



DAVE DE VERA

Executive Director
Philippine Association for
Intercultural Development

INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY CONSERVED AREAS

I will share something that you have always known. We just need to reiterate it as part of permanent policy and institution. I will also share trends and results of what we have been advocating for so long.

What are indigenous community conservation areas? These are the natural and modified ecosystems, including significant biodiversity, ecological services and cultural values voluntarily conserved by the indigenous communities. These are guarded by the community itself and are not declared protected areas but declared by the indigenous people as their own conservation areas.

This is the oldest form of conservation. It is not recognized by the government, but it is there. It predates all forms of projects, policies and conservation efforts. Indigenous community conservation areas have existed since time immemorial. All ancestral domains have indigenous community conservation areas. Indigenous conservation is found in almost all ecosystems.

Motivations for establishing and sustaining conservation areas vary among indigenous communities. For instance, many IP communities established conservation areas to sustain their traditional nutritional needs. In Aurora for example, certain parts of the riverbed were protected because these

Many IP Communities maintain conservation areas to sustain their nutritional needs.



served as shrimp nurseries. There were not ordinances or zoning, simply common understanding among all clans not to touch those parts of the riverbed for a certain period.

You may see from this picture of the Palawan people taken four years ago and notice that the boar is huge. They agreed that hunting season would only be from September to December. In case others would want to hunt during off-season, there is only a designated area.

This is in Aurora. For the Agta, many water sources are considered sacred. They have specific names to indicate the sacredness of the place. They have strict rules regarding the movement and activities near water sources.

There are three defining characteristics of ICCA, which have been agreed upon through years of consultations among indigenous communities globally. There are specific indigenous peoples or local communities that are closely concerned about that area, related to them culturally and/or because of livelihood. Such communities are major players and hold power in deciding, implementing and enforcing management decisions. For instance, if you go to Mt. Dimacili in Bukidnon, some places there do not have fences or notices, but the people fear to go near these places because of legends. Rules were 'established' by the elders, such as Amay Lakandilang.

The third definition states that voluntary management decisions and efforts of such communities achieve conservation results, although their intention may not be necessarily related to conservation. More often people say that superstitions are not true, but the conservation zones



The Palawan People for instance reserve certain areas of the forest for seasonal hunting w/c is regulated by traditional rules.



The Agta have very strict rules that regulate movement and activities near water sources.

ICCAs define the identity, coverage and extents of Indigenous territories



Provide habitat for nature, host environmentally critical areas and sustain life.

These areas (ICCAs) are the basis of securing income and resources such as energy, food, water, and fodder for millions of people,

ICCAs are "convergence points" of conservation and livelihood security for many Indigenous Communities in the Philippines.

established by communities are actually the areas that sustain life in the Philippines.

What is the significance of ICCA in the Philippines? It is clear that almost all ancestral domains have ICCAs because these define the identity of coverage of the indigenous territories. For instance, if someone files an ancestral domain claim, the first markers would be the tombs. I have been working with indigenous people for 27 years, and if you want to learn the trail, you

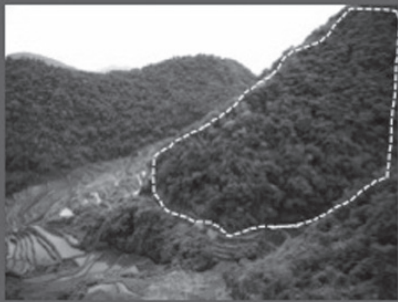
ask for the markers and they would point the sacred mountain, the lake, and their burial grounds, and by that they define their territory.

The ICCAs provide habitat for nature, host environmentally critical areas, and sustain life. In the Cordillera, conflict areas are declared common conservation areas, and these contribute to conflict resolution. They agree on rules in preserving the *gulongs*.

When we go to Banaue, we notice the rice terraces. But these rice terraces will not exist if there is no irrigation coming from the flood forest. It is not a government policy, it does not have funding, yet for thousands of years the watershed has sustained the terraces.

The whole Daguma range is considered sacred by the Dulangan. The lowlanders have become rich because of the bountiful agricultural harvest, and yet very little has come back to the Dulangan people for having ensured water that irrigates the lowlands of the Daguma range.

