

“Indigenous Peoples’ Advocacy on Oil Palm Development: Linking Grassroots Voices, Mobilization and Solidarity Networks between Palawan and Mindanao (the Philippines)”

<https://www.pkfeyerabend.org/en/2013/06/20/english-solidarity-and-joint-learning-and-action-among-indigenous-communities-resisting-oil-palm-monocultures-in-the-islands-of-palawan-and-mindanao-the-philippines/>

Project implementation period: from 15 June 2013 to 30 November 2014

Project areas: Southern Palawan and Northern Mindanao (The Philippines)

Grantee/Researcher-activist: Dario Novellino

Supporting organisation: ALDAW (Ancestral Land Domain Watch) and members of indigenous communities from Palawan and Mindanao.

PROJECT RATIONALE

In the Philippines, indigenous oil palm affected communities have limited opportunities for interacting with each others and exchange their experiences on current policies on biofuel and oil palm development, as well on their respective strategies to counter large corporations. Many indigenous communities (those who have not been exposed to oil palm development) also lack sufficient knowledge and understanding on the wider and long-term implications of these activities on their livelihood-base, forest ecology and cultural integrity. Oil palm companies, often succeed in convincing (brainwashing) local communities on the alleged benefits that they could bring to their life (e.g. school-education, hospital facilities, livelihood projects, etc.). As of now, agro-industrial development is responsible for blatant case of land grabbing (e.g. in Mindanao), as well as for the physical elimination of indigenous and farmer activists opposing oil palm corporations.

To respond to the above-described situation the project aimed at achieving the following tasks:

- Assisting indigenous peoples and their respective institutions of governance to gain a better understanding of what goes on at the national/international level in terms of policies and legislation, so that they can use such information in their own negotiations and advocacy at the local/regional level.
- Providing anti oil palm lobbying at the higher national level with continuous feedbacks from the ground (e.g. on the implementation of land conversion into mono-crop plantations).
- Identifying appropriate mechanisms in order to give a stronger voice to the indigenous communities affected/or going to be affected by oil palm plantations, while assisting them in sharing information, refining their own individual advocacy strategies and improve their understanding of national policies and international treaties and declarations.
- Generating awareness about indigenous peoples’ specific perceptions and experiences of extractive industries and oil palm development as well of biodiversity conservation and sustainable development, through networking and consensus building - with a view to mobilizing supportive policies, codes of conduct and mechanisms to help sustaining indigenous peoples struggles against the encroachment of corporations on their ancestral lands/domains.

- Communicating project findings to policy makers, so that indigenous culturally specific views can be taken into account in the making of new policy reforms and for the purpose of improving/changing existing ones.
- Creating solidarity networks and reciprocal supporting mechanisms, which would allow indigenous communities to come up with joint campaign/advocacy actions against mono-crop plantations (particularly oil palm) and extractive industries.



Oil Palm plantations in the Municipality of Espanola

A SUMMARY OF PROJECT KEY ACTIONS

On 13 June, 2013 Dario Novellino (the grantee) reached the Province of Butuan in Northern Mindanao. From this location he was able to approach selected Higanon tribal leaders from the Municipalities of Las Nieves, Buenavista, Nasipit and Carmen. On 20 June, some tribal leaders from the above mentioned locations and Dario travelled by bus to Malaybalay, Barangay Hagpa, Municipality of Impasugong (Province of Bukidnon). Here they met with the local Higanon leaders from 21 to 22 June. At the same time, an indigenous delegation came all the way from Palawan to join the meeting. As a result of these consultations on the impact of oil palm plantations, a document named the 'Malaybalay Resolution' was jointly signed. On 25 June, Dario and the Tisoy Mandawa - the Chairman of ALDAW (Ancestral Land Domain Watch) reached the Presidential Palace of Malacanan in Manila and submitted the resolution to the special office of the President. On the that day, the same document was also submitted to the central office of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR). A few weeks later, the 'Malabalay Resolution' prompted the Office of the President to take actions, such as requesting the concerned government agencies to properly address grievances and complaints included in the 'Malabalay Resolution'. As a result, a series of inter-agencies meeting took place and these were attended by the grantee, ALDAW, selected NGOs and indigenous peoples' representatives.



