

# **2024 Philippine Land and Resource Conflict Monitoring Report**

Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development  
(ANGOC)



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## **Disclaimer**

The views contained in this document do not necessarily reflect those of the We Effect, SIDA, CHR, and NAPC.

## List of acronyms

ANGOC	Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development
BARRM	Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
CADT	Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title
CALABARZON	Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, and Quezon (group of provinces)
CARL	Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law
CHR	Commission on Human Rights
CLUP	Comprehensive Land Use Plan
CSO	civil society organization
DA	Department of Agriculture
DAR	Department of Agrarian Reform
DENR	Department of Environment and Natural Resources
DHSUD	Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development
FPIC	free, prior, and informed consent
HRV	human rights violation
IP	indigenous people
IPRA	Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act of 1997
JAO	Joint Administrative Order
LGU	local government unit
LRCM	Land and Resource Conflict Monitoring
MIMAROPA	Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon, and Palawan (group of provinces)
MoA	memorandum of agreement
MWSS	Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System
NAPC	National Anti-Poverty Commission
NCIP	National Commission on Indigenous Peoples
NEDA	National Economic and Development Authority
NGO	non-government organization
NHRI	National Human Rights Institution
NIPAS	National Integrated Protected Areas System
NLUA	National Land Use and Management Act
PCIJ	Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism
PO	people's organization
PSA	Philippine Statistics Authority
UNGP-BHR NAP	United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights - National Action Plan

# Introduction

The Philippines has several progressive land policies, with landmark laws such as the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law (CARL) and the Indigenous People's Rights Act (IPRA). Land reform has been ongoing for over 80 years, marked by numerous legislative efforts. These laws, along with others, embody the social justice principles enshrined in the Constitution.

However, despite laws designed to protect and benefit vulnerable and marginalized sectors, these laws often fail to fully benefit those they were meant to serve. Implementation is often hindered by powerful and influential interests, who undermine the laws and the institutions enforcing them.

There have been notable successes, such as the recognition of indigenous peoples' rights over their ancestral lands, and the issuance of Certificates of Ancestral Domain Titles (CADTs). However, many continue to disregard these rights, commit unauthorized and illegal activities, and bypass the free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) process meant to protect indigenous communities.

While agricultural lands may have been distributed to qualified beneficiaries, many farmers have yet to till their awarded lands, as landowners continue to resist land reform. For those who have gained access or have been installed in their respective lands, the process may have been too lengthy, and many are now too old to farm. Meanwhile, the next generation appears to have little interest in farming – which poses a separate but significant challenge.

Rural communities also face growing threats to their lands and livelihoods. Existing laws and regulations fail to address many emerging issues. For instance, large-scale land reclamation projects now threaten the security and livelihoods of fisherfolk. Rapid conversion of agricultural lands undermines the country's food security.

Given the many challenges, a clear strategy is needed to resolve festering land and resource conflicts, many of which have been going on for decades. Stakeholders must come together, examine the data, analyze the issues, and together develop both immediate and long-term solutions.

## The Land and Resource Conflict Monitoring (LRCM) Initiative

In 2014, the Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ANGOC), in collaboration with the Xavier Science Foundation, Inc. (XSF) and the University of the Philippines College of Social Work and Community Development (UP-CSWCD), prepared a report on land and resource conflicts in the Philippines, focusing on their causes, intensity, impacts, actors involved, and resolution strategies, using secondary materials from CSOs and government agencies.

In 2018, ANGOC and Land Watch Asia produced reports on land conflicts in several countries, examining the nature, causes, impacts, and responses to these conflicts. In 2020, the Philippine LRCM Report adopted a more systematic methodology, involving Peoples Organizations and CSOs in data gathering, analysis, and recommendations, which were presented to government agencies in a meeting co-organized with the Commission on Human Rights (CHR). During the COVID-19 lockdown, the 2021 Philippine LRCM Report updated land and resource conflict data.

Also, a case profile form was developed as a tool to help CSOs and POs to document cases from communities, and this was utilized in the subsequent 2023 Philippine LCRM report. In 2023, the research framework and methodology were improved in collaboration with Philippine CSOs, POs, and NAPC, leading to the refinement of monitoring indicators, categories, and their definitions.

This 2024 edition of the LCRM Report provides updated information on the: a) populations and areas affected by land/resource conflicts, b) adversarial claimants and drivers of land/resource conflicts, c) incidents of human rights violations and their perpetrators, and d) responses of affected communities. Specifically, this study seeks to:

- present the prevalence and types of land and natural resource conflicts;
- analyze the nature and causes of land and resource conflicts;
- explain how communities respond to conflict, and how conflicts are resolved; and,
- present recommendations to prevent and address such conflicts.

## Methodology and data sources

This 2024 Philippine Land and Resource Monitoring Report uses both primary and secondary data sources.

*Primary* data were gathered directly from communities and community-based organizations (CBOs) through the use of *case profile forms* developed by ANGOC and local partners.<sup>1</sup> Primary sources constitute 4.4 percent of the total data sources, a slight increase from the previous year, and account for 20 cases reported directly by communities for 2024. The rest were secondary sources.

*Secondary* sources include mainstream news media (print, online), written accounts, as well as online platforms/ websites of peoples' organizations (POs), civil society organizations (CSOs), and the government. Other sources include professional organizations and the academe. Some 35.1 percent of the data sources were mainstream media reports, including those found in newspapers (print), online platforms, and news broadcasts. Cases found online were included only if they were published by credible sources. To validate the reliability and accuracy of the reports, the names, dates, locations, sizes of contested land/resources, and parties involved were cross-referenced with other sources.

For the 2024 Land and Resource Conflict Monitoring Report, the request for government data was coursed through the National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC). This led to an increase in the share of government-sourced data to 12 percent – up from just five percent in the 2023 Report. NAPC's involvement enhanced data collection, particularly by providing access to agrarian case records from the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR). Additionally, NAPC contributed 34 more cases during the validation workshop on 07 November 2024.

Table 1 below shows the distribution of main information sources used in the study. "Sources of information" refers to the individual articles, news reports, interviews and other major references used for documenting the land cases in this Report.

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<sup>1</sup> The case profile form is a questionnaire for collecting community-level data, and information on land and resource conflict.



**Table 1. Sources of information for the cases**

Sources of information	Number	Percentage (%)
CSOs/NGOs	198	44.0
Mainstream media (print, online, radio)	158	35.1
Government agencies, institutions	54	12.0
Communities, community-based organizations (CBOs)*	20	4.4
Professional organizations, academe	19	4.2
National Human Rights Institution (NHRI)	1	0.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>450</b>	<b>100</b>

\*Communities and CBOs are the *primary* or direct sources of information; others are considered as *secondary* sources.

ANGOC's existing database of previously documented land conflict cases<sup>2</sup> was also reviewed and revalidated through online research for updates, progress, or non-progress of the cases. This provided the bulk of information for the 2024 Report.

For the older cases that were sourced from CSOs, the validation process involved direct consultations with the respective CSOs to check on the status of the case, i.e., whether the land/resource conflicts had been resolved, or whether they were ongoing.

In the report, if the size of the land in conflict could not be determined or reliably estimated, it was recorded as "no data available (nda)". Consequently, the total land area affected by conflict in this report includes only cases where this variable was reported. In instances of conflicting data between sources, Government figures were used.

The data gathered for this Report covers the period of 1 January 2024 to 31 December 2024.

