

EVIDENCES FROM THE GROUND




Case Studies Highlighting Community Narratives and Experiences



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Erumanen ne Menuvu (Aromanon Manobo)

“The land owns us” — Indigenous Voices Assert Land Rights and Identity

UNDER THE LOOMING THREAT OF EVICTION, where families face the harsh reality of losing their homes and land, a struggle unfolds. In the mountainous barangays of Carmen in North Cotabato, the soil holds centuries of memory. Indigenous peoples are not just defending their land. Through listening and collective remembering during a community learning session facilitated by the Initiatives for International Dialogue (IID), the Erumanen ne Menuvu asserted their vision of justice rooted in the interconnectedness of land as life itself.

Since 2015, the community has held a Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT), a legal recognition of their traditional territories. However, despite securing the CADT, which covers 15,000 hectares, they continue to face land grabbing, legal manipulation, and systemic marginalization. “We have our CADT, but it did not stop others claiming it,” Rady Boy Pobre, an IP youth leader, said. “How many papers do we need before our truth is believed?” he added.

Their ancestral lands, while documented through oral tradition, customary law, and community mapping, are now overlapped by private claims, investor interest, and

conflicting government programs. In one case, a 263-hectare portion was titled under another name without their consent. The new owner demands ₱2.4 million or threatens eviction by force.

The land problem is historical. Stories emerged of land usurpation dating back to events that shaped the current landscape of conflict. In the early 1950s, logging concessions began, disrupting native land tenure and opening the region to exploitation. Later, military occupation entrenched external control, pushing indigenous communities to the peripheries. By the late 1950s, national settlement programs brought an influx of



Carmen, North Cotabato



non-indigenous settlers, legally sanctioned yet culturally oblivious, creating layers of contestation. Their return today, after conflict and forced migration, is often met with new challenges.

Displacement as a Pattern

“We were displaced during Martial Law. During the 1980s, we were displaced again,” recalled Refelia Lumontod. “Each time we came back, we found our lands taken, titled, or fenced off.”

This cycle of displacement and dispossession is not isolated but systemic. For many indigenous families in Carmen, the conflict is not just about ownership, but about

erasure of culture, memory, and spiritual continuity.

Yet, they farm, hold rituals, plant trees, and raise children on lands once walked by their ancestors. “The land owns us,” said Ronnie Manial, another youth leader. “Not the other way around.”

Kakap Dulunan: Peace in Practice

At the heart of this struggle is resilience. *Kakap Dulunan*, a traditional peace pact between the Erumanen ne Menuvu and Maguindanaon communities, is one example. This community covenant affirms ancestral boundaries, respect for each other’s governance, and peaceful dispute resolution. It shows

Indigenous diplomacy relies not on courts but on dialogue, ritual, and trust.

“*Kakap Dulunan* shows that peace can exist without being legislated. Through constant dialogue, it has become our own way of saving: we are neighbors, not enemies,” Timuay Ronaldo “Jojo” Ambangan, the traditional leader of the Eruamanen ne Menuvu in Carmen North Cotabato said.

In a region often portrayed through the lens of insurgency and militarization, *Kakap Dulunan* offers a radically different narrative which is one of self-determined coexistence.

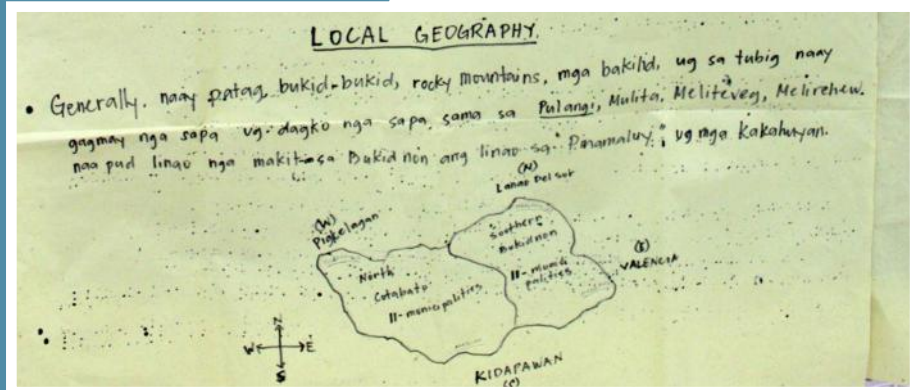
“In the past, our relationship with the Maguindanaws was very close, and it was characterized by immeasurable love. However,



We were displaced during Martial Law. During the 1980s, we were displaced again. Each time we came back, we found our lands taken, titled, or fenced off.

