



CORDILLERA PEOPLES ALLIANCE

For the Defense of the Ancestral Domain and for Self Determination

PERSPECTIVE ON CORDILLERA DEVELOPMENT AND REGIONAL AUTONOMY

A century of societal change from subsistence to globalization

Gawis ay agew ken dakayo am in. Greetings from the Cordillera Peoples Alliance. And thank you for this opportunity to be with IIC(Igorot International Consultation); on the topic of development in the Cordillera, which is a reflection on the past and a view on the present.

A.A CENTURY OF SOCIETAL CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE CORDILLERA

A century of rapid economic and social change has transformed the Cordillera from subsistence economy and traditional indigenous village society, to now being mainstreamed into the national Philippine society and the global economy. To paraphrase the venerable Scotty (William Henry Scott), "Igorots are now part of the pancit culture".

To reflect on our past, the cordillera region inhabited by Igorot indigenous peoples, missed out on the feudal economic and social change during more than 300 years of Spanish colonization. Yet in only one hundred years of the succeeding fifty years of American colonial and fifty years post colonial period, since the turn of the twentieth century; the once pre colonial village based Cordillera subsistence economies and traditional indigenous societies, has mainstreamed into the national Filipino society and the globalized economy. The subsistence economy has been eroded or marginally operates alongside cash crops, employment, commerce, or other gainful livelihood including overseas work. The very local ili/tribe world view continues to transform, though unevenly. There is a Kaigorotan consciousness and there is now a more inclusive Cordillera identity, as well as a Filipino consciousness which is our nationality; and there is the global citizen in the Igorot diaspora.

At the turn of the twentieth century, American colonial governance rapidly encompassed the Cordillera; aided by missionaries from Protestant (i.e Anglican, Presbyterian, Lutheran) and Roman Catholic (CICM and ICM) institutions. Christian proselytizing combined with programs in education, health, and skills training for livelihood and commerce. These supported the colonial government's policies on public education, representative governance directly experienced at town level, infrastructure like roads as well as public services like health, and development of a skilled labor force. These complemented the economic development policy of natural resource extraction - namely commercial operations of the gold and copper mines, mega dams to tap the rivers for energy, and temperate vegetable cash crops. This economic development scenario carried on into the post colonial Philippine governments, after independence in 1947, and into the present.

The remarkable socio-econ-pol-cultural or societal change has comprehensively transformed the Cordillera. Yet, essential aspects of our indigenous identity- culture, language, practices, and values persist. Our identity is with us wherever we are because we live it. For the Igorot diaspora, this has been sustained by BIBAK organizations and now also by IGO. Locally, this has been nourished in the struggle for indigenous peoples rights and assertion of self determination by the progressive peoples movement. These advocacies are actively waged locally and globally in the international arena of the indigenous peoples movement. The Igorot diaspora is understandably concerned mainly with identity and culture- like our indigenous attire (tapis and g string) as well as other symbols of our Igorot identity, dance and song and other cultural practices, and some support for local needs like scholarships and medical missions.

Whereas locally, the indigenous peoples movement address comprehensive concerns of which the more pressing are: ancestral and collective land rights, livelihood and employment, free prior and informed consent on development projects and benefits from such, militarization and human rights, as well as the political issue of regional autonomy.

B. PRESENT CORDILLERA DEVELOPMENT AND NATIONAL CONTEXT

In the present era of globalization, at this turn of the twenty first century, the Cordillera is a deforested and degraded natural resources environment. A century of rapid socio economic development had its consequences from logging, large scale mining, mega dams, chemical pesticide - fertilizer dependent vegetable cash crop industry, and waste disposal; now afflicting Baguio City and main town centers. Global warming induced climate change in weather patterns have affected agriculture, and have aggravated disasters especially erosions and ground subsidence in mining communities and other deforested mountain sides. Mining pollution has affected our river systems and is inimical to agriculture and river biodiversity. A rapidly decreased forest cover due to logging and an expanding vegetable industry has damaged watersheds with resulting limited irrigation and water supply.

There is crisis in livelihood and employment. The once robust vegetable industry is down due to the globalization policy of agricultural liberalization, that allow foreign agricultural produce to flood the local market; aside from the increasing cost of vegetable production, due to toxic soil and pests that require ever increasing expensive inputs. There is aggressive large scale mining expansion pushed by investors and the government; but there is as well active community opposition due to negative lessons from the operations of large scale mines. And the positive regular, and stable employment experienced with early large scale mine operations, is no longer the case with the present corporate preference for contractual labor. At present, it is the small scale mining industry that absorbs labor and provides livelihood for an increasing number of Cordillera rural families. There is rapid expansion of small scale mining areas covering all Cordillera provinces. About 45,000 fulltime and seasonal workers now depend on small scale mining as of 2011, increased from about 23,000 in 2007 and about 21,000 in 2005.

