

# THE INSURGENCY AND DEVELOPMENT PROCESS IN THE UPLAND: AN ANALYSIS OF THE LAKE BALINSASAYAO EXPERIENCE

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## Introduction

Development programs in the uplands face a number of constraints. While the inaccessibility problem of the upland communities has contributed mainly to the physical alienation of its inhabitants from the different services provided by the private and government agencies in the upland, such problem has provided the physical protection of the insurgents in the upland areas. As a consequence, upland communities in Negros Oriental in particular and in the Philippines in general have become the territorial residence of the insurgency elements such as the New People's Army (NPA). This physical and geographical protection provided security to the NPA elements. Hence, they have mastered the terrains in the upland communities and gained "forced" support from the local population while they failed to get such kind of support from the inhabitants located in the lowland. The NPA elements, therefore, consider the upland communities as their territories.

The presence of the NPA in the upland communities has varied effects to upland development projects. To some, it has stunted the developmental processes of the projects while to others it has facilitated the achievement of certain developmental goals at one point in time or, another. These conditions depend on the convenience that the NPA derived from a particular role it assumes relative to the project. Hence, at certain times, they are detrimental to upland projects; at other times they are not.

This paper is an attempt to analyze the effects of the presence of NPA in Lake Balinsasayao on the upland development project in the area. It is agreed that the NPA's role in our upland development project in Lake Balinsasayao shifts from be-

ing positive to a negative type and vice versa depending on the advantages that the NPA will get from a particular circumstance. Since the NPA operates on convenience, any circumstance that will provide a better edge to the insurgency elements will always be opted. Hence, in the long run, in spite of the positive role that the NPA will assume at certain points in time the overall effects to the development project will be negative.

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The NPA and the development project have essentially similar concern for the area. Both desire a positive change in the upland area. Since the NPA survival will have to depend on the local upland population, any improvement on the living conditions of the latter will mean an easier opportunity for them to derive local support. Meanwhile, for the development project such positive change on the socioeconomic condition of the upland population will serve as an indicator of success of the development project. Under such condition, the NPA will develop a strong sense of tolerance to the presence of the development project in the area while at the same time the development project will develop further interest in supporting the upland community because of its demonstrated viability toward development. Consequently, since the development project in the upland has shown its value in the upland setting, the NPA will generate a protective role on the development project. The safety of the lives of the field personnel of the project in the upland will be assured. As this continues, the NPA may expect direct assistance from the development project over and above what it receives from the local population. This is a critical stage for the field personnel of the development project since a wrong decision can affect the relationship between the project and the NPA during the entire lifetime of the development project.

On the other hand, the development project in the upland has no reason to relate to the NPA. Since the development project is intended for the non-NPA uplanders, the field personnel have to safeguard the project resources from being directly siphoned to the non-intended beneficiaries. A strong stand on this on the



part of the field personnel will nip the bud of unwarranted expectation from the side of the NPA. Generally, the NPAs do not insist for assistance from development project in the uplands if a strong disapproval is expressed by the project personnel to their first request. The first request determines the next. Disapproval to the first request generally means no more requests in the future. This arrangement will generally continue during the entire life of the project.

The failure of the upland development project to support the NPA will not necessarily lead to reprisals on the part of the latter against the former. Instead, the NPAs generally maintain their positive attitude toward the project since they realize the value of the project to the local population whom they are trying to get sympathies and to draw support from. For convenience, they have to maintain their positive role toward the development project.

However, when community organization in the upland gets stronger among the local population as a result of the development project, the NPAs generally become uneasy. As a response, they would begin to create fear among the local population to destabilize the organization since a strong community organization in the upland will create additional difficulty to the NPAs in drawing local support from the upland dwellers. At this instance, the NPA will develop a negative role against the development project. The game is generally subtly played by the NPA. Through this tactic, the breaking process of the community organization starts from within hence the problem will not really be discerned by the project personnel until the community organization will manifest an irreparable collapse. Obviously, this will constitute a damaging blow to the project. Such negative role of the NPA will continue to work on the sub-surface against the upland development project while an apparent protection of the project field personnel is continuously demonstrated by the NPA outwardly.

