Peace & Governance: Challenges for Sustainable Development of Lake Lanao, Southern Philippines

Keywords: basin governance, ecosystem services and basin management policies, sustainable development, cultural heritage

**ABSTRACT**

One of the world’s ancient lakes, Lake Lanao in the province of Lanao Sur, southern Phiippines, is home to the Meranaws, a Muslim group who inhabit the area since precolonial times. Lake Lanao is also a major economic re- source of the country being the source of water of six hydropower plants, the *Agus Powerplant Complex*, which provide a big bulk of electricity to Mindanao, the country’s southern most island and home to more than 30% of Filipinos. Lanao Sur is one of the poorest province and known to be hotbed of violent conflicts in the country, ranging from clan violence to historical Moro/Muslim armed secessionist rebellion and other forms of “shadow economy”. Against this social backdrop, the study inquires on the state of sustainable development of Lake Lanao. From a survey of 500 respondents, key informant interviews and on-site observation, the study reveals that Lake Lanao matters has not trigger conflict among the locals. However, the professional groups and development actors in the area, private and government alike, deplore the absence of, or poor, governance of Lake Lanao which, they argue, abetted the socially and environmentally damaging monopolistic control and utilization of the Lake by a government-owned and controlled corporation. The study highlights the (a) challenges of competing resource use, between local - subsistence and cultural - versus national, highly economic ; and (b) effective governance in ad- dressing peace and security in the locality as pillars of sustainable development.

# INTRODUCTION

Lake Lanao is not just a cultural heritage of the Mer- anaws; it is likewise a major economic resource for both Lanao areas and Mindanao, in general. As a cul- tural heritage, the Lake is crucial to the daily life of the Meranaws in terms of food for consumption and livelihood, as well as for religious practices in Islam. However, since the 50s until present, the National Power Corporation (NPC) has the monopolistic role in the industrial utilization of the lake through its seven- power generating plants, the Agus Hydropower Project. NPC provides more than 50% of the electrici- ty power base of Mindanao.

The construction of the NPC regulatory dam in 1978 already has some changes on the Lake as NPC now controls the outflow of the Lake. Prior to this, NPC only harnessed the natural flow of the Agus River to feed its turbines in the Agus 6 Hydorpower Dam which is more than 30 kilometers away from the lake. But it was only in 1991, where Agus 1 Hydropower Plant, constructed along the side of the Lake and with tur- bines at the bossom of Lake, will have been opera- tional that a popular contestation against NPC’s utiliza- tion of the Lake, particularly protesting against the operation of Agus 1 plant. This was the condition which paved the way for the creation of SALAM (Save Lake Lanao Movement, composed mostly of Meranaw professionals and traditional leaders, which embarked on an advocacy to bring justice, trans- parency and equity of Lake Lanao utilization. SALAM argues that Agus 1 operation will directly and radically affect Lake Lanao and its corresponding

ecological and economic roles. To date, NPC still holds the monopolistic reign over the Lake.

This study explores and documents cases of conflict that have occurred in the region which are directly or indirectly related to Lake Lanao. Moreover, this study inquires on the challenges on governance in the con- text of sustainable peace, both as experienced and perceived by the various stakeholders in the area.

# METHODS

A case study research design employing mixed method of qualitative and quantitative approaches. 500 community respondents were covered in the random survey and some 15 key informants for the in-depth unstructured interviews, and nonparticipant observa- tion. Key informants are community personalities and officials of the municipality and NPC.

# RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS

*Experiences of Conflict*

The Lanao region is popularly known to be a hotbed of violent conflicts between clans and family traditionally called *rido. Rido* has become the most important con- flict issue facing the Philippines’ Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) as this is the leading contributor of violent conflicts in the region *(Ferolin & Constantino 2014).* Table 1 below shows cases of of violence in Mindanao with *rido* gaining a gigantic lead.

In several studies conducted about *ridos*, the following are identified as causes and triggers for the develop- ment of *ridos* in Lanao del Sur, as follows (in random order): land disputes, political rivalry, homicide, busi- ness rivalry, non-payment of debts, sex crimes (eg rape, physical contact, elopement), pride/disgrace/ shame/affront to *maratabat,* accidents and drug-related cases.

