

Indigenous Education Networks in Mindanao, Philippines: A Case Study¹

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Context

The indigenous people of the Philippines number about twelve million or roughly about fifteen percent of the country's total population (NCIP 2003). Of this total, making up the sixty-one percent is the Mindanao cluster of eighteen different ethnolinguistic groups, which is collectively known as Lumad (Rodil 1994). As a sector, these indigenous people are believed to have the highest illiteracy rate in Mindanao.

The indigenous people live very far from town centers where most schools are located. The sheer distance, the perilous mountain trails, the numerous streams and rivers, and the lack of public transportation prevent children from going to school. If and when they can manage all these, there is always the problem of money to spare for education.

In many instances, the government is unable to establish primary and preschool centers in the tribal communities because of lack of funds or unavailability of teachers. Sometimes, the number of school-age children is less than that required to open a school in the area (Alfonso 2004). Lumad children whose parents can send them to school stay with relatives and friends in the town centers to study in the public schools. Unfortunately, very little information about the Lumad is included in the mainstream curriculum. In the end, these Lumad children learn to become just like the children coming from the majority Christian population (Manapol 1999, ACPC 2002, ESSC 2004).

This runs counter to the provision of the Constitution of the Philippines, which directs the Department of Education (DepEd) to "develop and institute an alternative system of education for children of indigenous cultural communities which is culture-specific and is relevant to the needs and existing situation in their communities" (Art. IX, Section 18).

Simply stated, a basic but relevant education is inaccessible to indigenous children and illiterate young people and adults.

Response

The Philippines enjoys an enviable distinction of having perhaps the most number of nongovernment organizations (NGOs) involved in sociocultural, economic, and political development. Borne out of a civic consciousness and commitment to serve, these organizations grapple with adverse conditions in the field and hope that they can initiate and sustain meaningful changes in the lives of people and their communities.

Many NGOs and church groups in Mindanao provide basic education to indigenous people (children/youth/adults) who live in far-flung mountain villages. They reach these communities and establish a semblance of a school or a learning center where children and adults can go to learn to read, write, and count, and to know and appreciate their traditional values and lifeways. Many of these initiatives are autonomous and uncoordinated. NGOs are extremely diverse both in terms of circumstance and material development (ESSC 2004). They look for their own funds, train their own teachers and parateachers, and develop their own curriculum and educational materials. Many share the same vision and, of course, the same problems.

Although the Philippine Constitution directs DepEd to "accredit and support non-formal but functional indigenous education programs conducted by non-governmental organizations in said communities" (Art. IX, Section 18), most of these independent groups still struggle with the accreditation criteria, which, in the main, are not appropriate to the special schools they have (ESSC 2004).

In time, these organizations had the opportunity of coming in contact with each other during consultations and social events. These interactions and sharing of experiences in implementing basic education programs for the indigenous people opened up the possibility of collaborative efforts. Many felt the need to level off on the orientation and direction of Lumad education, develop a culture-specific curriculum, train culturally sensitive teachers and parateachers, develop appropriate educational materials, locate or generate funds to run programs and schools, and maintain contact with each other. Others sought ways to coordinate their efforts with government programs.

Hence, the establishment of networks and linkages to bring about quality and sustainable basic Lumad education in Mindanao, Philippines.

The Indigenous Education Networks

In this paper, a network is a group of organizations and people bound together by similar activities and interests brought about by a common occupational interest (adapted from Bautista 2003). An indigenous education network is one that is engaged in linking organizations and people involved in providing indigenous education services. There are three such networks in Mindanao. These are: the Lumad Education Forum (LEF) of Mindanao, the Schools for Indigenous Knowledge and Traditions (SIKAT), and the emergent Interim Management Group (IMG) for the establishment of a Lumad High School. The LEF and IMG operate out of Davao City while SIKAT has offices in the National Capital Region, in Quezon City.