This double-edged effect of the NPA on the upland development project will have numerous implications on the project. For one thing, it will create an ambivalent attitude on the part

of the upland dwellers toward the project. For another thing, it will destroy the sense of community solidarity since households will tend to maintain individualized security or protection from the NPA. Since the government military force is concentrated only in the lowlands and the NPA force is in the uplands 24 hours a day, the government military force is meaningless to the security of the upland dwellers. The common crime against property in the upland, in fact, is easily curbed by the speedy trial court system of the NPA. Such system of punishing the criminal brings a strong sense of protection to the individual household in the uplands.

Development projects actually are not prevented from operating in the upland by the NPA. This attitude is important to the survival of the insurgency in the area. First, a development project serves as a potential unit for direct assistance to the NPA. Second, a development project can serve as a model which the NPA can partly ape in other upland communities to improve their own acceptability to the local upland population. Third, the economic improvement that the development project will bring to the upland dwellers could indirectly benefit the NPA through contribution that the local upland residents will have to make in the future. Fourth, the presence of a development project in the upland without harassment from the NPA can bring a message to the larger society that the NPA is in fact peace loving whose only concern is the betterment of the economic condition of the Filipinos.

However, the net effect of the NPA to the development project in the uplands will be negative. Since the NPA will always create an advantageous condition for their own and government activities, in most cases they will always undermine the objectives of the development project. Since development projects in the uplands can easily pose as counter-insurgency activities, the NPA will always make sure that this circumstance will not happen. Various tactics can be employed by the NPA to destroy the community organization from within. Since the community organization serves as the framework for any collective developmental efforts, the collapse of the framework can generally bring a total breakdown of the project.



## FINDINGS

Let us relate the theoretical philosophy we have just outlined to the actual experience of the Lake Balinsasayao project concerning the presence of NPA in the area.

### *NPA Organization Efforts*

In 1985, the farmers living around the Lake Balinsasayao area were finally organized. The organization was a result of a series of seminars held for them by an interdisciplinary team from the University Research Center of Silliman University. The farmers named their organization BANAGBANAG, an acronym for *Balinsasayao Naghiusang Balangay Nga Nag-  
saad* (which means Balinsasayao United Farming Community). The intention of the organization was to develop a collective effort toward the protection of forest and the development of farms using appropriate farming technology.

In 1986 reports were made by the farmers concerning the presence of NPA in the area. Heavily armed men traveling and visiting households were reported by the farmers. Meanwhile, the field personnel of the project never encounter them yet. It appeared that at this stage the NPA did not have any intention to associate with our field workers.

Toward the end of 1986, reports concerning meetings with the farmers and the NPA were received. Usually these meetings were called by the NPA when our field personnel left the area to make their 9-day monthly report at the University Research Center at Silliman. To the NPA, these meetings would be clandestinely made during the absence of the project field personnel in the area.

For curiosity and fear of reprisals from the NPA, the farmers attended the meeting. Reports indicated that during the initial meetings, introduction of attendants were made to familiarize each other. Slowly, later meetings started to move toward discussing issues on social problems and the need to organize one group to protect the farmers' own interest. At this stage, the farmers were already certain about the intention of the

NPA to organize the community. Since the farmers were looking for a better offer than what the development project was making, the NPA had not been able to draw a good support from the local farmers. Slowly, the attendance of the farmers, whenever the NPA called a meeting, progressively declined. The farmers made good reasons. Some purposely went down to the city or the municipal public market to sell agricultural product during scheduled meetings. Others claimed that they were sick.

As a consequence, the NPA failed to organize the farmers. Nevertheless, the NPA never pushed their plans for fear of strong collective opposition from the farmers. Still the NPA maintained a social distance from the Lake Balinsasayao development project and shift their strategy from organization to non-organized individualized household approach.

At this stage the NPA did not pose as a threat to the development project. Field activities of the personnel were not disrupted and the organization of the farmers continued to function normally. That condition was misleading since the NPA had already shifted gears in their own approach in organizing, whose effects of the project were only discernable at a later period.

