

A Focus on Bridging Leadership: Coalition Building in NMCIREMP, Philippines

The Northern Mindanao Community Initiative and Resource Management Project (NMCIREMP) is a six-year IFAD-funded project (2003-09) that aims to reduce vulnerability and enhance food security for 58,000 low-income households in 270 barangays (villages) in southern Philippines. The Project focuses on agrarian reform farmers, indigenous peoples, marginal fishing families, upland farmers and rural women.

NMCIREMP's mid-term review (2005) revealed a number of gaps in capacity development, including the need for "further training on coalition building." Thus, a proposal was submitted to SCOPE for the conduct of training workshops on "Building Coalitions through Bridging Leadership"—with the ultimate objective of forming five provincial coalitions of multi-stakeholders.

NMCIREMP Project Components

- Community Institutions and Participatory Development (CIPD) – establish and strengthen self-help groups (SHGs) and community institutions (CI); manage a poverty alleviation fund.
- Community Investment (CI) – construct or rehabilitate rural infrastructure (e.g., potable water systems and livelihood-related infrastructure); establish viable micro-finance services.
- Natural Resource Management (NRM) – develop the capabilities of local government units (LGUs) and communities to plan and execute integrated watershed management; appropriate farming systems and technologies and fishery enterprise with people's participation.
- Support Services and Studies (SSS) – provide advisory, research counseling and marketing information services to community enterprises; improve the delivery of health, nutrition and functional education.
- Support to Indigenous Peoples (SIP) – facilitate the membership of IP tribal leaders in local development councils, assure the security of IP ancestral domains and lands, and integrate the Ancestral Domain Sustainable Development and Protection Plan (ADSDPP) with local development plans and budgets.

WHY THE NEED FOR COALITION BUILDING?

Based on the original Project design, the responsibility for continuing the services and management of subprojects after NMCIREMP's phase-out would be turned over to the LGUs that were already handling them—including natural resource management, agriculture and fisheries, community planning, health, rural infrastructure and social work projects.¹

This arrangement, however, was foreseen as inadequate. Thus the need for an exit strategy that would involve not just the LGUs, but also line agencies, NGOs, and community-based

organizations (CBOs) with some “coalition mechanisms” to enable the coordination of efforts. One feature of the resulting provincial coalitions would be the link between CBOs and market outlets and traders to ensure better prices for community produce. Another feature would be “support groups” that would continually provide community organizations with technical and marketing services.

The question then faced was how such provincial coalitions would be formed. The Project thus sought the assistance of the Asian Institute of Management (AIM) Mirant Center for Bridging Societal Divides, which recommended Bridging Leadership

What is a Bridge Leader?

The qualities of bridging leaders include the ability to:

- Listen and understand deeply and from the perspective of the person sending the message
- Engender trust and help to build trusting relationships among others
- Respect and be able to relate to and be respected by individuals and groups from a wide variety of cultural, national, and social backgrounds
- Help to identify and develop common ground among diverse individuals and groups
- Inspire and facilitate joint concrete actions, in response to difficult situations, sometimes on the part of individuals and groups who have never before acted in concert
- Build and help others to build networks of people and groups toward common goals
- Grasp complex situations and help others understand and cope with them
- Be aware of and in-charge of one's own feelings, interests and behavior in complex and difficult situations

— Garilao, Ernesto D., Dinky Juliano-Soliman, Evangeline Lopez, Pamela Asis, and Marge Barro. “Bridging Leadership Framework” in *Building Coalitions Through Bridging Leadership – Reading Materials*. AIM Mirant Center for Bridging Societal Divides, NMCIREMP and Asian NGO Coalition, 2006.

¹ NMCIREMP progress report to SCOPE on preparations for Bridging Leadership Training, June 2006.

as an effective approach to the coalition building.

WHAT IS BRIDGING LEADERSHIP?

Bridging leadership is a style of leadership that focuses on creating and sustaining effective working relationships among key partners and stakeholders. By “bridging” different perspectives and opinions often found among a wide range of stakeholders, a common agenda can begin to be developed and shared in order to find solutions to social and economic problems.²

TRAINING IMPLEMENTATION

Four training activities were designed as building blocks towards coalition building among the different stakeholders in the five provinces covered by the NMCIREMP (Figure 1).

Activity 1: Reflection Sessions on “Bridging Leadership Influences on Coalition Building”

Prior to the training proper, two-day reflection sessions were conducted in June 2007 involving 41 representatives from communities, LGUs and NGOs in the five provinces covered by NMCIREMP.

