

THE "CULTURAL MINORITIES": A SUGGESTED APPROACH TO THEIR DEVELOPMENT

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Introduction

The people of the Philippines today can be roughly divided into the "cultural majority" and "cultural minority." The former is composed of the socio-economically and politically powerful groups that run the nation. Most of them are Christians and are found dwelling in the urban and urbanizing areas. On their shoulders fall the responsibility of running the Philippine government and economy. While a few of them may be labelled well-off, a general statement that they are the wielders of the political and economic powers will not be far from reality.

Found at the opposite pole are the rest of the populace. A greater portion of the rural populace are participants in the political process but not necessarily economically endowed.

By legal definition the name cultural minority is derived from the term "non-Christian," but does not refer to religious belief but rather to the geographical area and more directly to the *natives* of the Philippines, usually living in tribal relationship apart from settled communities. In a subsequent legislation, RA No. 1888, "non-Christian" is equated with "National Cultural Minorities."

Discussion among social scientists at this point, however, raises some questions on the use of "national cultural minorities." The strongest criticism is that it has a connotation of inferiority. Way back in the 60's, a conference in Sagada discussed the possibility of changing the term "national minorities" to one that would be less derogatory. The following suggestions were put forward, viz., ethnic communities, cultural minorities, ethnic populations and others. However, today the term "national cultural minorities" is still used as seen in the program of their conference.

Today, after some studies, the term "national cultural minorities" cannot be used to encompass all those who are non-Christians. From the term "cultural minorities" there are ethnic population

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groups that, though small in number have been able to unite. They have mustered enough political strength to be able to attract the attention of the national government. This group which is composed of many ethnic groups but united under one religion — Islam — is small in number but politically strong to participate in nation building. These Islamized population groups are the Maranaos, Maguin-danaos, Suluanos, Yakans, Palawani, Jama Mapun, Kalibugan, Sama, Badjaos, and others. The secessionist movement was mainly started by the first groups and then supported by the others. Able to get help from outside sources in the form of equipment and training, these groups showed a united front. Thanks to the policy of attraction and the focusing of development in Mindanao, viz. electricity, schools, roads, settlement projects, hospitals, and many other public service demanded by these forgotten populace, today the movement is reported to have weakened. The result however, is that the national government has been forced to pay attention to the needs of Mindanao. Truly, there are still local volcanoes that explode now and then in the form of ambushes, raids, vendettas and others, but they are all largely under control based on military reports. Thanks to the cooperation between the Muslims and the Christians on the one hand and the national government on the other hand for the next generations may be able to see a better tomorrow, and a better life in the countryside of Mindanao.

Rosy as we have painted the present situation, yet there are problems that need to be looked into and solved for the further development of Mindanao.

As has been mentioned, the Muslims have been able to get the attention of our national leaders and are on the road to total participation in national socio-economic and political progress.

But in contrast to the Muslims are those who are neither Christians nor Muslims; and for lack of a better term, we will call them pagans who have been left by the wheels of progress. Among these unfortunate brothers of ours are the Bilaan, Manobos, Atas, Subanuns, Tiboli, Tiruray, Mamanua, among others. Found in small groups and scattered, and worse, do not have or cannot present a united front, they have been almost left alone but not unmolested. The entrenchment of the extractive industries as mining, forest product gathering, and lumbering, the setting up of electricity generating dams, the agri-business plantations and the lowland farmers in search of better farming lands have caused chaos among them. Displaced from their ancestral lands, they are literally driven against the wall. As the saying goes even the crab will fight if cornered, so these people strike back. There are many killings, and ambushes in the interior because of the displacement of these people from their ancestral heritage. This is a pattern of human behavior

when cornered. Like animals, they will fight for their very life is at stake. They then are easy converts to the ideology that competes with what the average Filipino dreams about – a paradise on earth. This condition is worsened when government officials turn away from their demands and needs, further aggravated with the abuses of the police, the military and the politicians. Cornered, they have no way out except to fight.

A third group that has to be mentioned albeit they are not cultural minorities are the poor farming population who are lowlanders and harbingers of Christianity. They, like the second group of people we have mentioned, are threatened. But their problems are of different dimensions compared to the two groups. Nevertheless they are studied since they are either in contact with the two other groups or even probably live with them in mixed communities. These are our Human Resources that need development.