Employment in the cordillera is a microcosm of the national situation, in which nurses and those seeking employment overseas can not find work because of the global economic crisis. There is need for nurses in hospitals and rural areas but the government has no budget to absorb them. Which is the same for all other lines of work – the government cannot absorb and employ our annual thousands of new graduates. Without industrialization and stunted agriculture, the economy cannot absorb , an ever increasing labor force.

And this brings us to key points of the national context that bear on Cordillera development.

1. Legacy of colonial economic policy to export natural resources(i.e. logs/mineral ore) and agricultural products (copra/sugar/abaca); and to import manufactured products. The scenario of the Philippines as a natural resource and agricultural base while the U.S.A. and other industrialized countries like Japan are the industrial manufacturing centers. This foreign oriented, anti Filipino economic policy has historically stunted Philippine economy and has carried on up to the present era of globalization; where the Philippines has subscribed to the global policies of agricultural liberalization- privatization- and deregulation that benefit the dominant capitalist countries, but is inimical to countries like the Philippines. Now, we are left biting the dust while our neighboring countries that have undertaken national industrialization and modernized their agriculture have advanced to the benefit of their peoples.

2. Complementary to such foreign oriented economic development policy is the present national program for large scale mining operations, which directly affect the Cordillera being a mineral rich region; and where this is a general concern with community based opposition. Issues include control and

management of land and resources, just benefit from resources, and environmental concerns of degradation and pollution.

3. The export of labor, or official brain drain, is a short sighted and self defeating national policy . This may be immediately beneficial in terms of dollar remittances ; but it undermines long term Philippine development, aside from the social cost of separated families. We need our human resources to advance science, social, and over all national development.

4. The pyramid structure of Philippine society, with a ruling elite at the tip of the pyramid that control economic and political power, is a basic national context of development. The economic development policies articulated above mainly serve the interest of such ruling elite and their foreign partners. There can be changes of regimes as we have gone through from Marcos to the present; but with the elite class intact and exercising power from regime to regime, people's welfare is not genuinely addressed, and aspirations for social change are frustrated. But there is a nation -wide people's movement, of people's organizations (POs) and NGOs or Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) that persist in working for social change. And there is clamor for reforms within government – parliamentary, executive, and judicial. It is also a reality that, the deep divisions in Philippine society manifested in the pyramid structure, are such that there is a long running insurgency. A section of the population has opted to wage armed struggle against the established authority to achieve revolutionary change in Philippine society. This nation wide insurgency, is under the umbrella of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) with members that include the Cordillera People's Democratic Front, New Peoples army, and the Communist Party of the Philippines. There is Peace Talks between the NDFP and the GRP(Government of the Republic of the Philippine). And it is important in our development endeavors to consider the substance and results of such Peace Talks, because they are crucial to development work, especially the present phase on Socio Economic Reforms (SER). There is also localized insurgency in Mindanao by the Moro Islamic Liberation front (MILF), and Peace Talks is underway between them and the government.

C. TOWARDS PEOPLES DEVELOPMENT WITH REGIONAL AUTONOMY

As we face the challenges of economic and political development in the cordillera today; we reflect on the remarkable changes of the past one hundred years, take stock of problematic present realities, and explore prospects for the future. The colonial legacy of export oriented economic policy has persisted with dire results in terms of a stunted economy – backward agriculture and no industrialization. For example our mining industry exports raw mineral ore instead of processing such and building a steel industry, which is a foundation for industrialization and national development .

The government's 2004-2010 Medium Term Cordillera Regional Development Plan (RDP), that is within the Medium Term Philippine Development Plan (MTPDP); and which subscribes to the United Nations Millenium Development Goals (UN-MDG), is still within the discredited natural resource extraction – export oriented economic model that stunts industrialization and national development. A refreshing feature of the Cordillera RDP is the inclusion of cultural integrity and regional autonomy as development goals, in response to the popular assertion of Indigenous People's rights. But there should be vigilance so that this does not remain as lip service, without substance and reality.

The on going peace talks between the NDFP and GPH (Government of the Republic of the Philippines) gives opportunity for public appraisal of the development programs of the contending parties. The government (GPH) Cordillera RDP and national MTPDP are readily available. For the NDFP, it is during the Peace Talks such as now, that there is wider opportunity for the public to scrutinize the NDFP-GPH programs especially the second agenda on Comprehensive Agreement on Socio – Economic Reforms (CASER). “The NDFP Perspective on the Comprehensive Agreement on Social and Economic

Reforms”, call for genuine agrarian reform and national industrialization. It addresses social justice and people’s welfare towards decisive eradication of poverty. It supports Cordillera indigenous peoples ancestral land rights and just share from resources, as well as the right to self determination and aspiration for regional autonomy.