— REFELIA LUMONTOD

as observed nowadays, this relationship has encountered challenges which we need to overcome. The Mahindanaw sultans and our forefathers had an understanding and agreement in the past, which was the result of harmonious dealings and dialogue. This agreement has been challenged by the unfolding



of events inside and outside our territories. Thus, the descendants of the peace pact holders, the clans of Enalang, Mantawil, Saliling and Pontongan, have agreed to revisit and relive the agreement/peace pact as it is one of the reasons that the descendants of the clans have survived until the present.” — Datu Al Saliling, Erumanen ne Menuvu elder.

For the Manobo and Maguindanaoan, kinship is defined by traditional boundaries set by their elders as distinct peoples with their own culture and identity. These are boundaries in a shared space. The core element of the *Pagalatan* or *Peheleten*, which means boundary, is connection, not limitation. It is a shared story of how ancestors ended the great war. This defined their respective territories as distinct peoples. The *Pagalatan* or *Peheleten*, commonly called *dulunan*, created guidelines for the communities’ political, economic, and cultural distinctiveness, including faith.

The revisited boundaries go beyond the physical to include those that defined past kinship and relationships. To revisit this agreement, the Erumanen ne Menuvu and Maguindanaoan communities in Carmen, North Cotabato, organized a community pilgrimage called *Kakap Dulunan*. This reaffirmed and reenacted the traditional agreement, enabling indigenous groups to coexist in peace and harmony and encouraging economic sufficiency

and independence. They honored the agreement to protect future generations from a *mulaka*, or curse. The Erumanen ne Menuvu and Maguindanaoan clan leaders and community members retraced the history and principles of the agreements. This connects the past to the present, from the narratives of *Rempong* and *Sebala* to peace pacts, revealing grassroots peacemaking.

This community-based peacemaking practice resonates beyond local issues. It can also contribute to complex processes, such as formal negotiations between revolutionaries and the national government.

Central to these narratives is the *taak*. It was given by the *binalig*, a mythical giant eel along the river, to signify the peace agreement between tribes. Elders from both tribes remember the *taak*, a symbol of reconciliation, as 400 years old. Datu Al Saliling’s forefathers gave this *taak* to a Rajah of Maguindanao long ago, until it reached the Datu sa

“Kakap Dulunan shows that peace can exist without being legislated. Through constant dialogue, it has become our own way of saving: we are neighbors, not enemies.”

— TIMUAY RONALDO “JOJO” AMBANGAN

For the Manobo and Maguindanaoan, kinship is defined by traditional boundaries set by their elders as distinct peoples with their own culture and identity. These are boundaries in a shared space. The core element of the Pagalatan or Peheleten, which means boundary, is connection, not limitation. It is a shared story of how ancestors ended the great war. This defined their respective territories as distinct peoples.

Inugog. The descendants recall the last known keeper of the *taak* was Bai a Laga, a direct descendant of Rajah Sumunsang from a Matanguwanen wife. She had a brother, Zunzonga (the Datu of Kabacan), whose sister married another Maguindanaoan leader, Datu sa Inug-og, her second cousin. These two were the parents of Bai a Laga. Datu sa Inug-og's children with his other wife had no royal blood, so they could not keep the *taak*. Since he had no other sons, Bai a Laga was given the *taak*. Bai a Laga never married, which is why she was called Bai a Laga—a royal-blooded single woman.

The *Peheleten* or *Pagalatan* originates from the Manobo's story of *Rempong* and *Sebala*. This refers to the *Mamalu* and *Tabunaway* narrative, in which IP-Moro kinship was formed through a peace pact. This forms the community's basis for dialogue and peace between clans, a distinct cultural process and grassroots peacemaking. The framework hinges on mutual recognition and respect, the sharing of information, cooperation, the protection of life, and the sharing of resources. The tribes emphasize that Moros and IPs are brothers and sisters, and that the region's first peoples.

Concept

IP and Moro each have a concept of ancestral domain. These are territories inherited or occupied by their ancestors since time immemorial.

Territory

They have mapped traditional boundaries, encompassing belief systems, knowledge, customary law, and economic survival. The Moro claim an encompassing homeland, while self-governance defines the IP claim.