The preliminary findings (as of 30 September 2024) were first presented and discussed at a stakeholders' validation workshop convened by ANGOC and NAPC on 07 November 2024. An interim report (as of 31 October 2024) was then presented at an Inter-Agency Dialogue jointly organized by ANGOC, NAPC, and the Commission of Human Rights (CHR) on 27 November 2024. Participating in the dialogue were 26 representatives of government agencies that included the DAR, Department of Agriculture (DA), National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), Philippine Statistical Authority (PSA), NAPC sector representatives; and nine representatives of CSOs/POs.

This report incorporates inputs received from the above dialogues.

It should be noted that this study does not purport to provide a complete picture of land and resource conflicts for 2024. Many land conflicts continue to be unreported. Thus, the validation process will continue to make future monitoring reports more reflective of the true situation on the ground.

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<sup>2</sup> Database used for the earlier 2023 Land Conflict Monitoring Report.

Scope and limitations

This study presents data on land conflict cases that were reported in the year 2024. These include *ongoing* land and resource conflicts in 2024, and incidents of human rights violations (HRVs) related to specific cases of land and resource conflict that occurred within the year.

A perennial challenge encountered in the previous studies was the difficulty in securing data from government agencies. In requests for information, the government agency either took time to respond or replied that the data requested was still being processed or encoded. In some instances, government agencies simply did not gather data for the specific types of information requested.

While data was acquired from NAPC, other government agencies did not respond to the request for information. Government, in general, should not discriminate in entertaining requests for information. Non-government organizations (NGOs) and the public should have access to public information.

During the preliminary presentation of the data in November 2024, POs and CSOs remarked that many incidents of HRVs were not reflected in the data. This highlights a key limitation: the study includes only incidents reported in available information sources.

Main findings

Affected populations and areas

The study recorded a total of 262 cases of land and resource conflict in 2024. These cases involved 775,200.59 hectares and affected 104,095 households (see Table 2). This marks an increase from 211 cases in 2023, indicating that many conflicts had gone unreported in previous monitoring efforts. Also notably, no land cases have been removed from the previous tally for having been resolved.

**Table 2a. Total number of cases, area contested, and households affected by land and resource conflicts, 2024**

Overview of cases	Number
Total number of cases	262
Total number of hectares contested	775,200.59
Total number of households affected	104,095

By region, Western Visayas continues to have the most number of cases at 134, accounting for about 51 percent of the cases. This shows an increase from 99 cases in 2023, with 35 more coming from the region in 2024.

The region with the second most number of cases is CALABARZON with 25 (9.5 percent), followed by Central Luzon with 17 (6.5 percent).

**Table 2b. Number of cases and total area contested (in ha) by region**

Region	Number of cases	Contested area (in ha)	Percent (%) of contested area
Ilocos	3	95,021.00	12.26
CAR	4	11,686.23	1.51
Cagayan Valley	4	32,926.00	4.25
Central Luzon	17	24,891.74	3.21
CALABARZON	25	46,145.94	5.95
MIMAROPA	15	124,179.72	16.02
NCR	9	2,003.14	0.26
Bicol	2	4,538.00	0.59
Western Visayas	134	12,781.73	1.65
Central Visayas	2	23.83	0.003
Eastern Visayas	4	4,489.57	0.58
Zamboanga Peninsula	0	0	0
Northern Mindanao	11	96,397.69	12.44
Davao	15	37,603.62	4.85
SOCCSKSARGEN	5	22,752.19	2.94
Caraga	11	51,502.51	6.64
BARRM	1	208,258.68	26.87
<b>Total</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>775,200.59</b>	<b>100</b>

The Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) has only one reported land conflict case but has the largest affected area of 208,258.68 hectares (26.87 percent). MIMAROPA comes next with 124,179.72 hectares or 16.02 percent of the land under conflict. Northern Mindanao has the third largest affected area with 96,397.69 hectares or 12 percent of land under conflict.

Interestingly, the Zamboanga Peninsula Region has no reported cases.

#### **Box 1. Dinagat Islands and Mining**

Dinagat Islands is a province made up of the main island Dinagat and islets in northeastern Mindanao. It is composed of seven (7) municipalities and 100 barangays with a land area of 96,745.85 hectares.

In 2001, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), together with NGO conservation groups, spearheaded the Philippine Biodiversity Conservation Priority-Setting Program that designated Dinagat Islands as a highly critical terrestrial conservation priority. Dinagat Islands boasts a

unique faunal and floral composition with high levels of endemism. Notably, Mount Kambinliw and Mount Redondo are classified as Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs), serving as critical habitats for many threatened and restricted-range endemic species.

Ironically, Dinagat Islands remains unprotected by legislation that should declare it as a Protected Area. The province is still regulated under Presidential Proclamation 391 issued in 1939 by President Manuel L. Quezon, which declared the islands a mineral reservation. Thus, Dinagat Islands has been vastly exploited, mined, and its resources heavily extracted by mining companies. This has degraded Dinagat's Forest ecosystems and contaminated its watersheds, threatening the province's potable water supply.

### ***Chinese Investments in the Dinagat Island's Mining Sector***

For years, China has dominated mineral extraction and the transfer of mineral resources from Dinagat Islands to China. It controls mining through various investments, primarily on artisanal small-scale mining (ASM). This focus on ASM allows Chinese entities to evade scrutiny from national authorities, while leveraging connections with political elites and local officials to sustain their mining operations.

As of May 2019, some 20 mining tenements in the Dinagat Islands cover a total of 27,865 hectares. Mining companies operating under Mineral Production Sharing Agreements (MPSA) are 80 to 90 percent co-owned and funded by China. In Tubajon, Dinagat Islands, the key mining operators include Libjo Mining Corporation, Oriental Vision Mining Corporation, Wellex Mining Corporation, and Westernshore Mining Corporation. Currently, about 95 percent of Tubajon municipality's land area is covered by mining claims.

The Philippines is the world's largest producer of nickel ore, with the Caraga region – including Dinagat Islands – as a major extraction site. Most of this nickel ore is exported to China for the production of stainless steel and other industrial materials. However, despite significant mining investments, Dinagat remains among the 10 poorest provinces in the country, highlighting the lack of economic benefits for local communities.

### ***Saving Dinagat's Remaining Watersheds and Biodiversity***

As early as 2013, the DENR and former Congresswoman and Governor Arlene "Kaka" Bag-ao, prioritized the conservation of Dinagat Islands' 10 main watersheds through the Dinagat Islands Conservation Program (DICP). The DICP aims to save Dinagat's resources from mining and promote alternative sustainable livelihood for Dinagatnons. By excluding the 10 main watersheds from mining claims and operations, the initiative seeks to cancel existing Chinese mining claims and halt destructive mining operations in these critical areas.

### ***Malinao, Tubajon Municipality***

Despite the presence of active mining operations under MPSAs in Barangay Malinao, Tubajon Municipality, the Barangay and the Municipal Local Government Unit (LGU) remain firm in their position to conserve the Malinao areas, since its watershed provides potable water to over 1,700 residents.

Currently, Oriental Vision Mining Corporation (OVMP) operates near the intake box and reservoir of the Malinao Watershed. During the rainy season, siltation from mining operations threatens the source of water, potentially damaging the reservoir and compromising the communities' potable water supply.

To address this, the LGU partnered with the Dinagat Communities for Conservation led by KAISAHAN, Balaod Mindanaw, and PAFID, to assist communities in the demarcation of watersheds, and the drafting and approval of watershed protection ordinances at the *barangay* and municipal levels.

On 20 August 2024, the Municipality of Tubajon passed an ordinance designating more than 6,200 hectares as local conservation areas, including the 295-hectare Malinao Watershed (Kainong and Basak

Watersheds). With this ordinance, extractive operations – such as mining exploration and operations – are now prohibited.

