

The Ligawasan Marsh Stakeholders Mapping Project: Foregrounding the Marginalized

A Project Report Presented to the
University Research Council,
Ateneo de Davao University

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March 2015

Acknowledgements

The authors of this report gratefully acknowledge the generous financial, management and other support of the Ateneo de Davao University, especially Fr. Joel E. Tabora, S.J., University President, whose vision and passion for advocacy allowed the project proponents to realize their plans.

Gratitude is also due to the following:

The Department of Anthropology of the Ateneo de Davao University, especially Admin. Asst. Kenny Sitjar; and the Al Qalam Institute for Islamic Identities and Dialogue in Southeast Asia, and its Director, Datu Mussolini S. Lidasan, and Admin. Asst. Aimee Abdul, for the encouragement, networking, accounting and other support they provided throughout the duration of the project.

Mr. Rex T. Rola, Dr. Lourdes R. Simpol, Ph.D. and Dr. Jesse B. Manuta, Ph.D., of the Ateneo de Davao University for their various contributions to project planning and preparation, and to the writing and completion of this report.

Dr. Abonawas M. Pandalilay, Ph.D. of the Cotabato City State Polytechnic; Dr. Cayetano C. Pomares, Ph.D. of the University of Southern Mindanao, Kabacan, Cotabato; and Dir. Dausay Daulog of the Maguindanao Development Foundation, Inc., Marbel City, South Cotabato, who acted as the project's gatekeepers to the Ligawasan Marsh, and its people.

Julienne S. Baldonado, Marlouzel B. Mabunga, and Richard D. Belar, who served as field coordinators for the project.

Daniel Esperat, Al Azar Guiamla, Datun Laban, Shemran Laban, Sarah Mae Gonsang, Sitie Sencil, Al Rashid Sencil, Mondatu Pendililang, Omran Otto, Hyro Pipican, Michael Matula, Halima Abdul Salam, Rachma Saylor and Rochma Saylor, for conducting the field research for this project.

Dr. Gail T. Ilagan, Ph.D. of Ateneo de Davao University's Center of Psychological Extension and Research Services, Ms. Carol O. Arguillas of Mindanews, and Ms. Ma. Carmen L. Lauzon-Gatmaytan of the Mindanao Peoples Caucus, for helping connect the project with key actors in the Ligawasan Marsh area.

And the Maguindanao people, who welcomed the project and its researchers into their homes, lives and dreams.

To all of you, *sukran*.

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Abbreviations Used

ADDU	Ateneo de Davao University
AIA	Ateneo Institute of Anthropology
AQI	Al Qalam Institute for Islamic Identities and Dialogue in Southeast Asia
ARMM	Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao
BIFF	Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DENR	Department of Environment and Natural Resources
FGD	Focus-Group Discussion
FPE	Foundation for the Philippine Environment
IPRA	Indigenous Peoples Rights Act
KII	Key-Informant Interview
LGU	Local Government Unit
LMAG	Ligawasan Marsh Assistance Group
LMSMP	Ligawasan Marsh Stakeholders Mapping Project
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
MNLF	Moro National Liberation Front
NDU	Notre Dame University, Cotabato City
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NIPAS	National Integrated Protected Area System
PA	Protected Area
PAMB	Protected Area Management Board
PASA	Protected Area Suitability Assessment
TropICS	Tropical Institute for Climate Studies

The Ligawasan Marsh Stakeholders Mapping Project:¹ Foregrounding the Marginalized

1. Introduction

Project inception

The movement to establish a Protected Area (PA) in accordance with the National Integrated Protected Area System (NIPAS)² to cover the vast Ligawasan Marsh has been ongoing for more than a decade. In the latter half of 2013, however, the Foundation for the Philippine Environment (FPE), which has long supported this initiative, invited the Tropical Institute for Climate Research (TropICS), the Al Qalam Institute for Islamic Identities and Dialogue in Southeast Asia (AQI), and the Ateneo Institute of Anthropology (AIA), all of which are based in the Ateneo de Davao University (ADDU), to join in the formation of what came to be called the Ligawasan Marsh Assistance Group (LMAG). The LMAG was intended to provide support to the campaign for a PA, which was then entering the period for public consultations, to be organised and conducted by officials of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

Within the LMAG, Datu Mussolini S. Sinsuat, AQI's Director, was chosen to lead the group. In this capacity, he requested the AIA to conduct a stakeholders mapping project, in recognition of the perceived need for more information on the attitudes of local communities towards the proposed PA and the issues bound up with that project. The AIA agreed to conduct the said research project.

In the planning of this project, the AIA considered the character of the DENR's public consultations, which tended to focus on local government unit (LGU) officials and representatives of government agencies. It was decided that rather than duplicate the efforts and output of the formal consultation process, it would focus instead on the Maguindanao farmers and fishers of the Ligawasan Marsh area, who constitute the majority of the population therein, but who most probably would have little opportunity to

¹ A preliminary version of this report was presented at the *Ligawasan Marsh Summit: Sustainable Development and Environmental Conservation* forum, held on 30 October 2014, at the Notre Dame University, Cotabato City.

² Republic Act no. 7586 (1991).

participate in the formal consultations. The AIA's research project—subsequently named the Ligawasan Marsh Stakeholders Mapping Project (LMSMP)—was thus designed from the start to complement the process and results of the formal consultation process spearheaded by the DENR.

Research focus

This project report will not rehearse the environmental arguments in support of the proposed PA, which arguments are here taken as valid and substantiated. For readers who do wish to evaluate these arguments for themselves, they are directed to the *Protected Area Suitability Assessment for Ligawasan Marsh* (2002), the Protected Area Suitability Assessment (PASA) or official scientific report justifying the establishment of a PA in the Ligawasan Marsh area; as well as *Marshals of the Marsh* (2014), a concise and more recent description of the environmental value of the marsh area. Rather, this report will present data on the Maguindanao farmers and fishers of the Ligawasan Marsh area. In particular, it focuses on two issues of great relevance to the idea of establishing a PA in the area: (1) the local people's understandings of the marsh and its importance to them; and (2) their views on how the marsh can best be managed. To that end, the project planned to conduct focus-group discussions (FGDs) in the area as its primary data-gathering method, as discussed in the section on Research Design, below.

In pursuing these research objectives, the LMSMP has added its own inflection on the conduct of stakeholder mapping projects. Usually, such projects are designed to present the views of different stakeholders or actors, from various socio-political locations, on a given issue. Here, the focus as stated is on a single socio-political location; i.e., farmers and fishers—two livelihood categories that often merge with each other in the marsh—from various geographic points across the area. In this sense, the LMSMP 'maps' stakeholders not in the sense of providing a broad, landscape-type view of various actors' perspectives on an issue, but of discovering or locating one group of very critical actors within the discourse of environmental protection surrounding the PA concept. This is felt to be necessary given the general emphasis on the environmental and technical aspects of the PA project, and the relative neglect of socio-political issues and variables. The PASA itself, for example, claims to have conducted an 'ethnographic study' as part of its field investigations, but could only muster a scant seven pages of text, most of it introductory or merely descriptive in character (2002: 34-41).

In this, the PASA is representative of the broader academic literature on the Ligawasan Marsh, wherein the Maguindanao people and their culture are very poorly represented. Indeed, the review of related literature conducted in preparation for this project revealed that very little is known about Maguindanao livelihoods, land and resource tenure, and religious or spiritual beliefs, among other aspects of their culture, all of which have some bearing on the idea of setting up a PA in the marsh area. The one sub-field on which much has in fact been written is on Maguindanao local politics. Even here however, much of the material is either historical in thrust (see, for example, Ileto 1971, McKenna 1998, and Abinales 2000) or is heavily concentrated on elite politics (see Abinales 2010; Lara and Champain 2009; Lara 2014; Lara and Schoofs, eds. 2013). Moreover, the themes this latter set of studies tend to focus on are limited to the constellated issues of politics, violence, corruption and the so-called 'shadow economy', when Maguindanao history and culture is so much more than these issues. The one reading encountered that provided a glimpse into the real lives of contemporary Maguindanao in the area is the *Liguasan Marsh Vulnerability Survey* (2004), which is based on interviews of conflict-affected Maguindanaos, mostly in Pikit municipality. Even then, it is still difficult to draw generalizations from that one study, conducted largely in one area, and apply them to all Maguindanao farmers and fishers across the marsh. There is also the problem posed by the fact that this study is now ten years old, in an area that from experience is very complex and fluid.

This project thus also considers that the peace dividend from the talks between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)—which is widely and correctly seen by many as enjoying a strong presence in the Ligawasan area—and the Philippine government also includes the possibility of deeper and more sustained academic research in the marsh. The project is to be regarded therefore as a preliminary step towards establishing the ADDU's research presence in the area. To that end, this project was able to make contact with gatekeepers, recruit and train researchers who may be tapped in further studies, and generate data that provides a broad view of the region, its people and the issues they face. Towards the end of the project period, the AIA even assisted the AQI in negotiating for future research collaboration between the ADDU and Notre Dame University (NDU) in Cotabato City.

University support

The LMSMP design, incorporating the considerations discussed above, was written up as a research proposal and submitted to Fr. Joel E. Tabora, S.J., the President of the ADDU, in April 2014.

The proposal pointed out that it was consistent with, and builds upon, the identified action points of the recent series of Jesuit Conversations: First, through its quest to articulate the voices of Maguindanao farmers and fishers, it sets the stage for inclusive dialogue on a project that has great significance for the attainment of peace and social justice, the protection and enhancement of the environment, and the equitable distribution of benefits from the marshland. Second, by emphasizing the value of the presence, perspectives and participation of local farmers and fishers, it calls for a cultural shift in the way public consultations are undertaken, one that humanizes our practice of environmentalism. Third, the project's emphasis on introducing the views of farmers and fishers into the dialogue on the proposed PA allows it to contribute to three social movements or advocacies: The movement for peace and social justice; for the realization of the right to self-determination and political autonomy of the Maguindanao and other Moro peoples; and for environmental protection; all of which have been rightly acknowledged by the Jesuit community as crucial for the attainment of the common good. Finally, by helping lay the foundation for the ADDU's further studies in the area, the research project helps pave the way for interfaith dialogue on matters that could enrich our appreciation of nature, deepen our respect for the rights and knowledges of local peoples, and strengthen our passion for peace.

Fortunately, Fr. Tabora—through the good offices of Datu Mussolini Lidasan, Director of the AQI—saw some merit in the proposed research project and approved the same. The LMSMP thus expresses once more its gratitude and appreciation for the support of the ADDU, without which its goals could not have been realized.

2. Project Design

As noted above, this project was designed to complement the on-going DENR-led public consultations on the planned Ligawasan Marsh PA. Map no. 1 (p. 10) shows how the marsh-complex covers a very large area of about 288,000 hectares. Map no. 2 (p. 11) in turn shows how the marsh spreads across the territorial jurisdiction of 19 contiguous municipalities, in the three provinces of Maguindanao, Cotabato and Sultan Kudarat.³

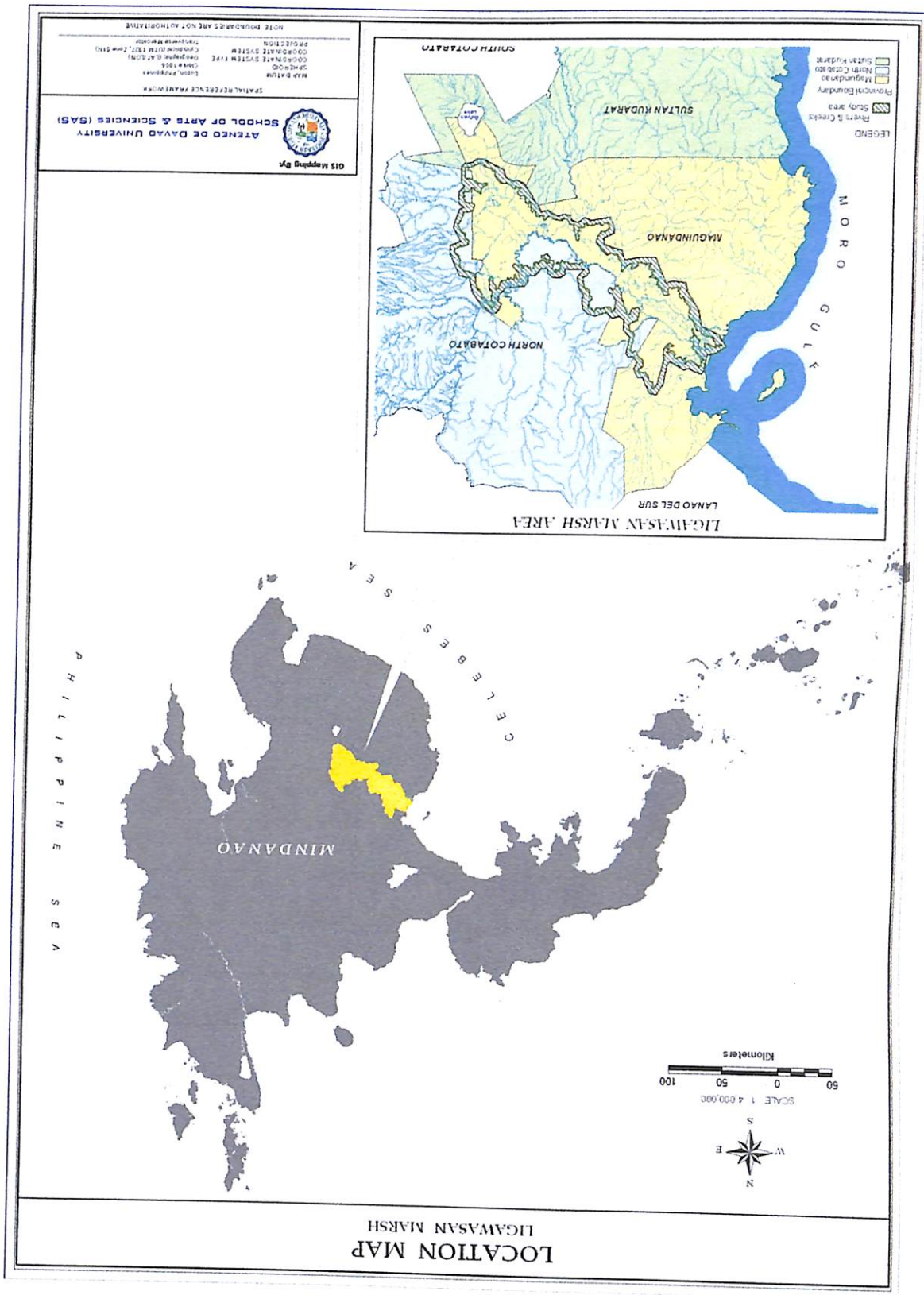
The original project design called for the conduct of FGDs in a 20 % random sample of all the barangays located wholly or partly within the Ligawasan Marsh area. Within this 20 % sample, 70 % would be from barangays within the core areas of the marsh, while the remainder would be from those on the periphery of these core areas. It turned out however that a 20 % sample would mean conducting research in around 75 different barangays. This was well beyond the available resources of the AIA, the AQI, and of the ADDU itself. Moreover, this large sample size meant that the study would not fit into the timeframe of the proponents of the protected area project.

In subsequent discussions about alternative approaches to the research design, it was noted that there will inevitably be differential public participation in the DENR-led public consultations. That is to say, some communities—defined here as barangays and their constituent *sitios/puroks*—will have better opportunities to participate in the consultations than others, in part because of problems of access to information, the high opportunity cost for subsistence farmers or fishers of attending a distant hearing (instead of working for their families' subsistence), and geographical remoteness and its related transport problems. It was thus decided that the study will focus on those barangays with limited opportunity to participate in public consultations. More specifically, the study looked to the 112 barangays which, according to available government data, are not serviced by any roads, and are thus constrained from attending public meetings. A 20 % random sample of these 112 barangays translates to 22.4 field sites, rounded off to 23 sites. This is a much more workable number of field sites for the LMSMP. Where there was doubt regarding the selection of any potential research site, it was resolved by reference to its location vis-à-vis the core areas of the marsh, which runs roughly east to west across the region. Map no. 3 (page 12) shows the project's field sites in relation to the core areas of the Ligawasan area. For a list of

³ Map no. 2 is only indicative, as there are problems arising from technical difficulties in mapping, as well as the comparatively fast pace of establishment of new municipalities in this area.