Meanwhile, the NPA identified households that had expressed sympathies with them. These sympathizers became the target for more intensive NPA household-to-household visitation. The sympathizers felt that their interests can be more protected by the NPA. Correspondingly, the NPA made commitments to protect the sympathizers' own interest.

But the community organizing effort of the NPA did not succeed. Although they failed to get the total community support, they succeeded to draw a compromise by getting support from a core group. This core group is a small segment of the household population in the upland community of Lake Balinsasayao. As a consequence the BANAGBANAG organization weakened since the members of the NPA core group turned out to be the major breakers of the law of the organization. For instance, one of the functions of the organization is the protection of the remaining forest from illegal cutting. The organization



created a council known as the Forest Protection Council. The council divided the area into sectors and depending on the location of the farm of a council member, that person is given the responsibility to protect a particular sector.

It was learned later that most of the NPA sympathizers were the ones breaking their own organization's law against illegal cutting of trees. Assurance of protection from the NPA was allegedly made for the sympathizers who cut trees for lumber to be sold. Some reports were made concerning percentage cut that the NPA received from the proceeds of lumber the illegal loggers made. This problem was common during the summer period of 1987. The increased military operations against illegal logging have, however, reduced the incidence of illegal logging activities during the following months.

At this stage, the NPA began to be more visible to the project personnel. They broke the social distance they had established earlier between themselves and the project. A group of NPA elements began appearing to our field personnel and made attempts at inviting our field workers to join the insurgents many times. Requests for material assistance were likewise made from our project personnel. These requests were refused by the fieldworkers on the ground that only their project director can act on their request. This happened during the last part of 1986 and the early part of 1987.

As a consequence, the NPA made plans to see the writer of this paper. Finally in the middle part of 1987, the NPA and myself met in the project site. I flatly disapproved their request and suggested to the NPA representatives that the project will cease operation if they disagree with my refusal. The NPA did not withdraw their request and asked the project to stay since it had a purpose for the farmers. Since then, the NPA did not make any request for assistance. However, they kept their irregular visits to our field personnel.

#### *NPA Offered Development Program Patterned After SURADPU*

Nevertheless, the NPA did not stop from their efforts to get and getting the whole upland area organized to support their

cause. Means of enticing the upland farmers to their side were made. The NPAs were convinced that the development project in Balinsasayao was dearly accepted by the farmers. Hence, the NPA thought that if they could offer similar project to the upland farmers they would get full sympathy or support from the local farmers.

Toward the end of 1987, reports were received again that series of seminars were made by the NPA for the upland farmers during the absence of our fieldworkers in the site. The seminars introduced a project similar in concept to our Lake Balinsasayao project. The farmers reported their surprise why a similar project being introduced by the NPA. It was very apparent that the NPA tried to get the support of the local farmers through a program which had already been highly acceptable to the local population. Unfortunately, the NPA still failed to elicit the support from most of the local farmers. The absence of logistical support in the NPA program did not allow the insurgents to provide the necessary inputs into the farms of the upland residents. The absence of this necessary ingredient in the farming systems development of the NPA turned off most of the upland farmers.

Despite all the failings of the NPA to draw the interest of the upland farmers toward their cause, they have remained to be very protective, at least outwardly, to our development project in Lake Balinsasayao. They have never manifested hostility to our field personnel. Instead, they have shown respect to our project staff. Such ambivalence on the part of the NPA is very essential to their very own survival in the area.

*NPA Creating Fear Among The Upland Dwellers*

The ability of the NPA to draw support from few households in the face of majority's disapproval to their presence in the area assured the insurgents with minimum resources for their own survival. By creating fear among the local population they have divided and ruled the population to their own advantage.

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Fear can be sown among the local population by having the NPA's presence felt in the area. Frequent exposures of the NPA in full battle gear to the local population will of course terrorize the inhabitants. This is done through regular patrols during the day.

From January 1987 to March 1988, sightings of the NPA were monitored by our project personnel. During this period NPA sightings were practically reported every month. The field personnel noted the sudden increase in intensity of the sightings compared to the earlier periods. This period coincides with the time when the NPA elements were also intensifying their efforts to get the local farmers' support.