The LGU intends to negotiate with the Mining and Geoscience Bureau (MGB) to exclude the 295-ha area in Malinao and the broader 6,200-hectares conservation area from existing MPSAs and mining operations in Tubajon. To date, the Dinagat Communities for Conservation (C4C), communities and barangay/municipal LGUs are negotiating with the OVMP to exclude these areas from their MPSA claims and to jointly improve the reservoir and intake box of the Malinao Watershed.

*Sources:*

Alvarez, K. (2025). *Dinagat Islands*. [Unpublished case submitted for the 2024 PH LRCM].

Bird Life International. (2019). *Important bird areas factsheet: Mount Kambinlio and Mount Redondo*. <https://datazone.birdlife.org/site/factsheet/mount-kambinlio-and-mount-redondo>

Camba, A. (2017). “The Direction, Patterns, and Practices of Chinese Investments in Philippine Mining,” in J. Morris-Jung, editor, In *China’s Backyard: Policies and Politics in China’s Resource Investments in Southeast Asia*. Singapore: The Institute of Southeast Asian Studies Press (ISEAS-Yusof Institute), pp. 129-153.

Table 3 below shows the duration of land conflicts, highlighting the systemic issues that allow land and resource conflicts to persist. Notably, 117 cases – approximately 45 percent of the cases – have *unknown* duration. Many of these cases involve long-standing landlord-tenant conflicts in sugar plantations in Negros, the country’s fourth largest island – where there is little or no information as to when the conflict began.

Of the 262 recorded cases, 66 have remained unresolved for over 20 years. When considering all cases that have persisted 10 years or more, the total rises to 108 cases or 75 percent of all the cases with a known duration. This underscores the enduring nature of land disputes and the urgent need for effective and lasting resolution mechanisms.

**Table 3. Duration of Conflicts in Terms of Number of Years**

Duration of Conflict	Number of Cases
Less than two years	6
2 to less than 5 years	8
5 to less than 10 years	22
10 to less than 15 years	23
15 to less than 20 years	20
20 years or more	66
Unknown	117
<b>Total</b>	<b>262</b>

Table 4a presents the type of land/resource affected by conflicts. It shows that the majority of cases involve smallholder agriculture and farmland, accounting for 162 cases or 61.83 percent of the total – an increase from 121 cases recorded in the 2023 LRCM. However, smallholder agriculture and farming conflicts account for only 8.20 percent of the total contested land area.

Conflicts involving ancestral domains and indigenous peoples (IPs) constitute the second- largest category, accounting for 17.94 percent of all cases. Yet in terms of total affected land area, conflicts involving ancestral domains ranks first, making up 83.05 percent of the contested land. Notably, the case with the largest contested area is the Teduray-Lambangian case in BARMM, covering 208,258.68 hectares of indigenous land. The second-largest is the San Manuel case in Pangasinan, involving the San Roque Dam, which spans 85,00 hectares and includes land of the Ibalois indigenous community.

Water/fisheries resources are the third most affected type of land/resource, both in terms of number of cases and total area contested. Specifically, 46,933.09 hectares of coastal and inland waters are affected. Some of these conflicts are linked to major projects, including the planned airport construction in the coastal areas of Bulacan (Central Luzon), tourism development in Palawan (MIMAROPA) and Iloilo (Western Visayas), mining and quarrying activities in the rivers of Zambales and Marinduque, and land reclamation projects in Manila Bay.

**Table 4a. Types of land and resource affected by conflicts, 2024**

Type of Land/resource	Number of cases	Percent of cases (%)	Contested area (ha)	Percent of contested area (%)
Smallholder agriculture/farming	162	61.83	63,551.67	8.20
Indigenous people/customary land/Ancestral domain	47	17.94	643,796.83	83.05
Water/fisheries resources	20	7.63	46,933.09	6.05
Smallholder agroforestry and people's plantation	14	5.34	12,164.62	1.57
Housing and settlements	13	4.96	122.20	0.02
Common lands/Public lands managed by the community	5	1.91	8,632.19	1.11
Community forest/Social forestry	1	0.38	nda	0.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>775,200.59</b>	<b>100</b>

Ancestral domains, as defined by the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA) of 1997, encompass not only land but also inland waters, coastal areas, and natural resources within them. One notable case involves 51,855 hectares of ancestral *waters* in Calauit Island in Coron, Palawan, where the rights are disputed between the Calauit Tagbanwa indigenous community and municipal fishers.

To precisely identify the resource affected by conflict, this study differentiates ancestral waters (when they were the primary resource in dispute) from ancestral land domains. Conversely, when water resources were not the main contested resource, they were classified under the broader category of ancestral land. The result is reflected in Table 4b which outlines the types of resource in conflict (land, water), along with the number of cases and the total affected area for all 262 documented cases.

**Table 4b. Type of resource affected, by number of cases and total area contested (in ha).**

Type of resource	Number of cases	Total area contested (ha)	Percent of contested area (%)
Land/land resources	241	676,412.50	87.26
Water/fisheries resources	21	98,788.09	12.74
<b>Total</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>775,200.59</b>	<b>100</b>

One of the largest land conflict cases involves 780 smallholder farming households — from the Ibalois indigenous community — and the San Roque dam project in San Miguel, Pangasinan. The dam was built on the Agno River and construction work was completed in May 2003. This is the largest dam project in the country, covering about 85,000 hectares, a significant part of which sits on ancestral land that is covered by a CADT.

The dam was built by the San Roque Power Corporation in partnership with the National Power Corporation (NPC) and financed by the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC). The project has been mired in controversy for causing increased flooding downstream, resulting in the displacement of numerous people. In addition, FPIC was not observed and even policies of the JBIC were violated (Ej Atlas, 2022).

While ancestral domain was the dominant category of land affected by this conflict, other sectors were equally affected by the dam construction, including smallholder farmers and artisanal miners.

## **Box 2. Urban Poor Conflict at the New Bilibid Penitentiary Compound**

### **Local Context**

Established in 1936, the New Bilibid Prison (NBP) in Muntinlupa City is the largest correctional facility in the Philippines, housing approximately 42,000 inmates—far exceeding its 17,000-person capacity.

Around 1,800 urban poor households have settled on unused land surrounding the facility, many choosing to live near incarcerated family members. These families depend on informal employment and small-scale businesses for survival. Over time, syndicates exploited the situation by illegally selling government-owned land within the NBP Compound. Using fraudulent land titles, they deceived residents into purchasing plots under the false claim that the land belonged to a private individual.

### **Conflict and Evictions**

During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the government pushed forward its plan to redevelop the NBP Compound into a mixed-use development, leading to mass evictions. On April 16, 2020, the Bureau of Corrections (BuCor) began demolishing structures, and by February 2021, around 150 families had been forcibly removed. By May 2021, the number of evicted families had risen to 663.

Reports of violence and intimidation surfaced, with authorities accused of using aggressive tactics to force compliance. Many families, some of whom had lived in the area since the 1990s, were displaced without adequate relocation or support, raising serious human rights concerns.

## Relocation and Community Struggles in the "Agaw-Agaw" Settlement

Displaced families from the New Bilibid Prison (NBP) Compound resettled in an 11-hectare section of the NBP reservation in Poblacion, Muntinlupa City, now known as the "Agaw-Agaw" community—named after the Filipino word for "grab"—reflecting the forced nature of their relocation.

Initially, residents hoped for an in-city relocation program that would grant them land ownership. However, as evictions progressed, a lack of clear communication and the coercive "kaliwaan" scheme—where families were pressured to relocate without adequate support—fueled uncertainty and distress.