This first activity resulted in:

- Identification of the most pressing issues and concerns per province, including the root causes, concrete manifestations of the effects on the people in the community, and degree of response;
- Recognition of community coping mechanisms, sectoral responses, limitations and breakthroughs;
- Acknowledgment of collaborative partnerships and alliances existing in the community as well as their respective unifying and common issues; and
- Formation of the provincial core coalition builders (PCCBs).

Activity 2: Training on Coalition Building

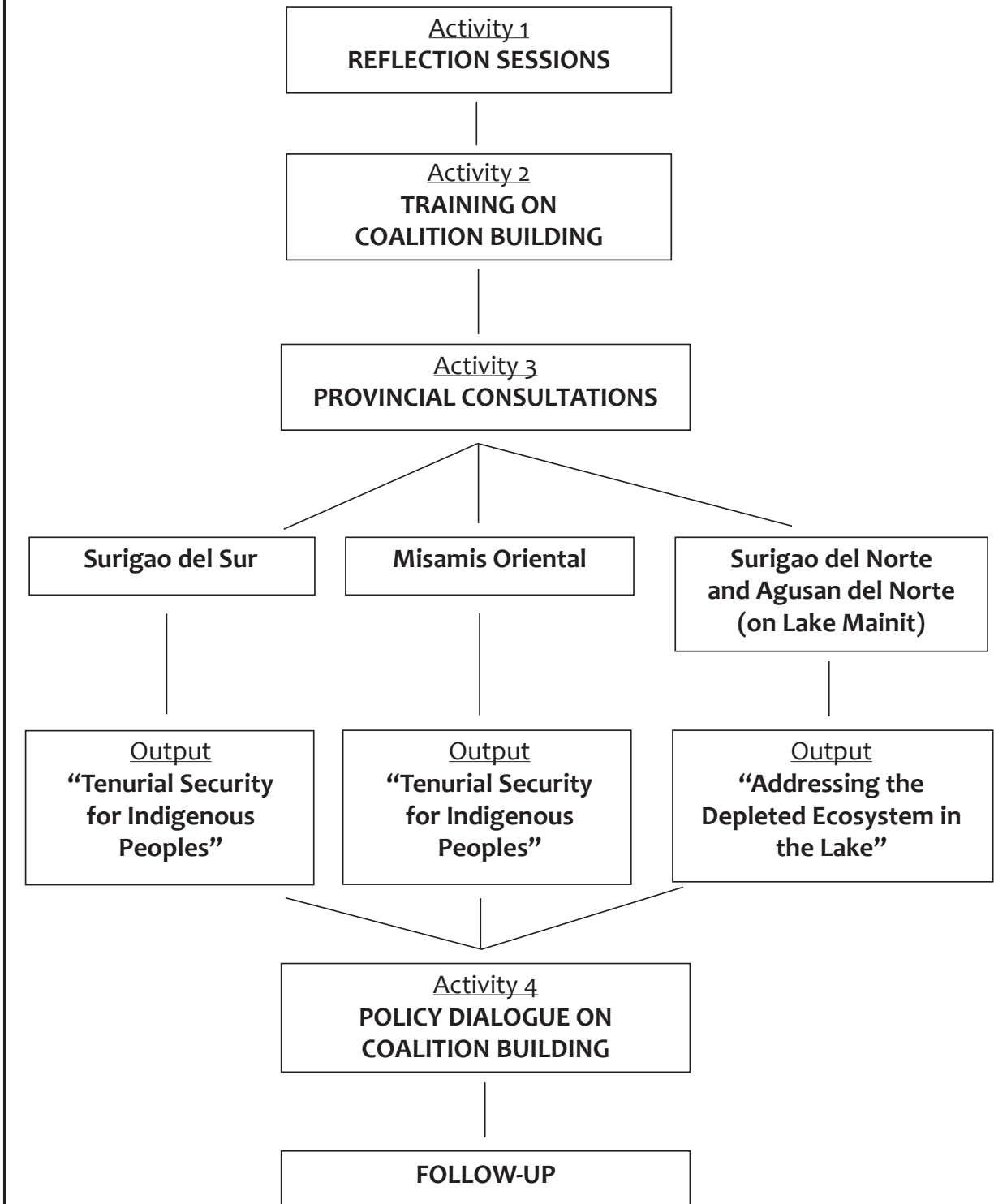
A three-day technical training was then conducted in July 2007 to systematically guide the participants through a step-by-step process in building a coalition among relevant stakeholders. Anchored on the outputs of the first activity and drawing on concrete experiences of the participants, the training discussed the issues that cause division and explored possibilities of healing.

