
Manila Women's Forum

A Network of Women Professionals

October 2006

Mindanao - Land of Promise, Land of the Unknown

By Linda Ferguson

On Monday Sept 18th, the Manila Women's Forum met at Linda Panlilio's lovely home in Dasmariñas for the monthly meeting. Maria Lourdes "Inday" Arcenas gave a very thought provoking presentation on the work she is doing for the Mindanao Business Council.

Inday is a trained psychologist and has been living and working in Mindanao since 1977. In her role as Advisor-Sustainable Development for the Mindanao Business Council, she actively promotes the campaign for Sustainable Responsible Investment (SRI). She said that SRI goes beyond corporate social responsibility because companies are encouraged to integrate sustainable development and social responsibility into the core business. She further emphasized that the approach is Think Locally Act Globally not the other way around. Thinking locally is essential to establish identity and make the locals feel secure and not to be overwhelmed by globalization. When people are comfortable and safe in their identities it is easier to accept innovation and become more open to global practices. SRI is applying the principles of corporate social responsibility in the socio-cultural economic context of Mindanao.

Her presentation provided an overview of development in Mindanao from colonial times to the present and inspired many of us to plan visits to the region.

Historical Context

Islam came to Mindanao in the 14th century and established itself in western Mindanao where previously small tribal units were welded into sultanates. The social structures were well established and therefore the Moros of Mindanao were able to resist colonization even up to 1898 when the Philippines was ceded by Spain to the United States. The communities were mostly in the coastal areas and the central mountainous regions remained relatively undeveloped and uninhabited.

From 1913, the American colonial government encouraged immigration through official resettlement programs in Mindanao as a method of assimilating the island. This included encouraging the migration of large numbers of Christians from Luzon and the Visayas. Foreign agribusiness interests Goodrich and Firestone established rubber plantations in Basilan, Zamboanga, and Cotabato; Del Monte developed pineapple plantations in Bukidnon; and the Japanese planted abaca in Davao. Many of the social problems, especially land issues, facing Mindanao are the direct result of this development strategy.

* Mindanao has been described as "One Island, Diverse Societies" with indigenous people (IP), Muslims, and Christians. The original Muslim and indigenous populations were subjugated involuntarily and have resisted attempts towards assimilation in the majority Christian culture. The resulting resistance and violence have impeded development.

* The Christian farmers settled primarily in the lowland areas, displacing the local indigenous population to the highlands. This has resulted in conflicts over land ownership and property rights. These issues are slowly being resolved through the implementation of the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA) and the Peace Process OPPAP.

* The increasing population of Mindanao of landless farmers employing subsistence kaingin (slash and burn) agriculture following logging operations have resulted in environmental degradation including deforestation, soil nutrient depletion and overuse of chemical fertilizers.

In view of its geographical position and cultural mix, more recently Mindanao has been recognized as a cornerstone in the fight against

(Continued on page 2)

Next MWF Meeting **When:** 6:30 p.m., Monday 2006 October 18
What: Linda Worth, Subregional Director of the International Labor Organization, will speak on her report "Breaking Through the Glass Ceiling: Women in Management."
Where: Grace Lourenco-Brunner's home, 3 Washington Street, West Greenhills **Bring:** Something to share for the potluck dinner (for about 30 people) **November meeting:** Monday, November 13, 2006.

(Mindanao... from page 1)
international terrorism. The Philippine government is actively pursuing peace negotiations with members of the Moro Islamic movements. Other governments have established assistance programs aimed at improving the local infrastructure and encouraging sustainable development. Many of the intergovernmental aid agencies are active in the area including the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Australian Agency for International Development (AusAid), German Technical Cooperation (GTZ), European Union, World Bank, Kuwait and Saudi Development Fund.

Mindanao – Land Of Opportunity

Even with the underlying social problems, Mindanao remains a land of opportunity.

* Less densely populated than other parts of the Philippines; 34% of the land area with approximately 24% of the population.

* 70% of the mineral deposits, this is a largely undeveloped natural resource; 50% of the national gold reserves; 83% of the national nickel reserves.

* Major fishery including tuna shipped directly to Japan.

* Considered the “Food Basket” of the Philippines with major fruit crops exported including coconut, bananas, pineapple, and rubber production. Mindanao is a largely typhoon free

area that makes it attractive for fruit production.

* 8% of remaining virgin natural forests in Mindanao primarily in the hinterlands including Lake Lanao, which is predominantly Muslim.

* Has the lowest unemployment rate in the Philippines, but also the highest underemployment rate and lowest per capita income.

One of the objectives of the work Inday is undertaking with the Mindanao Business Council is to ensure development in a socially responsible manner.

Mindanao Business Council

The Mindanao Business Council was established in the mid 1990s to harness the private sector to participate in peace and development of the region. It is the umbrella business organization of 39 chambers of commerce and industry and 8 industry associations in Mindanao. Its strategic program areas include small and medium-sized enterprise promotion and support, encouraging quadruple bottom line development, and responsible governance.

“We are committed to sustainable and responsible investments to help create a future for Mindanao that is free of poverty and violence where Mindanaoans equally participate and benefit from peace and prosperity.”

Recently on 8 September 2006, the business council participated in a stakeholders conference entitled “Mindanao Rising! Charting the Course Collectively” held in Davao City with Mindanao stakeholders -

local government units, national government agencies, non-government organizations, church, academe, women. The business council was co-convenor with the Mindanao Commission on Women to launch the campaign Sustainable Responsible Investments and Consensus Building on the Peace Process in Mindanao.

Inday closed her presentation with pictures of Mt. Apo and an invitation to everyone to come and climb the highest mountain in the Philippines. Many of us have promised to try. ■

The Manila Women’s Forum

The Manila Women’s Forum (MWF) is a cross-cultural network for women. It provides opportunities to build friendships, to talk to women of various cultures, and to share information about resources. Our meetings are intended to provide intellectual stimulation and lead to personal and professional development. All women are welcome to join. The current officers are **Lisa Lumbao**, Chair, Programs, Treasurer, and Newsletter. **Cecilia Leung**, Programs. **Beulah P. Taguiwalo**, Newsletter, Website.

Cost of membership is P300 per year. Members receive a copy of the current mailing list in addition to the newsletter, which is also sent to non-members. A contribution is collected at each monthly meeting: P20 for members, and P40 for non-members. Please contact Lisa Lumbao at Tel. 813-0168, or at lumbao@mozcom.com for more information about MWF.

Visit our website – a work in progress
www.geocities.com/manilawomensforum

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