Authorities dictated the relocation process with little to no input from the displaced families, preventing them from forming a collective voice. As a result, Agaw-Agaw community leaders, many of whom are women, lost their influence in advocating for their rights.

Community members disapproved of the planned minimum 20-square-meter floor area mandated by Batas Pambansa 220 (BP 220), the legal framework for socialized housing projects in the Philippines. Though they live in modest homes constructed from light materials, they view decent housing as an "upgrade" with at least 30 square meters – enough space for a living room, dining area, kitchen, gender-segregated bedrooms for children, and room for vegetation.

### Call for a Participatory Approach

Residents demand a more inclusive approach to housing and land tenure decisions, emphasizing that informal settlers should have a voice in the process. Success stories from other settlements demonstrate that community participation leads to sustainable solutions.

Organizations such as the Homeless People's Federation, Inc. and the Technical Assistance Movement for People and Environment have stepped in to support the Agaw-Agaw community. They introduced community organizing initiatives, savings programs, and a rapid household survey in early 2022, ensuring residents could actively shape their own solutions. These efforts eventually helped the community register as a homeowners' association with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC)—a crucial step toward securing their housing rights.

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Table 4c categorizes land conflicts by rural and urban settings, detailing the number of cases and total affected area. Initially, land conflict monitoring focused on rural and agricultural areas. It was only in 2021 that the initiative began tracking conflicts affecting urban dwellers. As a result, the recorded number of urban cases is likely an underestimation, with figures expected to rise as monitoring expands.

**Table 4c. Conflicts involving rural and urban areas, by number of cases and total area contested (in ha).**

Settings	Number of cases	Total area contested (ha)
Rural	245	774,179.59
Urban	17	1,021.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>775,200.59</b>

Farmers are the most frequently affected by conflict, in two-thirds (66.79 percent) of all cases. Indigenous peoples (IPs) were the second most affected sector, at 18.70 percent of the cases. Fisherfolk were the third most affected sector, at 7.25 percent of the cases.

**Table 5. Primary sector or community affected by land/resource conflict, by number and percent of cases**

Primary sector or community affected by conflict	Number of cases	Percent cases (%)
Farmers (landless smallholder farmers, sharecroppers, agricultural workers, tenants, lessees, small owners)	175	66.79
Indigenous peoples (IP)	49	18.70
Fisherfolk	19	7.25
Informal settlers	9	3.44
Tenured residents	9	3.44
Non-IP forest users, pastoralists	1	0.38
<b>Total</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>100.00</b>

The term “farmers” should be used to accurately describe those affected by land conflicts. These farmers differ significantly from the idealized image promoted by land developers, who market 1,000-square-meter “farm lots” to urban buyers. Smallholder farmers rely on the land for their survival and livelihood, yet many do not own the land they cultivate. Their tenure is often precarious, leaving them vulnerable to eviction or sudden loss of employment at any time.

## Adversarial claimants and drivers of land/resource conflicts

Table 6 shows the adversaries faced by land and resource rights holders.

Private companies are involved in 37.02 percent of all cases, making them the most common adversarial claimant. Another 32.06 percent of cases involve politicians, businessmen, landlords, and former government officials or public figures — collectively categorized as private interests — who are often in conflict with small farmers or local communities.

Government units, agencies and State enterprises account for 17.18 percent or adversarial claimants. Meanwhile, conflicting claims between poor communities (e.g., settlers, migrants, refugees) and disputes between sectors (e.g., farmer-settlers vs. indigenous people) – make up 12.21 percent of the total number of cases.

Notably, when all *private* interests are combined, they represent approximately 82 percent of all adversarial claimants.

**Table 6. Adversarial claimants in land conflict, by number and percent of cases**

Adversarial claimants	Number of cases	Percent cases (%)
Private companies	97	37.02
Powerful individuals (e.g., politicians, businessmen, landlords, officials/ex-officials, ex-military)	84	32.06
Government	45	17.18
Government agencies and State enterprises	32	12.21
Local Government	7	2.67
Both National and Local Governments	6	2.29
Community vs. community (residents, settlers, migrants, refugees)	32	12.21
Military, police, armed forces	2	0.76
Others	2	0.76
<b>Total</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>100</b>

### **Box 3. Land and water grabbing in the ecological frontier in Palawan, Philippines**

Lupa Namin, Handog ng Maykapal  
Lupa Namin, Handog ng Maykapal  
Hanggang Kamatayan, Amin ang Isla  
Hanggang Kamatayan, Amin ang Isla

- *Awit Alay sa Lupa at Dagat: Isang Awit Alay Para sa Bugsuk*

#### **A Timeline of Struggle of IP and Fishing Communities in Balabac, Palawan**

On June 29, 2024, a confrontation erupted between private security guards of a huge conglomerate and members of the Molbog, an indigenous community in Palawan. The conflict emanated from the contested Maria Hangin Island in the Municipality of Balabac, a territory claimed by both the San Miguel Corporation and Molbog.

Back in 2005, the *Samahan ng mga Katutubo at Maliliit na Mangangisda sa Dulong Timog Palawan* (SAMBILOG) filed an application with the NCIP for a Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT) covering 56,000 hectares of ancestral land and waters. However, the application remains pending.

Fast forward to 2014, the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) issued a Notice of Coverage (NoC) restricting ownership of 37.78 hectares of agricultural land in Balabac pending an investigation into its

eligibility under the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program Extension with Reforms (CARPER). However, in May 2023, DAR ruled the land ineligible, citing a field report that found the island's soil unsuitable for crops. A Certificate of Finality issued on June 27, 2024, informed Bugsuk residents that the land was no longer subject to redistribution. On December 12, 2024, the *SAMBILOG-Balik Bugsuk Movement* filed a petition challenging DAR's decision.

This development cleared the way for San Miguel Corporation's (SMC) *Bugsuk Island Ecotourism Development Project*, which aims to develop the island's 5,567.74 hectares, particularly in Barangays Bugsuk and Sebaring. SMC enlisted Bricktree Properties, Inc. to oversee the ecotourism zone's development.

The DAR was supposed to conduct consultations with affected communities, to assure that those displaced by the luxury ecotourism project would receive livelihood support and resettlement assistance. However, members of indigenous communities allegedly prevented DAR officials from conducting consultations. As a result, Caesar M. Ortega, former NCIP Ancestral Domain Office director and ex-officer-in-charge of the NCIP, filed grave coercion charges against 10 members of the *SAMBILOG-Balik Bugsuk Movement*.

### **Displacement, Livelihood Loss, and Ecological Impact**

While the 10 individuals face legal action, hundreds of fishing-dependent families stand to lose their primary livelihood. The ecotourism project on Maria Hangin Island—which includes plans for an aerodrome and hotels—risks displacing them from their traditional fishing grounds.

*Displacement and economic Impact.* Bugsuk's pristine waters make seaweed farming the primary and most profitable livelihood for residents, with an estimated 130 families relying on it. However, as Maria Hangin Island is effectively privatized, these families are being displaced.

According to *SAMBILOG*, Balabac municipality's seaweed industry generates approximately ₱72 million annually – contributing ₱52 million from seaweed, ₱15 million from dried fish, and ₱5 million from live fish trade. Additionally, around ₱28 million worth of marine resources is used for local food consumption.

*Ecological threats.* Balabac's marine and coastal ecosystems are also at risk. A *Rare Philippines* scoping study identified 59,331 hectares of marine protected areas (MPAs), covering 12 percent of the municipality's 493,528 hectares of municipal waters. The area also boasts 60,054 hectares of coral reefs and 5,724 hectares of mangroves — critical habitats that provide nursing grounds, coastal protection, and carbon sequestration.