Indigenous participants showing the encroachment of oil palm plantations on a participatory map

Between 1 July and 30 November 2013, Information and Education Campaigns (IECs) were carried out by the grantee and the supporting ALDAW group, throughout Southern Palawan. The main purpose of these IECs was to provide orientations to indigenous communities on a key national legislation (the IPRA law), which protects IPs' rights, and on the strategic use of such law for countering oil palm plantations. At the same time, the IECs provided the ideal ground for building solidarity networks and advocacy alliances amongst the indigenous communities of the six southern municipalities of Southern Palawan.

On 10 July 2013, the grantee - in collaboration with ALDAW - provided important evidences to the office of the National Commission on Indigenous People (NCIP) about the human rights and environmental violations committed by the oil palm companies in Palawan. As a result, on 15 August, the NCIP sent a letter to Agumil (the main oil palm company) that it had illegally encroached on the ancestral domain of indigenous peoples in various municipalities of Palawan, and requested clarifications on the company's wrong doings.

On 26 July, 2013, the grantee assisted ALDAW to prepare a letter being addressed to Romeo Dorado, the Executive Director Palawan Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD) and urging the immediate stop of tree felling and conversion of primary and secondary forest for the development of oil palm plantations in Barangay Sandoval, Municipality of Bataraza. A copy of the same letter was also sent to the Director of the Provincial Environmental Natural Resources Office (PENRO).



Proofs of deforestation by Agumil in Sandoval

On 7 August 2013, the grantee in collaboration with ALDAW, participated to the first inter-agency meeting on oil palm plantations, which was widely attended by all concerned government agencies in Palawan, as well as by a representative of the President of the Philippines, and by members of the impacted indigenous communities. On that occasion the grantee submitted to the group a comprehensive discussion-document named: “15 Good Reasons why a moratorium on oil palm expansion should be implemented in Palawan and particularly in community conserved areas and territories (ICCAs)”.

On 10 September 2013, the grantee handed over to CENRO (City Environment and Natural Resources Office) crucial information and GPS locations showing the encroachment of oil palm plantation on timberland and ancestral domain of indigenous communities. This prompted CENRO to carry out its own field investigation confirming that Agumil plantations had been established on Alienable and Disposable Land, on Timberland, on indigenous ancestral domains (CADT) and even on portions of the Mt. Mantalingahan Protected Landscape (MMPL) within the Municipalities of Quezon and Rizal;



Tribal representative showing oil palm encroachment in Sarong (Bataraza)

On 4 October 2013, the grantee and an ALDAW team, visited Barangay Sandoval in the Municipality of Bataraza, after being informed by members of the local Pala’wan tribes that oil palm companies had encroached

on their customary land. This prompted CENRO to carry out their own investigation in the area. As a result, on 27 January, 2014 CENRO came up with their own report confirming the illegal encroached of Agumil on Alienable and Disposable Land and on Timberland in the Municipality of Bataraza.

On 10 October 2013, Dario drafted a letter, which was signed by different NGOs in Palawan, calling the Land Bank of the Philippines (the key financier of oil palm plantations) to fully comply with its guiding principles and to implement its corporate policy with reference to the financing of oil palm projects.

On 3 November 2013, the grantee assisted Charlito Nilasa (an ALDAW member) to prepare a report on his own findings during the implementation of the joined Multipartite Monitoring Team (MMT). The report made reference to massive forest clearing and removal of riparian vegetation along the edges of Lyabongan river in Bgy. Berong (Municipality of Quezon) allegedly being carried out by Agumil Philippines Inc. Charlito Nilasa also documented the illegal opening of a road along the side of the same river and being constructed by the same company, causing severe soil erosion and collapsing of river edges. Such findings indicate that Agumil Philippines Inc and PPVOMI oil palm companies had violated DENR Executive Order no. 23 in both barangay Tagusao and Berong. During the mission, Mr. Nilasa also found evidence of Agumil oil palm plantations expanding in the Tagbanua CADT areas in Berong with no formal evidence of free-prior informed consent (FPIC) being obtained by such communities, and with no Certificate of Precondition (CP) released by the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) to Agumil Philippines, Inc.

