



The Dulangan-Manobo
Bagumbayan, Sultan Kudarat

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Peace-Building

Partnership in Productivity: The Building Blocks

Ely Ungot, a Dulangan-Manobo from barangay Chua in Bagumbayan, Sultan Kudarat province, learned to stay on the very edge of the road whenever he would pass Christian territory.

Like the other Lumad in his village, he learned to keep a low profile, with head bowed, whenever he ventured out of the village. As children, the Dulangan-Manobo were raised believing that if they had to choose between a Christian and a Muslim to approach at all, it would always be a Muslim. But that would change, eventually.

“It took months before I could convince him to speak up for the Lumad,” CO-Multiversity organizer Mimi Pimentel said. CO-Multiversity is the partner organization of CIDA’s Philippine Development Assistance Program (PDAP) in a project called the Mindanao Program for Peace and Development (ProPeace). ProPeace is one of the joint efforts of Canada and the Philippines in the rehabilitation and peace-building effort in Mindanao. (*See page 75 for information on the ProPeace.*)

ProPeace, established in 2001 as Mindanao grappled with the ravages of a “total war” declared by president Joseph Estrada the year before, supports the development



The remains of the Manobos' daycare center where the children and adult observers alike learned how to read and write.

initiatives of the Muslim, Lumad and Christian populations. In short, ProPeace is a “tri-people” response to the situation in Mindanao. It is premised on the belief that the conflict in Mindanao is not one borne by social, ethnic, religious or cultural differences, but by the scourge of widespread poverty.

“You can look at conflict from a socio-cultural to a religious perspective, but for PDAP, we see the issue as poverty. ProPeace is a recognition of the poverty context of the war, which is why our main strategy is also livelihood and enterprise interventions,” said Jerry Pacturan, PDAP’s managing director. “So, whether the community is purely an IP group or a combination of two or three of the population groups, PDAP may enter the picture because we want to address the issue of poverty and contribute to the community’s livelihood development.”

The communities supported by ProPeace are in various post-conflict stages of peace-building and development, just like barangay Chua where the three sectors are relishing newfound solidarity and oneness, a far cry from a time when ethnic prejudices and fears held sway.

With assistance from Propeace, the Daguma Range Tri-people’s Federation, the network of people’s organizations in Chua organized by CO-Multiversity, is engaged in a host of livelihood and enterprise development activities. These include a solar dryer for the peasant organizations, two cooperative stores run by the women’s groups, and goat dispersal for the youth association. Before these initiatives could commence, however, CO-Multiversity conducted several “culture of peace” seminars, first separately with the three different groups, then in joint sessions.

A Manobo mother and her children; CO-Multiversity staff Mimi Pimentel; youth volunteer Joannee Mendoza; and the initially "reluctant" Manobo spokesperson Ely Ungot
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“It was frustrating because Ely was articulate when the Lumad met among themselves. You could see his leadership potential stand out. But our tri-people meetings would start and end with him, as representative of the Lumad, saying not a single word,” Mimi recalled.

Finally, Mimi sat Ely down to convey the urgency of a Lumad voice. “I thought to myself when I watched and listened to the Christian and Muslim representatives, ‘They are not much older than me, not much different from me. Their issues are similar to ours. They worry about the same rat infestation that destroyed our crops. If they can speak out, I should try to as well,’” Ely resolved.

The key, Mimi reflects, is constant personal encounter, in spite of and precisely because of the people’s prejudices and differences. Mimi and her colleagues at CO-Multiversity did not tire of gathering the residents of Chua for the sessions, even if at first blush these appeared to be “idle chats.” Neighbours began to realize their similarities, as well as differences, with one another from the constant sharing of their respective beliefs, practices and customs, and the exchange of personal stories. “I knew we were okay when the three groups could afford to joke about their differences and laugh together,” Mimi said.

When she saw practically Ely’s entire community coming down the road to attend the federation’s first general assembly, Joannee Mendoza, a Christian

youth leader of Chua, could not believe her eyes. Even now, her voice falters when she remembers. “I was stupefied. They were all there – old men and women, the adults, the children. They even brought with them the infants and laid them in makeshift cribs tied to the posts,” she said. The Lumad were quiet, Joannee noted, but the sight of so many of them leaning against the wall was overwhelming.

Today, when Ely and the other Dulangan-Manobo from his village bump into their Christian and Muslim neighbours in the footpaths, market, the motor-cab depot or the double-tire bus, they trade updates about their different projects, aside from updates on their private lives. They celebrate one another’s achievement and lament one another’s misfortunes in unity. A few months ago, a Dulangan-Manobo’s pregnancy complication set off the whole barangay in a panic search for a *habal-habal* or *skylab* (local terms for an improvised motorcycle) to bring her to the health center in the town proper. It turned out to be a life-threatening ectopic pregnancy treated in the nick of time.

Indeed, the divisions have melted away and the reality of peace is gelling in Chua. In the meetings held outside the barangay, Mimi added, the Christian and Lumad participants take care of asking the question for their Muslim companions: “Are you serving us pork? None of us here eats pork.” Sometimes, Mimi would spy a Muslim break into a shy smile.

The vegetable depot for the farmers of Chua; a typical outhouse; the usual modes of access to and from upland villages in Mindanao such as Chua, fully packed jeepneys and “skylab” motorcycles improvised to hold one driver and as many as four passengers