Among the eight coastal municipalities of Southern Palawan, Balabac has the largest municipal waters and critical habitats. Along with its neighboring areas, it has been proposed as a Key Marine Biodiversity Area (KMBA), supporting the Philippines' commitment to the Global Biodiversity Framework target of protecting 30% of its land and sea.

### **Key Demands**

In December 2024, members of *SAMBILOG-Balik Bugsuk Movement* staged a 9-day prayer and hunger strike in front of the DAR office. They demanded the return of their ancestral land and waters that they claim were seized by SMC. Their key demands include:

- *Immediately reverse DAR's decision* and reinstate 10,821 hectares of Bugsuk Island under the agrarian reform program, recognizing the historical and ancestral claims of displaced families.
- *Implement transitional justice* by facilitating the return of displaced farmers and their heirs to Bugsuk and Pandanan Islands, with full support for rebuilding their lives.

- *Suspend all SMC development projects* in the affected areas until meaningful consultations and agreements are made with local communities, ensuring their rights, livelihoods, and welfare are protected.
- *Conduct a thorough and impartial investigation* into human rights violations on Maria Hangin Island and hold all those responsible accountable for their actions.

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Table 7 shows the drivers of land and resource conflict, by number of cases and the size of contested areas. In terms of drivers of land and resource conflict, the highest number of cases (38.93 percent) involve private-led businesses. Cases pertaining to landlord-tenant or agrarian conflicts were second (36.26 percent), while cases of conflicting claims between communities and other sectors comprised 12.21 percent of the total.

However, in terms of affected areas, conflicting claims between communities and sectors accounted for the largest share (45.43 percent). This was followed by cases involving private-led business enterprises (34.96 percent), and government projects (16.83 percent).

Conspicuously, mining is listed under private-led business, and not under government-led business or State enterprises as a driver of conflict. Under Philippine law, the government or the State owns all mineral resources; private companies enter into mineral agreements in order to extract the natural resource. In essence, mining activities in the Philippines are a joint venture between the government and private entities.

**Table 7. Drivers of land and resource conflict, by number of cases and contested area (in ha)**

Drivers of land and resource conflict	Number of cases	Contested area (ha)
<b>Private-led business enterprises</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>270,668.11</b>
Agribusiness, plantations	39	56,072.14
Mining, quarrying	29	170,216.63
Property/housing/real estate development	14	1,867.99
Tourism, ecotourism	7	41,793.00
Industry/manufacturing/production	6	597.35
Logging and tree plantation	4	nda
Power generation and transmission	3	121.00
<b>Landlord-tenant conflict/agrarian conflict</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>18,736.77</b>
<b>Conflicting claims between communities/ sectors over land and resource</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>351,724.76</b>
Overlapping tenure and use	31	340,724.76
Encroachment (e.g., migrants, settlers, refugees)	1	11,000.00

<b>Government programs</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>130,351.95</b>
Public utilities (dams, power lines, power/energy, irrigation, etc.)	8	98,382.40
Public infrastructure (including roads, bridges, airports, ports)	7	14,350.00
Land reclamation	6	3,326.14
Special economic zones	3	11,965.00
Social housing, urban development	2	2,304.58
Military facilities	0	0
Other Government projects/programs ( <i>flood mitigation</i> )	3	23.83
<b>Conservation/Protected Areas and “No Go” Zones</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3,719.00</b>
<b>Others</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>nda</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>774,179.59</b>

## Responses of affected communities

Conflict resolution – through direct or mediated negotiations with adversaries, government administrative mechanisms, judicial courts, human rights bodies, or legal adjudication – accounted for 71.42 percent of all community response to conflicts. This suggests a continued trust in the Philippines’ legal systems. Peaceful demonstrations, non-violent acts and protests were the second most preferred recourse, making up 26.96 percent of community responses.

The percentages were computed based on the number of known responses at 350. It should be noted that about 19.5 percent (85/435) of the cases have no known response to the conflict. It is crucial in the monitoring process to determine what courses of action the communities have undertaken.

The data indicates that communities hardly resorted to retaliation, suggesting that Filipinos are inclined towards peaceful methods of resolving conflicts.

Two incidents of retaliation against the adversarial claimant were reported. In one such incident, the retaliation did not involve physical violence, but consisted of the rights-holders uprooting crops that the adversary had planted on their land.

**Table 8. Responses to Conflicts by Communities**

<b>Responses of Communities to Conflicts</b>	<b>Number</b>
Seek conflict resolution	250
- through government administrative mechanism, NHRI, legal adjudication, and courts	183
- through local or direct negotiations	67
Peaceful demonstrations/non-violent acts	94
Withdrawal/escape	4
Retaliation	2
No information available	85
<b>Total</b>	<b>435</b>

*Note: Communities may take one or more approaches in response to conflict, resulting in the total number of responses (435) exceeding the number of cases (262). The chosen responses reflect the mechanisms or platforms that are more accessible to the communities.*

Table 9 shows that the government was the only party that undertook any corrective action, and it did so in 21.7 percent of the cases. However, no corrective action was taken in almost 50 percent of cases. The ratios would be higher if only the cases with known responses were considered.

It needs to be emphasized that “corrective action” refers to an adversarial claimant’s or interested third party’s *efforts* to initiate investigation or explore possible resolutions to the conflict. It does not reflect the full resolution of conflicts.

Meanwhile, there is no information in as many as 27 percent of the cases, and it is likely that no action was also taken in these cases.

**Table 9. Corrective actions to address the conflict**

Were there any corrective actions taken to address the conflict?	Number
Yes	60
- by the Government/State	57
- by agreement with the adversarial party	0
- by third party, specify	3
No / Not yet	131
No information available	71
<b>Total</b>	<b>262</b>

## Incidents of human rights violations (HRVs) and reported perpetrators

Table 10 shows the tally of HRVs related to land and resource conflicts. Some 28 incidents of HRVs against individual persons and households were reported in 2024.

**Table 10. Human Rights Violations (HRVs)**

Incidents of HRVs	Number Incidents	Number of Victims
Against individuals	8	19 individuals
Against communities	20	2,235 households
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	

For this edition of the report, instead of recording a cumulative number of HRVs where an individual might have been subjected to multiple violations, only the last HRV experienced was

recorded. Thus, the victims of murder may have experienced red-tagging<sup>3</sup> and intimidation prior to being killed, but such incidents were not counted in Table 11.

There were eight incidents of HRVs involving 22 individuals.

**Table 11. Forms of HRVs committed against individuals, by number of incidents and number of victims**

Type of HRVs	No. of incidents	Number of individual victims
Physical threat and other forms of intimidation	2	10
Disappearance, abduction	2	4
Killing/Murder	2	3
Detainment/legal arrest or illegal detention; and "criminalization"	1	1
Others ( <i>psychological stress</i> )	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>19</b>

*Note: Table 11 reflects only the most recent violation inflicted on the victim. Certain incidents, particularly red-tagging, often precede other types of HRV. To avoid a double counting of individual victims, red-tagging incidents are noted separately.*

Five victims experienced red-tagging in addition to the physical violence they endured. Three of the four abducted victims were red-tagged (in two separate incidents). The victim of illegal detention was also red-tagged. One of the victims of physical threat and intimidation was also the subject of red-tagging.