On 30 January 2014, the grantee requested and was able to secure a copy of the only SEP (Strategic Environmental Plan) clearance issued to PPVOMI (Palawan Palm and Vegetable Oil Mills Inc) [Agumil's sister company] by the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD) for its nursery and oil mill area (about 13 hectares). No SEP clearances have been issued, instead, for the remaining thousands of hectares being converted by Agumil into oil palm plantations (more than 7,000 ha until present time). This stood as a clear evidence that development and expansion of oil palm plantations was carried out without SEP clearance (as required by the law) and, therefore, in clear violation with the key provisions of the Strategic Environmental Plan (R.A. 7611);



Illegal road construction by Agumil in Calasaguen (Municipality of Brooke's Point)

On 6 February 2014, the grantee after several meetings with ALDAW and CENRO, succeeded in convincing the latter to file a criminal case against Agumil.

On 16 March, 2014 a complete profile-report on Agumil oil palm company (prepared by the grantee) was submitted to and published on Banktrack website. This document is still available online (https://www.banktrack.org/show/companyprofiles/agumil_philippines_inc). BankTrack is the international tracking, campaigning and CSO support organisation targeting private sector commercial banks ('banks') and the activities they finance. The organization's mission is to stop banks from financing harmful business activities; to promote a banking sector that respects human rights and contributes to just societies and a healthy planet; and to support fellow civil society organisations in their engagement with banks.

On 30 March 2014, the grantee in collaboration with the UK-based organization Biofuel Watch launched an 'International Declaration Against the 'Greenwashing' of Palm Oil by the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO). The declaration in defence of Human Rights, Food Sovereignty, Biodiversity and Climate Justice was translated in Spanish, German, Indonesian, French or Italian, and was signed by more than 270 organizations from all over the World. The declaration called policy makers to stop the conversion of forest land into monoculture oil palm plantations, that are precisely the cause of so many violations of the Right to Food and contrary to food sovereignty.

Between May and September 2014, the grantee, in collaboration with his partners from ALDAW and CALG (Coalition against Land Grabbing), played a major role in building consensus and strategic alliances amongst different stakeholders (IPs, farmers' cooperatives, small land holders, etc.) being adversely affected by oil palm development. The grantee, in partnership with the above mentioned organizations, was able to involve hundreds of people, from seven Municipalities (Aborlan, Narra, Sofronio Espanola, Quezon, Brooke's Point and Batarza) in a complex process of capacity building and 'levelling off' which provided them with the unique opportunity of meeting each others, discussing and agreeing on common advocacy strategies and finalizing the text of a petition requesting the Provincial Government to halt the expansion of oil palm plantations.



Indigenous Pala'wan showing newly harvested upland rice on a piece of land not yet taken by oil palm companies.

On 1 July 2014, the grantee in collaboration with ALDAW facilitated the creation of WOGOP (Working Group on Oil Palms), which included members of the major NGOs working in Palawan. However, WOGOP did not function as expected, mainly because the people attending meetings on the behalf of their respective organizations were not always the same persons, and, often, those attending were not knowledgeable about oil palm issues. The key objective of WOGOP was to operate as a real technical working group launching major advocacy actions. However this objective was not met due to the lack of commitment and shortsighted vision of the participating NGOs. As a result, the grantee and his ALDAW partners, decided to continue their advocacy alone, always keeping local communities at the centre of every action.

On 7-8 July and 1 August 2014 the grantee, in collaboration with ALDAW, carried out three different orientations on the oil palm moratorium signing in the Municipality of Espanola. The first orientation only involved indigenous members from Bgy. Iraray II, while the meeting on the 8th involved non-indigenous participants and cooperatives' members. Only on the meeting of 1 August, attended by representatives of Bgy. Punang, Iraray and Pulot II, we receive also the support of farmers' cooperatives, which decided to lead the process of petition signing in their own locations.

On 19 July, Dario and ALDAW began the petition signing process in the remaining Municipalities of Palawan.



