

PEACE & GOVERNANCE: CHALLENGES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF LAKE LANAOS, SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES

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ABSTRACT

One of the world's ancient lakes, Lake Lanao in the province of Lanao Sur, southern Philippines, is home to the Meranaws, a Muslim group who inhabit the area since precolonial times. Lake Lanao is also a major economic resource 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 addressing peace and security in the locality as pillars of sustainable development.

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



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INTRODUCTION

Lake Lanao is not just a cultural heritage of the Meranaws; it is likewise a major economic resource for both Lanao areas and Mindanao, in general. As a cultural 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 electricity 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 Hydropower 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 turbines at the bottom of Lake, will have been operational that a popular contestation against NPC's utilization 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, transparency 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 context of sustainable peace, both as experienced and perceived by the various stakeholders in the area.

METHODS

A case study research design employing mixed method approach was utilized in this study. Community respondents (n=500) were involved in the random survey and 15 key informants for the in-depth unstructured interviews, and nonparticipant observation. Key informants are community personalities and officials of the municipality and NPC.

RESULTS AND 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 conflict 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 shows cases of violence in Mindanao with *rido* gaining a gigantic lead.

In several studies conducted about *ridos*, the following were identified as causes and triggers for the development of *ridos* in Lanao del Sur, in random order; land disputes, political rivalry, homicide, business rivalry, non-payment of debts, sex crimes (*e.g.* 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	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 reported of a harrowing experience in 1990 in NPC, the only industrial utilizer of Lake Lanao since 1950s. This involved the killing of some personalities connected with NPC by Meranaws who were former employees. Key informants expressed dismay over the seemingly unfair practice of NPC in terms of employment, where Meranaws 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 (Table 2). Other activities identified are agriculture, quarrying and garbage dumping into the lake. These activities have been existing for a long time already and many respondents perceived them as “normal” practices. They recognized though that these practices must be controlled and regulated in order 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 large 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 protection of Lake Lanao. Key informants, however, report that there are issuances on the maintenance of the water quality of the lake, especially controlling pollution. 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 implemented by either NGOs or government agencies in specific communities. Few key informants though asserted 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 complains on the non-implementation of laws and national policies regarding Lake Lanao. This non-implementation has been to the detriment and deprivation of the Meranaws of the gargantuan bounties of the Lake. They identify the following national policies and enabling laws that are existing for the protection and development of Lake Lanao and the Meranaws: 1) Environmental Compliance Certificate of NPC which mandates NPC to deliver services akin to a corporate social responsibility, 2) Presidential Decree Declaring Lake Lanao Watershed for the protection and conservation of the lake, 3) National Integrated Protected Area System 1992- for the protection of Lake Lanao watershed, and 4) Water Code of the Philippines - protection and conservation of Lake Lanao watershed. Secondary data also shows the existence of other nationally mandated laws and policies for the protection of Lake Lanao and the Meranaws (*i.e.* 992 Presidential Memo No. 30 - a decree stopping the issuance and operation of all forms of timber cutting in Lake Lanao watershed; 1997 Republic Act 8435 - for the implementation of the Integrated Riverbasin Management and Development Master Plan for the Ranao (Agus) River Basin, for watershed conservation, river basin rehabilitation, flood control/mitigation, and water security for domestic, irrigation and industrial use, livelihood and economic opportunities in the area; 2001 - A Republic Act 9054 enforces total log ban in watershed areas; and 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 development and livelihood projects).

Existing Programs and Projects for Lake Lanao

Integrated Natural Resources and Environmental Management Program (INREMP) aims 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 rehabilitation program of the government. NGP seeks to enhance the country's forest stock to absorb carbon dioxide, reduce poverty by providing alternative livelihood 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, especially 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 livelihoods with environmental enhancements.

Issues and Concerns and Experiences of Governance of the Lake

The survey showed the following urgent concerns about the Lake: 1) Maintain the quality of water of the lake, 2) restore the beauty of the lake 3) Build fish port for easy access for the fishers, 4) establish fish ponds for fish production, and 5) Establish public toilets.

The National Power Corporation: The "Lord of the Lake"

NAPOCOR or NPC is a government owned and controlled corporation that started its 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, as the locals argued (Naga 2010). Five power plants were built along this river producing a total of more than 746MW. The company has been operating without any significant opposition from the communities until the 1990's hostage taking-incident¹. 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 in 1991 and NPC claims it has complete jurisdiction and control over watersheds surrounding its powerplants and energy sources, referring to national laws issued.

Local Stakeholders' recommendation on the following: 1) Management of the Lake: A tripartite comanagement 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, and 2) 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.

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