These places prevent mining as well, even if there is strong pressure for mining in the Cordillera. In Mountain Province, if the area



The Muyong of the Ifugao



Daguma Mt. Range in the ARMM

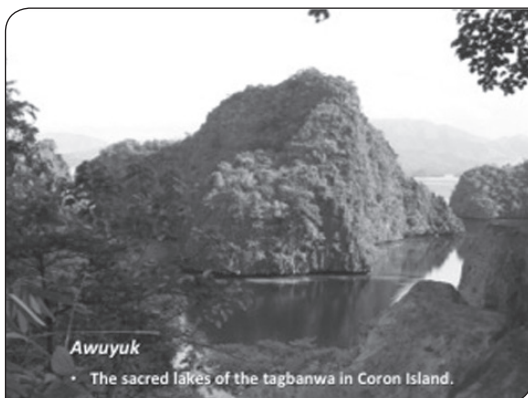
A sacred zone to the *Dulangan* and *Teduray* Communities. Headwater from the Mt. Range sustains the farms of lowland communities.



Photo by M. Patchay

The Batangan (community tree-farms in Sagada)

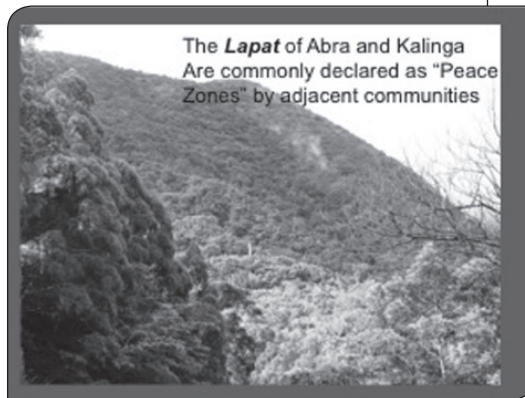
Tayan Areas in Mt. Province



Awuyuk

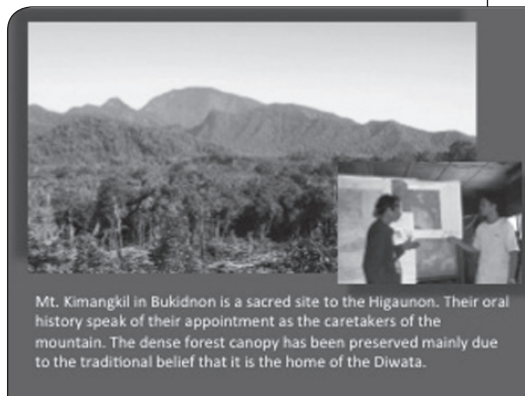
• The sacred lakes of the tagbanwa in Coron Island.

The *Lapat* of Abra and Kalinga Are commonly declared as "Peace Zones" by adjacent communities

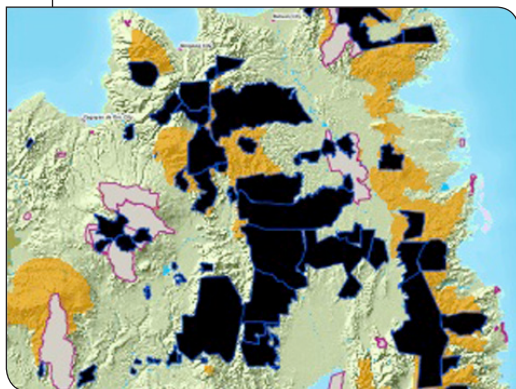
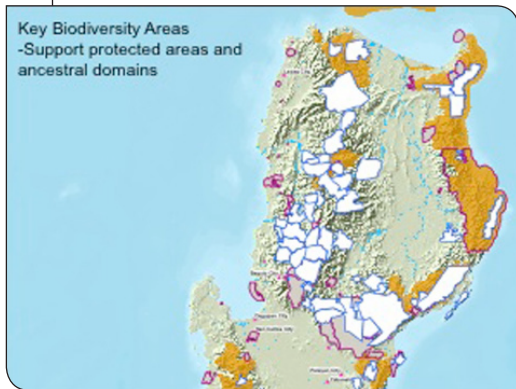
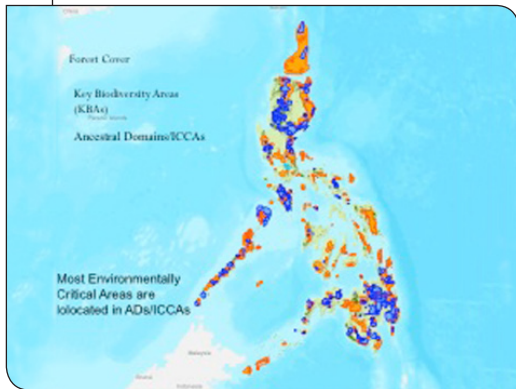