**Table 12. Number of individual victims by sex**

Type of HRVs	Male	Female	nda	Total
Disappearance, abduction	3	1	0	4
Physical threat and other forms of intimidation	0	1	9	10
Killing/Murder	3	0	0	3
Detainment/legal arrest or illegal detention; and "criminalization"	1	0	0	1
Others ( <i>psychological stress</i> )	1	0	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>19</b>

Table 13 below shows the reported perpetrators of HRVs against individuals, along with the number of incidents in which they were involved. Most of the reported perpetrators were either armed agents of the State (military or police) or unidentified assailants. They could also be private armed groups or agents of the national and local government.

<sup>3</sup> Red-tagging is the term used for labelling persons as members or supporters of the New People's Army (NPA) of the Communist Party of the Philippines, a group that is classified as a terrorist organization by the Philippine government. Persons who are red-tagged frequently have no links to the NPA, but in many cases, are human rights defenders or persons fighting for their rights who end up being harassed, intimidated, detained or killed because of the label.

**Table 13. Reported perpetrators of HRVs against individuals, by number of incidents and percentage**

Reported perpetrators of HRVs against individuals	Number of incidents
Unidentified assailants	3
Armed agents of the State (police, army, or military)	3
Private companies, private armed groups	1
Local Government	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>

Three incidents of HRVs were perpetrated by armed agents of the State while one incident was committed by both the national and local governments. It is ironic that these perpetrators are the same persons that rights-holders usually look to for protection. The same can be said as regards the HRV committed by the Local Government.

This incident refers to the demolition of mussel farms off the coast of Navotas. The demolition is intended to give way to the 650-hectare reclamation projects that will serve as the gateway to SMC's international airport in Bulacan. The DENR studied the long-term impact of the project and approved it. In turn, the Navotas LGU ceased issuing permits to mussel farmers and thus, declared their structures to be illegal and subject to demolition.

It is also worrisome that there were three incidents that involved unidentified assailants. This means that the victims are not likely to find relief until their assailants are identified.

Table 14 shows the number of incidents of HRVs against communities and the reported number of affected households. Four incidents of HRVs against fisherfolk affected the highest number of households (1,000 HHs).

**Table 14. Communities affected by HRVs, by number of incidents and number of affected households**

Communities affected by HRVs	Number of incidents	Number of affected households
Farmers	10	685
Fisherfolk	4	1,000
Indigenous peoples (IPs)	4	nda
Informal settlers	2	550
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>2,235</b>

Table 15 shows the types of HRVs committed against communities. Six incidents came in the form of threats and intimidation, and six other incidents involved forcible entry or entry without FPIC. There were four incidents of eviction, displacement and work termination affecting 594 households. Moreover, two incidents of destruction of crops, homes or property affected as many as 1,500 households.

Assuming an average household size of five persons, more than 11,000 men, women and children became victims of HRVs against communities, due to land and resource conflicts in 2024.



**Table 15. Types of HRVs committed against communities, by number of incidents and number of affected households**

Type of HRVs committed against communities	No. of incidents	Number of affected households
Physical threat and other forms of intimidation	6	130
Forcible entry/encroachment, entry without free, prior and informed consent (FPIC)	6	11
Eviction, displacement, work termination	4	594
Destruction of crops, homes, property	2	1,500
Labelling, branding, “red-tagging”	2	nda
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>2,235</b>

Table 16 shows the reported perpetrators of HRVs against communities, along with the number of HRV incidents in which they were involved.

Private companies were involved in eight incidents, including one incident perpetrated through armed groups. In many cases, even without the use of a private armed, private companies reportedly committed violence against communities. Three incidents involved physical threats and intimidation, three incidents involved eviction, and two incidents were of forcible entry or entry without FPIC.

Meanwhile, government (including local and national agencies) was the reported perpetrator in six incidents, while State security agencies (police, military) were reportedly involved in four other incidents. Together, these State entities were reportedly involved in 10 incidents, or half of all HRVs committed against communities.

The perpetrators in two of the reported incidents were not identified.

**Table 16. Reported perpetrators of HRVs committed against communities, by number of incidents and percentage**

Reported perpetrators of HRVs against communities	Number of incidents
Private companies, private armed groups	8
Government	6
Local Government	3
Both National and Local Governments	2
Government agencies	1
Armed agents of the State (police, army, or military)	4
Others	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>

## Administrative Developments

### *Review of Joint Administrative Order No. 1 (JAO-1)*

Consistent with recommendations in previous LRCM Reports, a technical working group has been constituted to review Joint Administrative Order No. 1 (JAO-1) of 2012. This JAO-1 has proved to be largely ineffective in resolving land conflicts, particularly where other tenure instruments and land claims overlap with ancestral domains. Notably, the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), which previously withdrew from JAO-1, has been actively participating in the ongoing discussions.

### *Revised FPIC Guidelines*

Amid ongoing controversies surrounding the process of obtaining Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) from indigenous peoples, a new set of FPIC guidelines has been under development for the past few years, and is expected to be released soon. However, concerns have been raised over certain controversial provisions, and the public consultation process has been described as unsatisfactory.

Key contentious provisions include:

- Exemptions from FPIC requirements for natural resources exploration and prospecting activities, despite their potentially disruptive impact.
- Allowing entry for the military to conduct operations without FPIC approval.
- Exclusion of indigenous peoples from participation in Field-Based Investigations.
- The option to waive FPIC requirements for different phases of a project through a Memorandum of Agreement.

### *Administrative Order No. 21*

Pursuant to Republic Act No. 11201, the Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development (DHSUD), the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), and the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) are tasked with identifying government lands that are suitable for housing and rural development. Under Administrative Order No. 22 dated 30 April 2024 an Inter-Agency Coordinating Council has been established to compile a Master List of all government lands. Consequently, government agencies and offices are conducting an inventory of their real estate assets that may be allocated for housing projects.

## Recommendations

Based on the data above, land and resource conflicts continue to persist, driven by unresolved structural issues and circumstances. Agrarian Reform has not been fully implemented. Indigenous people remain particularly vulnerable. Not only is FPIC frequently disregarded, but government policies and private sector activities contradict IP rights under IPRA. There are numerous instances of overlapping lands that have not been resolved by specialized administrative agencies.

The data shows that most conflicts arise from private-led activities, yet these activities continue to receive government-issued permits and licenses. Moreover, these private entities rarely take proactive steps to resolve or mitigate these conflicts. Compounding the issue, there is a significant

lack of readily available data on land disputes and conflict, making it difficult to assess how many land conflict cases have been effectively resolved by courts or administrative agencies.

In view of these, the following actions are recommended:

### **For Government:**

In nearly all cases of land and resource conflicts, the government invariably plays a direct or indirect role. Even where private investments are the primary cause of conflict or are implicated in human rights violations, their actions can often be traced to government policies and decisions. For instance, the government is a joint venture partner in all mining projects, meaning that conflicts and HRVs related to mining could be addressed – resolved or prevented – through stronger political and institutional interventions.

- ***Initiate investigations and provide remedies***

While the government has made some efforts to address/resolve land and resource conflicts, the response appears inadequate and ineffective.

Also, adversarial claimants from the private sector have largely failed to take action in resolving conflicts. Initiating formal investigations would compel these entities to at least submit themselves to the process and be held accountable. Additionally, investigations could generate crucial data and information on unresolved disputes. For instance, many cases are of unknown duration and many cases have no data on responses taken by communities.

Government must also take decisive action to curb corruption in all its forms within land agencies. Violators should be prosecuted, along with officials engaged in bribery, extortion, forgery, and fraudulent activities that facilitate land and property grabbing.

- ***Complete land and resource reform programs***

The data shows that agricultural lands account for the highest number of lands under conflict, with smallholder farmers being the most affected. Yet, very few of these cases are reported to have been resolved.