The Commission on Integration

Republic Act 1888 (amended by Act No. 3852) has for its main objective the development of the so-called "Non-Christians" the preamble of which states that:

"An act to effectuate in a more rapid and complete manner the economic, social and moral and political advancement of the "Non-Christian Filipinos or National Cultural Minorities into the body politic, creating the Commission on National Integration in charge with said functions".

Section 1 of the same act further clarifies the aim of the law: ". . . It is hereby declared to be the policy of congress to further accelerate and accomplish by all means and in a systematic, rapid and complete manner the moral, material, economic, social and political advancement of the Non-Christian Filipinos, hereinafter called National Cultural Minorities, into the body politic."

Thus the Commission on National Integration (CNI) came into existence. The chairman of the CNI had always been a major politician – more often a lawyer rather than a social scientist who had training and expertise in social change phenomena. Its early reports showed the lack of qualified staff. There were more administration men, viz., accountants, clerks, lawyers, and even field staff who lacked proper training.

In 1962, when I had the opportunity to go with an inspection team to Mindanao with the CNI chairman in the defunct Philippine Senate, what we observed in the field were way off the mark from the national efforts to truly bring the "cultural minorities" to the

folds of the majority body politic. Education, a very influential, albeit slow method, was not fully utilized. Only a few of the settlements had their own elementary schools and the teachers manning them were trained for lowland schools. Thus the problems were many with very little or no help at all coming from the commission in terms of expertise. Another example was in Cotabato, where the party of Senator Manuel Manahan, then chairman of the Senate Committee, was shown the accomplishment of the CNI in that particular area. Instantly, there was a fine administration building but nowhere was a school. The people (i.e. Tiboli) in the area were subsistence farmers, but the CNI staff had brought in a tractor for plowing the land. As seen by the party, the land was newly plowed. There were no draught animals nor iron or wooden plows. Thus, we assumed that the people were being made to jump from one agricultural level to another i.e. from marginal farming to modern agro-business. Indeed a major jump but of little or no use to the clientele for they did not understand the technology. These two instances demonstrate the inherent weaknesses in the established commission.

There was no continuity in the operation of the commission. Every election year the chairmanship changed; and many other personnel in its offices both at the national and provincial levels.

The benefits were distributed more as a largess to the political constituents. Among the benefits though largely political was the CNI scholarships. Whoever had a strong political influence was able to get the scholarship. For instance, the relatives of strong local politicians got more scholarships, even when they were not "cultural minorities" and even when they were very highly financially capable. Thus the fiasco on the commission continued for a while but stopped abruptly during the imposition of martial law. Then a new group came into being. First this was a private assistance group, and later turned into a foundation. During the martial law era, it became an office at the cabinet level. It has carried on the work better although still plagued by problems.

The PANAMIN: Its Activities

The PANAMIN or Presidential Assistance for National Minorities has been quite active specially in taking charge of the problems of

the "Cultural Minorities". In the process it has won a lot of friends to its cause and also competitors if not enemies on the other side. As a presidential arm, it has played an important role in bringing cultural minorities to the side of the government. To let them actively participate in the political functions however, may take time. Opposition is not only encountered with the positioning of the competitors but a greater opposition that is not easily recognizable has been generated by the cultural lag suffered by the "cultural minorities" due to their withdrawal from active participation in the culture change generated by the introduction of Christianity and its consequent westernization with modernization.

As of 1976 (the figures today may be greater) the PANAMIN reports the following accomplishments for the whole Philippines:

- 376 on-going projects
- 2.5 million tribal communities settled in its on-going projects
- 1.1 million hectares of ancestral land restored
- 3.5 million treated or given medical attention in many forms
- 250 School buildings constructed
- 250.5 children enrolled in their schools of school age
- 850 food production and commercial activities jointly undertaken with the tribal communities
- 86.5 reached by films and slides of its Museum of Philippine Traditional Culture.

In the PANAMIN News we quote:

"The spectacular expansion of the PANAMIN responsibilities under Presidential Decree 719 has been met with greater zeal and tremendous enterprise borne by its accomplishments to-date. Under the umbrella of PANAMIN massive assistance, the cultural communities in their tribal settlements are unfolding daily by their own choice and hard work glimpse of improved quality of life. Nomads no more, they are taking to the elementaries of science and technology in the production of fundamental needs with a sagacity as consuming as they addressed to their former food gathering, hunting and swidden farming."

Indeed when one goes over the accomplishments of the PANAMIN, they are impressive. Of course as usual such well-done tasks will incur problems. Furthermore, considering the number of 4.2

million, non-Muslim cultural communities; and the additional group, the Muslims, a lot of ground has yet to be upturned and cultivated.