Resources

They have identified lands, waters, and resources as their sources of survival. These are also sources of conflict when outside entities encroach and take control.

Governance

Both the Moro and IP have their own concept of governance, which is distinct from the state government. They have customary laws, justice systems, and traditional agreements.



Their calls are both clear and powerful:

- Institutional recognition and integration of peace pacts like *Kakap Dulunan* into formal governance frameworks.
 - A strengthened IP Code in BARMM with genuine consultation, not tokenism.
 - A unified Ancestral Domain Management Office with Indigenous leadership and oversight.
 - Community-led FPIC processes that are culturally grounded and legally binding.
 - Paralegal training and legal literacy for Indigenous youth and elders.
 - Sustainable livelihood support through land-based programs, reforestation, and seed banking.
- 

“We want to be heard”

While the indigenous-Moro peace pact is observed and considered to be sacred, the community shared how the overlapping jurisdictions of DENR, NCIP, DAR, and the Bangsamoro government create confusion and weaken IP rights. While the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) offers legal protection, its implementation remains inconsistent, especially within the evolving legal framework of BARMM. “There is too much bureaucracy and too little justice,” said Fevilyn Mantonggo. “We don’t want aid. We want to be heard.”

Conflicts arise not just from land scarcity, but from power imbalances embedded in law and development. Surveyors arrive without consultation. Projects are approved without Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) and ancestral lands become economic zones overnight, often with little regard for the communities they uproot. Despite these challenges, young people and the community remain hopeful. They see the land as a place of hope. The youth spoke about planting trees and reviving traditional crops while its elders shared songs and symbols of protection. Women reflected on how displacement has made them not weaker, but more determined. “Our culture has survived colonization, militarization, and modernization,” Ambangan shared, “We are still here. That is resistance.”

“It is where we will return”

“Moral governance,” Timuay Jojo emphasized, “is not a slogan. It must be seen in how we treat the land and the people who care for it. This means ensuring that genuine consultations are carried out regularly with indigenous communities, protecting ancestral lands through legal measures, and restoring significant portions of land to their natural state.”

Thus, the shared commitment is to carry the stories forward, honor their ancestors, and pass on the responsibility for caring for the land and their identity to the next generation. “We take care of the land, because it is like our body. When we die, it is where we will return.”

In Carmen, peace is not written in treaties but planted, remembered, and walked every day. It is a reminder of the stories rooted within it.

Meranaw (Maranao)

“We have become invisible in our own land” — The Plight of the IDPs

EIGHT YEARS HAVE PASSED SINCE THE MARAWI SIEGE, The crisis of prolonged displacement still puts many lives in grave peril and has deprived the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) of their rights as human beings. Amid much-publicized rehabilitation efforts in the city’s Most Affected Areas, the promise to rebuild the lives of the victims and survivors of the siege remains utterly unfulfilled.

In Sagongsongan Shelter in Marawi, a circle of voices gathered: displaced mothers, young women, elders, and youth leaders. They are not just telling their stories. They were reclaiming them. Among them was Adan, a soft-spoken but resolute youth leader who volunteers with the Reclaiming Marawi Movement.

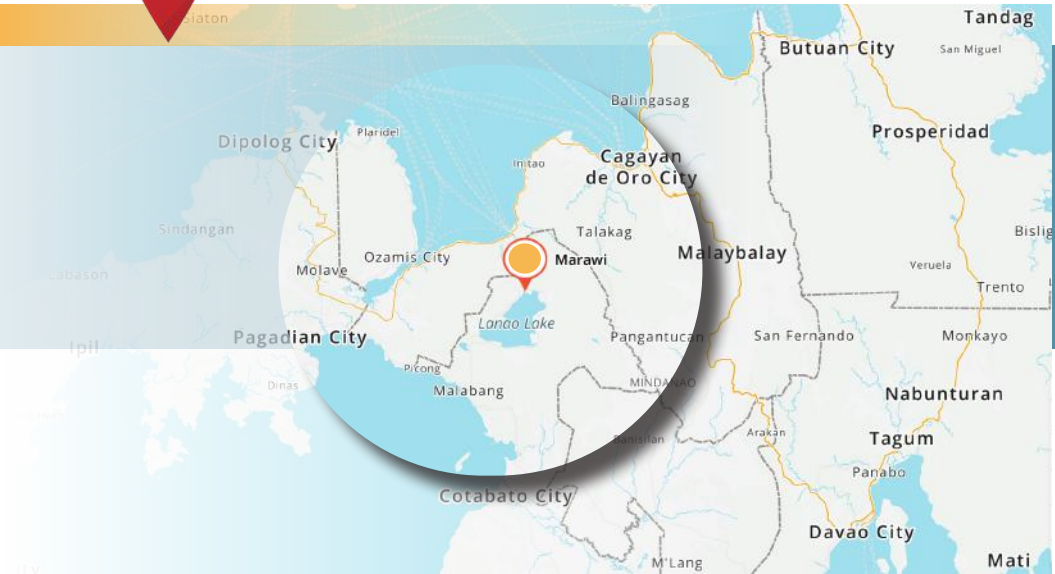
“It’s been almost eight years,” he said. “We had peace of mind in our old homes. We knew our neighbors. We had dignity. Now, even our grief feels temporary, like our shelter.”