The Lumad Education Forum of Mindanao

The LEF of Mindanao was nudged into being after the Summit on Lumad Education in 1999. Summit delegates—representatives of organizations involved in indigenous education—decided to create a Forum committed to pursuing the enhancement of indigenous education. Envisioned as a loose group, the LEF assumed a semblance of an organization only in 2002.

The LEF is supported by Fulford Foundation, a small philanthropic organization focused on education and culture in The Netherlands. The Foundation came to the Philippines in 1996 to explore the possibility of supporting basic education for the indigenous people. It established contacts with groups involved in indigenous education and commissioned a corollary inventory to identify the common needs and priorities of these organizations (PTS 1999). Twenty-one education implementers were involved in this inventory and the subsequent consultation.

Membership. Membership to the LEF is open to organizations implementing basic education for indigenous people in Mindanao. While it gets its inspiration from Fulford Foundation, membership is not limited to Foundation partners (Alfonso 2004). At present, the LEF has fifteen member-organizations providing basic education to twelve different indigenous tribes in Mindanao (Table 1). A number give nonformal education while a few are DepEd-accredited elementary schools. Organization and secretariat work are provided by Pro-Team Services, Inc. an NGO based in Davao City (LEF 2002).

Table 1. The Lumad Education Forum of Mindanao (LEF 2002).

LEF Member Organizations
1. Alternative Relevant Education for Indigenous People) South Cotabato (AREIP)
2. Community Action for Rural Development (CARD)
3. Fr. Leoni Lumad Mission Foundation
4. Interface Development Interventions, Inc. (IDIS, Inc.)
5. Indigenous Peoples Apostolate - Archdiocese of Davao
6. Indigenous Peoples Apostolate – Bukidnon
7. Indigenous Peoples Apostolate – Butuan
8. Indigenous Peoples Apostolate – Don Marcelino
9. Indigenous Peoples Apostolate – Tagum
10. Bukidnon Tribal Filipino Foundation, Inc.
11. Episcopal Commission on Indigenous Peoples – National Secretariat
12. GITIB, Inc.
13. Lumad Development Center, Inc.
14. Mamalo Descendant Organization (MDO)
15. Matalam Kabacan Lumad Organization (MAKALO)
16. Magiwanhay Pulangiyon Tribe – Bukidnon (MAPTA)
17. Relief and Children Alternative Program, Inc. (RECAP, Inc.)
18. Sta. Cruz Mission School, Inc. (SCMSI)
19. Silingang Dapit sa Sidlakang Mindanao – Tagum (SILDAP)
20. Tribal Filipino Program – Diocese of Kidapawan (TFP)
21. Tribal Education on Ecological System (TREES)
22. Tribal Filipino Program of Surigao del Sur (TRIFPSS)

Schools for Indigenous Knowledge and Traditions

Another network promoting indigenous education is the Schools for Indigenous Knowledge and Traditions (SIKAT), also launched in 1999. SIKAT is a national network of indigenous schools and community educators that emerged after cultural workers and indigenous teachers conducted research, consulted indigenous education groups and trained a core group of trainers through the initiative of the Asian Council for People's Culture (ACPC ca. 2001).

ACPC itself is an international network of cultural workers and community educators from sixteen Asia-Pacific countries (ACPC ca. 2001).

Its basic premise is progress founded on culture, and its key activities are community education and training that draws on local lifeways and learning systems. Its internet homepage identifies culture and indigenous wisdom as the core areas of study for people's empowerment and action (ACPC n.d.). ACPC Program Director Al Santos said, "In the last seven years, ACPC has been involved in establishing opportunities for indigenous communities to gain access to education" (NHK 2003).

Membership. The larger of the two more established networks, SIKAT counts among its members not only community educators and indigenous schools but also village elders and leaders. Its members come from indigenous tribes all over the Philippines. Some of the members of the Mindanao cluster are representatives to the SIKAT Council of Elders (Table 2). Of the Council's fourteen members, eleven are from Mindanawon tribes (ACPC ca. 2001, Binayao 2004). Some of the Mindanao indigenous schools are SILDAP, Sta. Cruz Mission and Saguilaw (Binayao 2004a).