Settling the cultural communities and stabilizing their way of life is quite a complicated matter. This is further aggravated by the great need to make them as Filipinos participate in the body politic. This can be better accomplished through guided culture change and through rationalized education both in the formal and informal type. Carried out well it can be prognosticated that they can be capably involved in running our nation; they must be educated properly so as to feel and think like real Filipinos — i.e. the sense of nationhood. It is a fact today that among them and others too, the feeling of identification and pride of being a Filipino has yet to be fully realized. Thus this is a major socio-economic-technical change undertaking.

This paper will therefore try to present the essence of and the significance of having a culture-change project properly run so as to render our people effective in running the nation. In this way national unity in spite of cultural diversity may yet come about. With this our human resources can then be properly harnessed to make our nation great. There are, however, multi-faceted problems that plague such development efforts. This has been so because many of the projects are mainly linear in nature, that is they are for the purpose of the improvement of one side of a people's culture, i.e. livelihood. No doubt one of the purposes of the R.A. No. 1888 (amended by R.A. No. 3852) is to improve the economic plight of these people and also their culture in general. That government agencies like the PANAMIN have attempted to improve their economic lives and obtained a certain amount of success is good. However, forgotten in the efforts to obtain *impact value* is the fact that any development of a people must be taken in the totality of their culture. In other words, if the livelihood is touched, all the aspects of their culture are involved. Once neglected, the success is temporary. Short of the support of the other cultural functions, the successes wither away at the sacrifice of the other parts of the culture of a people.

A culture change project involves innovative delivery systems and support or the backed stop of the functions matrix of a people. With out this solid basis as we have said above, the success will be temporary and tend to wither away.

For instance, the cult of individualism if used as a basis for introducing change, will succeed with the individual concerned. But

in the process, he is cut off from his community. Social pressures cause him to give up the gained learning, and to slowly revert back to be one of the members of his old society. Or that the environment of the culture does not support the change that he has accepted.

A good example are the Mangyans of San Teodoro Farm Settlement Schools. Here young Mangyans are taught the latest things in farming. After graduation from the school, they go back to their mountain homes. Since they live in the high altitudes and rolling, if not mountainous, terrain, the use of the plow is precluded. Furthermore, they are economically poor that to buy a draught animal like a bullock or a carabao is out of the question. Thus they go back to the slash and burn agriculture. It is what fits the environment and it is what the Mangyan society practices. And so, in order not to be an outcast, the young farm settlement school graduate tries his best to regain the old cultural practices so as to survive in his own society's environment. A consoling fact, maybe a kind of *consuelo de bobo*, stands out. In my experience among them, at least new plants have been introduced into their farming cycle. I have seen the largest *cucumber* right in the mountain surrounding Mt. Halcon.

These few examples we have given you can be multiplied in Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao. Thus there is a need for changing the approach. Instead of the traditional one, a more recent one, a product of experience must be employed. We are outlining the whole process below.

Integrated Development Approach

As discussed briefly above albeit the meager examples, the conclusion that we are to draw is that as far as approaches in development are concerned, one major practice dominates the scene. This is the development focused towards the improvement of economic life as exemplified by the projects mentioned. However, there is another good approach that is emerging, the Social Laboratory approach propagated mainly by the University of the Philippines at Los Baños, and carried into the field by other state colleges and universities.

The latter has the following for its objectives:

1. to mobilize human resources to fully develop land and water resources to transform the present farming that is traditional to that of a modernized commercial agriculture

so as to raise the standard of living and accelerate rural progress.

This second approach is what we will present. Although it has inherent flaws and weaknesses causing problems in its implementation, yet these problems are not insurmountable. The following problems have plagued this approach; the lack of a sound theoretical base as a framework; the little or non-involvement of competent social scientists; the lack of understanding of the totality of culture and culture change and the poor training of field workers and administrators. But these problems can be remedied, and are not impossible to solve.