The training outputs per province were:

- bridging leadership capital
- identification and understanding of the divide/main issue
- action plans

² The Synergos Institute, <http://www.synergos.org/>

Figure 1. Bridging Leadership Activities



- stakeholder analysis
- a stakeholders engagement plan.

Activity 3: Provincial Consultations on Coalition Building

Provincial consultations were then held to solidify efforts for the building of the coalition among the various stakeholders. The main challenge that the Provincial Core Builders (PCB) encountered was that some of the issues identified reflected the perspective of local governments rather than that of the poor. To correct this, it was suggested that the consultations be expanded to ensure that the resulting coalition shall be of and for the poor.³

a. Surigao del Sur

A total of 27 participants attended – 12 from IP communities and 15 from agencies concerned with the situation of IPs seeking tenurial security.

Tribal leaders were appointed as the interim officers of the coalition, meant to function prior to the formal establishment of a coalition for the IPs. Their immediate

task was to prepare for audiences with: (i) the Sangguniang Panlalawigan⁴ to push the demand of IPs to be part of the legislative body of the province; and (ii) the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) in light of conflicts among agencies related to issuance of tenurial instruments affecting the processing of Certificates of Ancestral Domain Titles (CADTs)⁵ – problems that the group understood could only be resolved by key persons at the top level of mandated agencies.

To manifest their commitment to agreements arrived at during the consultation, the IPs, support agencies and LGU representatives put their hand imprints on the statement of support they had formulated.

b. Misamis Oriental

The Misamis Oriental consultation had 20 participants from IP communities and 34 from support groups and agencies. The discussions focused on the problems related to the long process of ancestral domain titles (ADT) application.

³ NMCIREMP progress report to SCOPE on outcomes of Coalition Building project, October 2006.

⁴ Provincial Council

⁵ A Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT)—as provided for in the Philippines’ Republic Act 8371 (1997), otherwise known as the Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act (IPRA)—refers to a title formally recognizing the rights of possession and ownership of ICCs/IPs over their ancestral domains identified and delineated in accordance with this law. It differs from a Certificate of Ancestral Domain Claim (CADC) which merely declares and certifies the claims of ICCs over corresponding territories identified and delineated as ancestral domain. Hence the eagerness of ICCs/IPs to convert their existing CADCs to CADTs, or to apply for CADTs directly.

However, the IP leaders were not able to define mechanisms for follow-up action. They expressed that they were not yet ready for a formal coalition structure (see box “*Same Issue, Different Approach*”). To them, the assistance of the NCIP in converting their Certificates of Ancestral Domain Claim (CADCs) to CADTs was sufficient. The internal division within and among tribes was apparently so pronounced that tribal leaders have to confront and resolve it among themselves—if possible, with less intervention by outsiders.

Faced with the challenge to do something about this divide, other participants expressed willingness to share their technical expertise, services and programs. In the absence of a mechanism among IP communities, it was agreed that the NCIP would liaise between the IP communities and other development players to facilitate their CADT processing. A formation composed of development players for the IPs is in the offing, with members committed to support the IPs’ efforts to achieve tenurial security of their ancestral domains.

c. **Joint Provincial Consultation among Lake Mainit stakeholders**

The plight of the depleting resources of the Lake Mainit ecosystem – an issue common to both Agusan del Norte and

Surigao del Norte provinces – brought about this joint provincial consultation. Fifty participants represented fisherfolk, farmers, IPs, NGOs, LGUs, government line agencies, business, the church, media, and NMCIREMP.

The consultation resulted in an enhanced strategic plan as well as an engagement plan to preserve the depleting resources of the Lake Mainit Ecosystem—including identifying relevant stakeholders and their possible contributions to the plan’s implementation.

The presentation of a proposed coalition structure then led to discussions on the role of the coalition, its leaders, the mechanics to incorporate the structure within the local government (LGU), and sources of funding. The participants urged that the alliance involve fisherfolk, women, farmers and other sectors and groups earning a living from Lake Mainit. Finally, the group agreed to harmonize different development efforts related to the protection of Lake Mainit in the next two years.