Civil society or Peoples Organizations (POs) and non government organizations (NGOs), have engaged in people based development work, for over three decades. This combine socio –economic development with human rights and indigenous peoples rights. People based development address integrated and comprehensive socio – economic welfare, with active people’s participation, social justice, and sustainability that presently highlight climate change concerns. Cordillera development should nurture agro forestry, contribute to industrialization, and build self reliance.

Peoples development is not only socio-economic prosperity, and it is built together with people’s empowerment. Painsstaking and determined exercise of self determination should result in political maturity that would eventually achieve Genuine Regional Autonomy, which is the appropriate political framework for comprehensive development in the Cordillera.

In brief, the key points and principles of genuine development for indigenous peoples are:

1. Defense, management, and nurture of Ancestral land, resources, and environment.
2. Social justice and equity on access to land and resources , as well as any socio economic benefit
3. Sustainable development with organic agriculture and appropriate technologies
4. People’s participation to ensure ownership and accountability, as well as build self reliance
5. Assertion of indigenous peoples rights and right to self determination

Regional Autonomy initially advanced by the progressive people’s movement, is the applicable political framework for strategic cordillera development. But Regional Autonomy must be understood in its full substance as the exercise of self determination . It is not just devolution or decentralization of governance powers and administration. Neither is it only about funds and projects. And it should not dismember the Cordillera as one integral region of dominantly indigenous peoples. If it takes more time to absorb and unite on the essence of Regional autonomy, then so be it; but we become autonomous as one whole undivided Cordillera region. The third attempt to pass a law on Regional Autonomy at this time is again current political debate with a bill in Congress. Two earlier attempts were rejected.

Regional Autonomy is based on indigenous peoples’ rights and the right to self determination of indigenous peoples. It define the relationship of the autonomous region with the national government, as well as that of the Cordillera people in particular with the wider Filipino people of which we are part of. This would require a genuinely democratic local and national context for its operation. It combines the process and program for the fulfillment of our strategic aspiration of genuine regional autonomy with programs and campaigns that deal with present urgent problems and issues.

Indigenous peoples right to self determination is the right to decide on the social – cultural – political - and economic life. This includes genuine or people – based development on livelihood, social services and the economy. And this is linked with the cultural and political aspect of self determination, whether the goal is cultural like on language, religion or other aspects of culture; or political like levels of self governance such as regional autonomy. Genuine socio economic development embodies the people’s priorities, done at their own pace, and with their full participation. There should be access to information from local to international, equal opportunities for all sectors with special concern for women and youth. In this light, the Cordillera Peoples Alliance qualifies its perspective on regional autonomy as genuine, as distinguished from other versions of regional autonomy that do not address the full substance of self determination.

Regional Autonomy is not genuine if it does not address current problems which are manifestations of national oppression that violate the right to self determination. For the militant mass movement, Genuine Regional Autonomy is both a long term goal (i.e. autonomy act, structure, and positions) alongside

simultaneous action on current peoples issues; while continuously building unity and practice on the substance and features of self determination, including socio economic development at local levels or on specific concerns. These are the building blocks for grassroots people's empowerment which should be the foundation for Genuine Regional Autonomy in the future.

A. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The over all challenge, as we face the future, is for a perspective of development that upholds indigenous peoples rights and the right to self determined development, address economic and social justice, within the context of national industrialization and progressive agriculture, and is self reliant and sustainable now and for future generations. It is also a challenge to make this operational within the framework of genuine regional autonomy. And a further particular challenge is to support the on going Peace Talks of the NDFP-GRP, specially the present phase on Socio-economic reforms (SER).

Reflecting on our subsistence roots and indigenous systems, there are enduring practices and values that persist and that should be nurtured; because they enhance our humanity and social being even now in the 21st century. Among these, from Aplai or northern Kankanaey mainly Sagada are: the practice of **gubbaw** – of giving an Igorot name from family genealogy to a newborn. And there are the values of : **inayan** – admonition of good conduct because any ill you do to others or to nature will get back to you; **ayyew**-an exhortation to be good stewards of all material things especially food items because there is always somebody in need, and we must be good stewards of resources because our concern is not only for the present but also for future generations ; **ipeyas nan gawis** – to share and spread every good practice or value or whatever is good for others to also benefit; and **kasiyana** – a coping positive attitude in the midst of problems or crisis - that there is morning and sunshine after the night and darkness, therefore be strong to face the situation and move on.

As in the past, the challenge for the Igorot diaspora, is to be informed and possibly involved on events in the Cordillera. Inspired by the past, we nourish the present, and build a more prosperous future. Wherever you are as global citizens, the Cordillera home land will always be here; which we defend and nourish, for the spring to keep flowing. And of course changing, but with our values in place, and the hearth warm with the fire always burning.

Good day to all and best wishes for a successful Ninth Biennial IGO Igorot International Consultation (IIC).

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