Table 2: List of the Mindanao representatives to the SIKAT Council of Elders (ACPC ca. 2001, Binayao 2004a).

Member of the SIKAT Council of Elders	Indigenous Group
1. Datu Maximo Gabao, Sr.,	Bagobo
2. Datu Enalis Samboa,	Dibabawon
3. Maria Todi Wanan,	T'boli
4. Hajja Sakinur-Ain Delasas	Sama
5. Porferia Acuram	Subanen
6. Datu Sagin Monday	B'laan
7. Bernardo Limikid	Mansaka
8. Monico Casiple	Mandaya
9. Datu Conrado Binayao	Bukidnon
10. Raquim Dabi	B'laan
11. Bae Kiram Connie Saturno	Higaonon

Interim Management Group

The third is an emergent network intent on complementing the efforts of the two earlier networks and their member schools. Provisionally called

the Interim Management Group (IMG), it was formed primarily to focus on operationalizing the action areas of a plan to put up a public high school for the indigenous people of Mindanao (IMG 2002).

Membership. Unlike the two earlier networks whose members implement indigenous education programs, IMG has a multisectoral orientation. The IMG is a loose coalition united in its aspiration to establish a Lumad High School. Its members are NGOs, people's organizations (POs), church groups and government agencies concerned with the development of Mindanao's indigenous peoples (Tio 2004) (Table 3).

Table 3. The Interim Management Group for the establishment of a Lumad High School.

Organization	Sector
1. Archdiocesan Center for Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue	Church group
2. Assisi Foundation, Inc.	NGO
3. Basic Education Assistance for Mindanao (BEAM)	Semi-government
4. Department of Education - Region XI (DepEd XI)	Government
5. Indigenous People's Apostolate	Church group
6. Livelihood for a United Matigsalogs' Determination towards Sustainable Development - Nonformal Education	Church group
7. Mindanao Coalition of Development NGOs (MINCODE)	NGO network
8. Mindanao Economic Development Council (MEDCo)	Government
9. Mindanawon Initiatives for Cultural Dialogue	NGO
10. National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP)	Government
11. Panagtagbo - Mindanao	People's organization

Network Visions of Indigenous Education

An education rooted in the history and culture of the indigenous people and empowering their generation to stand firm in defense of their ancestral lands and self-determination, amidst change (LEF 2002, p. 30).

Indigenous education [is] founded on the lifeways, traditions, world view, culture and spirituality of the native community. It ... recognizes wisdom embedded in indigenous knowledge ... and responds to the genuine welfare and development of indigenous peoples (ACPC ca. 2001)

All three networks share the same vision: genuine education is inextricably linked to the culture of the indigenous people. LEF and SIKAT agree that indigenous education draws on tribal history, "lifeways, traditions, worldview and spirituality" for its lifeblood. It looks back to the past with a view to forming indigenous people who will develop their own communities and protect the environment. While IMG has yet to articulate its vision of lumad education, its dream Lumad High School is seen as being "culturally responsive and fully functional," as "perpetuating and enriching indigenous peoples' culture and existence." (IMG 2002).

The statement of LEF of Mindanao is specific and direct: education needs to empower people "to stand firm in defense of their ancestral lands ... amidst change" (LEF 2002, 30). SIKAT's declaration is more general and politic: education should produce people who are "committed to promote the rights and welfare of Filipino indigenous communities" (ACPC ca. 2001). IMG's educational focus is the holistic formation of future Lumad leaders and professionals (Alejo 2002b, NCIP 2004).

The three networks affirm indigenous education's rootedness in the natural world. LEF identifies "the ancestral lands and nature as [a] life-source among indigenous people" (LEF 2002, 36). SIKAT speaks of "revitaliz[ing] the integrity and ecological health of Mother Earth" (ACPC ca. 2001). IMG aims at integrating environmental protection and cultural regeneration in educational programs (Alejo 2002b).