Indigenous people during the petition's signing

On 18 and 19 August 2014, the grantee and Aldaw organized two consecutive oil palms related meetings in Bataraza Municipality. The first meeting involved pastors from different church denominations, while the second day meeting involved World Vision's personnel. Most of the pastors attending the first consultation gave their commitment for the collection of signatures among their followers and respective churches' members. The participants of the second orientations also gave their commitment to facilitate the process of petition signing. The petition was calling for a moratorium on oil palm plantations.

On 29 September 2014, all signatures collected on the ground were attached to the main text of the petition, which was signed by more than 4,200 individuals and handed over to Vice Governor Dennis Socrates during a meeting being facilitated by CALG. The meeting with Vice-Governor lasted about two hours and gave sufficient time to farmers and IPs from different municipalities to share their experiences and to express their grievances on the adverse impact of oil palm development. The meeting with vice-governor was followed on the next days by radio interviews, which provided an additional opportunity for the victims of oil palm development to bring their plights to attention to civil society at large

On 30 November, 2014 an alert condemning oil palm companies' violations in Palawan was compiled and posted on the ICCA Consortium Website (<https://www.iccaconsortium.org/index.php/2014/11/30/the-philippines-halt-oil-palm-rush-in-palawan-man-biosphere-reserve/>). This further contributed to strengthen the advocacy goals achieved during the PKF grant.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

With no doubts, the project was able to successfully accomplish its primary objectives and to set the bases for the present anti-oil palm movement in Palawan. The roots of whatever we have been able to achieve over the years, and up to current time, in terms of anti-oil palm advocacy, lie – indeed - in the 2013 PKF funded project. The latter was also pivotal to the signatory campaign calling for a moratorium on oil palm expansion in Palawan, which received massive support both on the ground and internationally. It must be pointed out that before the implementation of the PKF project the awareness of NGOs on oil palm issues was very low. At the same time, indigenous communities were completely at the mercy of oil palm companies and had no means and no strategy to counter the expansion of agribusiness plantations on their ancestral domain. The implementation of the PFK funded project was able to turn this situation upside down and to foster strategic alliances and solidarity links about oil palm impacted communities, none of which existed before.

On the other hand, the project was less successfully in building long lasting alliances between Palawan and Mindanao indigenous groups. There are several reasons for this: **a)** the Higanon of Bukidnon, after the drafting of the 'Malabalay Resolution', were unable to keep in touch with the Pala'wan counterpart. This is mainly because the local NGO supporting them had no sufficient human and financial resources to sustain the exchanges that we had initially foreseen between Palawan and Mindanao. Nevertheless, this did not encouraged ALDAW and the grantee to give up the initial idea of keeping the exchange on-going and, in fact, we also offered to the Higanon our support for writing a project proposal in support of their advocacy. As well, we promised them that we would have committed our own human resources to identify financial resources to sustain their struggle. We waited several months but no proposal was sent to us by our partners from Bukidnon; **b)** as far as concerning the Higanon of Las Vieves, Buenavista, Nasipit and Carmen, some of them were planning to run for political positions at the Municipal level and they frankly told us that their direct engagement in the anti-oil palm advocacy might have curtailed their plans. Some of them were also afraid of exposing themselves against oil palm companies and the politicians supporting them. Due to the high rate of extra-judicial killings taking place in their locations, they decided to play a low advocacy profile. Of course, we did respect their decision. Very sadly, one of the Higanon participants to our Malaybalay meeting was gunned down a few months after the signing of the 'Malabalay Resolution'.

The project, instead, has succeeded in building solidarity networks between those indigenous communities being affected by the oil palm industry in Southern Palawan. In fact, the strengthening and empowerment of these solidarity networks over the months, led to the establishment of an informal task force, which was created through the advocacy and capacity building of ALDAW (Ancestral Land Domain Watch). This task force named Task Force Opposing Large Scale Plantations in Palawan or *TASK-FORCE TUMUTUTOL SA MALAWAKANG NG MGA PLANTASYON SA PALAWAN (TF-TMPP)* was constituted on August 2014 after a meeting between 10 founding members was held in the Municipality of Quezon. Subsequently, as more members (ALDAW staff and associates) joined this group, it was decided to rename the task force as GROUP COALITION AGAINST LAND GRABBING, INC. (CALG), which was then legally registered as a non-profit organization under the Security Exchange Commission of the Philippines on 13 February, 2015. Since then, CALG has been the driving force in Palawan leading the struggle against rampant land grabbing, and it has invested considerable efforts in providing paralegal assistance and advocacy training, especially to those communities being impacted by oil palm plantations.