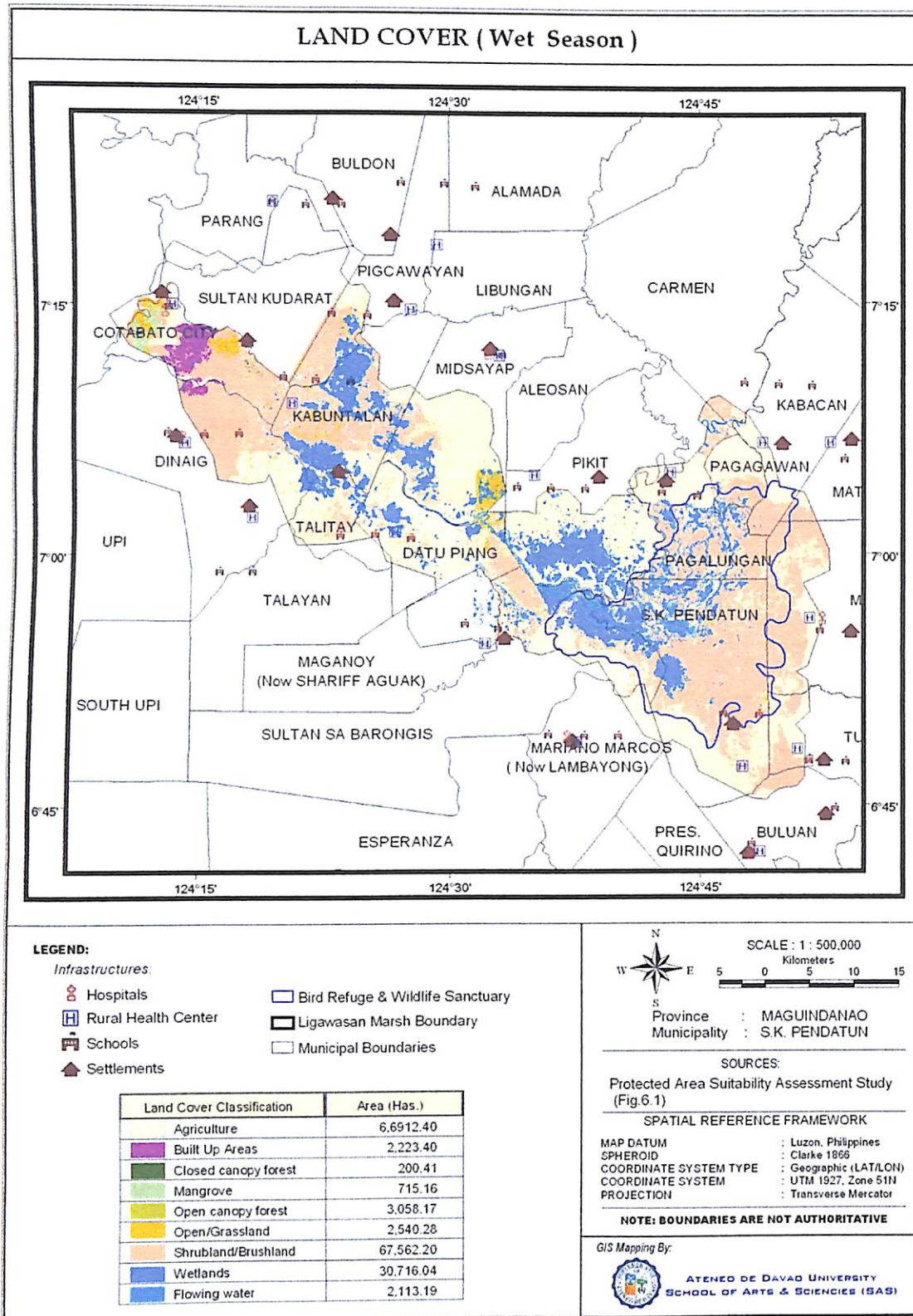
the project's field sites, kindly refer to *Annex A* of this report. As noted in that annex, the 23 field sites are scattered among 16 municipalities, in two provinces.

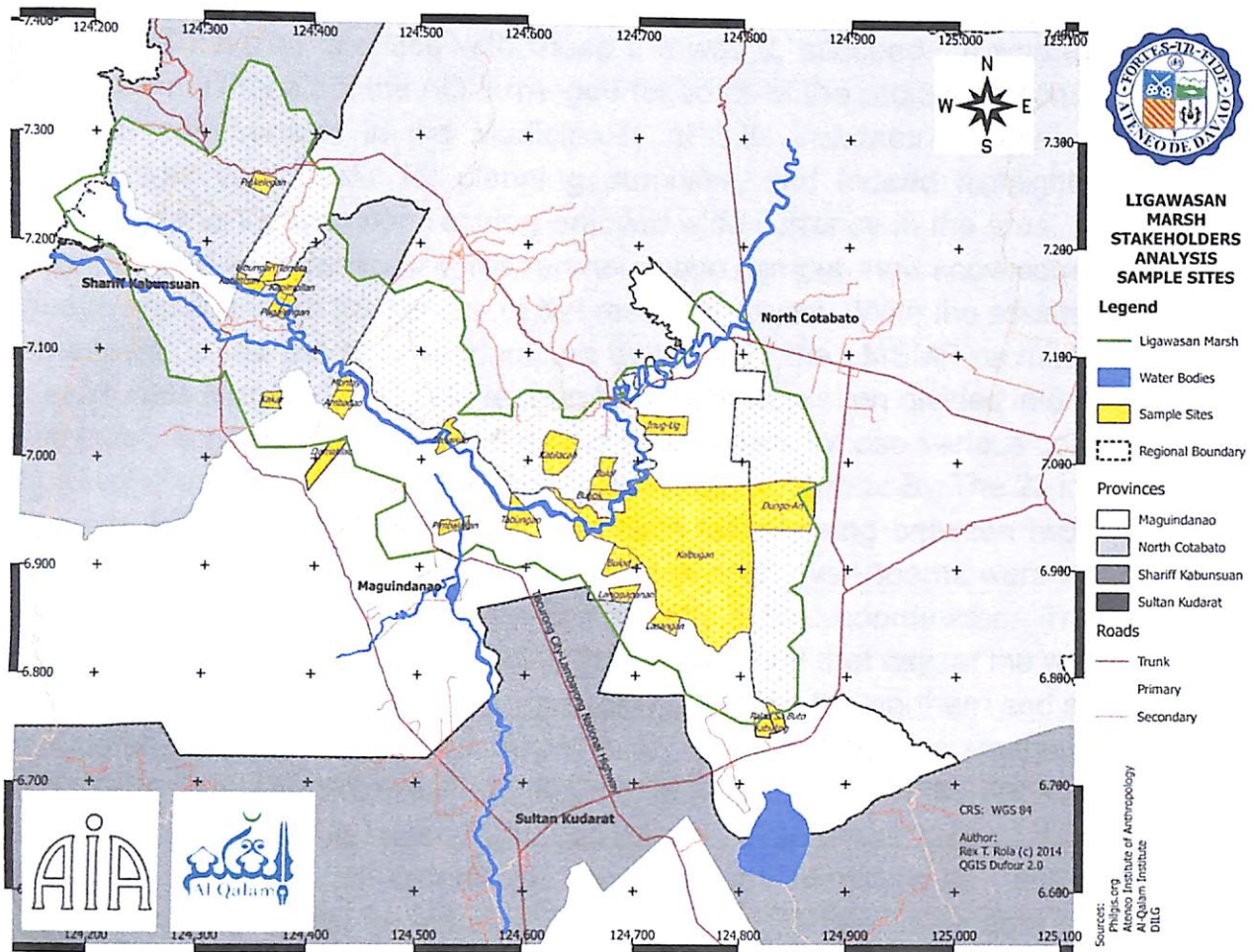
To note, a 20 % sample helps ensure the representativeness of the information gathered, as the research project would be drawing upon data from a relatively large number of sites in drawing its conclusions. Similarly, a random process of selecting the project's 23 field sites—the project proponents drew numbered lots in choosing the sites



Map no. 1. Location map of the Ligawasan Marsh area (map courtesy of Tropics-ADDU).

Map. no. 2. Indicative map of municipalities covered by the Ligawasan Marsh.
(map courtesy of TropICS-ADDU).





Map. no. 3. Relative location of LMSMP field sites.
 (map courtesy of Rex T. Rola).

—avoids any bias in the selection process, and likewise improves the representativeness and reliability of the data gathered by the researchers.

The next hurdle was the novelty of the Ligawasan Marsh area for the proponents of the LMSMP. Among other limitations, they do not speak Maguindanao; and they are unfamiliar with local political and cultural institutions and processes, and how a research project would have to interface with these if it was to succeed. It was fortunate that Datu Mussolini Lidasan of the AQI arranged for some of the project proponents to visit a few marsh communities in the Municipality of S.K. Pendatun in April 2014. This excursion was very useful for planning purposes, and indeed highlighted just how neither Cebuano-Visayan nor Tagalog enjoyed wide currency in the area. The solution was to recruit Maguindanao field researchers, who can put their knowledge of the local language and culture at the service of the research project. With the assistance of three 'gatekeepers' to the marsh area identified by the AQI, the LMSMP recruited six female and eight male Maguindanao field researchers, who were then divided into seven teams of two persons each. For a list of the field researchers, whose various contributions to this project are gratefully acknowledged, please refer to *Annex B*. The 23 identified field sites were divided among the teams, with each team having between two to four field sites. For administrative purposes, the 23 sites and seven teams were arranged into three clusters, each of which was supervised by a field coordinator. These clusters were the Cotabato City cluster, covering the sites around that city, at the western end of the marsh area; the Kabacan-Midsayap cluster, covering the northern and eastern sides of the marsh; and the Isulan-Tacurong cluster, covering the large southern side of the marsh. There were six field sites in the Cotabato cluster, five in the Kabacan-Midsayap cluster, and twelve in the Isulan-Tacurong cluster. The larger size of this last cluster reflects the geographical extent of the southern marsh area, and its relative environmental and social importance, given that the largest core area of the marsh appears to be in this sector.

The LMSMP, as stated, relied on qualitative methods for data gathering. More specifically, it called for the conduct of an FGD in each of the project's 23 field sites. Each FGD had to have farmers and/or fishers as their principal participants, thus ensuring that the voices of these non-elite residents of the marsh would be documented and articulated. For this purpose, a research instrument was gradually developed, and later translated into Maguindanao with the assistance of the field researchers. For reference, a copy of the research instrument in the original Filipino is attached hereto as *Annex C*. As a form of 'insurance' against data-loss or -fabrication, each research team was also required to conduct two key-informant interviews (KII) with either a farmer and/or fisher as respondents, within the same barangays assigned to each team, but in

sitios other than where the FGD was conducted. If all went as planned, the LMSMP's field researchers would produce 23 FGDs and 46 KIIs.

To note, the field researchers' background in research work was—with a few exceptions—limited to acting as enumerators in past surveys or censuses, such that as a group, they had no training or experience in qualitative research methods. This meant that it was necessary to arrange a training-seminar for them, which as will be seen in the discussion of the LMSMP's limitations, should have been more intensive.

In any case, the data from the FGDs and KIIs was to be supplemented by information from still other sources: (1) A workshop for the field researchers, where they discussed the learnings and insights they gained from their participation in the LMSMP. (2) KIIs conducted among identified institution-based (as opposed to community-based) respondents. These included two DENR officials, two MILF mid-level commanders, four *panditas* or ritualists, two Maguindanao academics (from NDU and from the University of Southern Mindanao, Kabacan), three NGO-representatives, and two Moro CSO-representatives. Originally, KIIs of LGU and military officials were also planned, but it was argued that the views of such officials can be drawn from the minutes of the DENR's public consultations, and there was no need to duplicate this effort. (3) Finally, some guidance could also be drawn from the admittedly limited literature on the Ligawasan Marsh, and on the Maguindanao people.

The field research was conducted over a period of two months, in June and July 2014. The project generated data from 22 FGDs (with a total of 149 respondents, or an average of 6.7 participants per FGD), supplemented by 40 community-based KIIs, nine institution-based KIIs, and one field researchers' workshop.

3. Scope and Limitations of the Study

Project scope

Again, this report presents data on Maguindanao farmers' and fishers' perspectives on the value or importance of the Ligawasan Marsh for their lives and livelihoods; and on who should manage the marsh, and how. The data here is presented not as objective truth, but as indicators of local attitudes and understandings, and of the ideological and pragmatic assertions of the various respondents. As such, the output must be read in relation to the context within which it was produced, hence the project's emphasis on utilizing parallel and complementary sources of data, such as institution-based interviews and the existing social science literature. In all cases, the data must and will be viewed with critical discernment.

Despite the concern for ensuring the representativeness of the data gathered by the LMSMP, there is no pretense that this is a statistical study. It does however provide a profile of the range of views held by respondents from a relatively large number of remote farming and fishing communities within the marsh area. With its reliance on FGDs, neither is the study an in-depth ethnographic study of a given site. Rather, it is something midway between these two methodological poles. In sum, the research project presents themes or patterns drawn from a reading of the totality of the qualitative data from multiple sites across the marsh area, which suggest issues that may be of concern to planning and implementing a PA in the marsh.

Having generated information on local views of socio-political and economic conditions within the Ligawasan Marsh, this project recommends even now the conduct of an ethnographic study in the area. In particular, there is a need for more in-depth understanding of indigenous political institutions and practices, local livelihoods and its related land and resource tenure systems, and Maguindanao religious or spiritual beliefs and practices, among other possible subjects. In this way, more and better data can be made available for consideration of planners and implementers in the future.

Operational limitations

The reader may have noticed that there is a discrepancy between the number of FGDs actually conducted (22) by the field researchers, and the number of field sites comprising the research project's sample (23). This was because one research team

was unable to visit one of its field sites because of security problems arising from a case of feuding or *rido* in that area. To note, other data was lost when another team—apparently new to the use of digital recorders—inadvertently deleted their recordings of their KIIs. In any case, even if one field site was not visited, the LMSMP still has the data from the 22 other sites, which together represent a sample of 19.64 %, which can be rounded off as to make the targeted 20 % sample. Moreover, the 'lost' field site was in the Municipality of Pikit, and the research project had two other field sites in that same municipality. In sum, the loss of one field site, while certainly regrettable, did not adversely affect the overall conduct of the LMSMP.

As noted, almost all of the field researchers had limited background or experience in conducting qualitative research, necessitating the conduct of a training seminar for them. Despite this training, a number of research teams were unable to maximize the FGDs they conducted. Most importantly, some of them did not follow through on issues, ideas or phrasings that emerged in the course of the FGD discussions, resulting in data with limited depth. One team seemed to have completely misunderstood the concept of an FGD, and instead conducted a marathon series of KIIs. Still, not all teams suffered such limitations; the data submitted by some research teams offered comparatively more substantial data. On the other hand, this also means that the overall quality of the data was rather uneven. This unevenness was exacerbated by the reality that *in the field* it is to a degree inevitable that some of the FGD instrument's questions were inadvertently altered or even omitted, again reducing the general comparability of responses from the various field-sites.