His words echo far beyond, forming part of a collective assertion of rights, identity, and memory:





Marawi City



“We, members and networks of the Marawi Advocacy Accompaniment (MAA), composed of bakwit communities (IDPs), civil society organizations, women and youth, and Meranaw leaders together with allies in the broader peacebuilding community, today, in commemoration of the 8th anniversary of the siege of our beloved Marawi City, reiterate our calls for justice, truth, human rights protection, and peace towards the full realization of an IDP-centered and IDP-sensitive safe and dignified return of all IDPs back to Marawi.”

These words carry not just hope but demands for action.

Samerah, a mother of four, lives in a rented shelter where her landlord refuses to provide her with a

certification, a critical document she needs to access the government’s compensation program. “Even if my former neighbors can attest that I lived there before, without the document, it is difficult to get the needed services, and it is as if I do not exist,” she sighed.

For many like Samerah, it is not just about land. It is about identity and recognition.

Hanifah, recounted the years she lived in the Most Affected Area (MAA). “We had free water, nearby schools, and the call to prayer reached us five times a day.” Her voice broke slightly. “Now, they say our new place is permanent. But we have no title. No proof. What is permanent if it can be taken away?”

Their words echoed. Each person carried a story of not only physical loss but also spiritual and cultural dislocation. Their homes, built on ancestral lands and passed down through oral agreements, were now gone. Formal legal systems did not recognize their histories, traditions, or claims.

Nanayaon, a proud member of the local sultanate, recounted how her family had won a long-standing land case in the courts. However, even then, the dispute persisted, as relatives contested ownership, greed took root, and the courts provided no resolution. “In the past,” she said, “our Datus and Sultans could resolve conflicts in days. Now, we spend years in court and still return empty-handed.”

The lack of land titles is a weight they all carry. It means exclusion from aid, uncertainty about shelter, and fear of being uprooted again. As

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— ADAN, Youth Leader



***“In shelters, families
recount being left off
aid lists, paying for
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We have become invisible
in our own land.”***

— SAMERAH, an IDP woman who cannot return or receive compensation because their residency lacks legal proof

Menchie, a mother and traditional leader, shared, “We never buy nice things anymore. What for? We might have to move again.”

Despite these burdens, the participants spoke not with bitterness but with a resilient longing for *kambalingan*, a Meranaw word meaning “return.”

In shelters, families recount being left off aid lists, paying for water and electricity, and navigating bureaucracies that do not recognize them. “We have become invisible in our own land,” says Samerah, whose family fled the siege but cannot return or receive compensation because their residency lacks legal proof.

Dapolog, a former landowner, explains: “Even those in ‘permanent’ shelters are being asked to pay rent. But the land isn’t even paid for by the government. What happens when the owners come back?”

A Call to Action

“Today, we demand that the Philippine government, through the Marawi Compensation Board (MCB), fast-track the compensation process for all eligible IDPs and observe the principles of just compensation.”

The IDPs echoed this demand. Many have yet to be called for hearings. Others are told they are ineligible because of missing paperwork lost during the siege. Traditional landowners without formal titles are excluded from this process. Families are fragmented. The youth become more vulnerable.

Still, they persevere. The Marawi Compensation Board (MCB) was established by an act of Congress in 2022 to handle claims for wrongful death, damage, or destruction of properties set forth in the Marawi Siege Victim’s Compensation Act of 2022. According to the MCB’s official website posted on October 30, 2025, they had already released a total of ₱2,753,215,029.55 for the victims of the Marawi Siege and resolved 2,838 claims out of 14,495.¹

“Rebuilding must be anchored on the principle of truth, justice, and accountability within a transitional justice framework to comprehensively address the roots of festering conflict and to ensure that another Marawi siege or similar tragic incident will never happen again,” said Prof. Tirmizy

Abdullah, a Professor from Mindanao State University and a community leader in Marawi.