Usually, the NPA would stay in the project site between four days to one week and disappear. To prevent from an "overhaul" of the food resources, the NPA always kept their stay in the site for a short period. While this has an economic implication, it also has a security value on their part. The element of "surprise" is very essential in guerrilla activity like that of the NPA.

The waxing and waning of the NPA presence in the area intensified the feeling of fear among the local population. In fact, the sudden appearance of the NPA in the area is usually accompanied by recent mass evacuation of families from the uplands towards the coast. These situations have tremendously affected the project operation in the site. Meetings had been postponed and collective farm development had been cancelled. Since the NPA disappeared, the evacuees returned back to their farms. This condition disrupted the total program of activities in the upland areas.

The NPA did not directly disrupt the operation of the upland projects. Instead they manifested tolerance with the presence of projects in the uplands by being friendly to the fieldworkers. Such friendly relations with the fieldworkers supposedly added some sense of security to the fieldmen, but at the same time create a feeling of uneasiness on the part of the fieldworkers for fear of military reprisals. In any case, the fieldworkers are al-

ways subjected to fear. Obviously, working under this condition will not allow an optimum output of the project. With most of the clientele population terrorized, the community participation in development activities will surely go down to an insignificant level.

In this manner, the NPA indirectly destroys the project causing the clientele population to lose trust and confidence in the project. In the process, the NPA may be able to shift the loyalties of most of the local population from that of the project to that of the NPA. Such trust and loyalty may turn into a form of resource which they badly need.

It appears now that the NPAs try to achieve their goals without creating an open conflict with the existing projects in the uplands. By simply increasing their physical presence under an atmosphere of combat, fear is sown among the upland population including the personnel of the upland projects. Such conditions will bring internal conflict to the project bringing its own demise.

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The problem of the insurgency elements in the uplands is an issue that development projects in this ecozone have to grapple with realistically. While it is true that the NPA elements do not provide an open confrontation with the workers of the project in the uplands, they have psychologically assaulted the local population including the fieldworkers which affect the general well-being of the upland development projects. Since the social ambience under which the development project in Lake Balinsasayao has been adulterated by the elements of fear, the strength of the community organization has been weakened. In most cases, the community organization serves as the mover of development projects. In the face of weakening community organization, the life support system of development project is threatened.

Officers of the BANAGBANAG organization no longer earnestly push for the implementation of provisions that have been collectively approved. Slowly, the leaders' credibility begun to erode as more rules had been purposely transgressed. For fear of NPA



appraisals, officers and members alike no longer implement activities that are self-initiated. The ability to self-initiate activities without the project's field personnel's direction is a quality that marks a mature community organization. The presence of NPA elements in the uplands leads to obstruction of the project.

The channel through which community organization can be nourished and strengthened is through community meeting. Community meetings allow individual members to express dissenting opinions which are essential in developing and evolving collective decision. In the absence of this process, community organization is dead. As the NPA elements create fear among the local population, the upland residents generally keep themselves away from community discussions. Such attitude is caused by fears: (1) the local population group may be mistaken by the military as a unit organizing to support the NPA; and (2) the local population group may be mistaken by the NPA as a unit organizing to support the military.

In either cases, the local population has to face the risks and hazards of armed attacks from either side. As a consequence, community organization becomes inactive and the social momentum is lost. Social momentum is essential in keeping the community organization going. Once this is blocked, community organization stops moving.

As an alternative, the local population may attend community meeting only when such activity is called and organized by the fieldworkers of the project. Such alternative, however, is unhealthy toward the development of a strong community organization. Since it has to be kept as a permanent component of community development, community leaders and members should run community meetings by themselves. This is part of the training which the local leaders and members have to internalize while the project is still operating. The idea is that the leaders and members will have to learn the processes of running a meeting so that when the project terminates, they can sustain the community organization. Community meetings are processes through which community organization depends upon. Community organization draws its life from community meetings. It

serves as the community forum through which community issues are discussed in a democratic manner. In the process, sources of community conflict are dissolved while potential for community cooperation is strengthened. Community cooperation serves as the backbone for community development. With the NPA's presence in the upland, this necessary element of community development is never given a chance to grow. This is not surprising since the NPA's survival in the upland will be higher if the community is either loosely organized or not organized at all. Under this circumstance, the NPA will not necessarily have to face a solid front of unwilling supporters. The more socially fragmented the upland communities are, the more likely the NPA can draw minimum and fragmented support.

