

Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines

The Condition of Indigenous Peoples

The Philippines is a culturally diverse country with an estimated 14-17 million Indigenous Peoples (IPs) belonging to 110 ethno-linguistic groups; they are mainly concentrated in Northern Luzon (Cordillera Administrative Region, 33%) and Mindanao (61%), with some groups in the Visayas area. The Philippine Constitution, in recognition of this diversity and under the framework of national unity and development, mandates state recognition, protection, promotion, and fulfillment of the rights of Indigenous Peoples. Further, Republic Act 8371, also known as the "Indigenous Peoples Rights Act" (1997, IPRA), recognized the right of IPs to manage their ancestral domains and has become the cornerstone of current national policy on IPs.

Yet, despite these guarantees, the fact is that wherever IPs live, they remain among the poorest and most disadvantaged peoples. The first-ever Report on the State of the World of Indigenous Peoples, issued by the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in January 2010, revealed that IPs make up fully one-third of the world's poorest peoples, suffer disproportionately in areas like health, education, and human rights, and regularly face systemic discrimination and exclusion.

In the Philippines, IPs have been subject to historical discrimination and marginalization from political processes and economic benefit. They often face exclusion, loss of ancestral lands, displacement, pressures to and destruction of traditional ways of life and practices, and loss of identity and culture. In extreme situations, social and political discontent has erupted into armed conflict – the 40-year old armed conflict in Mindanao, involving secessionists and communist insurgents is a prime example. Conflicts such as these not only threaten the stability and development potential of affected areas, they exacerbate

the plight of indigenous peoples. From economic development to environmental protection to justice, human rights, and good governance, the protections and participation promised to IPs needs to be mainstreamed through all relevant decision-making bodies and stakeholder organizations.

A Decade of Assistance

In the Philippines, UNDP has to date undertaken 35 IP-focused or IP-related projects, which have together assisted 28 distinct ethno-linguistic groups in 12 regions and 21 provinces throughout the country. These projects have focused on improving the capacity of government agencies, civil society, and other service providers, as well as building capacity amongst IPs and their leadership.

The "Capacity Building for IP Leaders" and "Community Development, Para-legal Functions and Project Planning and Management" projects provided training on basic and advanced paralegal skills, leadership and gender sensitivity, community organizing, and project development and management to dozens of IP leaders and governmental staff. These sessions resulted in increased awareness of leaders and elders on leadership and gender issues, strengthened traditional structures of community development and law enforcement, and improved competence levels for integrating tribal and customary laws with national legal processes.



Master Embroiderers of Lake Sebu, South Cotabato. Copyright @ ILO / Allan Barredo, 2009

Partnering with the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) and with support from the New Zealand Agency for International Development (NZAID), UNDP has also focused on empowering IPs, helping guarantee their land rights, and improving management and utilization of those lands through the "Integrated Programme for the Empowerment of Indigenous Peoples and Sustainable Development of Ancestral Domains." The programme has already resulted in the drafting of 10 Ancestral Domain for Sustainable Development and Protection Plans (ADSDPPs) – documents that institutionalize not only sustainable development plans but also further guarantees the rights of IPs to the management of their ancestral lands.

UNDP has also worked closely with IPs to help build capacity for modern resource conservation techniques through the “Conservation Programme in Ancestral Domains” project and to mitigate the effects of and better plan for natural disasters in the “Capacity Building on Disaster Preparedness and Management” project. Other IP-relevant issues, like disaster relief provision, support for community enterprises, and ecosystems management capacity building have also been addressed through projects in three of UNDP Philippines’ main thematic areas.

A New Phase of Assistance

Traditionally, UNDP’s response in the Philippines has been to include local-level components that target IP issues in individual projects. However, unlike many discrete development problems, those faced by IPs are truly cross-cutting and require programmatic interventions that span traditional development focal areas. With support from the Regional Indigenous Peoples Programme (RIPP), UNDP is launching a new programme, “Strengthening Indigenous Peoples’ Rights and Development in the Philippines: (2010-2011, SIPRD).” SIPRD will integrate and build on current responses and help facilitate greater mainstreaming of IP concerns across the development agenda.

The focus of SIPRD is securing IP rights to the sustainable use, management, and protection of ancestral lands, supporting the implementation of good governance principles, and promoting indigenous peace-building mechanisms. SIPRD will be implemented by NCIP in collaboration with IP organizations. One component of the project is the support of the National Statistics Office’s (NSO) population census, which for the first time will include disaggregated data on IPs. This effort will build a richer base of data for future IP work by all agencies and NGOs in the Philippines and provide a clearer picture of where interventions are most needed.

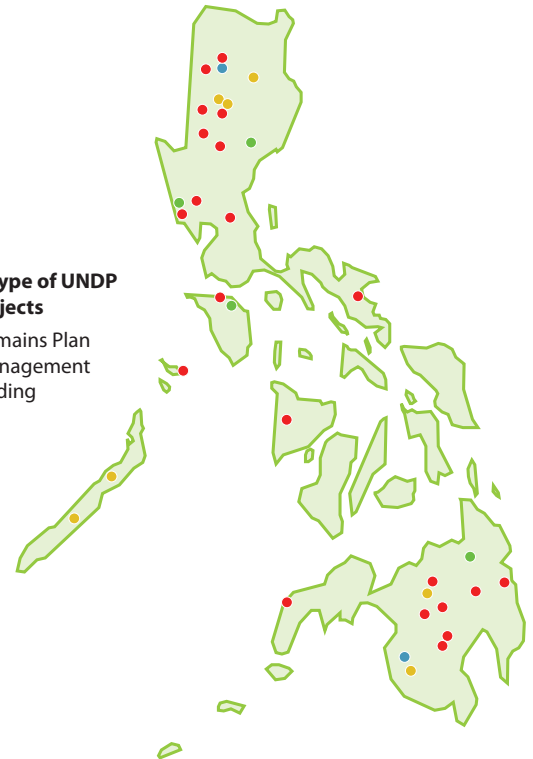
The deeply interconnected nature of the problems facing IPs means that the most effective responses occur through the cooperation of involved agencies. UNDP is uniquely suited to bring together



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Location and Type of UNDP Assisted IP Projects

- Ancestral Domains Plan
- Ecosystem Management
- Capacity Building
- Energy



stakeholders from relevant areas to work together on cross-cutting IP issues such as peace-building, environmental justice, and good governance. SIPRD is designed to provide UNDP and sister UN agencies with a framework through which responses to different IP challenges can be integrated, and drawing on the expertise and resources of the entire UN System, to identify gaps in responses and promote deeper cooperation amongst stakeholders.

After over a decade of supporting the development of indigenous peoples in the Philippines, UNDP, and the UN System as a whole, is entering a new phase in their assistance to IPs, characterized by greater integration between agencies and responses nationally, and increased collaboration at the regional and international levels. Building on extensive local, regional, and global work in human development, advocacy of democratic governance, and mainstreaming of human rights, UNDP and the UN System aim to provide opportunities and space for the voices and aspirations of marginalized indigenous peoples.

To contribute to this initiative, or to find out more about the work of UNDP in the Philippines, please visit our website at www.undp.org.ph, or contact Mr. Emmanuel Buendia, Team Leader for Fostering Democratic Governance, at (+632) 901.0225 or send him an e-mail at emmanuel.buendia@undp.org

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