“We believe that the issue of displacement, especially one that is driven by armed conflict, is a transitional justice issue that must deliberately respond to the justice claims of the IDPs,” he added.



The voices in that room demanded presence. They were not asking for lavish housing or compensation beyond reach. What they want is the dignity of going home, to rebuild on their ancestral lands, to hear the call to prayer from nearby mosques, and to be with neighbors who know their stories. To belong.

“Even if we live simply, let us live in our land. Let us rebuild. Let us return and reclaim what was never meant to be taken,” Sanairah, another IDP, said.

1 MCB. (2025, Oct. 30). ₱2.75 Billion in Compensation Released by Marawi Compensation Board to Siege Victims. Retrieved from <https://mcb.gov.ph/₱2-75-billion-in-compensation-released-by-marawi-compensation-board-to-siege-victims>

Several years after the siege, the calls remain louder. The stories were many, but the message was one: the land remembers us, even when the rest of the country seems to have forgotten. These justice claims are not abstract. They include:

- The right to return (*kambalingan*) with dignity;
- Just compensation processed urgently and transparently;
- Access to basic services in shelters;
- Resolution of land disputes that especially affect four barangays in Ground Zero;
- Halt to large-scale public infrastructure projects that deepen dispossession.

And most of all, the right to be consulted, represented, and remembered, not merely counted in statistics.

Impacts of Land Rights Insecurity

Most of the internally displaced have pointed out the loss of income sources tied to their land, such as rental units or farmland, leaving them dependent on aid or low-wage labor. Others tried to start businesses in relocation sites but failed because of poor conditions. Even in host communities, IDPs said they feel marginalized and excluded from social services, including the 4Ps program, because of their temporary status.

The inability to return to ancestral land, worship in or build mosques, or live within traditional clan structures has led to cultural dislocation and psychological distress. For young people, the weakening of family cohesion has led to early marriage,

Key Issues

Insecure Land Tenure in Resettlement Areas

Research participants in government-constructed shelters, such as Sagonsongan and Dulay, raised critical concerns over land ownership. Despite being placed in so-called “permanent” shelters, many do not hold land titles or legal proof of ownership. This legal limbo fuels anxiety that the land can be reclaimed by original owners or others at any time.

Loss of Ancestral and Customary Land Rights

Many IDPs, especially from Datu sa Dansalan and other barangays within Ground Zero, lost access to land passed down through oral tradition and customary arrangements. The lack of formal documentation has disqualified many from the compensation process under the Marawi Compensation Board.

Intergenerational and Intra-Family Conflict

The breakdown of traditional land-sharing practices, especially among relatives, has led to internal disputes, prolonged court battles, and family fragmentation. These disputes are worsened by the loss of community leadership structures and unclear jurisdiction over land after the siege.

more school dropouts, and risky behavior because of instability and lack of opportunities.

The case of Marawi's internally displaced persons underscores the intimate link between land, identity, and dignity. Beyond compensation and shelter, many yearn for a sense of belonging, the need to be rooted again in the land of their ancestors, free to rebuild their homes, communities, and futures. Listening to those who lost everything would foster genuine peace and resilience in Marawi, enabling them to reclaim what was theirs in the first place.



Rebuilding must be anchored on the principle of truth, justice, and accountability within a transitional justice framework to comprehensively address the roots of festering conflict and to ensure that another Marawi siege or similar tragic incident will never happen again.” — DR. TIRMIZY ABDULLAH, a Peace Research Officer, Institute for Peace and Development in Mindanao (IPDM), Mindanao State University (MSU) - Marawi

COMMUNITY IDENTIFIED REMEDIES

- **Preference for Customary Resolution.** IDPs called for stronger recognition of traditional leaders (*Sultans, Baes, Datus*) and Meranaw mechanisms, such as *Ijma* and *Taritib*, in mediating land disputes, as courts are seen as expensive, slow, and often ineffective.
- **Demand for “Kambalingan” or Return.** There is a strong and recurring call for the right to return—physically and spiritually—to ancestral lands. This return must be supported by legal recognition, inclusive rebuilding plans, and cultural sensitivity.
- **Need for Documentation Support.** IDPs request for the government’s help to retrieve or replace land titles and tax declarations that have been destroyed. They also appeal for flexible requirements and fewer bureaucratic hurdles.



