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**KNOWLEDGE, BELIEFS, AND PRACTICES ON RESOURCE USE, PLANNING,
AND MANAGEMENT OF THE ANCESTRAL DOMAIN OF THE IRAYA
MANGYANS OF BACLAYAN, PUERTO GALERA, ORIENTAL MINDORO**

By Lindsay A. Barrientos

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Abstract:

The exact number of people in the Philippine uplands remains undetermined but as of 2007, it was reported by the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) that there are now more than 12 million people living in the vast area. Indigenous Peoples (IP) communities are composed of 100 ethno-linguistic groups found in about 1.5 million hectares located in various parts of the Philippines. The importance of indigenous territories to biodiversity conservation cannot be overemphasized especially because of the deterioration of the resource base that has affected the country as a whole. While there is a pressing need to ensure sustainable resource use in the uplands, government policies and programs pertaining to the utilization of these resources, which cover watersheds, mineral deposits, timberlands and others of monetary value may not be the same as the principles, beliefs and practices espoused by IPs in accordance to their traditional resource rights. Furthermore, the worldview of IPs is perceived to be evolving which may impact on their present-day behavior.

An understanding of the indigenous knowledge, beliefs, and practices of the IPs at present time could serve as a springboard towards developing a framework for the sustainable planning and management of upland resources. The incorporation of IP values, knowledge and management systems into decision making with respect to the conservation of biodiversity in Puerto Galera, one of the areas regarded as a biosphere reserve is the object of the study. It aims to: (1) describe the knowledge, beliefs, and practices of the Iraya Mangyans in Barangay Baclaran, Puerto Galera on the use, planning, and management of resources within their ancestral domain; (2) determine the awareness and understanding of the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA); (3) identify opportunities and constraints in the planning environment of the Iraya Mangyans; and (4) recommend measures to enable the Iraya Mangyans to fulfill their role in planning and managing their domain.

The views shared by the selected respondents for the study reveal that Iraya Mangyans in Barangay Baclaran regard their ancestral domain as a communal property where members share the forests, hunting grounds and bodies of water. They generally view land as life and themselves as stewards of the land. In this context, they are duty-bound to nurture their land and prevent the abuse and neglect of people, air, water, minerals, plants, animals and other organisms within it. With the granting of the CADT to the community, Iraya Mangyans became aware that the title could serve as their primary instrument in securing their ancestral domain. They also understood that the title comes with the responsibility to protect their land. Apart from this understanding, the CADT holders in Baclaran were not able to elaborate on specific rights and obligations as provided in the IPRA. Furthermore, interviews revealed that the Iraya Mangyans in Barangay Baclaran desire to have individual land titles other than the CADT.

Contrary to the popular perception that provision of tenure alone will encourage IPs active role in planning for their development and managing their resources, it, in fact, does not guarantee that communities will be pro-active and effective in natural resource management. The Ancestral Domain Sustainable Development and Protection Plan (ADSDPP), while serving as an empowering instrument, has not yet been fully understood and considered by the Iraya Mangyans in their courses of action. Given these findings, there is a need for planners, program implementers and decision makers to bridge the gap between the indigenous ways and the mainstream approaches to resource planning and management to ensure the integrity of the IP culture and practices while delivering appropriate programs and facilitating local government involvement and support in developing more workable and lasting use of land resources. Development initiatives such as the preparation of resource management plans should be guided by approaches that are, among others, based on the rights and obligations of the IPs and on their indigenous knowledge systems and practices.

In view of the Iraya Mangyans' rightful ownership of their land as well as their power to determine their future through sustainable use of what they have in the present, the study recommends the following: (1) re-assessment of the needs and aspirations of the Iraya Mangyans towards mutual learning/understanding; (2) consolidation of baseline data for an effective monitoring system for resource conservation; (3) capacity-building on planning and management of resources as an input to the ADSDPP; (4) capacity building for the Iraya Mangyans' provision of eco-tourism services; (5) review of local environmental policies; (6) integration in the local plans (LDIP, CLUP, CDP) of comprehensive and sustainable programs for the IPs in Puerto Galera.