While the networks operate independently of one another, they do not work at cross-purposes. They look in the same direction, with culture and nature as vital elements of indigenous education programs. Proof of this is at least two indigenous schools — SILDAP-SIDLAKAN and Sta. Cruz Mission — are members of both LEF and SIKAT. The reason is: *Parehas lang man ang paglantaw* (The world view [of the two networks] is similar.)

Medium of Instruction

Both LEF and SIKAT stress mother tongue education. Classes are conducted in the "language of their blood" – Binukid, Dibabawon, Mandaya, Manobo, Tboli and other native languages. In some LEF learning centers for elementary pupils, the major nonindigenous language, Cebuano, is sometimes used in conjunction with the native language.

Advocates of mother tongue education believe that the use of one's native language facilitates learning and is the most effective approach to developing functional literacy. The scholarly research in Hidalgo (2004) supports this approach.

An early Philippine government policy, the Revised Educational Program of 1957, states that "the medium of instruction in the first two grades of the elementary school shall be the local vernacular; that at the same time the national language shall be taught informally beginning in Grade 1 and given emphasis as a language in the higher grades..." (Bautista 2004). This policy, which seems to be well anchored on the theory of mother tongue education, has unfortunately been superseded.

Constitutional changes, and lately, Pres. Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's back-to-English policy and House Bill 5814 have made English the medium of instruction in all schools throughout the country (Bautista 2004). This will make learning more difficult for the indigenous peoples (ESSC 2004).

IMG has yet to develop a language policy for its Lumad High School, which aspires to prepare its students for leadership and the world of work while protecting their cultural integrity.

Venues for Networking

Mindanao networks touch base with members for different reasons: to build capabilities, to plan activities, and to share experiences and updates. They set meetings, conduct training workshops and seminars, and hold consultations and assemblies. LEF conducts an annual Summer Seminar Workshop, which is usually also taken as the opportunity to hold a General Assembly. Coordinators and cluster heads have occasional meetings. The monitoring visits of the Fulford Foundation representatives are also opportunities for consultations.

SIKAT conducts training for trainors and for teachers. It arranges study tours to Australia, which has local government initiatives for the

development of indigenous schools (Binayao 2004a). It conducts cross-cultural workshops and holds consultations with tribal elders, educators, parents and learners (ACPC n.d.).

Further, LEF and SIKAT network not only with their members but also with key persons and organizations in the tribal communities and in government offices and cultural groups.

Some member schools of LEF and SIKAT dialogue with DepEd, seeking government accreditation of their education programs, others link up with their local government units (LGUs) for assistance.

The younger IMG has held planning workshops and meetings with representatives from government and nongovernment groups, people's organizations and academic institutions, which have resulted in detailed action plans for the establishment of a Mindanao Lumad High School (BEAM n.d., IMG 2002, NCIP 2004).

These networks emphasize cooperation not only among the members but also among different sectors. Thus far, the networks' multisectoral interaction provides interfacing opportunities between the private/nongovernment and the government sectors.

Network Priorities and Results

Across all three networks, the educational issues are: teacher training, curriculum development, learning materials and sustainability.

Teacher training

Workshop after workshop continues to be organized for the development of culture-specific curriculum, the honing of teaching skills, and the preparation of culturally appropriate learning materials. LEF has had and is still running summer workshops in alternative teaching strategies. In the 2003 workshop, the theory of multiple intelligences was shared to the teachers. In May 2004, another workshop, this time on creating the learning environment, was conducted for LEF member schools. The focus of the workshops is based on the needs of the member schools. Earlier LEF workshops had DepEd representatives give inputs on teaching strategies.

ACPC has held regional teachers training workshops to develop and design micro-curriculum plans after agreeing on a Macro Conceptual Framework for Curriculum Development (ACPC ca. 2001). Further, SIKAT plans to establish a Mindanao Community Teachers College

(MCTC) in Davao City (ACPC 2003). Steps include the lobbying for the enactment of a Charter for the MCTC by a multisectoral lobby group to be composed of SIKAT elders, members of Congress, DepEd, NCIP and the academe (ACPC n.d.)