“Despite being placed in so-called “permanent” shelters, many do not hold land titles or legal proof of ownership. This legal limbo fuels anxiety that the land can be reclaimed by original owners or others at any time.”

Policy Recommendations from the Community

- **Ensure Secure Tenure for IDPs in Shelter Sites.** Transfer land titles and legal documents to beneficiaries, ensuring they cannot be evicted or displaced again.
- **Accelerate and Democratize the Compensation Process.** Recognize oral claims and customary tenure systems as legitimate forms of ownership for those excluded by rigid documentary requirements.
- **Strengthen Traditional Leadership and Mediation Structures.** Support and institutionalize culturally rooted conflict resolution mechanisms, especially for intra-family land disputes.
- **Promote Meaningful Return (Kambalingan).** Facilitate the dignified return of IDPs to their ancestral land, backed by infrastructure, recognition of rights, and community rebuilding.
- **Educate Youth on History and Land Rights.** Institutionalize programs to teach young Maranaos about their history, identity, and legal rights, ensuring intergenerational continuity of land stewardship.



Barangay Kuya, South Upi, Maguindanao



Teduray-Lambangian

The Power of Participatory Conflict Resolution: Bridging Peoples towards Locally-led Peacebuilding

WHEN THE PEOPLE OF BARANGAY KUYA IN SOUTH UPI, Maguindanao, talk about land, they do not speak merely of property. They speak of ancestry, belonging, and the right to live in peace. For decades, however, that peace has been elusive.

The land in Kuya belongs to the *fusaka inged* (ancestral lands) of the Teduray Non-Moro Indigenous People (NMIP). They believe that they are the *andanggefe* (ancient people). More than anyone else, the Teduray and the Lambangian NMIPs dream of a peaceful and abundant homeland because Barangay Kuya is their *andang kageyiingede* (own place and land). For them, there is nowhere else to go because Kuya is tied to their individual and collective identity.



More than anyone else, the Teduray and the Lambangian NMIPs dream of a peaceful and abundant homeland because Barangay Kuya is their *andang kageyiingede* (own place and land). For them, there is nowhere else to go because Kuya is tied to their individual and collective identity.

The so-called “tri-people” characteristics of Barangay Kuya dates back to the 1950s and 1960s, when Teduray elders welcomed Maguindanaon families into their ancestral lands. This harmony ended in the 1970s, when hostilities led by Commander Toothpick forced the Maguindanaons out. They resettled in Barangay Tran, Lebak, Sultan Kudarat.

In the 1980s, the Christian settlers started to come. They availed of some parcels from the Teduray families and developed it into productive farmlands. On one hand, attempts to return in the 1980s and 1990s by the displaced Maguindanaon families had failed. In 2017, they found a host community in Sitio Dara.

Tensions reignited. Violence broke out between armed groups of Teduray and Lambangian NMIPs and the Maguindanaon Moro. From 2017

to 2020, homes were burned, lives lost, and hundreds displaced, mostly Teduray and Lambangian families who sought refuge in evacuation sites or makeshift shelters beside the river. During the several years of armed hostilities in South Upi, particularly in Barangay Kuya, the Maguindanaon Moro families resettled in Barangay Tran, Lebak, Sultan Kudarat until the present.

Moro, settlers, and IP communities collectively identified that one cause of the complex land conflict is rooted from a discord between customary and formal laws. In the context of Moro and IP communities, they have traditionally relied on their customary laws and verbal agreements to govern land ownership, which are often not recognized by the formal Philippine legal system. The

national system, based on the Torrens system of land titling, requires written documentation, surveys, and formal registration to prove ownership. This fundamental disconnect creates disputes when formal titles are issued on lands that have been communally held or inherited through customary law for generations.

