

MANGYAN INDIGENOUS PEOPLES DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

(English Translation from the Filipino Original)

We, the leaders of the indigenous Mangyan communities are appealing to be heard regarding our long-standing efforts to understand and embrace what is called "development" from our perspective, experience, and our people's history:

The indigenous Mangyan, in the early stages of history, did not suffer in poverty but thrived with abundant resources from the forests and plains where we originally dwelled. We also engaged in trade with neighboring islands, including Chinese merchants and others from different parts of Asia, even before the arrival of the Spanish. The Mangyan comprised the majority of the population on the island of Mindoro until 1910. The non-Mangyan population increased significantly only in the 1920s due to the influx of migrants from neighboring islands seeking more productive farmlands. During this period, the number of outsiders in Mindoro increased by over 300% (Schult 1991, 82).

In our culture, the concept of poverty was foreign to us, as all our livelihood needs were provided by the blessings of the land, given by our Creator. The land is our life, the true wealth of our indigenous community, which cannot be owned individually but belongs to the community as a whole.

Development for us, as indigenous people, is not solely measured by the amount of money (as we had no concept of money in our culture). Development is measured by harmonious relationships with each other and with our environment - the mountains, rivers, cultivated lands - which we consider sacred as they are inhabited by spirits. Even in our cultivation practices, there are ways to rest and restore the fertility of the soil.

Over time, many outsiders from different provinces migrated to Mindoro (settlers and traders), and we were displaced to the mountains. We were not inclined to engage in conflicts, so we surrendered, and due to fear or direct deceit, we exchanged vast tracts of land for pots, knives, or even just a box of sardines.

When the Americans arrived, land titling laws were implemented, and those who were educated and able took control and divided the land across the whole archipelago. The rights of indigenous people were not recognized in lieu of the so called titles or pieces of paper that bestow ownership rights to those who can legally secure them. Violent land grabbing and eviction of indigenous lands continue to this day.

Our forests, part of our ancestral lands, suffered severe destruction due to numerous commercial logging concessions authorized by President Ferdinand Marcos Sr. during Martial Law, which allowed for the establishment of 11 commercial logging operations within the 81,000 hectares of Mindoro's forests (Schult 1991, 129).

Therefore, if we, the Mangyan, are considered impoverished and lagging behind in the wheel of modern development, it is because of the long history of oppression, neglect, and direct exploitation, coupled with the lack of respect for our own culture and the way we have been denigrated as indigenous people.

However, we also assert that our indigenous communities are the ones to shape the kind of development we will pursue, based on our values and the strength of unity and cooperation inherent in our ancestral culture. A dependency mentality does not help us; it only makes us tools for the interests of others. But we still believe in the need for collaboration with various supportive groups advocating for our welfare and rights, especially local and national government.

How do we now define development in overarching arenas of ENVIRONMENT/ECOLOGY, INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS, and SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD:

ENVIRONMENT/ECOLOGY

We declare that:

The ENVIRONMENT, in its entirety, remains the foundation of our lives, its health is reflected in the condition of the forests, mountains, rivers, and seas, which are our sources of sustenance.

The destruction of our forests continues due to logging, improper land clearing for agricultural conversion, and landslides that cover our rivers and streams, as well as problems with charcoal-making.

The Mangyan people are not adequately consulted or informed when it comes to quarrying rocks or sand from rivers, often impacting our daily lives. We assert that springs, streams, and rivers are integral part of our lives.

We are also heavily affected by climate change, experiencing rising temperatures (global warming) that damage our crops and contribute to excessive rain and typhoons, leading to widespread flooding.

We are aware that the threat of mining is not yet over, as applications persist and the government has not completely closed or revoked them.

We oppose all forms of destruction and disrespect for nature.

WE PROPOSE THAT:

The government's environmental programs, especially those in the mountains where we reside, should always consider using more indigenous methods. The National Greening Program, which we believe has not been successful due to a lack of proper consultation and procedures with us.

Promote and expand forest conservation programs based on the concept and practice of "food forests" and extensive bamboo planting in watershed areas. The concept of food forests and bamboo planting would not only contribute to the rapid reforestation but also ensure food security and sustainable livelihood resources.

Strengthen the forest guard/environmental protection program by providing proper incentives to Mangyan members involved in it and ensuring their safety.

Declare protected areas the sources of our springs, even those on private lands (titled properties), to preserve clean drinking water sources.

That the government engage in partnerships with legitimate indigenous peoples' organizations for environmental protection, particularly in all the programs being implemented concerning us.

At all times, stop any mining in the mountains of our province, especially in our communities, and part of our ancestral land that has always been the source of our sustenance.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS:

As Mangyan people, our legitimate rights continue to be violated, and we still experience many different forms of discrimination in our daily lives.

