Before it was worth maybe 75 pesos,' says Alberto, 'but we couldn’t even have afforded that.' The fishing families offered 50 pesos a square metre, to be paid over a period of time. This offer was rejected. The fishers expect to be evicted and they assume that the land will be sold to Bacnotan Consolidated Industries.

Fighting the evictions

When the 31 families received the eviction notices they decided to contest them in the courts, and the Department of Justice provided them with a public attorney. The petitioners soon realised that the attorney was doing little to further their case; indeed he even signed an affidavit which stated that they accepted that they resided in an area owned by the man who had laid claim to it. They dismissed their attorney, who is now representing the opposition, and the case has subsequently been handled by a lawyer provided by CERD (Community Extension for Research and Development). 'A pity CERD wasn’t here 30 years ago,' says one of the women wistfully. 'If they had been, that man wouldn’t have got the title.' Possibly not.

CERD’s programme co-ordinator in Batangas is Carlos Flores, a young man with a pragmatic understanding of the feudal politics which govern rural society. He doubts whether his organisation, which has pioneered community-based coastal resources management programmes in Batangas and Samar, will be able to save the fishers of Salong from eviction. 'And there is nothing we can do to stop the process of industrialisation,' he admits. 'But we can demand things from government. If we can delay industrial schemes or land sales and evictions by using the courts, that will cost government and industry money. I think they will be forced to take note of us and of the fishing communities who are suffering.'

It is sometimes said that there is little wrong with the environmental laws in the Philippines; rather, it is their application that leaves much to be desired. The enforcement agencies are under-funded and under-staffed, and a combination of trapo politics and corruption means that many illegal practices — from dynamite fishing to illegal trawling, from logging in protected areas to polluting almost everywhere — continue to degrade the environment. In the rush to develop,
government agencies and local politicians frequently ignore environmental protection laws.

All industrial developments, in law, should be subject to an Environmental Impact Analysis (EIA), carried out by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, and should not proceed until DENR awards an Environmental Compliance Certificate (ECC). No EIA has been carried out on Bacnotan's smelting plant, no ECC has been granted, yet the development is going ahead. None of which will bother those municipal officials and corporate interests who stand to profit from the development, whether through local taxes or commercial spin-offs. When the municipality arranged hearings to discuss the Bacnotan development, organisations such as those founded by the fishers of Salong and Palikpikan were not invited.

According to Carlos Flores, central government has no programmes for the resettlement of evacuated communities. It assumes that the municipalities will deal with the problem. 'We accept that some people will be displaced,' says Flores, 'but development should not go ahead unless there is an adequate resettlement programme in place.'

Flores estimates that at least 6,000 people are facing eviction in Batangas to make way for CALABARZON developments. Around 5,000 alone are being displaced for the Cavite-Batangas highway, and smaller numbers are likely to be evicted in dozens of other sites. Throughout the country Philippines 2000 is proving to be nothing more than an eviction notice for many poor communities. What makes this unacceptable is not so much the fact of eviction — development is always likely to be accompanied by displacement — as the government's steadfast refusal to recognise that it has obligations. If families are to be evicted, they must be resettled, and resettled in a manner which enables them to continue to make a living, be they fishers, farmers, or rag-pickers.