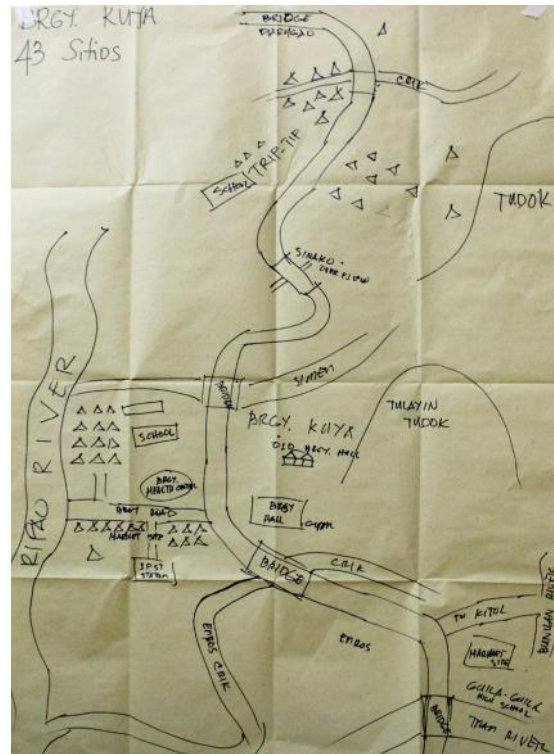
“Ito ang lupa naming ninuno”

In 2006, a Letter of Intent addressed to the municipal mayor of South Upi was submitted by some Moro families who were displaced because of violent armed conflicts. They claimed to be former residents of Sitio Trip, Sinako, and Mangao in Barangay Kuya. In return, the municipal government issued Ordinance No. 005, series of 2006, which is an “ordinance handling the returning evacuees.”

On November 18, 2013, an acceptance letter was signed by the barangay captain of Kuya, indicating the conduct of the investigation and ocular inspection of the land being claimed by the “13 Moro families and that they have complied with the requirements under Municipal Ordinance No. 005, series of 2006.” However, their return was not realized until the present day because of the strong resistance from the Teduray and Lambangian IPs and the series of failed “win-win” solutions implemented by the local governments.

By 2019, the Teduray-Lambangian leadership had declared a “*guboten*” or a state of ancestral domain under

siege. The provincial and municipal governments attempted mediation through land-sharing and surveys, but outsourcing the process to a private surveyor only worsened tensions. Those who could afford the survey gained an advantage, while those who could not felt further excluded.



“Ito ang lupa naming ninuno.” (*This is the land of our ancestors*). For the Teduray-Lambangian, the land is their birthright remembered through landmarks, rivers, and sacred trees. “Kaming mga IP, ang tanging alam lang namin na sa amin ‘yung lupa ay

mga palatandaan, mga pangalan ng creeks, bundok, at kahoy” (*As Indigenous Peoples, the only way we know the land is ours is through the landmarks, the names of the creeks, the mountains, and the trees*), said Conchita Quinlat, IP community member.

Samsodin Ayob, community leader, said that for the Maguindanaon, the land is also a legacy one they were told belonged to their elders. “Ipaglalaban namin ang aming mga lupa kasi sabi ng mga magulang namin, sa kanila iyon” (We will protect our land, because our parents told us that this land belongs to them), he emphasized.

For the Teduray-Lambangian, the land is their birthright remembered through landmarks, rivers, and sacred trees. As Indigenous Peoples, the only way we know the land is ours is through the landmarks, the names of the creeks, the mountains, and the trees.

- CONCHITA QUINLAT,
IP community member

Locally-owned Process: The Community Conversation Model

In 2021, the Initiatives for International Dialogue (IID) began the listening sessions with the Teduray-Lambangian Indigenous Peoples (IPs), Maguindanaon Moro communities, and Christian settlers whose intertwined histories and land claims had long fueled tension and displacements. These sessions created a space rarely experienced in the community, where people could speak, share their insights, and trace collectively how the conflict began. Together with its partners, United Youth for Peace and Development (UNYPAD) and the Teduray-Lambangian Women’s Organization, Inc. (TLWOI), IID decided to take on the case of the 13 Moro families as a pilot for a community-led conflict-resolution process. This is an attempt to resolve multiple and overlapping land claims among the IPs and Maguindanaon Moro in Kuya, South Upi, Maguindanao del Sur.

Through collaborating with the barangay local government unit (LGU) of Kuya, pilot cases were identified, starting with the 13 Moro families who had long expressed a desire to return. The process began not with any land-related validation or negotiation, but with sincere conversations and listening within each community.



Separate sessions were held among Teduray-Lambangian IPs and Maguindanaon Moros. People mapped who claimed which land parcels and who actually lived there. Many discovered they did not even know the other party. Gradually, case profiles were built, clarifying each claim and occupant.