PROJECT CHALLENGES

As the project/grant was implemented the grantee and his local partners did face key challenges, some of which still remain unsolved.

Ineffective Judicial system

As mentioned above. ALDAW encouraged government agencies such as CENRO to file criminal cases against the Agumil oil palm company and, in the case of NCIP, to inform them about the violations committed by the company against indigenous peoples' rights. Unfortunately, as of now, court cases filed against oil palm companies, in spite of all proofs of violations against them (further certified by DENR), are still waiting for a final conclusion, leaving community victims totally frustrated. With the present judicial system, companies and corporations have no fear to encroach inside timberland and indigenous ancestral lands. On the other hand, large companies like Agumil can still get away by not answering government's letters and demands and by bluntly violating the law with no fear of being apprehended. This is why complementary mechanisms would be needed to provide remedy for abuses and violations within indigenous peoples' ancestral domains. Moreover, indigenous communities should receive much more information and locally accessible, well-resourced, independent mediation to make remediation processes effective. As of now, the inequitable balance of power between companies corrupted state officials and communities might even frustrate the effective implementation of the IPRA law.

Bureaucratic paperwork being too slowly processed by NCIP Palawan

NCIP, the government agency in charge of implementing the IPRA law (Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act) is well known for its slowness in acting, especially at the Provincial level, where the organization is being influenced by the Governor of Palawan, who is himself a business man and a driving force behind the operations of some agribusiness firms. Presently, CALG has established good ties with the Regional Office of the NCIP, which is putting some pressure on its provincial staff, so to encourage them to act more quickly on indigenous peoples' requests. In spite of this, bureaucracy continues to delay key actions and this was surely the case during the grant/project being supported by PKF.

Unstable peace and order situation

Fluctuant peace and order situation, with episode of confrontation between military forces and insurgency movements, has led the trend in Palawan when the PKF supported project was being implemented. Sometimes, the communist guerrilla (NPA – New Peoples’ Army) infiltrated in the areas where the grantee and his partners worked. On some occasions, the grantee and his indigenous team was forced to slow down some activities or vacate the area until peace and order was restored. Although, NPA does not attack NGO members they do take drastic actions against companies and corporations encroaching on indigenous peoples’ and farmers’ lands. Some of these actions (burning companies’ equipment), although have short-term positive effects (i.e. they slow down companies’ operations), they do lead to increasing militarization, with the risk of indigenous people finding themselves trapped in the cross-fire between guerrillas and militaries.

Communities’ social cohesion being affected by the work of corporations

Often indigenous communities become split due to the divisive practices of large corporations aiming at fragmenting people’s unitary responses and at dividing them into ‘pro-mining’ and ‘anti-mining’, ‘pro-oil palms’ and ‘anti-oil palms’, etc. Overall in the Philippines, there have been various degrees of division amongst indigenous groups on whether to accept mining companies and agribusiness firms in their areas. Often, mining corporations and agribusiness firms have bribed community members. In some cases, selected individuals have received financial support and specific privileges such as free access to mining companies’ hospitals and medical services. Others, instead, have decided to make no compromises and to protect their land and resources at all costs from mining corporations and oil palm companies. To make the situation even more complicated, some officials of the National Commission on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) - rather than supporting their legitimate constituents (the indigenous people) - have allegedly sided with the mining and oil palm companies. As a result, some NCIP-Palawan officials have pushed for the election of ‘tribal chieftains’ and have used them to bypass the correct procedures for obtaining Free and Prior Informed Consent. Hence, NCIP elected ‘tribal chieftains’ have often operated against the interests of their own communities and in conflict with the traditional tribal leaders. This is why the creation of solidarity networks and communities exchanges during the grant/project was so important. This gave to the grantee, and his local partners, the opportunity to inform communities about the divisive strategies being used by corporations for the purpose of creating internal divisions and factionalism. In this respect, during project implementation, we provided in-depth information to communities on the impact of oil palm plantations, so to allow them to make informed decisions on whether to allow them on their ancestral territory.