Problems were also posed by the language barrier. It meant, in the first place, that the AIA could not conduct the research work itself, without doing violence to the University's academic calendar. As discussed above, the LMSMP thus had to rely on Maguindanao field researchers contracted for the project. This translates to a degree of loss of control over the research process. Second, this situation also meant that the research teams could translate the FGD instrument *in the field* in any number of possible ways. For example, the FGD question, '*Sa tingin ba ninyo ay maipapatuloy pa itong uri ng pamumuhay?*' was intended to probe local perceptions regarding the sustainability of local livelihoods. A reading of the FGD data shows however that this question was sometimes understood as asking about respondents' outlook for their children's future (e.g., whether their children will 'just' end up as farmers or fishers like the respondents) or their view of fate or destiny (e.g., that being a farmer or fisher is the will of Allah). There were similar difficulties in translating other concepts or ideas into Maguindanao. Third, the data submitted by the research teams to the AIA was already translated from Maguindanawon to Filipino. This meant that the project had to rely on each team's skills in translation, with the risk that something might have been lost in translation.

Having said all that, the LMSMP still has a substantial body of data as a result of its research work, which can still be useful, provided it is viewed with critical discernment. In any case, the research data can further be explored or deepened in future follow-up studies.

The research project also experienced delays in the conduct of field work. The occurrence of *rido* in the area has already been noted, preventing one team from visiting one of its field sites, and delaying entry of one other team to two of their sites. Another source of delays arose from what may be referred to as the political culture of the area. The LMSMP made it a policy that field researchers introduce themselves and the project to the concerned mayors and barangay captains prior to conducting actual research work. Unfortunately, it was difficult to arrange meetings with some officials, who were not in the habit of maintaining a presence in their offices. More, there were ongoing disputes over who was the rightful barangay captain in a few sites, with resulting changes in the identity of the incumbent. The letters of introduction the field researchers brought with them thus had to be replaced with corrected ones addressed to the new barangay officials. Finally, there were also logistical difficulties in mailing documents or sending funds to some of the researchers, who lived in areas without easy access to courier and money-transfer services. In this matter, one can only glean the relevant lessons from such experiences, and integrate them into the planning of possible future research projects in the area.

Finally, it has to be admitted that there were problems with the budgeting of the project, particularly the field research phase spearheaded by the project's Maguindanao researchers. This stemmed from a wholly inadequate estimate of travel costs from the researchers' various residences to their assigned field-sites, provided by one of the project's contacts. This problem again caused delays, as the field researchers could not complete their assignments without adequate travel budgets. It also necessitated some realignment of the LMSMP budget items. Fortunately, it was all worked out in the end. In the future, it would be best if budgeting was done with the assistance of people who are familiar with the area and travel conditions therein.

Contextual considerations

The field research on which this project report is based was gathered over a period of two months, June and July 2014, although a number of research teams were compelled to continue working through August, due to various factors beyond the project's control. This means the data presented reflects conditions during the region's transition from the dry to rainy season.

More importantly, the research period of the LMSMP coincided with the latter phases of the peace-negotiations between the MILF and the government. The currency of the negotiations, with its promise of political autonomy for the Bangsa Moro, may thus have colored some respondents' answers. For example, there is a strong indication that the MILF enjoys considerable support from many respondents, who perhaps appreciate its recent achievements at the negotiation table. It is possible that, in other circumstances, respondents' expressed views or attitudes would change. Had the MILF been less successful in its negotiations with the government, for example; or should the promises embodied by the peace agreements remain unfulfilled; local people's views of the MILF could very well change. Some respondents—such as the mid-level MILF commanders—also refused to answer questions regarding how the marsh area ought to be governed, out of deference to their superiors' authority to decide or negotiate these matters. Again, this reality can only be addressed by reading the LMSMP's output of data with an awareness of this context.

4. Research Findings

4.1. *Livelihood*

The majority of the project's respondents described themselves as farmers or fishers. Rice and corn are reported as the major crops in the area, with coconut coming in a very distant second. Only one community reported coconut farming as its principal source of livelihood. Another community was unique in its economic reliance on softwood-cultivation, -cutting and -marketing, though even there, farming and fishing were extant practices. These two cases however appear to be the exceptions that prove the general rule; i.e., a widespread economic reliance by Maguindanao in the marsh area on rice and/or corn farming, and on fishing. Respondents from fourteen of the 22 field-sites described their communities as engaging in both farming and fishing, while another five said both livelihoods were practiced there, though one predominates over the other.⁴

In some cases, respondents described themselves as both farmers and fishers. As one of them put it, "*Kung hindi maganda ang kalagayan ng pagsasaka, [sa] pangangisda naman.*"⁵ In other cases, the respondents described their *community* as being composed mainly of farmers and fishers, leaving unclear whether all residents practiced this shifting from one livelihood to another; or if there was some variation within the community, with some residents practicing only one or the other livelihood, while others engaged in both. In any case, the vital importance of farming and fishing in the region seems clear. The discussions of livelihood reported in the FGDs are overwhelmingly about fishing and farming. A tricycle driver who joined one FGD reported that even his livelihood was dependent on fishing, because if the local fishers' catch was poor, no one would hire him to go to market to sell fish or purchase goods.⁶ Another informant from another community, who was not from a fishing household, observed that if the local catch was poor, the market price of fish would increase,⁷ making it more difficult for her to cope economically.

⁴ In three of the five sites, fishing was said to predominate over farming.

⁵ *If the conditions for farming are not good, then we [shift to] fishing.*

⁶ "*Kung walang mahuhuli na isda ay wala din kaming kinikita dahil wala ring mamamalengke.*" (If no fish are caught, then we do not make any money either, because no one will be going to market.)

⁷ "*(K)ung mababaw ang tubig, nahihirapan silang mangisda, hanggang sa kahit kami ay maapektuhan din dahil tumataas ang halaga ng isda.*" (If the waters are low, they have difficulty fishing, so even we are affected because the price of fish increases.)

4.1.1. The problem of debt

This reported shifting between farming and fishing may be problematic for some local residents, however. As a respondent from Lasangan said:

"Ang totoo po, pati ang pagbili ng ... kagamitan sa pangangisda at pagsasaka ay nahihirapan kami. At mangilan lamang ang merong bangka, at ... maituturo mo na merong ... kagamitan sa pagsasaka."

(The truth is, we have problems buying fishing and farming equipment. There are only a few [of us] with their own boat, or ... whom we can identify as having ... farming tools.)

Indeed, a number of communities expressed an interest in assistance or support in the form of free farming or fishing equipment, or to a lesser extent, in provision of financing for purchasing such equipment. Without such assistance, people have to rely on loans for purchases or borrowing neighbors' equipment. Again from Lasangan comes this statement:

"Talagang ang hirap ngayon dahil kahit mangangisda ka o magsasaka ay utang ka muna bago ka mangisda o ... makapagsaka sa lupa mo, dahil sa kawalan ng pera na pambili ng gamit ... [o kaya] pang-arkila ... ng gamit pangsaka at pangangisda."

(It is really difficult these days because whether you go fishing or farming, you have to borrow money first before you can fish or ... farm your land, because we have no money for buying [inputs] ... [or] for renting ... farming or fishing equipment.)

The resulting indebtedness could very well lead to the exacerbation of the economic distance between elite and non-elites within local communities, or across the area, in a region already noted for the poverty of a large segment of its population.⁸ A respondent from Tabungao offered this somewhat resentful reflection:

⁸ See

http://www.nscb.gov.ph/poverty/data/1stsem_2012/2012OfficialPovertyStatistics.pdf, for a government report which finds that poverty incidence among the country's regions is highest in the ARMM, where the marsh is located. The same source also indicates that Maguindanao province, which contains much of the Ligawasan Marsh area, has the fourth highest poverty incidence in the country, behind Lanao del Sur, Apayao and Eastern Samar, in that order.

“Nahihirapan ang mga magsasaka ... kaya nangungutang na lang sila. Pagkaharvest nila ay di po sila makakaganansiya at napag-iiwanan pa sila ng utang. Ang nangyayari sa mga tao na mahirap ay lalo pang naghihirap at silang mga mayayaman ay mas lalo pang yumayaman.”

(The farmers are impoverished ... so they resort to borrowing money. At harvest time, they make no profit and are even left in debt. What happens to poor people is that they become poorer while they who are rich become even richer.)

There thus seems to be widespread reliance on loans not only to enable local people to shift from one livelihood to another, but also to sustain the very practice of farming or fishing. There is a general observation that rice cultivation, in particular, has become input- and therefore credit-dependent. Once more from Lasangan comes this plaint:

“Noong unang panahon ay madali ang paghahanapbuhay dahil marami pang isda at wala masyadong binabayaran. Ngayon ay dumami na talaga ang binabayaran; pamatay-peste, abono, land preparation, planting time up to harvest time, lahat ay ginagastusan mo. Sa pangingisda naman, wala ka nang masyadong nahuhuli ... na isda ... kaya madalas nangungutang na lang dahil iyon na lang ang paraan para lang mabuhay kami.”

(In the past, life was easy because there was plenty of fish and little to pay for. Today, so many things have to be paid for; insecticides, fertilizers, land preparation, from planting time up to harvest time, you have to pay for everything. As for fishing, you cannot catch much fish anymore ... so we often end up borrowing money because that is the only way we can survive.)

That phrase, *‘iyon na lang ang paraan’* (that is the only way) underlines a general sense of constraint or compulsion, if not of desperation. That is to say, many farmers and fishers in the marsh area reportedly find themselves forced to secure loans, just to ensure their families’ survival. So central is borrowing credit in local livelihoods that an informant observed: *“Hindi umuusad ang aming paghahanapbuhay kapag wala kaming nauutangan.”* (Our livelihoods cannot move [forward] if we have no one to borrow from.)

Such a reliance on borrowing erodes any potential profits from a Maguindanao household’s farming or fishing activities. A resident of Katilacan said: *“Ito namang hanapbuhay na pagsasaka ay nauuna ang pagkakautang, at bago ka makakaani ay halos wala nang natitira sa iyo kasi binabayad lahat sa utang.”* (In the farming trade, borrowing money is the first [thing], and even before you harvest [your crops], almost

nothing is left to you because everything [has been earmarked] for paying back the loan.)

A reliance on loans could conceivably lead as well to the emergence of patron-client relations between creditor and debtor, and the resulting erosion of the latter's economic and political autonomy. In Dungguan, fishers describe people whom they refer to as their "boss" in fishing:

"Doon ka magdeliver sa kanya kung doon ka magpasuporta sa kanya. Halimbawa, magpabili kami ng [fishing] net, na babayaran mo rin sa kanya ... kung kailan ka makaluwag-luwag."

(You deliver [your fish] to whomever [you chose] to support you. For example, we ask them to purchase a fishing net [for us], [the cost of which] you will repay ... whenever [your financial situation improves].)

Access to credit appears to be a crucial economic variable across the area. In some cases, it is used to purchase needed agricultural inputs or to buy or rent farming or fishing equipment; in others, it is necessary to tide families over while awaiting harvest, or to sustain them while fishing activities are undertaken.

4.1.2. Environmental factors

As can be expected from the above, most informants from the majority of the project field-sites described their livelihood as difficult. Such terms as "*mahirap*" ('difficult', the term most often used to describe local livelihoods), "*tabla*" ('[breaking] even', hence without profit), "*isang kahig, isang tuka*" ('one scratch [on the soil], one peck [of food]', or "*walang ganansiya*" ('no profit') or "*walang sobra*" ('with nothing over'; i.e., nothing is left over after meeting consumption needs), among others, underline the economic hardships very many project respondents seem to face. In the same way, the Maguindanao words, "*kadsabar*" and "*katigkel*"—both of which roughly translate to the Filipino '*pagtitiis*', or 'enduring' or 'persevering'—come up in other informants' descriptions of their lives. Still others speak of how they live from day to day, their gains from fishing or farming insufficient to support their families for more than a day. From Kabuling comes just such a description of everyday life:

"Sa pagsasaka at pangingisda ay hindi kami nakakaganansiya; kung ano ang kinikita namin sa ngayon ay para lamang sa buong araw [na] iyon. Ang

madalas nangyayari, sa pagsapit ng gabi na natutulog kami, ... hindi namin alam kung ano ang ikabubuhay namin sa umaga."

(We make no profit in farming or fishing; whatever we earn [in a day] is enough only for that day. What often happens is, when we go to sleep at night, ... we do not know what we will live on the next morning.)

Occasionally, respondents would try to 'sugar-coat', as it were, their situation. For instance, when asked if they make a profit from their livelihood, a resident of Pagalungan said: "*Oo, kaunting-kaunti lang; ang importante ay hindi tayo makakapag-nakaw*" (Yes [we do], but only very little; what is important is that we do not have to resort to stealing). Still, the harsh reality of economic hardship cannot be denied. Thus, an informant from Pigkalan described their livelihood in the following words: "*Minsan po ay madali, ngunit parating mahirap talaga.*" (Sometimes it is easy, but it is always very difficult.)

Indeed, when asked to compare the quality of their lives now vis-à-vis their lives before, the vast majority of LMSMP respondents, right across the area, viewed life in the past as comparatively easier. Representative of this viewpoint is a statement by an elder from Kakar, who—spitting on the ground for emphasis—made this comparison between life then and now:

"Malayo talaga. Tingnan mo, ha. Noon ay marami ang ani; marami ang isda. Wala ka masyadong makita na pakabimban."

([The past and the present] are so far apart. Just look. In the past, we had big harvests; there was much fish. [And] you rarely see [anything to tempt you].)

"*Pakabimban*" is from the root-word, "*bimban*"; 'to attract' or 'to allure' (see Sullivan 1986: 95). This reflects the view from a small number of field-sites, that part of the causes of the Maguindanaos' economic problems today is the heightened consumerism of contemporary culture. As a respondent from Pagalungan puts it:

"Noon, makakuha ka ng isang isda o dalawa, ay OK na. Ngayon ay kung makabili ka ng isang damit ay gusto mo pang dagdagan. Kung may motor ka na ay gusto mo pang makabili ng trak."

(In the past, when you got a fish or two, [then you're] OK. Now, if you can buy one [piece of] clothing, you want to [get more]. If you already have a motorcycle, you want to buy a truck.)

In any case, there may be a temptation to dismiss the view that life was better or easier in the past as mere stirrings of nostalgia. However, one informant noted, "*mahirap din noon, pero mas mahirap ngayon mabuhay.*" (It was also difficult in the past, but it is more difficult to survive these days.) This informant, in other words, knows and accepts that life in the past was hard as well, but that it has become even *harder* today.

This is not to say that there was uniform pessimism about contemporary life and livelihoods in the marsh. In Montay, for example, respondents asserted that life is better today, as assistance from government agencies can now reach them.⁹ Similarly, a resident of Dasawao said that life is easier now because, "*(m)arami [na] ang paraan na kung paano kumita.*" ([T]here are now many ways to make money). It should be noted however that Brgy. Dasawao is unique among the LMSMP's field-sites in its active engagement with softwood-cultivation and –cutting, so its residents do not rely as much on farming or fishing. But even in Dasawao, there were other informants who argued that life was better in the past, pointing out that, "*mumurahin ang mga bilingin*" ('goods were cheap'), "*madali ang paghuli ng isda*" ('catching fish was easy'), and "*marami ang ani*" ('harvests were large') then, as compared to today.

In almost all field-sites, "*pagbaha*" ('flooding') or "*pagtaas ng tubig*" ('rising waters') is most often cited as the prime cause for their economic hardship. Over and over, informants spoke of how floods destroyed their crops, often forcing them into debt just to sustain their families. The following is a representative statement, made by a farmer from Buliok: "*Kahit nga ang pagsasaka ay hindi rin gaanong [naaasahan], kasi naaabutan ng baha, at ang mga mais namin ay namamatay lahat; kaya nagkakautang naman kami.*" (We cannot rely even on farming anymore, because the flooding comes and all the corn [we plant] dies; and we end up in debt.) This view was echoed by a neighbor, who then challenged the field-researchers by saying, "*Kaya paano kami mabubuhay nang maayos?*" (So how can we make a proper living?) Not surprisingly, a few communities called for the construction of dikes and similar waterworks to control or reduce the impact of such floods.