BALAOOD Mindanaw joined in 2023 as IID's partner. Together with UNYPAD and TLWOI, a series of legal education and clinic sessions was conducted separately with Teduray and Lambangian IP community members, as well as with Moro

communities, to include the 13 family claimants. The next step was to generate information and facts on the details of the claims of ownership for each of the contested lot parcels, from among the 13 listed Moro family-claimants and the IP families who are actually occupying the land parcels. The discussions explored possible options for resolving the issues, drawing on both legal frameworks and customary or traditional practices. One fundamental element for this process is their collective reflection of their ancestry through the *Mamalu* and *Tabunaway* kinship narrative.

Platform for Collective Action: The Creation of the CSWG

The Community Sectoral Working Group (CSWG) was coined by the group to refer to their trusted traditional or customary leaders who led the inter-community dialogues. Through community legal education, claimants learned about both customary and formal land titling systems and other relevant national laws, including the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) and the Community-Based Forest Management (CBFM) Program—both legal instruments they can use to secure their rights. This helped each side appreciate the legitimacy of the other's experience and strengthened their capacity to negotiate.

Over a period of two years of community conversations, dialogues, and learning sessions, they tried to formulate their respective positions on a peaceful, acceptable resolution of the overlapping land claims which

are in conflict with other communities and groups of people. When both communities expressed readiness to engage with each other through the inter-community conversation and dialogue, the IID consortium team facilitated the meeting of the two parties who will meet for the first time. The ground rules for the inter-community conversation were established before the in-person meeting. A mutually acceptable facilitator guided the group all throughout the process. The community-to-community dialogue had resulted in the identification of acceptable steps to undertake separately and/or jointly towards the resolution of each case.

“Pasalamat tayo at sila ang tulay... hindi lamang nagkikita, kundi nag-uusap, nagdadamayan, sabay-sabay na rin sa pagkain at pagtulog” (*We are grateful because they have become the bridge that creates space for these two groups, who once never met, to finally come together*), said Ismael Gubel, a Moro community leader. Through these shared spaces for expressing and listening to one another, they collectively reimagined a peaceful future.

By April 2025, the IP and Moro CSWGs had reached common ground. Of the 13 Moro family cases, six were ready for resolution—awaiting re-survey as facilitated by the LGUs of Kuya and South Upi, and leading to formal signing of agreements with the knowledge and support of the





In 2021, the Initiatives for International Dialogue (IID) began the listening sessions with the Teduray-Lambangian Indigenous Peoples (IPs), Maguindanaon Moro communities, and Christian settlers whose intertwined histories and land claims had long fueled tension and displacements.

These sessions created a space rarely experienced in the community, where people could speak, share their insights, and trace collectively how the conflict began.

Teduray and Lambangian elders within the Teduray Justice and Governance (TJG), which is their Indigenous Political Structure (IPS), as well as from the BARMM Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs (MIPA). While there are remaining cases to be settled since they require the involvement of relevant government authorities, the efforts undertaken by both communities is a testament that decades of conflict can be resolved through locally-driven and community-led initiatives.

Through a symbolic act of reconciliation and shared stewardship of land, members of the Moro and IP CSWGs convened for a ceremonial signing of agreements and exchange of cultural tokens on October 30, 2025 in Cotabato City.

Peacebuilding from and for the People: Lessons and Reflections

In Barangay Kuya, one lesson resounds from the community: Peace is possible if the community itself takes a proactive role to resolve issues. It grows from conversations rooted in respect, guided by tradition,

and grounded in truth, as one community member said, “to make dialogue work, the ground rules must be clear, fair, and accepted by all!”

From BALAOD Mindanaw, an emphasis on the integration of indigenous system. “Isama natin ang mga nakasanayan o tradisyunal na sistema sa mga batas para hindi maging banyaga sa mga tao ang batas” (*Let’s work together to incorporate your customary practices into the law so it won’t remain alien to the people*), Atty. Buboy Mendoza, BALAOD Mindanaw said.

The journey shows that when people listen and dialogue with each other, they begin to see that land, like peace, cannot be owned by one side alone. It must be shared, cultivated, and cared for together. It also takes time, patience, flexibility, and a deep understanding of the contexts and resources for a community-owned and managed conflict-resolution process that upholds individual and collective rights to their ancestral lands.

EVIDENCES FROM THE GROUND

Case Studies Highlighting Community Narratives and Experiences



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