The primary land reform program in the Philippines is the redistribution of land under the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law (CARL) and its iterations and extensions. Yet records show that land distribution, especially under the Duterte administration (2016-2022), dropped to its lowest level since 2005 (Dela Pena, 2022), with only a little over 28,700 hectares awarded by the end of its term (Dela Pena, 2022). To address this backlog, the current administration through the DAR must accelerate land distribution to fulfill agrarian reform commitments.

Similarly, the registration of ancestral lands must be prioritized. The National Commission on Indigenous People (NCIP) should be given adequate funding and resources to fulfill its mandate under IPRA. In 2023, the NCIP achieved only 33 percent of its target of issuing 1,531 CADTs and CALTs (IWGIA, 2024). It was also reported that 70,344.96 hectares were added to the current 1.33 million hectares of ancestral lands that are now facing graver ecological danger (IWGIA, 2024).

- ***Remove policies that contradict the intent of laws and strengthen mechanisms for resolve overlapping claims***

A technical working group has been formed to develop a more effective mechanism to resolve overlapping land claims. This group should include diverse stakeholders and should gather information on best practices in resolving similar cases. The proposed mechanism should recognize the NCIP's authority in resolving overlaps involving ancestral lands. Additionally, it should incorporate alternative dispute resolution (ADR) processes that would allow parties to confront and resolve claims without the need for lengthy judicial or administrative proceedings.

It should also be noted that policy inconsistencies tend to exacerbate land conflicts. In 2021, then President Duterte lifted the moratorium on open pit mining. This turnaround in policy contradicted the goals and rights established in IPRA. Mining operations have been the largest industrial intrusion into ancestral lands (Quizon and Pagsanghan, 2014), severely undermining indigenous people's rights and IPRA. To date, the moratorium has not been restored.

Also, while the government's push for alternative sources of energy is commendable, this should not undermine IPRA and the indigenous peoples' rights. Many hydropower projects are located within ancestral domains, often overlapping with areas considered to be biodiversity hotspots, indigenous community conservation areas, and protected areas (IWGIA, 2024).

Policies governing extractive industries and energy must be reviewed to ensure they align with relevant land legislation and human rights.

- ***Incorporate United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights in government systems and develop its National Action Plan (NAP)***

The government must adopt the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) in its policies and systems, particularly in decision-making processes related to investments. Economic gains should not take precedence over human rights. In line with this, the government must institute a National Action Plan (NAP) on the UNGPs, with a specific component on land rights.

Given the pervasive conflicts and issues arising from business activities on land and natural resources, the government should include land rights as a priority area in its NAP for UNGPs. This framework would enable the government to establish coherent and inclusive policies and programs on land rights and business (CHR, 2023). In addition, the government's actions would be informed and responsive as they would be a result of multi-stakeholder collaboration (CHR, 2023).

The first crucial step in assessing the action plan is data collection. While key metrics have been identified, access to relevant and accurate data remains a major challenge. For instance, it has been found that the DAR has no comprehensive data on land under its jurisdiction (Quizon et al, 2018). The DAR is unable to track illegally-converted agrarian land (Quizon et al, 2018). The actual population of IPs is also undetermined with many unreported births (Almeda, et al., 2023). Thus, the government should be properly equipped to monitor and report on the outcome of its efforts under the NAP.

Moreover, all actors in government recognize and respect land rights, accord respect for those who hold them. This includes instituting and mainstreaming basic human rights and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in government policies and actions. It must be inculcated in every member of the bureaucracy that public service should prioritize people's welfare over private interests.

- ***Pass laws that strengthen land and human rights protections***

Legislative action is crucial in addressing long-standing land and resource conflicts. The whole of government, including Congress, needs to take action to make protection of land rights comprehensive and effective. The passage of key legislative proposals needs to be pursued:

- An Act Mandating the Completion of the Land Acquisition and Distribution Component of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program
- Agri-business Ventures Arrangements in Agrarian Reform Lands Act
- National Land Use and Management Act
- Human Rights Defenders Protection Act
- Anti-Red Tagging Act
- Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Act
- The Bantay Dagat Welfare and Incentives Act
- Forest Resources Act
- Indigenous Communities Conserved Areas and Territories Act
- Philippine Mineral Resources Act

The Commission on Human Rights (CHR) has advocated for the inclusion of a Human Rights Impact assessment as a prerequisite to allowing certain businesses to be set up in the country (ESCR, 2023). Legislators should seriously consider this recommendation as it would help prevent human rights violations linked to corporate activities.

The passage of the National Land Use and Management Act (NLUA) is long overdue. Various versions of the bill have been filed and re-filed for over 30 years, yet no law has been enacted. During this period, the Philippine population has surpassed 110 million, making proper land planning and allocation more urgent than ever. The DENR has repeatedly emphasized the need for a national land use law, noting that the Philippines lags way behind other countries in land use legislation (Reyes, 2024). At present, House Bill 8162 has been forwarded by the House of Representatives to the Senate's Committee on Environment, Natural Resources, and Climate Change (Reyes, 2024). If passed, the NLUA would help address widespread land use conversion (Reyes, 2024), one of the biggest drivers of land conflict in the country.

- ***Ensure genuine implementation of FPIC***

The Kaliwa Dam project in Rizal remains highly controversial because of strong objections from the Dumagat-Remontados indigenous communities. Affected communities have accused DENR and NCIP of inaction and bias in addressing their concerns.

The opposition by the Dumagat Remontados against the Kaliwa Dam in the Sierra Madre extends beyond indigenous land rights. It is claimed that many other communities will be adversely affected due to the threat of flooding.

This case illustrates the need for genuine and transparent implementation of FPIC as provided under IPRA. Even the NCIP has faced accusations of siding against the Dumagat-Remontado community. Similarly, the proposed amended FPIC guidelines have been met with strong opposition, as it would undermine IPRA and the rights of indigenous communities. Stakeholders must closely monitor the development of these new FPIC guidelines to ensure they uphold indigenous rights and prevent further government overreach in ancestral domains.

## For Local Government Units

- ***Update Comprehensive Land Use Plans, strictly implement zoning ordinances, and limit reclassifications of land***

Local government units (LGUs) should update their Comprehensive Land Use Plans (CLUPs) to reflect current population needs and ensure sustainable land use. Food security is one primary concern which is currently threatened by rapid land conversion. Zoning ordinances should protect agricultural land and prevent its rampant conversion.

During the Inter-Agency dialogue, PSA representatives reported a significant decrease in agricultural land – from 9.97 million hectares in 1991 to just 7.27 million hectares in 2012. Although the data is outdated, the declining trend nonetheless remains alarming.

In reality, many agricultural lands undergo *de facto* conversion even before formal reclassification. Land use gradually shifts to commercial or industrial purposes, a process referred to as “conflicting use.” LGUs often acquiesce with the changes, as the land is no longer suitable for agriculture, and such conversion is often supported by the DA. This means agricultural land is effectively lost before legal reclassification even begins. Thus, LGUs must strictly enforce zoning regulations to prevent such informal conversions. Keeping agricultural lands designated as such will help preserve food security and rural livelihoods.

## For the Commission on Human Rights:

- ***Strengthen the education of rights-holders concerning their rights and available remedies and reliefs***

Many rights-holders remain unaware of their legal rights and available remedies. This lack of knowledge and awareness contributes to a sense of helplessness, particularly in land and resource disputes and the violations that they suffer.

Although the report shows that more than half of affected communities had sought conflict resolution mechanisms, including resort to courts, at least 85 cases have no recorded response. It can be inferred that affected communities in these cases did not avail of legal remedies that would have otherwise been documented. Furthermore, in many cases, adverse claimants (e.g., private investors, corporations) have taken no corrective action to address the conflict. Rights holders may not know how to engage or discuss with adverse claimants in order to compel them to address the conflict.