is declared *tayan* area, it is not opened to mining activities. The *batangan*, the old fine trees in Sagada are common conservation areas of the people of Sagada. Mt. Dimacili, on the other hand, is the best area that exemplifies everything that I am talking about, and it is not even a protected area. The DENR wanted to declare it a park, but the people said no. It is already a park, according to them, and they have been given the roles of being stewards by the *diwata*.

You will find the elders there taking the responsibility of protecting the area. Meanwhile, the lakes in Coron, the sacred place of the Tagbanua, are already in the hall of fame. Forests in Abra and Kalinga are called *lapat* areas or conservation zones.



Mt. Kimangkil in Bukidnon is a sacred site to the Higaunon. Their oral history speak of their appointment as the caretakers of the mountain. The dense forest canopy has been preserved mainly due to the traditional belief that it is the home of the Diwata.



ICCAs in the Philippines include sacred sites, natural features, indigenous territories, cultural landscapes and seascapes as well as marine areas. ICCA sites represent different biogeographic regions. They can be found from the mountain ranges all the way to the other zones in the Philippines to the coral reefs. They provide habitats to a high diversity of flora and fauna.

Almost all ancestral domains have ICCAs. It will not be an ancestral domain if it does not have sacred and traditionally conserved areas. Based on the IUCN definition of ICCAs, at the very least, there could be as many ICCAs as there are indigenous cultural communities in the Philippines. There could even be more because ICCAs are not limited and exclusive to areas conserved by indigenous peoples but include other areas conserved by other local communities.

These are the Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) that we identified through a national biodiversity strategic action plan. These are the ancestral domains.

Government strategy is simply to declare these as protected areas and reservations (PARs). Our progress is slow, maybe because of money, politics, etc. But who is giving de facto management of the ancestral domain? The indigenous tribes.

KBAs are huge in Mindanao, but the performance of PARs remains slow. Why wait for PARs when in reality, these are ancestral domains. Can you imagine the opportunity if we partner with the tribes when the system of conservation proven since time immemorial is already in place? Besides, there is a legal framework such that we can explore other options beyond PARs.

But ICCAs are under siege by private organizations and NGOs that have emerged as the new actors and ‘managers’ of the resources. You will notice the billboard reads, “You are now entering Tagaytay Area Protected Forest Reserve. Gathering of forest product is strictly prohibited and punishable by law.” The people however did not agree since their livelihood only comes from the area.

In fact there is still conserved area in Aurora because of the indigenous people, yet the government spends millions of pesos to criminalize them, not even understanding that their governance is exactly what we need to conserve the resource. Up to now, that billboard exists, criminalizing the people who actually conserve the area.

Control of the local conservation areas had been removed from the indigenous community. This picture is just about one hour from here. It is the closest CADT. It is in the boundary of Bulacan and Quezon City in Karahume. Karahume is actually an important term for the Agta, but suddenly they see this sign stating that their conservation area is now a Palmera Homes Subdivision, courtesy of a very famous senator. The Agta are now prohibited from entering the area.

Conflicting national policies, commercialization, strict competition and indifference have exacted its toll on the ability of indigenous peoples to sustain their management and governance of their conservation areas.

The lack of understanding of traditional governance and prejudice towards the skills of IP communities in managing the environment has been prevalent. The belief that they cannot manage the resource because they are not professionals has continued.

Commercialization and the entry of market economy and the pressure of popular culture have brought about a drastic change in values. Traditional culture and people’s relationship with the environment have been diluted. In South Cotabato, it is heart-breaking to learn that the B’laan kids who are scholars of the mining company are the same youth



- A global change of historical proportion happened through the last 7 centuries and has been accelerating at an unabated pace:
- States, and private or corporate owners emerged as new actors in the management of natural resources.

who are now signing the petition to declare their elders incompetent to decide for them. The 'educated' are saying now that their elders are incompetent because they are preventing development from coming in.



