Indigenous Peoples Call for Security of Tenure as Key to Food Sovereignty

“That piece of paper is a morale booster for the community.”

Timuey Ronaldo ‘Jojo’ Ambangan of the Erunamen ne Menuvu Kamal pointed out the need for the immediate release of their Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT), a document that legally recognizes the ownership of indigenous peoples of their territories during the dialogue on Indigenous Peoples: Agriculture and Food Sovereignty, virtually conducted on 19 November 2020.
“We have always endeavored to facilitate dialogues between indigenous peoples and government agencies because we firmly believe that only through constructive dialogue that issues being raised by indigenous peoples can be resolved,” explained Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, the executive director of Tebtebba and former UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples. “This also allows the government agencies to share more broadly what they are doing in relation to the welfare, well-being, and rights of indigenous peoples,” she added during the gathering facilitated by Tebtebba.

In the dialogue, Indigenous Peoples in the country raised their different issues and concerns which were responded accordingly by the representatives from the NGAs.

CLOA Within Ancestral Domains

“Malinaw po sa ‘min ang nasasaad sa IPRA at alam po namin ang mga karapatan namin... May four (4) bundles of rights kami doon, kasama ang karapatan sa ancestral domain,” asserted Manobo Lumadnong Panaghiusa (MALUPA) representative, Datu Berino Sumin Jr. He shares that the Manobo Tinananen peoples in Arakan, North Cotabato in the Southern Philippines are grappling with the confusion brought about by the distribution of Certificates of Land Ownership Award (CLOAs) despite them awaiting the issuance of the already approved 1998 CADT.

“It is good that indigenous peoples themselves are voicing these concerns,” National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) Commissioner Cayat responded, affirming the issues raised by Ambangan and other indigenous peoples in the dialogue. He said that other colleagues from the different national government agencies (NGAs) need to realize that there are indeed problems at the local level. Thus, concerned government offices must discuss these issues seriously.
(It is clear to us what has been stated in the IPRA and we know our rights... We have four (4) bundles of rights concerning our ancestral domain... We are entitled to the protection of our ancestral domain...)

Ambangan mentioned the same situation in Carmen, Cotabato where titling and identification of so-called agrarian beneficiaries are being conducted over several parcels of land within their ancestral domain despite the fact that the area is covered by a CADT. He requested for help regarding the matter as he stressed that these inglorious activities are being done by non-indigenous peoples who do not rightly own those lands.


(Our problem is that there are some who obtained land titles via DAR. For those who were able to receive titles, they hold these documents but they do not know where these lands are located. There are others whose lands are being farmed by others. These lands are within the ancestral domain. How can farmers make sure that the lands they are cultivating are theirs? There are no indigenous peoples provided with titles. Most of those given are outsiders. We need to bring this issue out so that indigenous peoples are helped.)

Samahan ng mga Katutubong Agta/ Dumagat at Remontado na Ipinagtatanggol ang Lupaing Ninuno (SAGIBIN-LN) President Marcelino Tena, via video patch, also presented the need to review and cancel CLOA distribution in General Nakar, Quezon since a CADT was already awarded to the indigenous peoples in the area. He mentioned that the CADT is unfortunately not fully recognized by the Department of Natural Resources (DENR) and DAR.

Timuay Justice and Governance (TJG) Titay Bleyen (Assistant to the Supreme Chieftain) Santos Unsad pointed out the need for the Bangsamoro government, through the Intergovernmental Relations Body (IGRB), to address the same issues in the Bangsamoro Au-
Access to Government Services and Programs

Barrios mentioned that many members of PASAKK do not have complete access to seeds that are supposedly distributed by the DA. Some of them, she mentioned, are provided with these seeds in exchange for a 500PhP fee.

Barrios also shared that indigenous peoples in her area are not able to avail of bank loans as massive prerequisites are required including a land title (that acts as a collateral when obtaining a bank loan). She stressed that such a requisite cannot be provided by indigenous peoples since their lands are collectively titled as CADT. The issue here is how CADTs can be used as documents to access credit for indigenous peoples. She hoped, however, that indigenous peoples’ organizations (IPOs) do get recognized as legitimate project intermediaries so that small farmers get provided with more livelihood opportunities.

Pidlisan Tribe Organization (PITO) representative, Ian Sagmayao of Sagada, thanked the DA for the irrigation aid that they received and requested for further assistance in the maintenance of the 9.2-kilometer irrigation facility used by their community.

TJG Timuay Labi (Supreme Chieftain) Leticio Datuwata, called for the necessity of various government agencies to support indigenous peoples as they struggle against food insecurity brought on by limited mobility during this COVID-19 pandemic.

Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSP)

John Mart Salunday of Nagkakaisang mga Tribu ng Palawan (NATRIPAL) presented the ancient practice of “pag-uuma” (swidden farming)—a tradition that many consider as environmentally destructive. He made an appeal for DENR and NCIP to forge a Joint Memorandum Circular to recognize ‘kaingin’ (swidden/rotational farming) as a legitimate and environmentally sustainable practice and asserted that the “Controlled Burning Ordinance” in Palawan contradicts this indigenous custom.
Unsad introduced the similar practice of Téduray and Lambangian people called ‘sulagad’—an indigenous livelihood system where the ancestral domain provides everything that they need. He mentioned that, through this farming system, they refrain from using commercial fertilizers. Instead, the fertility of the soil depends on the decaying wood and leaves found in the land. He added that the ancestral land provides relief from hunger—it is a “food repository or granary.”

“You only take what you need. You can even use these land-obtained items as medicine and to strengthen the body. They are our inheritance from the ancestors and are also God-given.)

Nevertheless, he also mentioned that modernization, technology, climate change, displacement, and even some government policies and programs have contributed to the weakening and erosion of this time-honored custom. Unsad appealed for support in the revival of the ‘sulagad’ system with the aid of appropriate government programs and policies.

Salunday and Ambangan asserted that the development and maintenance of oil palm plantations within Palawan and Aroman town in North Cotabato, respectively, violated the right to free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) of indigenous peoples.

Agri-business Within Ancestral Lands

Salunday specified Bataraza, Rizal, Brooke’s Point, Española, and Quezon in Palawan province where numerous trees were cut in the ancestral lands including those in the mangrove areas, which caused huge damage to Palawan’s environment and biodiversity. Salunday mentioned, however, that NATRIPAL already prepared a petition requesting for a national inquiry with the aid of the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) to halt the operation of these oil palm plantations in Palawan.

National Government Agency Representatives Respond

DA Undersecretary Zamzamin Ampatuan, through Mr. Camilo Andi Jr., addressed the overlap of CLOA and ancestral domain raised by the indigenous leaders and committed to visit the Eruamanen community and strive to solve this problem by 2021.

Likewise, NIA Regional manager Engr. Benito T. Espique, Jr. acknowledged the irrigation problem in Sagada, Mountain Province. He said that their office will instruct their provincial branch to conduct the validation of the 9.2-kilo-
Cayat mentioned that their office continues to lobby for resources which can, then, produce more IP-focused services. "Kung ayaw nila ibigay sa NCIP, they should give it to Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) or sa nakakatulong talaga para directly maibigay sa ating mga indigenous brothers and sisters na talagang nangangailangan," he pointed out. He also emphasized that other government agencies should respect the ancestral domains of indigenous peoples and should not carry out other surveys in these areas.

(If they [the government] don’t like to give it through the NCIP, they should give it to [the] DSWD instead, so that services go directly to our indigenous brothers and sisters who really need the help).

NCIP Commissioner Norberto ‘Jong’ Navarro acknowledged that each government agency has individual mandates and so there are points of conflicts, but that there are also areas of cooperation among them. For instance, he mentioned that there is a huge discussion now about the joint efforts of DA and NCIP for food security as he announced a PhP150 Million joint project that is being processed in support of farmers.

In response to Kamal’s earlier presentation, DAR’s representative Emelita Mayol explained that an initial validation and segregation survey was conducted in March 2020, based on Executive Order 75 (EO 75) stating that the land used by the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) is government-owned. Likewise, Mayol explained that violations of the said EO and JAO were committed by various government departments. She added that DAR acknowledges the area claimed by indigenous peoples in Aroman and that, at present, no portion of the disputed domain has been given away yet since the said validation and survey is still ongoing.

Representatives from the NCIP responded that there is really a need for all concerned government offices to discuss and fix this predicament to help indigenous peoples. NCIP Central Mindanao Commissioner Jennifer Sibug-Las posited that the issues raised by indigenous leaders in North Cotabato, particularly that of land conflict, were already reported to their office and that they stand committed to coming up with resolutions for the said problems.

Commissioner Jennifer Sibug-Las, National Commission on Indigenous Peoples
Protection and Respect of Indigenous Rights

Tauli-Corpuz reiterated that “indigenous peoples’ lives will be in a much better state if they are able to pursue the kind of development they want to see in the present and in the future.”

The first of the Dayalogo series was facilitated by Tebtebba with the support of the European Union through the Indigenous Navigator Initiative participated in by a total of 89 indigenous community leaders from all over the Philippines and several officials and staff from the different national government agencies including the DA, DAR, NIA, and NCIP.

The Dayalogo 2020 event aims to facilitate constructive and sustained dialogues between indigenous peoples and government agencies towards the fulfillment of the Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act (IPRA), the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

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