As a marsh-complex, the Ligawasan is of course expected to flood periodically, particularly in the rainy season. However, the "*pagbaha*" that respondents refer to here is not the usual, seasonal rise in water level, but is repeatedly described as "*pagbaha*

⁹ "*Mas maganda ngayon kasi may dumarating na supply galing sa mga agency ng gobyerno.*"

na wala nang control (flooding that has gone out of control), and with less frequency, *“pagbaha na wala nang panahon”* (unseasonable flooding); i.e., abnormal flooding that is unusually quick or high, and coming at unpredictable intervals. One informant complained that it may flood three times in a single year. Similarly, a farmer from Pembalakan reflected that it has been ten years since they’ve had a successful harvest.¹⁰ So destructive is the flooding that the viability of farming itself seems to have come under doubt, as can be seen from the following testimony:

“Ang totoong trabaho namin dito ay ... pagsasaka. Ito po yong aming inaasahan. Ang amin pong buhay dito dati ay maganda, sapagkat ang bawat bagong taon namin dito maganda. Pero mga ilang taon na ... ay naging ganito na kami. Hindi na kami nakakasaka nang maayos; namamatay ang aming hanapbuhay dahil sa pagtaas ng baha.”

(Our true livelihood here was ... farming. That was what we depended on. Once, our life here was good, [and] every New Year [celebration] here was [good]. But it has been some years now ... and we are as we are now. We can no longer farm properly; our livelihood is dying because of the rising of the flood [waters].)

The above are the thoughts of a farmer from Pigkalagan, who expresses concern about the continued feasibility of farming in a context of frequent, severe and unpredictable flooding. Coming through his words, as well, is a sense of longing for a more stable, more gainful, and happier agrarian past.

One would think that such floods bring with them the opportunity for plentiful fishing. Certainly, this seems to be true for some areas, as was reported for example in Ambadao. However, there seem to be variations in local experience. For instance, a fisher from Inug-og noted, *“may mga panahon din na `pag tumaas ang tubig, wala kami masyadong makuhang isda.”* ([T]here are also times when the waters rise, yet we do not catch many fish.) A fisher from Damamblac explained the situation in this manner: *“Kapag tumataas ang tubig ... ang naapektohan ay ang pangingsda namin, sapagkat kapag malalim na ang tubig, mahirap na hulihin ang isda”* (When the waters rise ... our fishing is affected, because when the waters become deep, it becomes difficult to catch fish). This seems to point to the limits of existing fishing technologies; e.g., nets or techniques designed for shallow waters, or fish-weirs that are inundated, allowing captured fish to escape. Another respondent, from Katilacan, observed, *“Wala na masyadong nakukuhang isda dahil sa parati na lang bumabaha at lumalayo na ang*

¹⁰ *“Halos sampung taon na ang lumipas ay wala pa ring halos nabubuhay na pananim.”* (It has been about ten years now and still almost none of our crops have survived.)

isda." (Few fish are caught these days because it always floods and the fish have gone farther [from us].) This is understood to mean that, with higher flood-levels, the normal distribution or movement of fish across the marsh may have been altered or disrupted.

Flooding aside, many respondents also said that fish catches today are not as plentiful, and that the fish one does manage to capture tend to be smaller in size. From Kalbugan comes this statement:

"May mga panahon talaga na mahirap manghuli ng isda; at ang mga isda ngayon ay ang liliit na. E kung maliit ang huli mo, ganon din kaliit ang kita mo."

(There are really times when it is difficult to catch fish; and the fish [you do catch] are so small now. And if your catch is small, your profit is just as small.)

Another fisher, from Montay, voiced a similar complaint, but using more concrete imagery:

"Inaabot na lang ako ng umaga ay mga sampu lang ang nahuhuli ko. Maliliit pa ..."

(I fished until the early morning, and all I got were around ten fish. And they were [all] small ...)

Indeed, in at least two field-sites, individual fishers stated that they have stopped fishing altogether, having become discouraged by the problems they encountered. While this does not seem to be a common response to the difficulties of fishing today, it does underscore how fishing, like farming, is also beset by problems of productivity and profitability.

A number FGD participants also spoke of the 'rise of the land' (*pagtaas ng lupa*), or its converse, the lowering of local water levels (*pagbabaw ng tubig*). Such changes, which may be linked to the reported increase in flooding in the marsh—altering local land forms and water routes—may be depriving local fish populations of their refuges or spawning grounds, and may partly explain the many reports of reduced sizes of fish and fish-catches.

Other environmental problems cited, though with less frequency, are deforestation (often linked causally to flooding by informants), droughts in the dry season, and water

pollution (*mabaho na tubig* or foul-smelling waters).¹¹ In almost all field-sites, there clearly was local awareness that the ecological condition of the marsh affected people's livelihoods, dependent as they were on local resources. In response to an FGD question regarding how the condition of the marsh affected the wellbeing of people, one respondent reversed the perspective, as follows: "*Ang nakakaapekto sa kalagayan ng Ligawasan Marsh ay ang tao, ang mga chemical company ... at pagtatapon ng ... chemical products at ... maduduming bagay sa daluyan ng tubig papuntang Ligawasan*". (It is the people who affect the condition of the Ligawasan Marsh, the chemical companies ... and the disposal of ... chemical products and ... filth in the streams leading to the Ligawasan.) Thus, some local people do link the quality of the marsh—and by extension, the quality of their livelihoods and lives—to practices located well *outside* the marsh area. It is unfortunately unclear from the LMSMP data how widespread such awareness is across the marsh.

The CSO- and NGO-representatives interviewed as institution based informants were much more able to articulate the ecological links between the marsh area and the upriver watersheds that supplied it with water. One CSO-representative, in particular, argued that the proposed PA should not only be seen as an issue "*about birds ... and fish*", but more importantly, as an issue involving the Maguindanao people who consider it their home. He went on to discourse at length on the need to look beyond the boundaries of the marsh; to appreciate the links between projects and other activities in the highlands of Bukidnon, and their impact upon the condition of the marsh and the lives of its people; and to coordinate community-based projects and movements between the two areas.

4.1.3. Other factors

The impact of flooding and other environmental factors has been outlined above. The destruction of crops and hardships in fishing reported in the majority of the project's field-sites can be linked to local reliance or dependence on loans, which has also been noted. The high cost of goods, from agricultural inputs to rice for consumption, has also been mentioned, if only in passing.

A number of informants also mentioned violence as another factor that exacerbates their precarious economic situation. As a resident of Kabuling phrased it, "*Kung mapayapa na ang lugar ay madali-dali na din ang pamumuhay.*" (If the place becomes

¹¹ One or two communities also cited 'black bug' infestations, the loss or diminution of local populations of crocodiles, birds, fish and trees, the massing of water hyacinths, and destructive winds.

peaceful, making a living will also become a bit easier.) Given the long history of conflict that surrounds this region (Mercado 1992, May 1992, McKenna 1998, Rodriguez, ed. 2010, Kreuzer 2010, Abinales 2010, and Castillo 2014), one would expect that conflict and its economic impact would have been more widely cited by project informants. Perhaps the more hopeful, forward-looking atmosphere generated by the government-MILF peace talks has something to do with this. In any case, it appears that the violence that those respondents who did mention it is of two types. The first, of course, is the 'vertical' violence surrounding the revolutionary movements of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), and later, the MILF. An FGD participant from Kapimpilan asserted that, "*Gaganda lang ang pamumuhay [natin] kung maging maayos na iyong usaping pangkapayapaan*". (Our livelihood will improve only if the peace-talks succeed.) This is a clear reference to what has been called the 'peace dividend', particularly the socio-economic benefits which are supposed to follow the cessation of hostilities. Unfortunately, while conflict between the Philippine state and the MILF is winding down, conflict with the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) seems to be going on intermittently, once more resulting in physical and socio-economic losses and displacement.¹²

The second type of violence is 'horizontal', exemplified by the practice of *rido* or feuding (see Torres, ed. 2007 and 2014), which has already been mentioned above. Although the conflict here involves two nominally private parties, their seemingly kin-oriented, localized clashes can actually escalate into open warfare between government troops and groups such as the MNLF and the MILF, as both parties draw on their respective relatives or allies in their struggle against each other (Canuday 2007, 2014). An informant from Langgapanan described the peace and order situation in the community, saying "*Magulo na, kasi lagi na lang may barilan dito*" (It has become unstable, because there are frequent shootings [now].), before underscoring that she was referring to what a field-researcher translated as "*grads*"; i.e., "grudge"-fights or feuds. Though comparatively less intense than armed hostilities between state and anti-state forces, they can also result in evacuations and disruption of livelihoods.¹³

Still another factor which may affect the economic wellbeing of farming households in particular is landlessness and share tenancy (see Gutierrez and Borras 2004),¹⁴ which

¹² See, for example, <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/389616/news/regions/suspected-biff-member-captured-in-maguindanao>.

¹³ See, for example, <http://www.mindanews.com/top-stories/2014/11/21/dozens-displaced-27-houses-burned-in-rido-in-north-cotabato/>.

¹⁴ There are no reports from the field of any similar exactions demanded by landowners from fishers working within the formers' property. Clearly, the local notions and practices of

was reported in some—though certainly not all—field-sites. In one community in the Municipality of S.K. Pendatun, farmers spoke of surrendering 10 % of their crops, or of the income from the sale of their crops, to the local land-owning family, who considered such transfers as their “royalty”, in the words of a municipal official who was himself a member of that land-owning family. Other informants from other communities reported similarly handing over between 10 to 20 % of their harvest. There was one extreme case, from a community in Sultan sa Barongis town, where landowners were said to receive 85 % of their tenants’ harvest. This last instance may be exceptional—and indeed, demands verification—but it seems reasonable to conclude that in any case, such obligatory transfers of farm products or income can only mean greater hardship for farmers already mired in economic hardship. The field researchers, in their post-research workshop, collectively agreed that share tenancy poses problems for farmers in general, and that some reforms are necessary in this regard. One of the two Maguindanao scholars interviewed for this study described share tenancy outright as “feudal”; both scholars agreed on the need for some form of agrarian reform in the area. Some of the other institution-based KI interviewees also acknowledged that share tenancy is practiced in parts of the marsh area. All these interviewees however—anticipating the possible adverse reaction of powerful land-owning families—cautioned against implementing agrarian reforms without extensive social preparation. It is interesting however, that none of the project respondents directly linked such exactions to their difficult economic situation. Perhaps the project’s researchers were unable to gain the respondents’ full trust, so the latter held back from drawing such a link; or perhaps such exactions are taken as a given or ‘naturalized’ part of everyday life (following Bourdieu 1977). The situation is muddled somewhat by the reported existence of other local farming arrangements between landowners and farmers, such as “labor”, “hatian”, and “porsyento”, which all entail transfers of part of a farmer’s crops or incomes to landowners. Further research on this and related matters, with their implications not only for economic policy and social welfare, but also for the refinement of future researchers’ ethical frameworks, is called for.

Finally, some respondents also complained of a lack of other economic options for the people of the marsh. On one hand, respondents such as this one from Dungguan might say, “*Gusto rin naman natin na mabuhay nang maginhawa, pero wala tayong magagawa, ito lang [ang] makakakaya natin na pamumuhay.*” (We also want a life of ease, but we cannot do anything, this is the only living we can manage.) In some cases, this seemingly passive acceptance of fishing or farming is explained by reference to the informant’s lack of education. From Bulod, for instance, comes this statement: “*hindi naman kami pwedeng maging guro kasi wala rin naman kaming*

water tenure, and the rights and obligations that arise therefrom differ from those applying to land.

natapos." ([W]e cannot become teachers anyhow, because we did not finish [any course of studies]. In a few other cases, the informant's currently difficult economic situation is seen as the will of Allah, as in this testament from Langgapanan:

"Lahat naman po ... gusto ng magandang buhay, kaya lang ito lang talaga ang bigay sa amin ng Allah na buhay. Ang sa amin na lang, magpasalamat na lang [kami] kung anong meron."

(Everyone ... wants a good life, but this truly is the only life that Allah has given us. All that is left to us is to be grateful for what there is.)

Some informants appear to be unable to even imagine alternative livelihoods for themselves, as seems to be the case of this fisher from Lasangan: "*Kung wala pa itong pagsasaka at pangangisda namin, ay wala rin po kaming alam na ibang mapanggagalingan ng ikabubuhay namin*" ([Other than] our farming or fishing, we would not know any other source of our livelihood). Interestingly, most of the institution-based informants interviewed in the course of the LMSMP also seemed to have difficulty imagining alternative livelihoods for the people of the marsh; they instead called for improvements in local fishing and farming technologies, among other measures. This is indicative perhaps of the degree to which fishing and farming dominates the lives and thoughts of many people within the marsh area, making it difficult for them to imagine anything else. At any rate, there is a sense here that local residents are compelled by circumstances into making do with fishing and farming, with all the difficulties these livelihoods are now saddled with.

On the other hand, a resident of another community was quoted as follows: "*Sana may source of income pa maliban sa pangangisda.*" (I wish there were other sources of income besides fishing.) While this statement still does not articulate an actual alternative to fishing (or farming, for that matter), it points to an attitude that looks beyond farming or fishing. Indeed, when pressed on this issue, alternative livelihoods were cited by a few informants from various field-sites. These included livestock and poultry-raising schemes, operating a rice-mill, exploring fruit-tree, rubber, and oil-palm cultivation, eco-tourism, basketry-weaving using dried hyacinths, and even using the epidemic growths of water hyacinths as fuel for bio-mass power plants. A few respondents also stated that trading (*negosyo*)—or other enterprises, perhaps—is a possibility for them, but that securing capital for financing such a project is a major problem. The point is that, in contrast to most of their more passive neighbors, some FGD participants seem to be actively seeking, or at least thinking about, possible economic alternatives to farming and fishing.

In that connection, a large number of informants saw education as a key strategy towards improving their families' economic situation, as it could open up employment or livelihood opportunities other than farming or fishing. As a resident of Katilacan asserted:

"Hindi ko matanggap [na magiging magsasaka o mangingisda ang aking mga anak], kaya nga lahat ng mga anak ko ay pinapag-aral [ko]. Kung sakali na makatapos sila sa pag-aaral, ay hindi na nila mararamdaman ang hirap ng buhay. Kung hindi ko lahat kayang pag-aralin, ay ipapa-abroad ko ang iba para mayroong makakatulong sa akin sa pag-aaral naman ng iba."

(I cannot accept [that my children will become farmers or fishers], that is why I put all my children through school. Should they complete their studies, then they won't feel the hardships of life anymore. If I cannot support all their studies, I will send some of them abroad so they can help me with the others' studies.)

4.1.4. *Economy and ecology*

The only material offering more than a passing glance at the economic conditions of Maguindanao residents of the marsh area that the LMSMP encountered was Accion Contra el Hambre's *Liguasan Marsh Vulnerability Survey* (hereafter *Vulnerability Survey*), from 2004. The PASA (2002) claims to have conducted an ethnographic study, but what it actually offers simply does not provide substantial information or insight into the local people's quality of life. It is recommended that this portion of the PASA be improved, ideally before the projected PA's management begins its planning activities.

To return to the *Vulnerability Survey*, there is broad correspondence between most of its findings, on one hand, and that of the LMSMP, on the other. For example, there is agreement on the economic reliance of many marsh residents on farming and fishing, on local land and water tenure practices, and the roles of middlemen particularly in fishing as a livelihood. It is striking, however, that the *Vulnerability Survey* differs from this report's findings on two important issues: First, in contrast to the data presented hereinabove, it found that flooding is not a perceived problem in its field-sites. Second, the marsh residents' reliance on loans seems underemphasized, compared with the LMSMP results. These discrepancies may be due to a number of factors: Foremost is the fact that ten years separate these two reports, and many changes may have occurred during the intervening time. It may be that flooding and credit-dependence

were not issues in 2004, or were not yet perceived as problems then. If so, then the emergence of flooding and indebtedness as local livelihood problems can be dated to after 2004. Moreover, the bulk of the data that the *Vulnerability Survey* relied upon comes from communities in the Municipality of Pikit. It is possible then that their data describes a situation with characteristics that do not hold true for other communities (or people) across the marsh area. On the other hand, the LMSMP data from its two field-sites in Pikit—namely, Buliok and Katilacan—both reported flooding and indebtedness as problems affecting livelihood. Finally, the *Vulnerability Survey* was conducted shortly after a major outbreak of fighting between the MILF and the Philippine government. It is possible then that issues relating to peace-and-order were, as reported, foremost on their researchers' and respondents' minds. At the time field research was conducted for this report, no major government-MILF clashes had occurred in the area for some time, so that flooding and the resulting crop-losses and reliance on loans were the focus of local peoples' concern. For these reasons, the LMSMP stands by the findings generated by its field researchers.

