

Land tenure security for the next generation

Romerey Suclatan



Why do indigenous peoples (IPs) need to fight for their rights over ancestral lands? This is an age-old question that besets IPs and has resulted in conflicts over lands that have been handed to them over generations.

Maybe the simple answer is that IPs need to fight for their lands because they owe it to succeeding generations.

Pangantucan, Province of Bukidnon in Mindanao, Philippines have been fighting to reclaim their ancestral land.

For thirty years, farmers and their families from *Sitio* Dagtan, *Barangay* Bacusanon, Municipality of

This story is about a 10-hectare land holding originally belonging to Rufinito Tumopas. The land is adjacent to the

landholding of his neighbor, Juan Atunay. The two farmers planted their crops side by side for many years, with Rufinito even sub-leasing portions of his land to Juan from time-to-time as Juan is more well-to-do and had capital to plant more crops.

In 2012, the landmark which serves as the boundary between the land holdings of Rufinito and Juan mysteriously vanished, giving Juan – who already uses around three hectares of Rufinito’s land – a reason to claim that said portion is within his land as well.

This was exacerbated when Sumifru Corporation, which exports bananas, came to Pangantucan and subleased land in and around Bacusanon. Juan’s landholding, which now includes three hectares of Rufinito’s land, was one of the many farms subleased to the corporation.

This development made Rufinito even more hopeless that he can recover the three hectares taken from him by his erstwhile trusted neighbor.

The issue of encroachment was one of many issues related to land tenurial security confronted by 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 project implemented a survey of community members to determine their landholdings and definitively ascertain ownership through the issuance of certificates generated based on data obtained from the survey.

Issues like Rufinito’s frequently cropped up in the course of the data-gathering, which led to dialogues between parties facilitated by the project implementers.

While some issues have been resolved through dialogue between parties, others like Rufinito’s took some time.

In October 2020, Romerey Suclatan, the local youth enumerator facilitated a dialogue between the two parties which resulted to significant progress in the resolution of the long-standing dispute.

Clear boundary indicators were put up to properly delineate the two areas from each other.

Rufinito shared that “I was well informed about the grounds of the project, and that is to identify clear land boundaries between households in the community.” “On our part, we would ensure that the owners of the neighboring land parcels are also informed during the mapping and surveying activities – which is very crucial to prevent contentions,” he adds.



The project was really able to help especially in addressing trespassing incidents – it brought on respect for one another, and most especially, peace in the community.

He added, “Overall, I am grateful to God, the project stakeholders along with the *barangay* officials, and to a large extent, the enumerators who concerted a commendable effort in our area. This land that was still inherited by my father from my grandparents, is very valuable to me – we depend on land to live.”

What has definitely been resolved, however, is that certificates of ownership based on empirical data (generated from the survey and mapping activities), are needed to ascertain ownership over land and lead to tenurial security because the rightful bearers can show proof of ownership to would-be land grabbers. ■