Curriculum development

Two of LEF's summer workshops focus on developing culture-specific curricula, which eventually led to the improvement of existing curricula. Common themes were identified and utilized as a springboard for teaching different subject areas, such as Science, Math and Civics (LEF 2002) (Annexes 1 and 2).

Likewise, SIKAT workshops are venues for evolving innovative curriculum designs for basic indigenous education, which are culturally responsive and developed with the participation of the community (ACPC ca. 2001). Higaonon Datu Conrado Binayao, who runs an indigenous school, Saguilaw, participated in SIKAT workshops and uses the thematic approach in developing Saguilaw curriculum for culture (Binayao 2004b). In curriculum consultations, draft curriculum plans are reviewed and recommendations are proposed. "Salient points in the review were the strengthening of the consultation process with the community, integration of relevant daily community activities in curriculum plans and development of local language curriculum assessment tools (ACPC n.d.).

The National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), an IMG member, identified both teacher training and curriculum development as verifiable indicators for the establishment of a "culturally responsive and fully functional center for a holistic education of the Lumads in Mindanao" (NCIP 2004). Special trainings are to be organized for qualified teachers and staff of the proposed Lumad High School, and a "special indigenized curriculum" for secondary education is targeted through "research and consultation among Lumad culture experts" (NCIP 2004). The curriculum is envisioned to be "relevant, culturally sensitive and can support and encourage the dynamic perpetuation of Lumad cultures, develop pride and confidence among the young Lumads, enable them to move on to college and develop in them meaningful life skills" (Alejo 2002a).

Learning materials

A culture-specific curriculum requires appropriate learning materials. LEF schools are preparing educational materials that reflect indigenous

culture. An example is the Dibabawon alphabet visual aid used in the SILDAP-SIDLAKAN learning centers in Kapalong, Davao del Norte. Dibabawon words and images of Dibabawon life—apparel and accoutrements, flora and fauna, household objects—are used to teach letter and word recognition, sight reading skills, and vocabulary development. The letter A, then, was for "apple." Now, it is for *agong*, a native instrument (SILDAP et al. 2001; see also Sison 2002).

For their part, SIKAT schools are producing "[b]ooks, literature, visuals and educational guides and tools ... [that] contain the history, experiences, life cycles, beliefs and culture of the community as wellspring of knowledge" (ACPC ca. 2001). SIKAT also has an Alamat Big Book Project that "will promote the writing and production of big books around the themes of culture and environment by young people of tribal communities (ACPC n.d.).

Sustainability

All three networks are supported at the moment by foreign aid agencies. LEF is aided by Fulford Foundation of The Netherlands. SIKAT is assisted by Broederlijk Delen, Catholic Organisation for Relief and Development AID (Cordaid) and Missio, also a European support organization.

IMG is funded by the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), which is spearheading Basic Education Assistance for Mindanao (BEAM) in cooperation with the Government of the Philippines. BEAM works towards increasing access to basic education in Regions XI, XII, and ARMM, by providing support to programs that will respond to local educational needs of the indigenous people and Muslim communities (BEAM n.d.).

All three, however, are looking for ways by which they can eventually support themselves. Initiatives in sustainability include small farms cultivated by the parents-teachers associations or the school itself whose income is to be used to support the local school (Alfonso 2004, Binayao 2004b). Community counterpart includes the construction of school houses and teachers' cottages from locally available materials and food supplies for the teachers.

The IMG is working towards securing government approval for the Lumad High School, assuming that "with a legal mandate, the special Lumad High School will receive regular and adequate government financial support" (NCIP 2004).

Networking Results

The networking efforts of LEF, SIKAT and IMG have had meaningful results. Uncoordinated and isolated efforts of the past have been transformed into a more dynamic exchange of knowledge and skills in indigenous education (Alfonso 2004). Assemblies have made possible the sharing of experiences among different indigenous educators.

Coming from geographically isolated areas, the tribal delegates appreciated the rare opportunity to meet and interact with indigenous people from equally remote areas. Thus, the cross-cultural sharing between Luzon and Mindanao tribes as well as inter-tribal learning interaction across the various ethnic groups were cited by the participants as the overwhelming gain of the assembly (ACPC ca. 2001).