It is argued that the dire economic situation of most residents of the Ligawasan area must be addressed if the proposed PA for the marsh is to succeed. This is so, given the perceived link between unproductive livelihoods and the resulting poverty, on one hand; and unsustainable livelihood practices, on the other. Thus, a resident of Kabuling discussed the fate of the local forest-stands in the following terms: "*Pinagpuputol po, ang mga iba ay ipinagbili nila dahil yon lang ang paraan na alam [nila] na mabuhay sila, lalo na sa panahon na wala masyadong nakukuhang isda sa Ligawasan.*" (They cut [the trees] down, and sold some [of the logs] off, because that was the only way they knew to survive, especially during times when there weren't many fish caught in the Ligawasan.) There is here a discourse of economic necessity, which also undergirds local views of other unsustainable and proscribed economic practices, such as electro-fishing or the use of fine-mesh nets which capture even young fish. A number of informants did cite local efforts to curb such practices, but some of them also reported difficulties in implementing or enforcing them, knowing the economic pressure their erring neighbors were under. It is in this sense that a resident of Pigkalagan spoke of electric-shock fishing as being 'unavoidable': "*Sa pangunguryente naman ay hindi natin maiiwasan yon.*" ('As for electric shock-fishing, we cannot avoid that.')

To reiterate, the proposed PA can succeed if, among other measures, its proponents and implementers help ease the economic pressure on local communities and households—addressing, in other words, the factors that make reliance on destructive activities economically "unavoidable"—thereby removing an important driver of ecologically-unsustainable livelihood activities or -destructive technologies.

4.2. Valuing the marsh

4.2.1. Local perspectives

The Ligawasan marsh was, rather unsurprisingly, valued by almost all LMSMP informants as the source of their livelihood. As a resident of Kabuling explained: *“Magkadugtong ang lahat [ng] aming kabuhayan sa kalagayan ng Ligawasan Marsh ...”*. (All our livelihoods are linked to the condition of the Ligawasan Marsh.) Another respondent, this time from Libungan Torreta, went so far as to describe the relationship between the marsh and its people as *“(p)arang mag-asawa”* (like husband-and-wife), suggesting perhaps a relationship of mutual dependence. It is unfortunate that the field researchers who recorded this last response did not further explore the ideas underlying the informant’s perspective. In any case, such statements clearly reflect the extent to which local communities rely on the marsh and its resources for their survival and development.

Less often cited as a basis for valuing the Ligawasan Marsh was the notion that the marsh area is the homeland of the Maguindanao people. This view is expressed in this statement by an informant from Langgapanan:

“Napakaimportante po sa amin ang Ligawasan dahil dito na kami namulat at bumuo ng aming pamilya; at dito rin nanggaling ang ibang kabuhayan namin, katulad ng pangangisda, at kung tag-init, pagtanim ng mais at palay.”

(The Ligawasan is very important to us because this is where we came to know the world and founded our families; and this too is the source of our livelihood, such as fishing, and during the dry season, the planting of corn and rice.)

A similar point was made by a Katiduan resident, who drew on the discourse on ancestral lands and domains found in Philippine law¹⁵ while describing life in the marsh:

“Mahirap. Lahat naman mahirap. Pero hindi naman kami makaalis dito, dahil considered na ito[ng Ligawasan] ay aming ancestral domain, dahil dito na kasi tumira ang aming mga apo.”

([It is] difficult. Everything is difficult. But we cannot leave this place, because the Ligawasan is considered our ancestral domain, since our ancestors had lived here.)

¹⁵ Republic Act no. 8371 (1997), also known as the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA).

Indeed, there were three communities where the marsh was described as belonging to the “*Bangsa Maguindanao*” or “*talainged Maguindanao*”, rather than the broader term, “*Bangsamoro*” around which the ongoing peace-process revolves.¹⁶ These data reflect some Maguindanao informants’ sense of belonging to, or rootedness in, the marsh, born of historical or genealogical links to the area, and of the perceived role of the marsh in sustaining them and the lineages they belong to through time. There is thus a clear sense that the Ligawasan Marsh is, for some Maguindanao, their ancestral territory or domain, rather than a common property of all Moro peoples, or indeed a commons shared by all Filipinos.

Finally, there were two or three separate references to the marsh as a gift of Allah. A fisher from Inug-og described the Ligawasan in this way: “*Ito ang ginamit ni Allah na paraan para mabuhay kaming lahat dito.*” (This is the way chosen by Allah to [give] all of us here life.) This perspective is interesting because it suggests that local attitudes towards the marsh and its resources can be enhanced by reference to Islamic concepts or teachings, and may thus have potential as a cultural resource for the protection of the proposed PA. This is a point that a number of institution-based KI interviewees reiterated; one of whom—a Maguindanao academic and cleric—even quoted a relevant passage from the Koran.

4.2.2. *Indigenous beliefs*

The notion that religious or spiritual beliefs can provide cultural support for the proposed Ligawasan Marsh PA can further be explored through the appreciation of local or indigenous beliefs regarding the marsh. This project’s field researchers reported apparently widespread folk beliefs about the marsh. Most frequently mentioned by informants was the existence of very large, white, or otherwise supernatural crocodiles, referred to as “*pagali*”, meaning “relatives” or “kindred” (Sullivan 1986: 248-249); the idea being that these animals are actually the local residents’ relatives, who have taken on the form of a crocodile. Much less often mentioned were white monkeys, a beautiful maiden wandering the marsh, strange lights, ambulant islands, and localized bubblings or vortexes in the marsh waters. People were generally expected to refrain from making noise or comments about the marsh and its features, as a show of respect for it. Failure to do so was said to result in some form of supernatural punishment. In Pagalungan, for example, respondents told of a group of soldiers—perhaps the perfect symbol of the alien, unknowing other in this war-torn area—boisterously undertaking a

¹⁶ See the Draft Bangsa Moro Basic Law (2014).

river-crossing exercise using a rope. This lack of respect was punished by the unexplained breaking of the rope, sending some soldiers into the water.

Many informants expressed fear of such supernatural entities and their punitive powers, prompting them to avoid disturbing the marsh as much as possible.¹⁷ The effect then is to reduce human impact on the marsh, as noted by a resident of Pembalakan: "*Nang dahil [sa ganitong mga paniniwala], alam namin ang kahalagahan ng Ligawasan, at hindi kami basta na lang gagawa ng ikasisira nito dahil hindi lang kami ang nangangailangan dito*". (Because [of such beliefs], we come to know the value of the Ligawasan, and we do not just do anything that might damage it, because we [realize we] are not the only ones who depend on [the marsh].) This viewpoint was echoed by Iranon *panditas* later interviewed in Cotabato City.

A weakness of this approach to protecting the marsh however is in how it all hinges upon belief. As a resident of Dungguan commented:

"Hindi makakaapekto [itong mga paniniwala sa amin] kasi ang pinagbabawal ng matanda dati, hindi na namin [sinusunod]. Ang maaapektohan lang doon yong taong gumagawa ng sinasabi ng matatanda ..."

([Those beliefs] do not affect us because we no longer obey the proscriptions of our elders. The only ones affected [by such beliefs] are those who [still] follow the sayings of the elders.)

In other words, these supernatural beings can affect you only if you believe they can. Interestingly, belief in these beings is eroded not only by a Weberian 'disenchantment of nature', but also by the arrival of more conservative interpretations of Islam. An informant from Dasawao observed, "*Hindi na ganun kadami ang mga naniniwala ... dahil din sa ... mga expert sa Islam*". (Not many believe anymore ... because ... [of the teachings] of Islamic experts.) The situation is perhaps best captured in a recorded exchange in Montay, where one informant declared, "*Di ako naniniwala*" (I do not believe [such things]), pointing to the lack of evidence to support such beliefs. A neighbor responded however by saying, "*Kahit wala akong ebidensya, ay nirerespeto ko pa rin [ang Ligawasan Marsh]*" (Even if I do not have any evidence, I still respect [the Ligawasan]). It would seem then that there are ongoing negotiations among the Maguindanao regarding the place of indigenous spiritual beliefs in contemporary life in the Ligawasan area.

¹⁷ As a resident of Inug-og said, "*Syempre, natatakot din [kami], kaya nagiingat lang talaga kami.*"

The widespread distribution of these indigenous beliefs, it is argued, still offers opportunities for developing ideological resources that could help move people to 'respect' or protect the marsh. Perhaps these beliefs can be enhanced by carefully linking them to Islamic ideas or practices. For example, local supernatural creatures may be associated with the "djinn" mentioned in the Koran, as seems to be the practice in Tabungao. In any case, these beliefs have intrinsic scholarly value, and have yet to be given the academic attention they are due. Further study of this matter, especially in relation to environmental management, is recommended.

4.3. *The marsh as ancestral domain*

The FGD instrument also included questions about possible management frameworks for the marsh, among them the notion of "ancestral domain". It should be emphasized that neither the field researchers nor the respondents had any specific training with respect to IPRA and its definition of ancestral domain. The data here thus presents lay-people's understandings of the term. In any case, the research instrument required field researchers to ask respondents about what they thought of having the marsh area titled as an ancestral domain. As the reader may infer from the data presented, many respondents tended to focus on the notion of titling, rather than the notion of ancestral domain.

4.3.1. *Calling for ancestral domain titling*

Surprisingly, a relatively large number of informants expressed support for, or at least openness to, the idea of having the Ligawasan Marsh titled as ancestral domain, given the MILF's reported reservations regarding the IPRA and its provisions on ancestral lands and domains. In these cases, "*maganda*" (*mapia* or good) was most often used to describe the idea. Some respondents saw this proposal as responsive to a long-held aspiration of the Maguindanao people, as in this statement from Inug-og:

"Yan ang pinakamaganda, at sana mangyari na yan, Insha Allah. Alam din naman nating lahat na yan ang pinakaaasam natin ... para maging payapa na rin tayong lahat dito sa Mindanao. Naniniwala ako na kapag mangyari ito, makakamit natin ang katahimikan, Insha Allah."

(That would be best, and hopefully that will happen, Insha Allah. We all know that that is our dearest aspiration ... so that we can all finally live in peace

here in Mindanao. I believe that if this happens, we will achieve peace, Insha Allah.)

Underlying this viewpoint seems to be the awareness that land-ownership and/or resource-control were potentially contentious issues that could very well lead to conflict. This can be gleaned from the words of this Buliok resident: *"Pwede din patituloan ang Ligawasan para hindi na magkaroon ng gulo, kasi mayroon nang pinanghahawakan ang bawat isa"*. (We can also have the Ligawasan titled so there will be no more conflict, since everyone will be holding [documents to protect their respective interests].) Clarifying relative ownership rights, in other words, is seen as a key to avoiding local conflict and/or displacement from the land.

There is, however, another dimension to this wide interest in titling. Titling appears to address tensions not just between local residents of the marsh communities, but also between the Maguindanao as a polity, on one hand; and the government and non-Maguindanao people, seen as standing outside the marsh, on the other. Thus, one informant asserted that, *"Basta ang mahalaga ay maipangalan ang titulo [sa ancestral domain] sa mga Bangsa Moro, at hindi [sa] mga taong galing sa ibang lugar"*. (What is important is that the title to the ancestral domain is in the name of the Bangsa Moro, and not [in the name of] people from other places.) This perspective is reiterated by a Dasawao resident, who said that through titling, *"lalong maisasa-publiko na walang karapat-dapat na magmay-ari [ng Ligawasan] kundi [ang] Bangsa Moro"*. ([I]t will further publicize [the fact] that no one has a [better] right to own the Ligawasan than the Bangsa Moro.) Similarly, an FGD participant from Kalbugan also said of ancestral domain-titling: *"[I]to talaga, Bai, ang pinaglalaban ng Bangsa Moro; kapag mangyari ito, siguradong magiging payapa tayong lahat, Insha Allah"*. (This truly ... is what the Bangsa Moro fought for; if this happens, we will surely come to peace, Insha Allah.)

It can then be inferred from the above that, for some Ligawasan residents at least, the years of fighting led by the MNLF and the MILF was at least partly about protection of local people's rights to land and resources, rather than the 'grander' political narratives of separatism or the establishment of an Islamic government (following McKenna 1998), such that ancestral domains titling came to be construed as the culmination of that struggle.

4.3.2. Other viewpoints

This is not to say that there are no alternative perspectives on the issue of ancestral domains titling. For one, "ancestral domains" are understood in law to be a form of

common but private property.¹⁸ Many FGD participants who expressed interest in the idea of titling the marsh area argued however that if so titled, it should be done individually, rather than as the common property of the Bangsa Moro (or Bangsa Maguindanao). This view is exemplified by this statement, from Kabuling:

"[S]umasangayon kami sa pagpapatitulo ng mga lupa dito; na ang magpapatakbo ay ang gobyerno ng Bangsa Moro; sa paraan na sa bawat may-ari ng lupa, hindi bilang ancestral domain. Walang may-ari ng Ligawasan Marsh kundi ang Bangsa Moro lamang ..."

(We agree to the titling of the lands here; with the government of the Bangsa Moro as the implementor; and in such a way that [the lands are titled in the name of] each landowner, and not as an ancestral domain. No one but the Bangsa Moro can own the Ligawasan Marsh ...)

This view was echoed in Tabungao: *"[Ang pagpapatitulo] ang maganda sa lahat ... ngunit hindi bilang ancestral domain, kundi patitolohan ito bilang indibidwal, [para] sa ... bawat isang nagmamay-ari at nandiyan sa Ligawasan."* ([Titling the marsh] would be best of all ... but not as an ancestral domain; it should be titled individually, [in the name of] ... each landowner and resident of the Ligawasan.) In Katilacan, a respondent similarly asserted that land should be titled in the name of *"mga taong matagal nang naninirahan sa lugar"* (those people who have long resided in the area); otherwise, *"kung sakali na maipangalan sa iba, ay tiyak na magkakaroon ng kagulohan."* ([If [the land] comes to be titled in anyone else's name, then there surely will be conflict [here].) In the field researcher's post-fieldwork workshop, one researcher said that as he understood this proposal, *"mahahati-hati ang pagmamay-ari ng lupa, pero ang management sa MILF"*. ([T]he ownership of the land will be subdivided [among the people], but the management [will be coordinated by] the MILF.) Some informants feel so strongly about individual titling that one of them, from Ambadao, asserted that if titling will not be done on this basis then, *"huwag na lang."* ([Just forget it].) Again, this perspective seems to emerge as a reaction to historic or personal experiences of dispossession from land, hence the interest in securing legal recognition of—in this case, individual—ownership.

Still others were unsure about the actual pros and cons of titling the marsh area. Thus from Montay comes this recommendation: *"Bago magkaroon ng titulo, ay magconsult muna ang mga namamahala sa atin, at malalaman din natin [kung] magdudulot ito ng mabuti o masama."* (Before we [get into titling], our leaders should first consult with us, and then we will learn if this will bring [us] good or evil.)

¹⁸ See Secs. 3 (a) and 5 of Republic Act No. 8371 (1997).

