

Land tenure (in)security in *Sitio Quarry*

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The lack of secure access to land has relevance to socio-economic problems in rural areas, more so on ancestral lands. While generations of indigenous peoples have lived and worked on their native land throughout the years, the growing fear among indigenous peoples that “someday our land will not be ours,” casts a real shadow of vulnerability.

There are some individuals who do not own land, whether IP or migrant settlers, and having a communal or sharing of land is a common practice in rural areas.

For instance, a friend of the landowner farms the land until harvest time, and will give the latter a share commensurate with the agreed sharing scheme in the area. Some would also agree on a different form of sharing by taking the next harvest of the borrower. Few would let the borrowers farm the land for free.

“Land tenure security is really important for the family, and a proper document against land grabbers is essential towards this end,” *Sitio* Quarry leader Jovito Baclaan stresses.

To assess the security of land tenure, the respondents were asked by the following questions:

- How many years are you living in this place? How did you acquire this land?
- Are there any problems/challenges that you have encountered in acquiring this land?
- What is the land area of your property?
- How important are the documents of land in your life?
- What are your dreams/aspirations/recommendations in owning the land?

In *Sitio* Quarry, *Barangay* Bacusanon, Pangantucan, Bukidnon, assessment had shown that half of the land area (seven hectares) of the *sitio* (hamlet) is owned by a single person, Primitivo Corugda, who is an absentee landowner. However, the property was only acquired by Corugda’s family by grabbing it from an IP family – the Salang family – by having the land title processed without the knowledge of the latter.

Over time, two hectares of Corugda’s property has been returned to the community through a deed of sale.

The lack of legal documentation over land ownership is a real cause for concern in the community. During one of the interviews, Mrs. Letecia Biangos, who is a migrant settler, expressed her fears. She bought land from Danilo Polinda, but only a private document was used to cover the terms between them.

Without a public document such as a land title, Biangos fears that the sale will be declared null and void in the future and her children will not benefit from it. Polinda was the first person who bought land from Corugda.

This apprehension is shared by almost all members of the community. Some people are optimistic that the project will help assuage their fears and that through it the local government will intervene.

To realize the hopes of the community in *Sitio Quarry* and ensure land tenure security, they have recommended the following:

- Enumerate landless families and available public land and create a system of land classification to reduce complexities and problems in the area;
- Assess landholdings and give access to land documentation for rural communities and individuals;
- Ensure mapping programs are efficient and affordable and encourage local participation in mapping activities;
- Advocate land reforms in non-conflict and post-conflict geographic areas and provide education to resolve disputes and improve public awareness about land rights, especially those displaced and resettled individuals;
- Formalize and legalize customary community land rights, i.e., the rights to forest land where localities are in current use to verify community-led rights conforming with demarcation of boundaries around ethnic areas;
- Suggest to local government units to amend laws against compulsory land acquisition such as land grabbing and low compensation to both small and big landowners. and offer free and accessible legal assistance to vulnerable individuals; and,

- Strengthen the system for local land administration and local community access to land mapping, dispute, and documentation in order to ensure public awareness, transparency, and accountability.

Through the project “Enhancing Tenurial Security of Smallholder Farmers in Northern Mindanao, Philippines” implemented by the Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ANGOC) and Xavier Science Foundation Inc. (XFS), in partnership with the Global Land Tool Network (GLTN), the fears and doubts of the *Sitio Quarry* community have been replaced by hope and assurance.

The initiative has contributed in reducing such vulnerability by accurately pinpointing landholdings and other natural resources vital to the people in its project sites through a stringent process of land enumeration and assessment.

Although the process takes time and effort, the project has maximized the resources available to help the whole community and for the security of land tenure. ■