So far, LEF and SIKAT have come to a common definition and direction of indigenous education through the assemblies and training workshops. SIKAT's *Pagsandawa* 2001 collectively clarified the qualities, qualifications and functions of an indigenous community educator (ACPC ca. 2001).

Teaching skills and capabilities have been enhanced in the same networking venues, developing more culture-sensitive teachers and equipping them with more creative classroom strategies. Culture-specific curricula and learning guides have been drawn up as well.

Communication lines between the networks and government agencies and other concerned groups have been opened, which may allow more productive interfacing of public and private initiatives in indigenous education.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

NGO networks play an important role in promoting indigenous education, composed as they are of organizations of people whose commitment and energy have brought basic education where it is needed most. As we have seen, the networks have been instrumental in engendering indigenous education, which is key to the survival of indigenous people. In areas where government educational services do not exist, network members provide education facilities and opportunities for Mindanao's distinct populations (Alfonso 2004).

Further, networking and cooperation contribute to improving quality and equity in indigenous education. Education has become more

accessible to the indigenous people. At the same time, this type of education has become more culture-specific and therefore relevant to them. Further, this has facilitated the enhancement of the knowledge and skills of the teachers. Some networks have also established links with relevant government organizations, such as local units and line agencies, for support in providing better services.

Finally, indigenous education networks recognize and respect diversities in language and culture, as against the government's earlier thrust of assimilating the indigenous people. A genuine indigenous education brings them closer to achieving self-reliance, self-governance and self-identity or self-confidence (in Alfonso and Castrillo 1999). Underpinning indigenous education are the use of the native tongue in instruction and the integration of culture in curriculum content.

Recommendations

More can be done to protect and develop cultures while at the same time developing social cohesion and intercultural understanding.

1. *Intensify networking efforts (LEF plans, resolutions and policy recommendations in Alfonso and Castrillo 1999).*

Indigenous education efforts on the ground need to be strengthened to protect and develop cultures. Networking can be on three levels: in the membership of individual networks, among the three networks, and among the networks with other key players. Greater efficacy may be achieved if membership can be expanded to reach other groups and educators in the field. Much more is possible if the capability of the networks can be developed. Networking with the other key players, e.g., DepEd and NCIP, and the academe should be strengthened as well.

NGOs should be viewed as partners in the development work that is education. Shared goals are easier to achieve when people continually "organize and be effective in relation to, or as members of NGOs ... in dealing with the government, business and institutions, such as schools and universities" (Abueva 2003). Partnerships can be forged, efforts can be converged or interfaced (NCIP 2003).

For example, NCIP (2003) plans on converging efforts with other government agencies, NGOs, and the international community in the fulfillment of its mandate as enshrined in the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act:

“The State shall provide equal access to various cultural opportunities to the ICCs/IPs (indigenous cultural communities/ indigenous peoples) through the educational system, public or private cultural entities, scholarships, grants and other incentives without prejudice to their right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions by providing education in their own language, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning. Indigenous children/ youth shall have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State.” (Chapter VI. Section 30. IPRA [RA8371, 1997])

NCIP (2003) gives education the second highest priority (after enterprise development) in its *Medium-Term Development Plan 2004-2008*. It will be coordinating its education programs with DepEd, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and the National Commission on Culture and the Arts (NCCA). Its programs include scholarships; the development of curriculum to integrate indigenous knowledge, skills and programs; the promotion of nonformal education services, and the establishment of indigenous peoples’ community schools. To develop intercultural understanding, NCIP aims to:

Expand capability of the larger society for acceptance and understanding of indigenous peoples’ culture, tradition and institutions.

- Revise educational modules and curriculum in public schools accordingly.
- Educate the media, public servants and the general public (NCIP 2003).

In the Indigenous Peoples Sectoral Agenda, which provides the larger context and the direction of the Development Plan, the NGOs, POs and civil society are identified as cooperating agencies (NCIP 2003).