Conflicting and overlapping laws and legislation

In the Philippines, laws and rules emanating from different sources are conflicting and overlapping. Furthermore, policies tend to change with each new leader, and different leaders emphasize different programs. We are all too aware of the conflict and confusion that has been generated by the simultaneous implementation of laws such as the National Integrated Protected Areas System (NIPAS), Community Based Forest Management Agreement (CBFMA), IPRA (Indigenous People’s Rights Act), etc., especially when these laws are implemented simultaneously in the same location. Generally, the indigenous communities are the primary victims of the great level of confusion being created by overlapping laws and ordinances, and by the way in which these are being interpreted by politicians, government officials and their

respective departments. For instance, in Palawan, the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD) - under the SEP law (The Strategic Environmental Plan) - is in charge of zoning “tribal ancestral lands”, while the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) is involved in CADT processes. Areas traditionally managed by indigenous communities are also being declared as “critical habitats” under Republic Act (RA) No. 9147. Some key bans within the newly declared critical habitats (CHs) include extraction of minerals, logging, quarrying, killing and collection of wildlife species, and wildlife trading. On the other hand, established tribal groups and indigenous cultural communities living within declared ‘critical habitats’ can, in principle, continue with their practices in accordance with the rules and customs traditionally observed, provided it is only for traditional and personal use, and not primarily for commercial purposes. However, as it is well known, most of IPs are engaging in commercial gathering of honey, rattan, *almaciga* (resin of *Agathis philippinensis*), etc. and thus, they would be affected by the said law. Restrictions within CHs would apply as well to IPs hunting and collection of wild species.

During the project and our meetings with the indigenous communities, we always emphasised that IPRA law and the concept of ICCA, should have precedence over other laws. As of now, there is a urgency in harmonization existing legislation. This is one of the prerequisite to avoid confusion amongst indigenous peoples that, often, are in the middle of the crossfire between acronyms, laws’ definitions and regulations, which they cannot understand and relate to. All the way through project’s implementation, the grantee and his team always defended the idea that the IPRA law and the notion of ICCA should have precedence over declared ‘critical habitats’ and, overall, over protected areas legislation. This is because – as of now – the declaration of Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs), CHs and protected areas have not properly recognized the role played by indigenous peoples in the management of their ‘territories of life’.

After six years from the implementation of the PKF project the need still remains of ‘harmonizing’ different laws and make them intelligible to local people. However, laws cannot be ‘harmonised’ unless the different players (e.g. government agencies, departments, decision makers, etc.) are also harmonized. Furthermore, I should highlight the fact that it takes a huge amount of time for indigenous people to internalize and fully understand laws and regulations. It is not surprising that, after almost 20 years from the passing of the IPRA law, many indigenous communities, nation-wide, have no idea of what the law says and no means, whatsoever, to apply for CADT, unless significant support is being provided by outsiders (NGOs, etc.). This is why the support from PKF was essential to foster some clarity amongst indigenous communities on the meanings of different laws and how these could be used to counter the aggression of oil palm companies.

Since the PKF grant was implemented, the political scenario in the Philippines has become even more complicated due to the election of Presidente Rodrigo Duterte, and the escalating extra-judicial killings of environmental and human rights defenders (EHRDs). In addition to this, non-Filipino nationals supporting indigenous people (including religion persons such as nuns and priests) have now much higher chances to become persona non grata and of being deported. Thinking in retrospect, it would have been almost impossible today for the grantee to carry out the same advocacy activities that were implemented during the PKF supported grant, without risking immediate deportation and/or physical elimination.

'SIX YEARS LATER': CONCLUSIVE REFLECTIONS

Gaining trust of local government authorities

Since the implementation of the PKF supported grant, I can say that that local government agencies have begun to trust and respect the work done by CALG. Again, it is important to emphasize here that CALG was, indeed, one of the outshoots of the 'PKF 2013 Grant'. This is to say that CALG foundations lie in those very crucial activities that were implemented during the PKF supported project between 2013/2014.