“Mahirap kasi na bigla ka na lang magtitulo ...” (It would be reckless to suddenly rush into titling), cautioned a respondent from Pagalungan. This expresses a degree of wariness, which at least partly comes from the awareness that land ownership is in fact a very contentious issue, here as elsewhere. A number of informants thus called attention to the land-claims of certain powerful local families. For instance, there is this statement from Tabungao: *“Ang Ligawasan Marsh na ito ay hinati-hati sa bawat isa na mga datu sa loob ng Ligawasan.”* (This Ligawasan Marsh has been subdivided among the various *datu* here inside [the marsh].) In some cases, such land-claims held by powerful families have also been already covered by government-issued land titles, making the process of titling appear even more problematic, and possibly volatile. As a resident of Kakar wondered, when the idea of ancestral domain titling was broached: *“Na, paano na iyong mga lupa na may dati nang titulo?”* (But what will happen to those lands which are already titled?) A concerned neighbor—participating in the same FGD—responded by adding, *“Katulad ng sa amin.”* (Like our [lands].) Some informants who favored the idea of titling responded to this potential obstacle by appealing to the affected land-owner’s sense of high-mindedness, as in this statement from Dungguan: *“Kahit may lupa na ang iba, pwede din silang pumayag [na mapatitulo sa iba ang kanilang lupa].”* (Even if there are those who already have [titled] lands, they can still agree [that their lands will be titled in the name of others].) In the same spirit, a respondent from Ambadao hoped those who received titles over lands which previously had been held or owned by landowners would be treated by the latter as follows: *“Sana hindi siya makaisip ng masama sa taong nakapasok sa kanyang teritoryo [para maghanapbuhay].”* (Hopefully, [the landowner] will not think badly of those who will now enter their lands [to make a living].)

Still others simply saw no need for titling, perhaps because of the sense that the projected Bangsa Moro government seems to be approaching realization. From Dungguan comes this assertion: *“Hindi dapat titulo [ang Ligawasan]; wala namang Christian sa tabi-tabi namin.”* (The Ligawasan should not be titled; there are no Christians [living near] us anyway.) In other words, titling is felt to be unnecessary where there is no perceived threat of encroachment by non-Maguidanaons. Finally, there were those who feared that ancestral domain titling would only open another opportunity for powerful local families to consolidate their control of land or resources. A respondent from Kakar shared this reflection:

“Ang mahirap lang dito na mangyari ay baka iyong malalaking pamilya lang ang makinabang. Paano na iyong mga mahihirap?”

(The difficulty here is that it might only be the powerful families that will benefit. What of the poor?)

If the marsh is to be titled, it would seem, measures would have to be taken to ensure that the entire process is seen and understood as equitable or fair. As one FGD participant put it, "*magandang patituloan [ang Ligawasan], basta pantay-pantay [ang] pamamahala ...*". (It would be good to have the Ligawasan titled, as long as the implementation is fair)

4.3.3. *On land tenure*

The LMSMP data also shows that there is a considerable degree of variation in terms of landownership across the marsh area. Many respondents said they were the owners of the lands they tilled, and had the titles to prove it. Some of these titles were said to be free patents, others issued by the municipality (perhaps a local cadastral survey), and then there are the cases where it is simply unclear from the data what sort of deed of title is under discussion.

Some others similarly considered themselves the owners of the land they cultivated, even though they had no documents of title to that effect. An example is this farmer from Katilacan, who when asked who owned the land, said: "*Akin; galing pa sa aming mga magulang.*" (Mine; [I inherited the land] from our parents.) When pressed on whether the land claimed as property was titled however, the informant confessed: "*Wala pa akong maipapakitang papeles, kasi [nasa] public land [ang classification ng lupa].*" (I have no titles yet to show [you], because [the farmland is classified as] public land.) Here is seen the interface of an indigenous notion of ownership, based on inheritance from ancestors recognized as pioneering or long-term residents of the area; and that of the Philippine state, with its land classification scheme, which determined the possibility of land titling.

In other cases, it was the local landowning families who were considered the owners of the local lands. Thus, when asked who owned the lands in the community, a Tabungao resident replied:

"Ang Makalay, Mamakol at ang Mamo family. Ito ay sa kadahilanang kanilang mga pamilya po ang nakalagay dito".

(The Makalay, Mamakol and Mamo families [own the lands here]. This is because their families are [rooted] here.)

Here again appears the indigenous notion of landownership, centered on original or pioneering settlement by individuals or families. Sometimes these ancestral or family-based claims to landownership have been reinforced by government-issued documents of title. Thus, respondents from Lasangan admitted: "*Wala kaming titulo; nasa mga datu ang mga titulo ng mga lupa.*" (We have no titles; the datos have the titles to the land.) Situations like this led some informants to describe themselves as landless, and thus compelled to negotiate arrangements with landowners if they were to live by farming.

The precise combination of individual and family-based ownership, individual and family-based titles, and landlessness is expected to vary from community to community. The complexity of the tenurial landscape is further complicated by the local use of different tenure instruments across the area, which could range from titles issued by the Department of Agrarian Reform or cadastral surveys, to various certificates issued by DENR programs, and even real estate tax receipts. Documenting such tenurial complexity, particularly at the community level, would be a very interesting mapping project, which would have intrinsic academic value, as well as great practical use for economic and environmental planning purposes.

On the other hand, there were a few cases where informants actually challenged the right of ownership of some local families. When asked who owned the land in the community, a Katilacan resident reported, "*Pinatituloan daw [ng mga Pendatun].*" (They say it was titled [in the name of the] Pendatun family). Hearing this, another FGD participant reacted:

"Hindi ko alam kung may katotohanan [yon]. Sinasabi lang nila na pag-aari ng pamilya Pendatun ... pero wala rin silang maipakita na katibayan ..."

(I do not know if there is any truth [to that]. People say [the land] is owned by the Pendatun family ... but they cannot show any proof [of ownership], either.)

In this particular situation, the assertion is that the Pendatun family has no actual evidence of its right to own the land in question, implying that the speaker had as much right to claim it as property. However, there was at least one case encountered by the LMSMP project where the assertion of right to land was premised not on an imputed evidentiary weakness on the part of the opposing party, but simply on the claimant's identity. For example, in Dungguan, one farmer was asked if he had title to the land he

cultivated, to which he answered, “*Walang titulo*”. (No [title].) A neighbor, hearing this, responded emphatically:

“Hindi, sa atin yan na lupa. Sa Bangsa Moro yan na lupa; sa atin.”

(No, that land is ours. That is the land of the Bangsa Moro; [that is] ours.)

This assertion reflects what in the context of the history of Philippine land law, is a radical perspective; that by virtue of being a member of the Bangsa Moro, one is *ipso facto* a co-owner of the lands of the marsh. And this brings the discussion back, full circle, to the idea of communal ownership of ancestral domains.

4.3.4. *Local political complexity*

The contentions over land and landownership noted in this section of the report suggest their continuing economic, political and symbolic importance to the people of the Ligawasan Marsh. More importantly perhaps, the data also outlines, if only preliminarily, the tenurial complexity of the area, characterized by historical tensions between the Maguindanao of the marsh and external actors, including the Philippine state itself; strains between elite and non-elite Maguindanao families and individuals, with their respective interests; conflicts and conjunctions between state and indigenous Maguindanao notions of ownership; and potential contradictions between two broad management objectives, environmental protection vis-a-vis economic welfare and development. All this, in a context of popular expectation that the peace process—and the MILF in particular—can address some of the inequities that many local residents have had to endure these many years. It is unfortunate indeed that the field researchers were not equipped to go further and explore the possible links between ancestral domains titling and the protection of the environment. In any case, even though the idea of ancestral domains titling was included in the FGD instrument more as an exercise in conjecture than as a concrete proposal, it did provide a lens by which to discover the nuances of local perspectives on land and landownership.

Further, the data also indicates that there are individual Maguindanao who assert views and claims that challenge those of local elites; particularly with respect to the latter’s perceived control over land. It is unfortunate that the scholarly literature on the Maguindanao is heavily concentrated on powerful families and leaders, and their practices of politics (see Ileto 1971, Beckett 1982, Beckett 1997, Bentley 1997, Abinales 2000, Lara and Champain 2009, Human Rights Watch 2010, Lara and Schoofs 2013, and Lara 2014, and to a lesser extent McKenna 1998). The general tendency is to

accentuate these elite actors' power, with the result that non-elites are, by implication, depicted as passive subalterns, if not altogether ignored. But rather than a homogenous mass of hapless peasants enthralled by the hegemonic power of local elite families, the Maguindanao people emerge here as a differentiated population, some of whose members can and do articulate discourses of anti-elite resistance.

The institution-based interviewees of this project all acknowledged the complicated socio-political context in the area, but remained optimistic that these can eventually be resolved. When asked if this fraught local politics could adversely affect implementation of the PA, the DENR representatives said that, even as they recognize the complexity of the local situation, these can be resolved later, during the planning and implementation phases. What was important for them was setting up a legal framework that would allow them to initiate urgently needed measures to address environmental problems in the marsh area.

This section concludes with the recommendation that land and water tenure be the subject of further study, given their clear relevance on issues of economic and ecological development and planning.

4.4. The marsh as protected area

Following are the report's key findings regarding local Maguindanao perceptions or views of the proposed Ligawasan Marsh PA. One can see from the FGD instrument, in Annex 'C' of this report, that the questions regarding this issue were placed towards the very end of the instrument. This was with a view to minimizing the possibility that the discussion in each FGD would be limited to the relatively narrow frame of a PA. In fact, it was the intention of the project proponents to present the idea of a PA as only one of a range of possible management mechanisms for the Ligawasan Marsh area, to allow for freer discussion of the issue.

4.4.1. Knowledge of the PA plan

The field researchers were also instructed during their training seminar to simply ask their respondents what they thought of the idea of a PA, without first explaining what the term meant and entailed. This would provide a better sense of the informants' actual level of knowledge or understanding of this issue.

“Paano yun?”

(How is that?)

This was the response that the LMSMP’s field researchers in Kakar received when they asked their FGD participants about their opinion of the proposed PA. Kakar was one of the areas where the local people had little or no knowledge of the plan to establish a PA over the marsh. The first time these people heard of the idea was when this project’s field researchers asked about it, and later explained as best they could the concept of a PA. In the post-fieldwork workshop for the project’s field researchers, the latter collectively affirmed that the majority of the field sites had little or no knowledge of the proposed PA. This suggests that the ongoing consultation process spearheaded by the DENR needs to expand its scope and intensify its efforts, to avoid any possible future confusion or conflict. Just such an enhanced information and consultation process is strongly recommended.

4.4.2. Acceptability of the plan

Once the concept of a PA was explained by the field researchers, however, respondents generally expressed a positive, or at least open (e.g., “*OK lang*” or ‘[It’s OK’), attitude towards having one established in the Ligawasan Marsh area. In fact, all but a few LMSMP field-sites expressed approval of the proposed PA.

Most respondents linked the expected improvement of the local environment, resulting from the implementation of the PA, to future improvements in their livelihoods, which of course was a major concern for them. This viewpoint is exemplified by this declaration from Gambar: “*OK ako [sa PA], kasi kung gaganda ang kalagayan ng Ligawasan, gaganda rin ang kalagayan ng mga tao dito*”. (I am OK with [the idea of a PA], because if the condition of the Ligawasan improves, so will the livelihoods of the people here.) Once more, statements such as this can be read as an indication of local people’s awareness that their livelihood is dependent upon the marsh and its ecological condition.

4.4.3. Conditionalities

This acceptance of, or openness towards, the idea of a PA was, in most cases, not absolute. In Buliok, for instance, one resident stated: “*Papayag din ako [sa PA] pero idaan muna sa paguusap o konsultasyon para marinig ang hinaing ng bawat isa*.” (I will

also agree [to the PA], but there should first be a discussion or consultation so we can hear everyone's [interests].) Here, acceptance of the proposed PA was conditional, premised on the conduct of a consultative process meant to ensure inclusivity in the decision-making process. Only one field-site actually demanded this type of precondition, however. Much more often, the conditionalities set by respondents were substantive rather than procedural in nature. There are three such substantive conditionalities with which local people qualified their approval of the planned PA, each of which will be discussed in turn. It should be noted that these qualifications were aired singly, or in various combinations, by different respondents.

First—and most often articulated by informants—is that the implementation of the PA must not adversely affect local livelihoods, particularly fishing. As discussed above, there appears to be widespread economic hardship across the area. The concern here seems to be that the implementation of a PA, with all its attendant regulations, might restrict fishing, or otherwise impose added difficulties on residents whose lives are already economically precarious as it is. An instance of this stance is the following, made by a resident of Inug-og: “[A]ng importante lang pagdating sa pamumuhay namin, [ay] walang magbabago, ganon pa rin, hindi kami pagbabawalan ng mga tao na manguha ng isda.” (What is important when it comes to our livelihood is that nothing will change, everything remains the same, and we will not be forbidden by anyone from catching fish.) A Katilacan fisher articulated this same concern in rather more dire terms: “kung bigyan naman kami ng limitasyon sa panginigisda, ay malamang ay hindi na kami mabubuhay.” (If we are going to be given limitations on our fishing, then we will probably be unable to survive.) Interestingly, there was no expressed concern at all that the proposed PA may likewise constrain the practice of farming in the area. It would be interesting to discover why, as the LMSMP’s field researchers did not pursue this point further. At the moment, one can only conjecture that this reflects the project respondent’s not-entirely-accurate association of the PA with the waters of the marsh, while the land, which in many cases has been titled, is beyond the reach of state regulation.

There were also a small number of cases where respondents argued that the establishment of a PA should not impede the development or exploitation of mineral resources, particularly fossil-fuels, in the Ligawasan Marsh. Thus, a resident of Dasawao agreed to the PA proposal, “[b]asta’t ... hindi maging sagabal sa pagkuha ng iba pang kayamanan ... tulad ng langis” ([a]s long as ... [the PA] does not become an obstacle to the extraction of other resources ... like oil). A respondent from Kabuling similarly declared: “Ang gusto namin ay lahat ng makukuha na may pakinabang ... sa mga tao ng Ligawasan at sa tao ng Bangsa Moro.” (We want everything we can get that would be beneficial ... for the people of the Ligawasan and of the Bangsa Moro.)

This is understood here to mean that the respondent wants to ensure that there would be no restrictions on exploiting any or all resources which could benefit the people of the marsh and beyond. Economic development based on the extraction or exploitation of local resources, at least for some informants, appears to be just as important as environmental protection. This is in a context where some local people are anxious that outsiders might control or profit from such resources, to the prejudice of marsh residents. Thus, in their discussion of local mineral resources, a Tabungao informant declared: "*[A]ng tanging makakuha lamang ay ang gobyerno ng Bangsa Moro, at walang sinuman pwedeng makialam maliban sa Bangsa Moro.*" (The only one that can extract [these resources] is the government of the Bangsa Moro, and no one can intervene in [these matters] but the Bangsa Moro [people].) Just as forcefully, a resident of Pembalakan said of the resources of the marsh: "*Hindi natin yan ibibigay sa kahit kanino lang, yan din ang dahilan kung bakit tayo handang magbuwis ng buhay.*" (We will not give [these resources] to just anyone, when these are the very reason we have staked our very lives [in our struggles].) These seem to be indications of how the peace process has generated expectations that the Bangsa Moro (or Bangsa Maguindanao?) will finally gain control of its own wealth-generating resources, and thereby escape from poverty.

