

## **Abstract**

*ICRAF has been conducting research on contour hedgerow technologies for the past decade in Claveria, Misamis Oriental and Lantapan, Bukidnon in northern and central Mindanao, Philippines. Focus was much on assessing the management strategies that address key technical constrains of the contour hedgerow system, and we observed that adoption by farmers was low for many reasons, including, high labor in establishment and maintenance of the hedgerows, resource competition above and below-ground, between the hedgerows and associated crops, limited value-added from the hedgerow prunings, and poor species adaptation. We concluded that low adaption and adoption of the conventional hedgerow system was not only due to some technical constraints but, largely, to socio-economic and institutional constraints faced by poor farmers in the uplands.*

*In view of this, we refocused our efforts toward finding alternative systems that address the technical and institutional issues of conservation farming. We found that natural vegetative filter strips (NVS) provide simple solution to the technical constraints of soil conservation on sloping farms. These are buffer strips laid out on the contour in which natural vegetation is allowed to re-grow into thick, protective cover. We found out that NVS is effective in controlling soil erosion by 95%, and it is easy to establish, maintain and it does not compete with the associated alley crops. NVS also provide the foundation for farmers to evolve into complex agroforestry systems with fruit and timber trees and other perennials—and thus, improve total farm productivity. We now see a tremendous surge of adoption of this system, enhanced by a dissemination approach, called "Landcare".*

*Landcare is a movement of autonomous farmer-led organizations supported by local governments with backstopping from technical service providers-- that share knowledge about sustainable and profitable agriculture on sloping lands while conserving natural resources. It is also referred as a participatory approach to inexpensively and rapidly disseminate conservation technologies through the group and farmer-to-farmer method. The approach itself has developed into a dynamic voluntary movement with now more than 5000 farmers involved in 250 groups from five municipalities in northern, central and eastern Mindanao. Local governments provide support in terms of policy incentives and funding for trainings and projects. Farmers share their knowledge, skills, leadership and experiences, apart from the labor, time and low-cost materials they put together for group activities. On the other hand, technical people provide knowledge, skills and facilitation for group formation and development. Today, Landcare becomes the melting pot for farmers and other community members to discuss issues, share lessons, invest talents, skills and other resources geared towards better land husbandry and protection of the environment from degradation. It threads a path for constructive, long term and practical action at a community level for tackling environment and sustainability issues for the well-being of people and their communities. Farmers in Landcare are adapting soil and water conservation technologies and agroforestry systems on their farms. Some of the groups are involved in community-based projects such as; stream rehabilitation, riparian and buffer zones rehabilitation, water watch, education and training, and policy advocacy. Landcare has*