For instance, agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARBs) have reportedly faced resistance not just from landlords, but even from the DAR itself, which has sometimes acted against their interests. In such situations, ARBs are often left uncertain as to how to proceed to get their land. Indigenous communities have also expressed feeling ignored by the NCIP when certain government agencies are the first to violate their right to FPIC, as in their experience in the Kaliwa Dam project.

Thus, the CHR should expand educational programs and capacity-building initiatives among rights-holders. This would empower rights-holders to respond appropriately, particularly through the legal system, and not be frustrated in their peaceful protest actions.

- ***Monitor and investigate land and resource conflicts, especially red-tagging incidents***

The CHR, as the primary human rights agency, should intensify its monitoring and investigating efforts on human rights violations. It should institutionalize a monitoring mechanism for land rights. Establishing a formal monitoring system for land rights is crucial, since monitoring improves the protection of human rights (OHCHR, 2011).

Under Executive Order No. 163, series of 1987, the CHR has the power to investigate violations of civil and political rights on its own initiative. It does not need to wait for a formal complaint to initiate investigations. However, the CHR remains financially dependent on the administration, which can limit its capacity.

While land rights pertain to economic and social rights, the above study shows that land and resource conflicts provide the setting for violations of civil and political rights. These violations include red-tagging, criminalization of land rights defenders, and even the murder of rights-holders that are involved in land conflicts. Since these cases fall within CHR's investigative mandate, the agency must proactively monitor, document and intervene to prevent human rights abuses in land conflicts.

- ***Advocate for government accountability in protecting human rights***

The CHR must actively push for the immediate formulation and adoption of a National Action Plan for the UNGPs with comprehensive provisions on land rights. It should actively campaign for government compliance with international human rights instruments.

The CHR should likewise encourage legislators to enact critical bills that safeguard human rights and mitigate land and resource conflicts. These crucial bills are enumerated above, and the CHR should make its position known on these pending pieces of legislation. In 2021, the CHR released a position paper on the proposed Code of Conduct for the Eviction of Underprivileged and Homeless Citizens, Demolition of their Dwellings, and their Resettlement Amending for the Purpose R.A. No. 7279, Otherwise Known as the "Urban Development and Housing Act of 1992." It also made its position known on the Anti-Hate Speech Act. In 2018, the CHR also made its position known on the Human Rights Defenders Bill. The CHR needs to amplify and reinforce its stance on urgent human rights issues, especially those linked to land and resource conflicts.

In 2023, the CHR released its first Monitoring Report on the Situation of Land Rights. It should continue issuing periodic reports to track developments and hold violators accountable.

## **For Business:**

- ***Ensure full compliance with regulations and genuine FPIC implementation***

Businesses must comply with all laws and government regulations and honestly adhere to FPIC processes. However, unethical practices have been mentioned:

- During the inter-agency dialogue (27 November 2024) it was revealed that some businesses purposely modify the condition of agricultural land to render it non-arable. Once transformed, the land is applied for reclassification and legal conversion.

- In the conduct of FPIC, it has been reported that some businesses deal with people who do not represent the community. Mining companies have recognized false tribal leaders in order to appear compliant with the FPIC requirements (Almeda, et al., 2023).
- Indigenous communities report that FPIC proceedings often ignore customary decision-making and governance processes, while imposing restrictive deadlines (Almeda, et al., 2023). These violate the principles of FPIC as envisioned under the IPRA. The standard for FPIC – of being timely, legitimate, credible, and substantial – should be observed (CHR 2023). Businesses must not only comply with the law, but honor its intent and spirit.

The CHR has further recommended that in the conduct of FPIC, all women -- and not just those who have become head of their household -- should be allowed to participate (ESCRC, 2023). Furthermore, the CHR advises that impartial observers should be present at the first and second community assemblies (CHR, 2023). Businesses should be open to this.

- ***Practice corporate accountability and ethical business practices***

Businesses must engage in fair, arm's-length agreements with farmers, indigenous people, fisherfolk, and other rights-holders, ensuring that their protection is not just a formality but a guiding principle. Contracts must include provisions that safeguard people's rights, for instance, recognizing that farmers in particular bear far greater risks from unstable market prices. Ethical business practices demand not only legal compliance but also a commitment to equity and sustainability in all dealings.

- ***Implement UNGP-BHR***

While laws are in place to regulate business activities, many of these are minimum standards. Instead, businesses should voluntarily adopt higher ethical standards in alignment with the UNGPs. For instance, businesses may implement human rights due diligence to see if their operations and supply chains are aligned with the UNGPs.

Investors should take an active role in the business rather than be passive investors. If the company's management has no social responsibility, investors should be prepared to take their investment elsewhere. Similarly, businesses should be mindful of whom they partner with and require compliance with basic human rights before entering into any transaction

## **For Civil Society Organizations (CSOs):**

- ***Organize and empower vulnerable communities and individuals***

Many communities and rights-holders remain unaware of their rights. Thus, CSOs need to play a pivotal role in providing legal education, advocacy, organizational support and assistance to vulnerable communities, especially when the government institutions fail to act – or worse, become complicit in rights violations.

CSOs are often trusted more by communities, especially if they have worked together over long periods. Their grassroots presence and longstanding relationships enable them to educate, mobilize and advocate effectively.



- ***Include land and resource conflicts in voter education (i.e., mid-term elections in May 2025)***

A recent study by the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) revealed that 71 out of 82 governors belong to political dynasties. Many have direct interests in large agribusiness plantations, export processing zones, and mining operations that violate FPIC or environmental regulations. CSOs must therefore educate voters on the dangers of electing officials with vested interests in land and engaged in resource exploitation, without community interests in mind.

- ***Improve monitoring and reporting on land and resource conflict and HRVs***

The government is often unreliable in monitoring and reporting on land conflict and HRVs for reasons ranging from reluctance to release data, red tape or simply because it does not collect the data needed. For this study, the request for government data had to be coursed through the NAPC.

CSOs have their ear to the ground. They are also trusted where community members are hesitant to report incidents to State agents. CSOs also have the ability to accurately relay information that may be lost through transference. It is no coincidence that almost half of the data was gathered through various CSOs.

CSOs, in direct engagement with communities, can help provide (a) independent reporting on land conflicts and HRVs; (b) exposes on under-reported human rights abuses; and (c) reliable data for policy advocacy and litigation.

## Conclusion

While government data on land conflicts remains scarce, the Inter-agency Dialogue (CHR, 27 November 2024) revealed that government agencies are willing to share their insights on the data. One suggestion was to submit the LCRM report to NEDA as a contribution to the Philippine Medium-Term Development Plan.

Much work remains to be done in the resolution of land and resource conflicts. Legislation is particularly difficult, with obstacles in Congress delaying the passage of the National Land Use Act – despite strong support from executive agencies. Nevertheless, incremental progress can be made. The ongoing review of JAO-1 of 2012, which has long complicated the resolution of overlapping claims, is one such opportunity.

However, while there are areas where the stakeholders, including government, are able to work together, communities and CSOs need to remain vigilant. The new guidelines on FPIC with controversial exceptions to FPIC that are antithetical to IPRA should be monitored and improved. Long-unresolved land disputes, some spanning generations, need to be prioritized and finally resolved.

The data reflects systemic issues in land and resource governance in the country. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated efforts among government agencies, businesses, and civil society. Even small improvements in monitoring, advocacy and policy reforms can provide communities with hope for justice and resolution. ☐

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