Table 1. Cases of Violence in Mindanao

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Cases of Violence in Mindanao** | **%** |
| **Between families & clans “rido”** | 17 |
| **Between farmers and landowners** | 4 |
| **Between Muslims and Christians** | 0.3 |
| **Between the AFP and Abbu Sayyaf, a Muslim extremist group** | 2 |
| **Between the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the New Peoples Army (NPA)** | 3 |
| **Due to crime** | 3 |
| **Due to Muslim rebels** | 2 |

*Source: Social Weather Station 2005*

Respondents ascertained that the utilization of Lake Lanao by the locals has never been a cause or a source of conflict, trouble or problem among the locals. They explain that the Lake is accessible to all of them; they all have access to the lake and has been using the lake their entire life, especially for their daily needs. On a similar vein, majority of the respondents have not heard of any news or information about occurrence of conflicts between Meranaws nor between anybody in their communities and nearby areas that concerns or relates to the Lake.

However, contrary to the experiences and perceptions of community-based respondents, key informants re- ported of a harrowing experience in 1990 in the Na- tional Power Plant, (NPC), the only industrial utilizer of Lake Lanao since 1950s. This involved the killing of some personalities connected with NPC by Mer- anaws who were formerly NPC employees. Key in- formants expressed dismay over the seemingly unfair practice of NPC in terms of employment, where Mer- anaws are rarely provided the chance even if they are qualified (Naga 2010).

*Activities that Threaten the Lake*

More than half of the survey respondents report they are well aware of on-going activities that can harm Lake Lanao. Most identified logging as a major threat to the Lake as it causes denudation of forests in the

uplands of the area (see Table 2). Other activities iden- tified are agriculture, quarrying and garbage dumping into the lake. These activities have been existing for a long time already and many respondents perceive them as “normal” practices. They recognize though that these practices must be controlled and regulated in or- der to safeguard the integrity of the Lake Lanao’s ecosystem.

Table 2. Activities Threatening the Lake

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Activities | Frequency |
| * Logging in the forests | 50-66% |
| * Dynamite fishing | 21% |
| * Other destructive fishing | 20% |
| * Agriculture | 9% |
| * Quarrying | 8% |
| * Garbage throwing, no toilets | 5% |

*Existing Laws and Ordinances For Lake Lanao*

A big majority of the survey respondents said they are not aware of any law or policy or ordinance, whether local, regional or national, that are existing for the pro- tection of Lake Lanao. Key informants, however, re- port that there are issuances on the maintenance of the water quality of the lake, especially controlling pollu- tion. However, there are no documents as proofs of these issuances. Key informants from the government and private sector explained that policies regarding lake protection usually stem from programs imple- mented by either by NGOs or government agencies in specific communities. Few key informants though as- serted that there exists no local policies as the lake is entrusted to the NPC.

Members of the Save Lake Lanao Movement (SALAM) reiterate their long-standing woes and com- plains on the non-implementation of laws and national policies regarding Lake Lanao. This non-implementa- tion has been to the detriment and deprivation of the Meranaws of the gargantuan bounties of the Lake. They identify the following national policies and en- abling laws that are existing for the protection and development of Lake Lanao and the Meranaws:

* Environmental Compliance Certificate of NPC which mandates NPC to deliver services akin to a cor- porate social responsibility;
* Presidential Decree Declaring Lake Lanao Water- shed for the protection and conservation of the lake
* National Integrated Protected Area System 1992- for the protection of Lake Lanao watershed
* Water Code of the Philippines - protection and con- servation of Lake Lanao watershed

Secondary data also shows the existence of other na- tionally mandated laws and policies and for the protec- tion of Lake Lanao and the Meranaws, as follows:

* 1992 Presidential Memo No. 30 - a decree stopping the issuance and operation of all forms of timber cut- ting in Lake Lanao watershed
* 1997 Republic Act 8435 - for the implementation of the Integrated Riverbasin Management and Develop- ment Master Plan for the Ranao (Agus) River Basin, for watershed conservation, river basin rehabilitation, flood control/mitigation, and water security for domes- tic, irrigation and industrial use, livelihood and eco- nomic opportunities in the area.
* 2001 - A Republic Act 9054 enforces total log ban in watershed areas.
* Republic Act 7160 - mandates NPC to provide monetary benefit to host local government. The share of host LGU to national wealth tax shall be applied to lower the cost of electricity and to finance local devel- opment and livelihood projects.