The NPA capitalized on their physical presence and movements within the upland zone of Lake Balinsasayao. By projecting the image of ready combatants truly willing to kill private residents known for their strong positive military support, they have succeeded in controlling the Lake Balinsasayao area. The farmers have never launched either clandestine or open attacks against the NPA. The fieldworkers have to maintain a strong stand on neutrality in return for NPA's tolerance and respect of the farmer's presence in the area. The area is considered a territory of the NPA, hence, the fieldworkers of the projects are outsiders. In fact, the farmers have to maintain a sense of gratefulness to the NPA in allowing them to make a living in an area considered to be an NPA territory.

The NPAs could throw the development project out of their own territory in Lake Balinsasayao but they did not opt for that. Instead, they have kept a seeming supportive attitude to the project for possibly a number of reasons:

- (1) by tolerating the project in the area, the NPAs have succeeded in projecting a positive image for themselves for the outside society as peace loving and generally concern for the development of the upland poor;
- (2) the project can serve as model for upland development which the NPAs themselves may implement under their own administration; and



(3) whatever improvements the upland farmers will get from the project, part of it may flow toward the NPAs' benefits—thus, improving their survival in the area.

But to prevent the community from developing into a strong self-fulfilling community, the NPA kept the project from optimally delivering its benefits to the farmers. By simply creating fear on everybody in the community, developmental processes were shortchanged causing farmers confusion and inaction in the face of threatening risks.

On the whole, the NPAs have demonstrated ambivalent attitude toward the development project in Lake Balinsasayao. For convenience, such attitude is essential for their own survival. The mixture of positive and negative support allowed the NPA to calibrate the effects of the development project to their own advantage. The net result is the inability of the project to deliver the full developmental process and output to the upland farmers.

### SUMMARY

The BANAGBANAG experience with the NPA elements in the Lake Balinsasayao area may be considered unique. However, in the absence of similar study in other parts of the Philippines, we cannot make a definitive statement on this. Nevertheless, specific observations may have to be highlighted at this point:

(1) by providing certain amount of tolerance, the NPA had succeeded in allowing the development project in Lake Balinsasayao to exist under a controlled condition;

(2) under this controlled condition, the NPA had regulated the impact of the project on the local farmers below the optimal level to protect the interests of the NPA for survival;

(3) the NPA had a mixed attitude toward the project in Lake Balinsasayao (somewhat in favor and somewhat against);

(4) the NPA had maintained this stand on the project without necessarily having an open confrontation and conflict with the project. Through the use of fear, the NPA had succeeded in

keeping the farmers' involvement in the development process limited:

(5) the NPA had capitalized on the use of increased physical presence with full combat gear to sow fear among the local population;

(6) by using fear the NPA had succeeded in dividing the local upland population according to their loyalties to the NPA in order to rule the area;

(7) since the NPAs only needed minimum support from the local population in order to survive, they purposely maintained a philosophy of localizing support only from the sympathizers without harassing those not sympathetic to their cause;

(8) through this approach, a certain degree of peace and order had been kept by the NPA in the area;

(9) in this manner, the effects of the NPA on the project would be working from within; (Community organization had been weakened and the whole process of community development would suffer from the problem of community inaction and underproduction).

(10) the net result of the project on the local farmers would be underdevelopment; (This condition was purposely kept by the NPA since it would provide them utmost control on the local farmers. The NPA elements were acting on the basis of convenience for their own survival.)

(11) any development project in the uplands which would strongly depend on community organization would have a very slim chance of success in the upland areas where NPA elements could be found.

It is therefore recommended that under this circumstance a development project has to be designed in such a way that it can operate without community organization support. Crop production systems development can be one.

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