<i>Initial Scoping of Projects for Convergence</i>		
CONVERGENCE PROJECT	ROLE OF NCIP (AS MAIN IMPLEMENTING/ FACILITATING AGENCY)	ROLE OF OTHER STAKEHOLDERS
Revision of curriculum for public education	Lead in dialogue with DepEd and CHED	NGOs and civil society to provide input and technical assistance. POs/Communities as primary sources / active participants

2. *Lobby for government recognition of the curricula developed by the indigenous education service providers and networks.*

Government recognition of indigenous curricula is an oft-repeated recommendation of the two older networks and other alternative education providers (LEF 2000, Bennagen 2001, Diaz 2002, ESSC 2004; see LEF plans, resolutions and policy recommendations in Alfonso and Castrillo 1999).

There are, however, groups that propose revisions to the DepEd accreditation criteria, which are less than appropriate (sometimes even oblivious to the realities on the ground), much like the formal DepEd education programs are to the particular contexts and needs of the indigenous peoples.

Early this year, the Environmental Science for Social Change (ESSC 2004) requested DepEd Secretary Edilberto de Jesus to issue a memorandum circular that will recognize primary schools for indigenous peoples in the Philippines. The DepEd memo circular is seen as containing specific policy guidelines for indigenous education on the matter of curriculum framework and learning competencies, qualification of learning facilitators, school calendar, school building, land ownership, among others. Other civil society organizations, such as the Mindanawon Initiatives for Cultural Dialogue, sent a Statement of Concurrence supporting the ESSC policy recommendation.

These groups believe that “it ought to be possible for the indigenous people to benefit from a solid formal education without losing the positive values inherent in their own unique cultures and to prepare them for meaningful and genuine participation in general Philippine society without destroying their cultural identities” (ESSC 2003).

3. *Generate increased support for indigenous education. More sustainable means of support can be identified and tapped.*

Existing initiatives have to be recognized, organized and supported (Alejo 2002b). Clearly, one sector whose support can be significant is the government. DepEd, NCIP and CHED are among those who can help these earlier initiatives sustain and improve their delivery of services. Formal academic institutions, such as state universities, the Notre Dame Educational Association and the Mindanao Ateneo-schools, can also be encouraged to extend themselves in the area of teacher training (Diaz 2002).

4. *Set up within the DepEd a Bureau of Indigenous Education with a corresponding budget (ACPC 2002, also in Bennagen 2001).*

DepEd has been endeavoring to assist the indigenous people in terms of developing intercultural understanding. In 1998, during the leadership of Bro. Andrew Gonzalez, FSC, it embarked on "indigenizing the curriculum" of public schools. It conducted a National Seminar Workshop on Indigenization / Localization of the Secondary Education Curriculum, which aimed to:

... make the curriculum responsive to the needs of the people in various locations in the Philippines by accommodating, accepting, and studying locally, national and internationally accepted facts, concepts, principles and theories against the broad background of their cultures/subcultures; and develop prototype indigenous materials for selected topics in the curriculum (indigenized content, strategies, and instructional materials, i.e., sample lesson plan) (DECS Memorandum No. 356 s. 1998).

DepEd also has a Bureau of Nonformal Education, which assists groups that do literacy programs, but programs for the indigenous people are invisibly lumped with other general categories of people who benefit from them (NCIP 2003).

Still, institutionalization through a Bureau of Indigenous Education is seen as a way by which efforts in indigenous education can be made more systematic and can be more properly harnessed for development. Diaz (2002) echoes the idea that DepEd should include Lumad education in its regular education program... [to] be done within the present national budget—perhaps with realignments.

Engendering a truly indigenous education is a continuing challenge to all stakeholders—government and nongovernment organizations, indigenous communities, and other support groups. Interfacing public and private initiatives may be part of the answer.

Note

¹Ms. Pamela Castrillo presented this paper at the Southeast East Asian Ministers of Education Organization-United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (SEAMEO-UNESCO) Education Congress and Expo held in Bangkok, Thailand on 27-29 May 2004.

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