Low self-esteem of indigenous peoples beneficiaries

I have noticed that, since the grant was implemented the capacity of selected indigenous communities to stand for their rights has definitely improved. On the other hand, decades of abuses and discrimination against indigenous people and the prevailing colonial mentality of mainstream society, has affected the self-esteem and the confidence of many others. As of today, the grantee and CALG continue to work hard to empower local communities and to increase their sense of belonging and tribal identity. On the other hand, I'm also aware that it will take much time before the people will acquire the capacity to stand on their own, event without the assistance of other organizations.

Increasing dependence on money and purchased items

Since the grant was implemented six years ago, new emerging needs have continued to influence important choices being made by indigenous households. Members of self-sufficient societies who, until recently, made no use of 'money' are now becoming concerned about the formal education of their children and have come to realize that money could help them to achieve this and other objectives. Often, young indigenous people from the most acculturated communities migrate to the capital city to look for better job opportunities, working as housekeepers and helpers in restaurants. Some of them aspire to acquire higher education and have enrolled in college. Nevertheless, some of the solidarity networks that were established during the grant are still on-going and, as of now, serve as 'platforms' for indigenous people to meet and discuss critically the increasing challenges that they face.

FINAL REMARKS

Oil palm expansion in the Philippines is a huge issue, and the possibility that the country will become one of the key exporters of oil palm kernels and palm oil in Southeast Asia, after Malaysia and Indonesia, is not so remote. We are still taking action to counter this ominous scenario. For instance, recently, we have succeeded in convincing a Malaysian company to stop buying crude palm oil from the Agusan Group, to which Agumil (the oil palm company operating in Palawan) belongs. This was done by submitting and circulating clear evidences of Agumil's misconduct and violations of human and environmental rights. As a result of these actions, the buyers, during our engagement with Agusan, suggested the company to set up a grievance procedure and a public grievance platform to increase transparency, thus enabling stakeholders (in their business/supply chain) to raise questions or any concern they might have towards its operations. The buyers also suggested the company to resolve on-going social disputes on a transparent manner; to provide regular updates on a public corporate website about the progress of their engagement with all the key stakeholders (i.e. cooperatives, farmers and the relevant authorities).

On the other hand, aside from CALG, civil society and key Manila based NGOs, until now, have not taken up the oil palm issue seriously nor they have implemented systematic actions to counter it. While the support of international advocacy groups at the international level has been massive (more than 200,000 signatures collected to support our anti-oil palm campaign), in turn Philippine civil society continues to be largely silent on this issue. We, in CALG, feel that the 'missing link' in our advocacy is really the national advocacy level.

Just like mining, the anti-oil palm advocacy must be tackled through well-coordinated actions not only at the community, municipal and provincial levels but, above all, at the national level. If we do not do that, the tendency will be to compartmentalizing the local anti-oil palm struggle as a Palawan or Mindanao regional issue, failing therefore to do the lobbying that needs to be done at the national level...this is what we need at the moment.

A decisive and very urgent move to stop oil palm expansion at the national level is, indeed, much needed. The failure of oil palm plantations to respect basic environmental measures in Palawan, to the extent of grossly violating national laws is, indeed, a serious indication of what could happen to the entire Philippines, if the government's prediction of converting millions of hectares into oil palm plantations will truly materialise.

List of Acronyms, abbreviations and definitions

Barangay – The smallest political unit in the Philippines
CADT – Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title
CALG – Coalition against Land Grabbing
CBFMA – Community Based Forest Management Agreement
CH – Critical Habitats
CP – Certificate of precondition
DA – Department of Agriculture
DENR – Department of Environment and Natural Resources
FPIC – Free and Prior Informed Consent
IEC – Information and Education Campaign
INC – Ipilan Nickel Corporation
IPs – Indigenous Peoples
IPRA – Indigenous Peoples Rights Act
ECC – Environmental Compliant Certificates
EHRD – Environmental and Human Rights Defender
LGU – Local Government Unit
NCA – National Commission on Indigenous Peoples
NIPAS – National Integrated Protected Area System
NTFPs – Non-timber forest products
PD – Presidential Decree
SEP – Strategic Environmental Plan

- **This narrative report was prepared by the former grantee, Dario Novellino, on 13 June 2020. All documents mentioned in the section "A SUMMARY OF PROJECT KEY ACTIONS" will be sent via "We Transfer".**