Activity 4: Policy Dialogue on Coalition Building

The final activity, held on September 13, 2007 in Butuan City, was a dialogue with policy makers. This involved the presentation of the following policy papers:

Same Issue, Different Approach

The provincial consultations in both Surigao del Sur and Misamis Oriental involved IPs whose main concern was the security of ownership of their respective ancestral domains.

In Surigao del Sur, security of land tenure among indigenous peoples (IPs) - particularly the conversion of CADCs to CADTs - was consistently focused on the training on Bridging Leadership and finally validated with the IPs themselves during the provincial consultation. Stakeholders were initially assessed, using the stakeholder analysis tool, as to their position on the issue of conversion of CADCs to CADTs. As a result, stakeholders who were identified as for the resolution of the issue were invited as participants to the provincial consultations. Those who were identified as against, the PCCB decided to deal with later.

In the Misamis Oriental consultation, participants discerned two basic issues confronting the IPs. First is the internal weakening of the IP communities, as shown in the gradual disappearance of a distinct culture that their younger generation can identify with and live according to its norms and mores. Then, there are the external conflicts among and between tribes regarding boundaries, as the perspective on communal ownership is continually muddled by the influence of lowlanders. Further, tribal elders and leaders, who for years have stood for the political, economic and social life for the tribe, are now ignored. The zeal to defend the tribe, its culture, and its ancestral domains against big businesses and politicians has weakened.

Different approach – Although the identified issues confronting the IPs were similar in these two provinces, the training designs were different. Surigao del Sur had a one-day consultation, while Misamis Oriental and Bulidnon held theirs for two days. The series of pre-work done by the PCCB expedited the process in Surigao del Sur so that, when invited stakeholders and IP leaders came for the consultation, they were prepared and had clear expectations. For Misamis Oriental and Bukidnon, the absence of pre-work made it necessary for the PCCB to validate the issues with the IPs and then process their positions and expected responses from other development players who joined them the next day.

Realities to consider – The consultations in the two provinces revealed two realities for consideration in the formation of a coalition.

The pace of life in IP communities. Living in simplicity, the IPs may sometimes be confused by the complexity of situations and the interplay of different systems. Thus, outside interventions with a set framework and timetable may be more harmful than beneficial to their needs.

The IPs are focused on an immediate concerns. To date, the IPs are engrossed with processing the conversion of their CADCs to CADTs; resolution of internal conflicts; and struggling for their daily subsistence. The concept of a coalition was appreciated, but the formation of one was not yet a priority for them. □

– NMCIREMP. SCOPE-August 2007 Update

- Tenurial Security for the Indigenous Peoples of Misamis Oriental
- Agusan Marsh Siltation and River Bank Protection
- Addressing the Depleted Ecosystem in Lake Mainit
- Tenurial Security of Indigenous Peoples in Surigao del Sur

OUTCOMES OF THE “BRIDGING LEADERSHIP” TRAINING⁶

The initial reflection sessions by the multi-stakeholder groups generated the urgency to work together and to bridge differences among the different stakeholders. Back in their provinces, they were able to convene sectoral bridging leadership consultations that focused on particular issues: (i) ancestral domains in Surigao del Sur, (ii) development of Lake Mainit for Agusan del Norte and Surigao del Norte, and (iii) IP empowerment for Misamis Oriental. These consultations brought forward certain policy recommendations emerged that will be discussed in the upcoming Policy Dialogues.

As a result of the project, there is now a core of “bridging leaders” who can facilitate sectoral consultations aimed at engaging the different stakeholders in addressing an issue. These are the provincial core groups that could continue the discussion and implementation

of solutions. These groups have already achieved initial successes:

- The Surigao del Sur tribal leaders were able to level off with local governments and other agencies regarding the demands and requirements that would enable them to safeguard their culture and way of life.
- The Lake Mainit Development Alliance has been able to formulate fishing laws, eco-tourism plans, protection of forests and regulation of small mining activities in a manner acceptable and binding to all the seven municipalities in the two provinces (Surigao del Norte and Agusan del Norte) that border the lake.
- In Misamis Oriental, progress has been made in minimizing the distrust of the indigenous communities of the NGOs and non-IPs who are working for ancestral domain rights in behalf of IPs (e.g., through an economic program aimed at promoting their abaca and banana marketing).
- For Agusan del Sur, participants focused on the Agusan River Basin Development – a hitherto difficult issue because of the various conflicting stakeholders involved, including the presence of “armed groups.”