We lack proper representation in government offices and are not given the opportunity to participate in development planning due to the absence of legitimate representatives, such as the Indigenous Peoples' Mandatory Representatives (IPMR), as mandated by the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA).

There is a lack of social services such as water supply, housing, education, healthcare, and other social services, which are often not prioritized or often inadequate.

There is a lack of action and delays in addressing our applications and granting rights to our ancestral lands, resulting in decades of waiting and leading to the loss of our rights as non-Mangyan people and destructive projects continue to encroach in our ancestral lands, displacing us.

Our culture is often misused in celebrations, invasive taking of photos, launching projects, and in using indigenous symbols or artifacts without appropriate consent or compliance with the Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) process as required by the IPRA.

We, as indigenous communities, have our own laws, customs, culture, and way of life that should be respected and recognized.

We are often exploited and victimized during election periods due to practices that bring fear and prevent us from voting freely, such as manipulative campaigning by opposing parties or candidates.

WE PROPOSE THAT:

Advance the right to ancestral land, the recognition and issuance of CADT (Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title), as well as the corresponding framework of ADSDPP (Ancestral Domain Sustainable Development and Protection Plan).

The appointment of IPMR (Indigenous People Mandatory Representative) in local governments, as mandated by the IPRA, should be implemented to truly represent the voices of indigenous peoples and be the basis for genuine participation in policy-making and government programs. We believe that every Local Government Unit (LGU) can achieve this if they so desire and abide by the law.

Promote and expand social services in indigenous communities and allocate substantial funds for health and nutrition programs, clean drinking water, housing, education scholarships, and other projects that recognize and respect the culture of indigenous peoples.

Promote the right to education for the indigenous Mangyan people and implement and allocate sufficient funding for the IP Education program, a method of advancing education that respects and values our own culture, recognized by the Department of Education.

Allow us to establish a tribal shelter in our town (Balay Lakoy) to serve as our refuge, especially for our children studying, our fellow Mangyans traveling, and those seeking medical attention in the town, so that we feel more connected to the larger society and can act without discrimination.

We hope to be allowed to exercise our freedom in choosing leaders because we have cultural methods and processes in selecting them. We also request the promotion of widespread literacy and education among the Mangyan people to eliminate the need for outside writers during elections and to enable every Mangyan voter to vote freely and to dissuade any manipulative cheating.

SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD:

Many of us experience poverty due to the following reasons:

Our products are priced lower than non-Mangyan products. We often experience exploitation from buyers, and our products are undervalued in the market.

We lack access to existing markets because of the lack or absence of programs that focus on this aspect – in strengthening our capacities for lowland trading and entrepreneurship.

We only rely on producing raw products and lack knowledge in processing or adding value, as well as continuous programs for our business success.

Our unique products, such as root crops, which are our competitive strength, are not given due attention.

There is also a lack of job opportunities for us outside of agriculture, even for educated Mangyan individuals who struggle to find employment.

Many of us are not included in National Registry Programs related to agriculture due to a lack of required documents, especially in land ownership, such as in the RSBSA and CFRS (Registry System of Basic Sector in Agriculture at Coconut Farmers Registry System)

WE PROPOSE THAT:

Funding for programs that increase agricultural yield using eco-friendly methods (agroecology system) should be allocated continuously, as the use of chemicals and pesticides is not part of our culture.

Recognize our indigenous knowledge in agriculture, protect our seeds, and assist us in recognizing our indigenous identity.

Assist us in participating in government programs without exclusion due to restrictions and policies related to our status as indigenous peoples.

Help us improve the quality of Mangyan products through adequate funding, technical support, fair markets, and showcasing indigenous skills and products.

The conditions, issues, and demands that we have presented, we, the indigenous people of the Mangyan Alangans and Tadyawan in the Municipality of Victoria, Province of Eastern Mindoro, hereby declare that:

We will continue to unite and cooperate with the government in its beneficial programs as legitimate partners in sustainable development.

We will strive to strengthen and develop ourselves through collective action and indigenous cooperation inherently practiced in our culture.

We will develop our capabilities in managing various protection and implementation programs within our communities.

We will continually defend and promote our culture and traditions before the non-indigenous peoples.

We will endeavor to develop and protect our ancestral lands and continue to advocate for the environment that sustains our lives.

We also assert our rights to be part of decision-making processes, especially in matters concerning our own understanding of development.

Above all, we commit to act tirelessly and unwaveringly towards achieving and fulfilling the contents of this Mangyan Indigenous Peoples Development Agenda.

Together with the partner organizations and individuals, we pray that the development framework we have presented in this document, which resulted from the discussions among leaders representing our communities, held on the 25th of June in Barangay of Loyal, Victoria, Oriental Mindoro, will be heard and respected.