A third qualification on acceptance of the PA reported from the LMSMP's field-sites is the demand that the implementation of the proposed PA be fair, just or equitable. This was less often cited by individual respondents than the concern that local livelihoods would not be impeded, but certainly more often than the interest in allowing economic utilization of the mineral and other resources within the marsh area. Thus, an FGD participant from Dasawao agreed to the PA, "*[b]asta pantay-pantay ang pagtingin nito sa lahat ng tao sa Ligawasan, maging ordinary man o may kapit sa batas.*" ([p]rovided there is equal treatment of everyone in the Ligawasan, be they ordinary folk or people with a hold on power.) From Kakar comes this position: "*[Dapat] parehas ang kasapal sa mga tao.*" (The 'kasapal' should be the same for everyone.) "*Kasapal*" comes from the rootword "*sapal*", or "to control" (Sullivan 1986: 296), so this last statement reads as a demand or expectation that everyone—elite or non-elite—would be equally regulated, with no bias towards the former. While articulating an interest in the development of fossil-fuels in the marsh, an informant from Ambadao similarly declared: "*Pero kung sakali lang ... na hindi pantay ang pagtingin sa ordinaryong tao ng Ligawasan at ang mga 'royal blood', ay mas mabuting hindi na ... i-operate [ang planta].*" (But if it happens that ... there is no equal treatment between ordinary people and those of 'royal blood' [in the management of fossil-fuels], then it would be better that the [oil-plant] not be operated at all.) The concern here seems to be that the establishment and implementation of the PA could open up opportunities that local elites may exploit, giving them unfair economic or other advantages over the non-elite. This suggests that

these respondents are reacting against the existing economic and political dominance of the local elites, and are seeking ways of ensuring that the latter do not manipulate the PA system to their continued or added advantage.

4.4.4. *The MILF as manager*

It is perhaps in this context that many—but certainly not all—respondents called for the active involvement of the MILF in the management of the projected PA, and the exclusion therefrom of other actors.

“Basta. Basta lang, walang maniniwala kung Christian [ang mamamahala sa Ligawasan]. Huwag lang gobyerno ang mamamahala ng Ligawasan. Ang prublema kung ang gobyerno ang mamahala kasi, magkakagulo. Pero kung galing sa [MILF] Central Committee ang utos, wala nang marami pang salita ang mga tao.”

(Enough. Enough already; no one will follow any Christian [who is put in charge of the Ligawasan]. The government should not be in charge of the Ligawasan. The problem is that if the government is put in charge, there will be conflict. But if direction comes from the [MILF] Central Committee, then people [will obey] without [a lot of fuss].)

This assertion, coming from Dungguan, clearly reflects trust in the MILF. As to why, it may be instructive to look to how another informant explained his suggestion that the MILF be involved in the management of the PA, that is: “[U]pang tuloy-tuloy ang pagtingin sa mga karapatan ng bawat Bangsa Moro.” (So that the rights of every Bangsa Moro can continue to be watched over [by the MILF].) From this, we see that the MILF has established its credibility as a guarantor of local people’s rights. People of the marsh, in other words, seem to be looking to the MILF to ensure that implementation of the PA—and management of the Ligawasan more generally—is fair and will not unduly favor the local elites. This perception that the MILF is fair in its dealings with the people of the marsh was collectively confirmed by the LMSMP field researchers in their post-research workshop.¹⁹ In this sense, this apparent turn towards the MILF suggests an agentive effort on the part of Maguindanaon non-elites to find some mechanism with which to counter-balance the power of the elite. So necessary is

¹⁹ One field researcher stated that, based on what he and the other researchers had witnessed and experienced during their field work, the residents of the marsh will agree to the establishment of a PA in the Ligawasan area “as long as MILF ang mag-manage, kasi fair sila magdala” (provided the MILF will manage [the marsh], since they are fair in their dealings).

the MILF's participation for some respondents that one of them, from Kabuling, said, "*Kung hindi ang MILF ang mamamahala ng Ligawasan Marsh, ay wala ding mangyayari.*" (If it is not the MILF which will govern the Ligawasan Marsh, then nothing will happen.)

It appears however that the MILF is not without its critics in the Ligawasan area. One FGD respondent from Montay was wary about giving the MILF a prominent role in managing the marsh: "*Kung hindi nila gawing kampo [ang Ligawasan], at gawan nila ng irrigation, maganda.*" (If they do not turn [the Ligawasan] into a camp, and instead they build irrigation [systems], then that would be good.) Implicit here was the conditional acceptance of the MILF's involvement, the whole turning on the issue of whether the latter would devote itself to local development (symbolized by the irrigation-works) rather than militarism (symbolized by the armed camp). Another resident expressed another concern:

"Pero baka ang MILF lang din ang gaganda ang buhay kapag na-develop ang Ligawasan. Paano ang mga tao sa [mga] barangay?"

(But maybe it will only be the MILF forces whose lives will be improved by the development of the Ligawasan. What of the people of the barangays?)

These last two statements, however, clearly reflect a minority view of the MILF within the marsh area. Reading the LMSMP's FGD reports, one gains the distinct impression that many local residents do respect the MILF, which is why a large number of them urged its involvement in PA management. In general, the Maguindanao institution-based interviewees tended to agree that the MILF does enjoy this sort of credibility and standing across the region.

4.5. *Leadership and management*

4.5.1. *Managing the marsh*

When asked who actually manages the marsh at present, a very large majority of the informants considered themselves as the current managers. For instance, a resident of Kapimpilan stated:

"Sa ngayon po ay parang kami na rin (ang namamahala rito), dahil sa may mga lupa rin naman ang mga tagarito na kasama ko. At sa tagal na rin na

panahon na naninirahan kaming tagarito, kami na rin yung nagbibigay halaga at atensyon sa Ligawasan.”

(Right now, it seems that it is just we (who manage the marsh), since my neighbors who are from here have lands [in the marsh]. And through the long time we who are of this place have dwelt here, we have been the ones as well to give importance and attention to the Ligawasan.)

This statement is interesting because it concisely lays down two important and interlocking points: First, the Maguindanao have been living in the marsh for a long time. The reference to neighbors with lands implies that they have inherited those lands from their parents and other ancestors, establishing an enduring link between the people and the place. It will be recalled how other informants have spoken of historic and other ties to the Ligawasan area.

Second, that long period of co-existence with the marsh has enabled the Maguindanao to develop values that allow them to “give importance and attention” to the Ligawasan Marsh. It is interesting how the marsh here has become personified as someone in need of care and attention, recalling another respondent’s description of the relationship between the Ligawasan and its people as “*parang mag-asawa*” (like husband-and-wife). The point is that by living with the marsh the Maguindanao have come to understand its needs, as it were. Thus, an informant from Pagalungan said:

“Iba rin kung ang nag-aalaga [ng Ligawasan] ay inhabitant din. Alam niya kung ano ang nararapat.”

(It would be different if the one who cares for the Ligawasan is an inhabitant [of the marsh]. S/he would know what is appropriate [to do].)

This sets up a claim to capacity for managing the marsh and its resources.

This is a contentious matter, as is reflected in the literature. On one hand, there are scholars who espouse local peoples’ ability to protect the environment and to co-exist with it (Poffenberger, ed. 1990, Bennagen and Lucas-Fernan 1996). On the other is a still-growing body of scholarly writing that warns against a simplistic association of local or indigenous communities with environmentalism (Brosius 1999; Tsing 1999; Gollin and Kho 2008, eds., 2008; Dove, Sajise and Doolittle, eds. 2011). This report takes the position that the question of local capability for local resource management is an empirical one, which has to be ascertained through further ethnographic study. As it is, the report has already noted how most informants can appreciate the link between the

ecological quality of the marsh, and the economic quality of their lives. There were also a few cases of respondents describing local initiatives to protect local resources—particularly prohibitions against indiscriminate fishing technologies, such as electric-shock fishing and the use of fine-mesh nets—although it is difficult to ascertain how successful such efforts are.

When asked who actually manages the Ligawasan area, a large majority of the project's informants answered, the "*Bangsa Moro*"; invoking an ethno-political identity that draws a boundary around the Maguindanao residents of the marsh (among other Moro groups) and asserts a claim on the Ligawasan Marsh. This suggests the wide currency of a sense of ownership by the Maguindanao of the area—this recalls the use of "*Bangsa Maguindanao*" in a few field-sites—over the marsh. The proposed PA would do well to consider building upon this popular perspective, which suggests that local residents have an established stake in the area, and thus an interest in its protection.

When asked who *should* manage the Ligawasan Marsh, the vast majority of research informants said something along the lines of this statement from Gambar: "*Wala na akong alam maliban sa Bangsa Moro din, dahil mapa-LGU dito o sa grupo ng MILF, ay Bangsa Moro pa rin.*" (I know of no one else [who should manage the marsh] but the Bangsa Moro, because whether they are in the LGU, or in the MILF, they are still Bangsa Moro.) It is unclear whether by "Bangsa Moro" the respondents here meant that management of the marsh should be in the hands of the proposed government or the people as a polity, or both.

In a smaller number of cases, the Bangsa Moro is again presented as the rightful or appropriate manager for the marsh, but alongside the MILF. The precise configuration of such a 'partnership' however, is not clear from the submitted FGD data.

In a few other cases, the MILF alone is identified as the appropriate choice for manager of the marsh area. This brings the discussion back to the finding that the MILF currently enjoys wide credibility and support in the area, leading to its being recommended as a manager.

4.5.2. *Local leadership*

The local leader-figure most often recognized by the project's informants was by far an incumbent Barangay Captain. There were, in addition, two cases where a retired Barangay Captain was identified as the respondents' local leader. Coming in a distant second were MILF commanders or officials. This again reflects the general popularity

of, or support for, the MILF among the local populace, as already discussed. In fact, it appears from the LMSMP data that in many field-sites, respondents assured the field researchers that they and their neighbors were all supporters of the MILF.²⁰ Third most often cited were traditional leaders, such as elders ("*nakakatanda*") and local *datus*, which is suggestive of the enduring relevance of these actors at the community level. Other leader-figures cited much less often by FGD participants were Islamic clerics, mayors, and other municipal or barangay officials (kagawads or ex-kagawads) or bodies (the *Lupong Tagapagpaya* of the barangay).

Interestingly, there were perceived links between almost all of these various leaders and local political actors. For example, a former barangay official, considered as the leader of one community, would clearly have links to the local LGU units; he or she might at the same time be an MILF supporter or officer; and be related by blood or marriage to the local "*royal blood*" family. The boundaries between government, non-government, and anti-government in this region may thus be very blurred indeed. This indicates, on one hand, that such local leaders are well connected and presumably able to navigate local politics on behalf of his or her constituency. On the other, it also suggests that all three domains of leadership are occupied by members of the local elite. This interlinking of local government, insurgent and indigenous authority outlines the complexity of local political dynamics in the Ligawasan Marsh area. The implications for local governance, and for inclusive and fair resource management are clear, making local notions and practices of leadership a key subject for further study.

For the moment, the inferred control by local elites of the various local leadership positions raises two problems: First, would an ordinary fisher or farmer have the wherewithal to file a complaint with the DENR, for example, against local leaders, should the latter be involved in illegal logging or some other illicit activity? Second, if these various leadership roles are occupied by members of the same class, if not the same family, can one set of leaders be relied upon to prevail upon the others? In particular, can the MILF be expected to check the possible environmental and other abuses by LGU officials or traditional leaders, when the MILF's local commanders are also drawn from the same class as those leaders? These questions are relevant to the issue of enforcement within the proposed PA. If regulations cannot be enforced equally, without undue regard for the identity of the apparent wrongdoers, then the entire environmental project loses credibility and effectiveness (see Ostrom 1990: 94 et seq.).

²⁰ The project encountered only one case where the MNLF, rather than the MILF, had officials who were recognized by the community as their leader. There was absolutely no reference to the BIFF in the project data.

This issue was presented to the institution-based informants of the LMSMP. Most of them acknowledged that ordinary people would find it difficult to act against local leaders, because as one CSO-representative put it, "*medyo malaki ang makakabangga nila*". ([T]hey will be coming up against somebody rather [powerful].) A number of them said that the MILF could, however, be relied upon to 'control' any abuses on the part of local leaders. This argument reinforces this report's position that the participation of the MILF in PA management as urged by many FGD participants reflects non-elite interest in finding a mechanism to counter-balance the power of local elites. When asked about hypothetical cases where the MILF itself may be involved in violations of PA regulations, there was a general insistence that the MILF has existing mechanisms for disciplining its various elements and/or officials. When cases of apparent lapses in discipline were cited—such as a report of two MILF commanders in Pikit waging *rido* against each other—a few interviewees countered by asking who had committed more abuses, the state and its military, or the MILF? The point being, between the state and the MILF, the latter is still the more respected and credible actor; it may not be perfect, but the alternative represented by the state and its agencies is even less so. The interviewees from the MILF, interestingly, seemed perplexed by this series of questions, confident perhaps that local people and the MILF itself can play their respective parts in the protection and development of the Ligawasan Marsh.

4.6. Conclusion

4.6.1. Summary

The LMSMP found that many Maguindanao residents of the Ligawasan Marsh continue to rely on fishing and farming for their livelihood. Both livelihoods however are beset by difficulties. Farming activities in almost all field-sites are reported to suffer particularly from abnormal flooding, which destroys local crops. Fishing activities appear to suffer less from the flooding, though it is reported that high waters do not guarantee improved catches. Very many communities with fishing households complained that the size of fish catches are decreasing, and that the fish that are captured are smaller in size. Farmers and fishers alike rely on loans to purchase agricultural inputs or services, or fishing equipment; or to rent fishing or farming equipment. These difficulties force local fishers and farmers into greater indebtedness, as they resort to loans to tide their families over during difficult times. Livelihood is thus a critical concern for local residents.

Another concern of non-elite residents seems to be 'a sense of injustice'—for want of a better phrase—in their relations with local elite families; that is, the perception that the

latter enjoy more advantages than the former. Admittedly, Project respondents did not express this sentiment explicitly. However, it can be inferred from such data as the observation that the rich are getting richer; the concern that titling might only benefit the elite; the cases where individual informants challenged the property claims or titles of local elite families; the large number of informants who demanded that implementation of the proposed PA be fair; and from the widespread support for the idea of involving the MILF in the management of the marsh.

The vast majority of the project's informants valued the Ligawasan Marsh as the source of their livelihood. There is a clear appreciation of how the quality of local people's lives depends upon the ecological quality of the local environment.

There was surprising support for the idea of titling the marsh area as an ancestral domain. This support stems partly from the perception that clarifying people's relative rights to land is a key to reducing local conflict, and to addressing tensions between the people of the marsh and external actors, particularly the state. There were differences however on how this proposal is imagined to proceed. Some respondents called for 'communal' titles, others for individual titles. Still others saw no need for titling at all.

Finally, the project found that there were areas where there was little or no knowledge of the proposal to establish a PA within the marsh. Once the idea was explained, however, the informants from these areas joined the other respondents who had heard of the projected PA and approved of the idea. In almost all the field-sites, there was acceptance of, or at least openness to, the PA as a concept. This acceptance is premised on the expectation that as the local environment improves as a result of the implementation of the PA, the informants' lives would also improve. However, the acceptance of the idea of a PA was very often made conditionally. The most often cited condition sought by informants was that implementation of the PA would not adversely affect local livelihoods, particularly fishing. The next most often cited conditionality was that the implementation of the PA should be done fairly, justly or equitably. Finally, there was a small number of cases where respondents demanded that implementation of the PA would not prevent the development or exploitation of resources within the marsh, particularly fossil-fuels.

In a large number of cases, the involvement of the MILF in the management of the PA was sought by FGD participants. This project interprets this datum as an indication of many local residents' desire to ensure that the implementation of the PA is, as already noted above, fair or equitable as between the local elite and non-elite residents. In other words, people are looking to the MILF—which currently enjoys widespread

support across the marsh—to act as a check upon possible abuses by the local elite families.

When asked who manages the marsh at present, a clear majority referred to the “*Bangsa Moro*”. When asked who should manage the marsh, most informants again replied, “*Bangsa Moro*”. In many cases, however, the MILF is presented as a ‘co-manager’ alongside the *Bangsa Moro*. In a smaller number of cases, the MILF alone is recommended as the appropriate manager of the marsh.

4.6.2. *Concluding argument*

It will be recalled that this project’s approach to ‘stakeholder mapping’ is not the usual presentation of the positions taken by a range of different actors with respect to an issue, but rather the ‘mapping’—in the sense of dis-covering, locating or recording—of the Maguindanaos’ location within the environmental discourses revolving around the Ligawasan Marsh. In a sense, the project seeks to foreground the Maguindanao’s presence in, relationship with, and activities within, the marsh area. At the same time, it does present the positions taken by a range of Maguindanao respondents on the issue of establishing a PA in the marsh.