⁶ Polestico, Rachel. NMCIREMP Monitoring Report. August 2, 2007.

While the project aimed at building five provincial coalitions, only three emerged: (i) Surigao del Sur for IPs, (ii) the Lake Mainit Development Alliance taken up jointly by Agusan del Norte and Surigao del Norte, and (iii) Misamis Oriental also for IP concerns. It is interesting to note that these coalitions focused on the main challenges of NMCIREMP as pointed out by the MTR and the supervision missions – addressing IP issues and natural resource management – two key issues that will most likely persist even after NMCIREMP.

LESSONS LEARNED⁷

The strategy of gradual change – There was wisdom in adopting a strategy of gradual change in trying to make different groups agree on a common program and course of action. The stakeholders were allowed to discover for themselves the need for coalition building, then they were provided with appropriate training that responded to that need, and finally they designed their own course of action. This made them own the process and the program, and thereby become committed to pursuing the solution. As a result, the idea of forming coalitions – initially unacceptable – emerged as an attractive strategy for addressing persistent issues of the different provinces. All the stakeholders needed to

learn were the system and the methodology of “Bridging Leadership.”

Systems thinking – As evidenced by the documentation, the participants of the provincial sectoral consultations now have a method of looking at issues using systems thinking and the tools learned during the Bridging Leadership training. They looked at their bridging leadership capital, examined different divides, made causal loop diagrams and multi-stakeholder analyses, created a coalition structure and proposed dialogues to co-create solutions and bridge the different divides—skills and attitudes that can actually be used in many other applications.

The role of the SCOPE grant – The SCOPE grant was a critical intervention for the entire project. It reminded the Project Facilitation Office (PFO) that vertical coalition building of the basic sectors (especially the IPs) was an expected output of the project. It also made them take stock of their preoccupation with meeting project targets and made them focus on post-project sustainability (i.e., an exit strategy) as well. The funds provided gave them the means to involve multi-stakeholders in looking at this issue and zeroed in on “Bridging Leadership” as the strategy to ensure post-project sustainability.

⁷ Polestico, Rachel. Lessons Learned: NMCIREMP SCOPE Project, “Bridging Leadership Influences in Coalition Building,” August 8, 2007.

When to Build Coalitions?

At particular times, circumstances help to move the formation of coalitions:

- When dramatic or disturbing events occur in a community
- When new information becomes available
- When circumstances or the rules change
- When new funding becomes available
- Where there is an outside threat to the community
- When a group wishes to create broad, significant community change
- When you have not only a good reason for starting a coalition, but also the possibility that one can be started successfully in the community. This important issue is dependent upon a number of factors:
 - Is the issue or problem clear enough that everyone can agree on what it is?
 - Is there some level of trust among the individuals and organizations who would make up the coalition?
 - Is a coalition in fact the best response to the issue?

– *Coalition Building: Starting a coalition, from Community tool box, www. ctb.ku.edu. In building coalitions Through bridging leadership - reading materials, AIM Mirant center, 2006.*

RECOMMENDATIONS⁸

The activities raised some recommendations for policy advocacy:

1. Existing laws (e.g., the Indigenous People's Rights Act, the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law, and various laws that protect watershed, forest, and fishing areas) should be enforced based on the primacy of these laws over local laws which are very often enacted to protect vested interests of powerful blocs.
2. The most common source of conflict in most of the issues discussed was the primacy of private or individual rights over community rights, or the rights of those who "have less in life." More than the formulation of laws, it is the integration of values—as promoted in Bridging Leadership—that will rectify this imbalance.
3. Upon the phase-out of NMCIREMP, the Provincial and the Municipal Governments should provide resources to continue pursuing the issues and activities already started in this project. NGOs still operating in CARAGA and Region X should also be urged to assist in this effort.

8 Ibid.

4. “Bridging Leadership” may be introduced to other IFAD-supported projects. NMCIREMP has excellent documentation of the process undertaken and a cadre of people who could attest to how effective the methodology is in addressing an issue.

5. The Bridging Leadership framework and methodology can be simplified and made more adaptable to grassroots settings. While the concept has been tested among provincial and municipal officers, with NGOs and other development agents, the challenge is how the Bridging Leadership way of looking at things and resolving issues can be made a habit not only among village leaders, but even among ordinary farmers, fisherfolk, women, and indigenous communities. □

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