Ati Burial Grounds in Boracay

Unabated entry of development activities have had its toll in many Indigenous Community Conservation Areas

This is Boracay. This is the most expensive golf course in the world. This picture was taken right after the developers dug out the cemetery of the Ati and gave the Ati 17 sacks containing the bones of their fellow tribes people. The Ati have a CADT, but they are forbidden to build their houses on their ancestral domain. This order was issued by the President himself.

This has had the tremendous impact on many IP communities in the world. The very important link of indigenous cultures

to the environment has in many communities been broken. In many instances, the indigenous knowledge systems crucial in protecting and conserving the environment have been permanently lost. There are many communities in Central Luzon where the Aeta children and next generation know sugarcane but cannot recognize the *balite* tree and other old wood. Today we are losing a broad range of traditional knowledge systems along with the lifestyle and culture that has been successful in managing our forest and environmentally critical areas for a very long time. The real experts are diminishing in number.



Sec. 8j of the CBD recognises that indigenous peoples and local communities

- have much to contribute to the governance of state protected areas (shared governance), &
- can establish and govern their own conservation territories (ICTs) and conserved areas (ICCAs).



But there are shifting paradigms that we should all be aware of. In 2010, the global Biodiversity Outlook 3 was released and it was on the Convention on Biological Diversity or CBD. It defined national policies. CBD itself said that "in addition to officially designated protected areas, there are many thousands Community Conserved Areas (CCAs) across the world including sacred forests, wetlands, and landscapes, village lakes, catchment forests, river and coastal

stretches and marine areas. Some studies show that levels of protection are actually higher under community or indigenous management than under government management alone.

We have been saying that there is no budget for the traditionally conserved areas. Yet, these areas keep our world from the tipping point. If we remove these areas, it is the world's downfall, yet there is very little support and recognition.

The World Bank came up with an independent review in 2009 stating that traditional resource management practices in indigenous cultural communities are more effective than the government strict protected zone.

The CIFOR, the global think tank on forestry, also has a study that states "levels of forest destruction are higher in areas that have been declared as strict protection parks by the government compared to traditionally protected areas by ICCs." NGOs have not done this – there are already quarters that acknowledge the role of the indigenous people.

There is already an international framework. There are three major articles that Philippine government is signatory to, which promote respect and recognition of areas declared by the tribes as conservation zones. The CBD itself states that government should recognize the indigenous community conservation areas. It has a compliance mechanism, and the Philippines government is a signatory. It is now in the process of recognizing traditional conservation zones at par and same value as natural parks.

IPRA itself provided the local legal framework, providing the indigenous people's right to manage and conserve natural resources within their territories. They can also create sustainable development and management plan for their ancestral domain or where the conservation areas shall be identified and zoned.



Chapter 3 Sec. 7, b., Rights to ADs. (IPRA) states that IPs have the right to manage and conserve natural resources within the territories and uphold the responsibilities for future generations

The ICCs/IPs shall prepare their own ancestral domain sustainable development and protection plan (ADSDPP) in accordance with their customary practices, laws and traditions.



The problem is how to measure the level of awareness as well as the effectiveness of the management and governance plan. Many of us are resistant to the idea that there is traditional knowledge and governance on the health of the environment. We are also resistant to the belief system of people on healthy forests, but now we have a legal backhoe that we can use to actually zone out extractive activities in indigenous community conservation zones.



UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) 2007

Article 12

the right to manifest, practise, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies; the right to maintain, protect, and have access to their religious and cultural sites;

Article 25

the right to maintain and strengthen their distinctive spiritual relationship with their traditionally owned or otherwise occupied and used lands, territories, waters and coastal seas and other resources...

Article 29

the right to the conservation and protection of the environment and the productive capacity of their lands or territories and resources.

As a summary, indigenous community conservation areas have long existed in the Philippines and predate current initiatives of environmental conservation and protection. Ancestral domain areas offer the clearest illustration of self-determination through various forms of traditionally governed conservation systems that have proven to be very effective in protecting the environment and ensuring the sustainability of our natural resources for the future generation.

So it is better that we learn more from the experience of the indigenous cultural communities that we continue to listen, because by listening we believe in our minds that their systems do work. We should strengthen and support the indigenous cultural communities in their governance of ICCAs, and harmonize policies to strengthen IP governance in their ICCAs. There are various overlapping plans that communities make while our land use plan is incoherent. Let us not allow that the indigenous people lose the relationship between governance and their conservation zone.