This task has some urgency because the majority of the Maguindanao people suffer a three-fold marginalization: First, many of them are, as this project found, economically and socio-politically marginalized. Second, they are marginalized within the existing scholarly literature, which focuses mainly on the interests and activities of the local elite, rather than ordinary fishers and farmers. Third, the formal consultative process for the proposed PA is, perhaps unavoidably, focused on the views of LGU officials, state agency executives, and other local leaders, rather than farmers and fishers in rural villages. In other words, the LMSMP is an exercise in centering the marginalized within the conversation over the proposed PA.

There is no question about the critical ecological importance of protecting the Ligawasan Marsh. This project’s assertion is that, to properly address the ecological threats to the marsh, the management of the PA must always keep the Maguindanao communities in the area as the focus of its decision-making processes. After all, the local people not only have a very large stake in improving the quality of the marsh and its resources, but their demographic and socio-economic location within the marsh means that their cooperation is crucial to the success of the PA. The LMSMP thus underscores the need to ensure that the PA and its processes are inclusive; fair or equitable; and politically, economically and culturally sensitive to the rights, interests

and welfare of the people of the marsh. Indeed, just as measures that improve the quality of the marsh can only improve the quality of life of its residents, the improvement of the lives of the 'Children of the Marsh' can also improve the ecological condition of the marsh. If local conditions of economic and socio-political marginalization are duly addressed, people need not resort to ecologically destructive livelihoods or technologies; their relationship with the DENR becomes less contentious and more open, leading to improvements in implementation; and perhaps most importantly, their sense of ownership—and therefore, responsibility—for the Ligawasan Marsh is deepened or enhanced. In this sense, the appropriate implementation of the PA can help contribute to the fulfillment of the peace negotiations' promises of a better life for individual Maguindanao, for the *Bangsa Moro*, and for the national community.

4.7. *Project photographs*²¹



Fig. 1. A small Maguindanaon village, located along one side of the many water-channels running through the Ligawasan Marsh.

²¹ All photographs used in this report, including the cover illustration, were taken by Augusto B. Gatmaytan.



Fig. 2. A small mosque, perched on a small island in the middle of the marsh.



Fig. 3. A troop of well-armed MILF fighters passes by a Maguindanao village while travelling through the marsh area.



Fig. 4. A rice-field, located at the edge of a marsh village, on the right. Note how vulnerable the crops are to flooding.



Fig. 5. During the dry season, when this photograph was taken, land preparation for farming may entail the burning of grass or brush.



Fig. 6. One type of fish-trap, with a conical shape, used by Maguindanao fishers.



Fig. 7. A Maguindanao fisher rows out in the morning to set his fish traps. The trap shown here differs from that pictured in Fig. 6, having a roughly tubular form.



Fig. 8. A type of fish-weir or -cage, set into the marsh bed to capture fish as they move across the waters. The two weirs shown here were part of a very long line of such traps cutting across a section of the marsh.



Fig. 9. A Maguindanao fisher prepares to set his net in the waters. Just visible behind his *bangka* are two other fishers wading in the marsh, setting their fish traps.



Fig. 10. Part of a fisher's catch at the end of a day's work. These fish were sold as a *tuhog* or string, for PhP 50.00.

5. Recommendations

At present, the advocacy work for the Ligawasan Marsh PA is still at the public consultation phase. The LMSMP's recommendations are thus arranged into three broad groups. The first group consists of those actions that have to be considered for implementation as part of the consultation phase as soon as possible, as part of the social preparation work for the PA. The second group of recommendations should be addressed during the legislative and DENR discussions of the PA, when the design and composition of the PAMB will first be addressed. The third group of recommendations can be undertaken during the implementation phase of the PA, on the assumption that the measure will gain the approval of the legislature.

5.1. *For the preparatory phase:*

- 5.1.1. Conduct an expanded and intensive information drive regarding the planned establishment of a protected area in the Ligawasan area. "Expanded" here refers to the conduct of consultations or meetings on the issue of the PA not only in selected urban centers, but in as many rural communities as can be managed. "Intensive" here refers to public discussions of the issues surrounding the PA and its implementation, to address concerns (particularly with respect to livelihood) or even correct misconceptions. This recommendation stems from the fact that there are areas where local residents have little or no knowledge of the planned PA.
- 5.1.2. Improve the ethnographic section of the PASA, which has yet to be submitted to the legislature. The PASA is supposed to contain all the necessary information needed by legislators and other actors to make informed decisions on the PA. Unfortunately, it contains insufficient information on the local people or communities within the marsh. Moreover, including more in-depth information on the socio-economic and political conditions of the marsh residents in the PASA allows legislators or other actors to address issues of poverty and inequity, if they are so minded, as early as the Congressional debates on the PA.
- 5.1.3. Conduct an extensive 'permission-seeking' process for the PA as soon as possible. The point here is to secure the permission and

commitment of all local actors to the PA project. This recommendation is based on the Maguindanao principle of “*udas*” (see Sullivan 1986: 350), understood as a sincere and careful process of explaining, discussing, and securing permission for the PA.

5.2. *For the PA design phase:*

- 5.2.1. Explore the possibility of alternative mechanisms for representation of non-elites on the Ligawasan Marsh PAMB. To note, the usual structure of PAMBs is heavily biased towards LGU officials. The legislators and other policy makers should consider organizing a parallel system of representation, based for example on watersheds, mosque-affiliation, or some other locally relevant territorial unit other than LGU boundaries and family-connections.
- 5.2.2. In line with the above, the PAMB should also be redesigned and expanded to allow for mandatory sectoral representation; such as, but not necessarily limited to women, youth, religious leaders, farmers and fisherfolk, and the MILF itself, among other possibilities. This measure is also intended to address the question of socio-political marginalization of the fishers and farmers of the marsh by providing inclusive mechanisms that allow them to represent themselves in PA matters, rather than rely on a local leadership drawn from the ranks of the elite.
- 5.2.3. Conduct community-based studies and projects to improve local resiliency and adaptability to flooding (and the occasional drought) reported across the marsh area. Ideally, the design of the PA itself considers the reality of climate change and other similar issues.
- 5.2.4. Enhance and build upon local communities’ sense of ownership, control and understanding of their local environments. The people of the marsh rightly consider themselves as the managers of the area. Policies and regulations should be structured so as to include them in various levels of decision-making, administration and enforcement, as well as in the distribution or allocation of any benefits and gains from the improvement of the local environment.

5.3. *For the implementation phase:*

- 5.3.1. Coordinate the management of the Ligawasan Marsh area with economic programs of the national, regional/autonomous, and provincial governments. Again, it is necessary to address the economic marginalization of the people of the marsh, who are the PA's most important stakeholders given that the success of the project largely depends on their cooperation. To ensure local support for the project, a program of economic development must address concerns that the protected area will limit livelihood activities within the marsh. Improvement of local economies will also help reduce the probabilities of people adopting livelihoods or technologies which might further endanger the marsh. Finally, this will increase their stake in the protection of the marsh and its resources. The following points require particular attention:
- 5.3.1.1. Consider the implementation of a building program of small- to medium-scale infrastructure in the areas outside core or strict-protection zones. In particular, waterworks for flood-control are urgently needed in light of widespread reports of crop-destruction as a result of flooding.
 - 5.3.1.2. Improve local access to capital or credit, perhaps following the model of the Grameen Bank, or of Islamic banking, which hopefully will stimulate local economic activity.
 - 5.3.1.3. Explore ways of improving and disseminating ecologically-sound farming and fishing technologies.
- 5.3.2. Improve the educational opportunities for residents of the Ligawasan area. Education can increase the livelihood options of residents of the marsh, and could help reduce the economic and environmental pressure on the marsh in the long run.
- 5.3.3. Study the feasibility of implementing agrarian reform in areas where share tenancy is confirmed to exist. This is still another measure intended to address the marginalization of a particular segment of the marsh population.

- 5.3.4. Coordinate the management of the Ligawasan Marsh PA with that of the Pulangi river and other tributaries of the marsh. The management of the marsh cannot be conducted in isolation from these upland systems.
- 5.3.5. Where deemed necessary, expand the coverage of the PA into the uplands, so that it would 'roll' upriver from the marsh. Alternatively, the marsh PAMB could support the establishment of another PA in the upland watersheds, management of which will necessarily be coordinated with that of the marsh area.
- 5.3.6. Conduct further ethnographic and other social-science research within the marsh area. In particular, the following areas of interest may be useful in guiding the management of the PA:
 - 5.3.6.1. Studies of local farming, fishing, and other livelihoods; Maguindanao notions of land and water tenure, considered in contrast with state laws and regulations on land and resource ownership; and the mapping exercises these entail.
 - 5.3.6.2. Maguindanao political culture, ideas and practices, especially from the perspective of non-elites, as it relates to democratizing or otherwise improving existing mechanisms for governance and decision-making, and political representation.
 - 5.3.6.3. Islamic and indigenous religious, ritual and symbolic practices, particularly as they may help build the ideological resources for resource management.

These recommendations are offered as possible steps towards the achievement of local economic development and social justice, and the refinement and humanization of the practice of environmentalism. They may also be read simply as starting points for further discussion of the PA project, which has the potential for addressing the marginalization of a large segment of the Maguindanao people. Either way, it is hoped that the recommendations will go some way towards repaying the Children of the Marsh for their generosity with their time and homes, and their thoughts and sentiments.

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Maps

Map nos. 1 and 2 were generously provided by ADDU's TropICS, with the permission of its Director, Dr. Lourdes R. Simpol, Ph.D. Map no. 3 was designed for the project by Mr. Rex T. Rola.

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Randomly Selected Field Sites of the LMSMP

A. Cotabato City Cluster

1. Brgy. Kakar, Mun. of Datu Odin Sinsuat, Maguindanao Prov.
2. Brgy. Katidtuan, Mun. of Kabuntalan, Maguindanao Prov.
3. Brgy. Pagalungan, Mun. of Kabuntalan, Maguindanao Prov.
4. Brgy. Gambar, Mun. of Kabuntalan, Maguindanao Prov.
5. Brgy. Kapimpilan, Mun. of Northern Kabuntalan, Maguindanao Prov.
6. Brgy. Pigkalagan, Mun. of Sultan Kudarat/Nuling, Maguindanao Prov.

B. Kabacan-Midsayap Cluster

7. Brgy. Buliok, Mun. of Pikit, Cotabato Prov.
8. Brgy. Bulol, Mun. of Pikit, Cotabato Prov.
9. Brgy. Katilacan, Mun. of Pikit, Cotabato Prov.
10. Brgy. Libungan Torreta, Mun. of Pigcawayan, Cotabato Prov.
11. Brgy. Dungguan, Mun. of M'lang, Cotabato Prov.

C. Isulan-Tacurong Cluster

12. Brgy. Montay, Mun. of Datu Piang, Maguindanao Prov.
13. Brgy. Ambadao, Mun. of Datu Piang, Maguindanao Prov.
14. Brgy. Dasawao, Mun. of Sharif Saydona Mustapha, Maguindanao Prov.
15. Brgy. Damamblak, Mun. of Talayan, Maguindanao Prov.
16. Brgy. Inug-og, Mun. of Pagalungan, Maguindanao Prov.
17. Brgy. Kalbugan, Mun. of Pagalungan, Maguindanao Prov.
18. Brgy. Langgapanan, Mun. of Sultan sa Barongis, Maguindanao Prov.
19. Brgy. Bulod, Mun. of Sultan sa Barongis, Maguindanao Prov.
20. Brgy. Pembalakan, Mun. of Mamasapanu, Maguindanao Prov.
21. Brgy. Tabungao, Mun. of Rajah Buayan, Maguindanao Prov.
22. Brgy. Lasangan, Mun. of Salipada K. Pendatun, Maguindanao Prov.
23. Brgy. Kabuling, Mun. of Pandag, Maguindanao Prov.

The selected field sites add up to a total of 23 Barangays, located in 16 Municipalities, in two Provinces.

List of Project Field Researchers

<i>Name</i>	<i>Cluster</i>
1. Abdul Salam, Halima	Isulan-Tacurong
2. Esperat, Daniel	Cotabato City
3. Gonsang, Sarah Mae	Kabacan-Midsayap
4. Guiamla, Al Azar	Cotabato City
5. Laban, Datun	Cotabato City
6. Laban, Shemran	Cotabato City
7. Matula, Michael	Isulan-Tacurong
8. Otto, Omran	Isulan-Tacurong
9. Pendililang, Mondatu	Kabacan-Midsayap
10. Pipican, Hyro	Isulan-Tacurong
11. Saylor, Rachma	Isulan-Tacurong
12. Saylor, Rochma	Isulan-Tacurong
13. Sencil, Al Rashid	Kabacan-Midsayap
14. Sencil, Site	Kabacan-Midsayap

ANNEX 'C'

Indicative Instrument for FGDs

A. *Pagpapahalaga* (Valuation)

Ano po ba ng inyong gawaing panghanapbuhay?

(For farmers: Sino pa ang may-ari ng lupaing sinasaka ninyo? Ano ang batayan ng pagmamay-ari ninyo/nila? Titulado po ba ang lupang ito? Kung kayo ang may-ari ng lupa, binabayaran ninyo ba ang buwis na pinapataw ng gobyerno dito? Kung iba ang may-ari, anu-ano ang inyong tungkulin sa may-ari ng lupa? Anu-ano naman ang mga karapatan ng may-ari ng lupa?)

(For fishers: May nagmamay-ari po ba ng lugar na pinangingisdaan ninyo? Sino ang may-ari nito? Ano ang batayan ng pagmamay-ari nito? Anu-ano ang tungkulin ninyo sa may-ari ng pinangingisdaan ninyo? Anu-ano ang karapatan ng may-ari?)

Kumusta naman ang inyong pamumuhay?

Madali po ba o mahirap ang inyong kabuhayan? Bakit po ninyo nasabi ito?

Sa tingin ba ninyo ay masmadali ang pamumuhay noon kaysa ngayon? Kung may napansin kayong pagbabago, ano kaya ang pinagmulan nito?

Kumikita ba kayo sa inyong paghahanapbuhay? Bakit po ninyo nasabi ito?

Sa tingin ba ninyo ay maipapatuloy pa itong uri ng pamumuhay?

Naaapektuhan po ba ng kalagayan ng Ligawasan ang inyong kabuhayan? May nakikita ba kayong pagbabago sa kalagayan ng Ligawasan?

Ano sa tingin ninyo ang halaga ng Ligawasan para sa inyo at sa inyong pamilya?

Mayroon po ba kayong mga paniniwala ukol sa Ligawasan? Anu-ano po ang mga ito? Naaapektohan po ba ng ganitong mga paniniwala ang inyong kabuhayan? Paano?

Ano po ang naiisip ninyong magandang kabuhayan para sa inyo at sa inyong pamilya?

B. Pamamahala (Management)

Sinu-sino ang kinikilala ninyong pinuno o lider sa inyong pamayanan?

Ano po ang kaugnayan ng inyong pinuno sa mga sumusunod:

- Sa barangay o LGU;
- Sa MILF;
- Sa DENR; at
- Sa mga malalaking angkan?

Sino po ba ng namamahala sa Ligawasan sa ngayon?

Sino po dapat ang mamahala sa Ligawasan?

Ano ang pinakamahalagang simulain o prinsipyo sa pamamahala ng Ligawasan?

Ano po ang tingin ninyo sa panukalang gawing teritoryo o probinsya ng MILF ang Ligawasan?

Ano po ang tingin ninyo sa panukalang patituloan bilang Ancestral Domain ang Ligawasan? Kung sakali man, kanino dapat ipangalan ang titulo sa Ligawasan?

Ano po ang tingin ninyo sa panukalang gawing PA ang Ligawasan? Kung sakali man, maapektuhan ba nito ang inyong pamumuhay?