*Existing Programs and Projects for Lake Lanao*

*Integrated Natural Resources and Environmental Management Program (INREMP) for Lake Lanao - a*ims to address the dual goals of poverty reduction and watershed conservation reducing forest denudation, unsustainable farming practices, loss of environmental services and loss of agricultural productivity.

*National Greening Program* is a massive forest reha- bilitation program of the government. NGP seeks to enhance the country’s forest stock to absorb carbon dioxide, reduce poverty by providing alternative liveli- hood activities for marginalized upland and lowland households relating to seedling production and care and maintenance of newly-planted trees. In 2011, two communities in Lanao del Sur are beneficiaries.

*The My Lake Lanao Project (MLLP)* is a one-year partnership between Mindanao State University, espe- cially the College of Arts and Social Sciences being the lead implementer, and the NGO , ABAG sa Kalambuan Inc. The project was funded by the US Embassy in Manila Cultural Affairs Division. MLLP project focussed on advocacy on Lake conservation and raising awareness of the young generation on the role of the Lake, as well as community-based liveli- hoods with environmental enhancements.

*Issues and Concerns and Experiences of Governance of the Lake*

1. The survey show that following urgent concerns about the Lake:

* Maintain the quality of water of the lake
* restore the beauty of the lake
* Build fish port for easy access for the fishers
* establish fish ponds for fish production
* Establish public toilets

1. *The National Power Corporation: The “Lord of the Lake”*

National Power Corporation (NAPOCOR or NPC) is a government owned and controlled corporation has started operation since early 1950s using the natural outflow of lake water through the Agus River. In 1978, it constructed a regulatory dam which affected the water of the lake, locals argue (Naga 2010). Five power plants are built along this river producing a total of more than 746MW. The company has been operating without any significant opposition from the communities until 1990’s hostage taking-inciden[t1](#_bookmark1). This incident opened up employment opportunities for Meranaws to replace the Christian employees who refused to report back to work. Moreover, this incident spurred in the office. to spurred In 1991, NPC claims it has complete jurisdiction and control over watersheds surrounding its powerplants and energy sources, referring to national laws issued.

1. Recommendations from Local Stakeholders on the following:

* Management of the Lake: A tripartite co- management among DENR, ARMM and the LGU- Lanao del Sur. With co-management, NPC will have stronger basis to participate in watershed management and to attend to the eastern side of the lake where the tributary rivers are.
* Awareness-raising among the youth on the role of Lake Lanao - maximization of the roles of schools. Also, to further study Sharia Law, especially on the context of “Khalifa” - stewardship of man to nature.

# REFERENCES

1] Naga, Pipalawan (2016) February 4. *Lake Lanao: State of E n v i r o n m e n t a n d L e g a l A s p e c t s* . 2] Macabuac-Ferolin, Maria Cecilia & Norma Constantino. 2015.Localizing Transformation: Addressing Clan Feuds in Mindanao through PCIA, in Journal of Peacebuilding and D e v e l o p m e n t 9 : 1 p p 1 0 - 2 5 . h t t p s : / / d o i . o r g/ 10.1080/15423166.2014.894404

1. Naga, Pipalawan. 2010 October 27. Lake Lanao Brief. A powerpoint presentation for the Save Lake Lanao Movement. Mindanao State University, Marawi City
2. ESSC, 2015. “Lanao as Watershed” in Forest Faces, ESSC.
3. Kamlian, Jamail. 2005. *Incidences of Clan Conflict and Conflict Management: Survey of Feuding Families and Clans in Selected Provinces of Mindanao .* The Asia Foundation & USAID. *http://* [*www.asiafoundation.org*](http://www.asiafoundation.org/)

[1](#_bookmark0) This incident is reported to have been perpetrated by disgruntled Meranaw employees who were relieved from work.