On the other hand, that these problems can be overcome is shown by the experience of a privately organized human development project. Run on a small budget but with dedicated and well-trained personnel the experiment in Sudtonggan (Mactan) Cebu has been a success. Analysis of the basis for their success shows the following:

1. the people were prepared for the culture change project and were actively involved;
2. their culture and aspirations were properly studied and analyzed;
3. plans for their development and the techniques to be employed were based on the analyzed data;
4. their social institutions and values like their religion, pride in their barrio, etc., were properly utilized;
5. the new industries introduced and developed were based on the existing natural resources and the skills of the people;
6. there was concentration on education and skills training and leadership training;
7. new organizations for developmental purposes were based on the people's culture and capabilities;
8. the whole project was well sold and understood by the participating community as well as the general public;
9. field workers were residents in the community so that problems could easily be taken up and discussed;
10. the administrators and field technicians were well trained and they continually learned about the people and their field of work; and

11. the general public, viz., the government sector, corporations and others were continually involved.

One of the sectors that have quantifiable results in the Budtonggan experience is the income side of the people:

1. per capita income rose from —₱416 (1975) to ₱1,446 (1979)
2. family income in 1975 was ₱1,460 rising to ₱6,504 in 1979
3. rock dressing industry from ₱2,888 (1975) to ₱70,859 (1979)
4. handicraft from nothing in 1975 to ₱74,937
5. *huri* furniture industry from zero in 1975 to ₱30,660 in 1979

The above results are the quantifiable ones. Those that are qualitative in nature are:

- a. transformation of the *barangay's* physical appearance from the image of a poor barrio to that of an actively developing one, viz., more buildings (school nurse, public center, clinic, etc.)
- b. better pathways and roads in the community leading to other communities
- c. developed water resources and lighting system
- d. functional and better organizations
- e. holding of regular barrio celebrations and the cultivation of their traditional values that are improved in the process, and others.

These are some of the few that are to be mentioned in favor of this integrated approach employed in Budtonggan. This has resulted in the development of a barrio people to a stage wherein they are proud of themselves, their community, willing to cooperate in community undertakings, have better education and skills and have developed strong self-reliance. No longer are the populace of the community afraid to face the uncertain future, they can do this with confidence. Indeed this has been a success. This success is manifested in the group deciding to multiply the side of human development in Mactan and even herein in Mindanao.

The above success story has been with the lowland island dwelling Christians and not with the "cultural minorities". Thus the application of the approach has to be done with caution.

Theoretical Basis

The development of rural people as already said has not been an easy task. The SL of the different state schools from Luzon to Mindanao have shown these difficulties. Thus the need for a theoretical framework. We suggest the following:

Development of people must be based on the sound study of their culture. Their socio-cultural institutions, their values and attitudes, their hopes and aspirations and their environment are to be basis of change, i.e. development. And that the development thrust must be cyclical rather than linear. This must be so because to touch the matrix and functions of culture will affect the other functions. If the changes do not involve the full seven functions of culture, the change is not stable.

With the framework above we have to define two terms:

- a. Culture is the state of the development of the human mind in so far that it affects the development of the human body. This state of development of the mind interacts with its socio-psychological environment and produces ideas and knowledge (mentifacts); and also with its physical environment and produces artifacts (viz. usable objects as tools, buildings, etc.).
- b. Functions of culture provide the system of institutions and corresponding values for a people. There are seven functions: biological maintenance; continuation of the species; socialization of new members; production, distribution and consumption of goods and services; political order; search for and expression of the meaning of life; and communication.

All these functions are interwoven with one another. Touch one aspect and the effects reverberate through out the cultural matrix.

It maybe good to mention here that development can be forced on a people, but the better way is to work with them as partners in development. Thus, there is a need for tapping the various institutions to help in the change.

A good model is suggested by Loudermilk and Laitus to the components of integrated rural development:

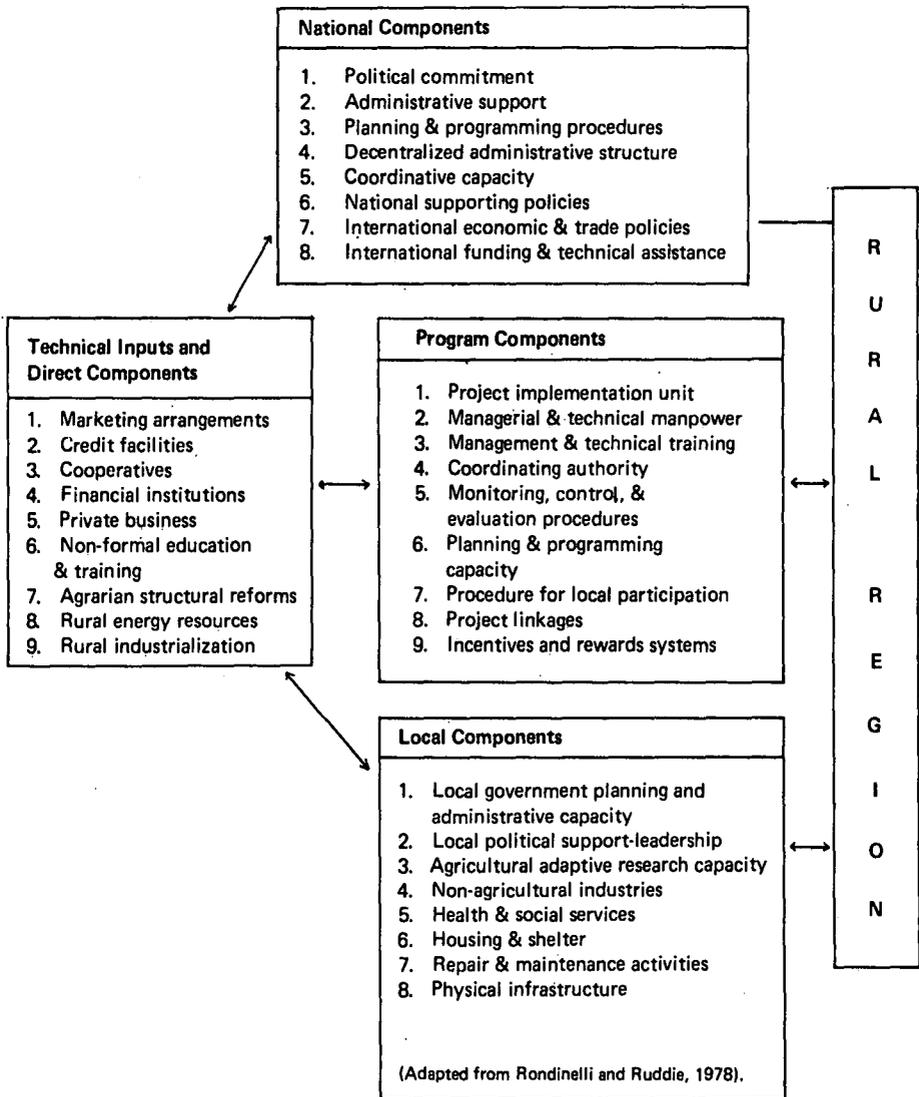


Fig. 1 Functional components of integrated rural development.

The outline presented above is the organizational structure of integrated development. While in the Philippine setting they may not be totally acceptable, the restructuring could be done to fit our needs and situation. It has been noted that successful projects require apt attention on the part of the administrators and field workers.

"Rural development is a continuous process of planned social, political and economic change in rural and urban structures and organizations which provide for adequate incentives, production possibilities and services to help rural people achieve higher levels of living, knowledge, and skills. Rural development helps to modify their physical and social environments and maintain sustained progress toward desired goals which the rural people help to establish and implement over time."

Programs of development among cultural minorities will vary to some extent on what has been designed and workable for the lowland rural and urban populace. As we have said above, these people (cultural minorities) are in the state of cultural lag of varying degrees. To develop them requires much more than those Filipinos who have been acculturated due to their acceptance of Christianity and in contemporary times, those who have come to live in urban areas. Thus, the necessity to accelerate their phase to come up to the level of the Christians eventually to be drawn into the modernization process.

In order to plan and implement programs that will be successful, we have to remember a few things. One of these is to know that rural development should not be isolated from the urban sector and the total economy of the nation. This isolation has been experienced in the rural development of China, Korea, Taiwan, Sri Lanka and Tanzania. "While decentralization and increased local autonomy are important a need exists for strong natural commitment and intervention."

A second thing is that development programs among the "cultural minorities" will have a higher probability of success only when the following conditions are met:

1. the required knowledge of the culture of the people that has been thoroughly studied and analyzed;
2. there should be a national and regional policy base that integrates the development of the cultural minorities to these two levels;

3. there should be a self-sustaining economic base that will increase the productivity of the people concerned;
4. incentives for development should be adequate;
5. the recognition and training of local leaders and workers; and
6. employment of qualified culture change experts and field workers.

Other requirements for the success of planned programs of development among our "cultural minorities" are: realistic time frame; careful local planning to achieve specific goals to create a so-called demonstration effect; adequate funding that will focus on local needs and opportunities of the area; and realistic methods of monitoring, evaluation and problem solutions.

The above suggestions are not perfect. However, if followed through, the results will be better than the canned solution frequently employed in Philippine setting for rural development.