

## Culturally Sensitive Community Empowerment Practices for Indigenous People in the Philippines: Roles of Non-Indigenous Community Workers

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## **I. Introduction**

In the face of globalization of the economy, many indigenous Filipino tribes are in danger of losing their ancestral land to outside settlers. Much of their land comprises forested regions or mountains that are rich in natural resources. Thus, conflicts often arise between these tribes and the outsiders, many of them based outside the Philippines, including Japan, who want to exploit these resources, mostly without the consent of the indigenous people.

A local NGO, PAFID (Philippine Association for Intercultural Development), assists indigenous people in regaining their ancestral land and developing their communities to be self-sufficient. I have worked with PAFID since 1996 and conducted fieldwork with several indigenous tribes to establish community development projects that will improve their livelihood.

In order to work with indigenous Filipino people, non-indigenous community workers from industrialized countries face complex and inherent challenges. Non-indigenous workers, themselves, are part of the history of colonization and represent the culture of “intruders.” However, if non-indigenous community workers approach an indigenous community with respect for and sincerity toward their tradition and culture, community workers could be catalysts for the development and empowerment of their communities in multiple ways, as they have access to extensive social resources.

This paper reports my fieldwork with indigenous Filipino communities and examines community empowerment practices from a viewpoint of cultural sensitivity. Analysis is also conducted regarding the type of roles non-indigenous workers play in terms of community empowerment. In addition, I offer suggestions to develop a practice framework for community empowerment of indigenous Filipino tribes.

## **II. Roles of Non-Indigenous Community Workers: Collaborative Team Approach**

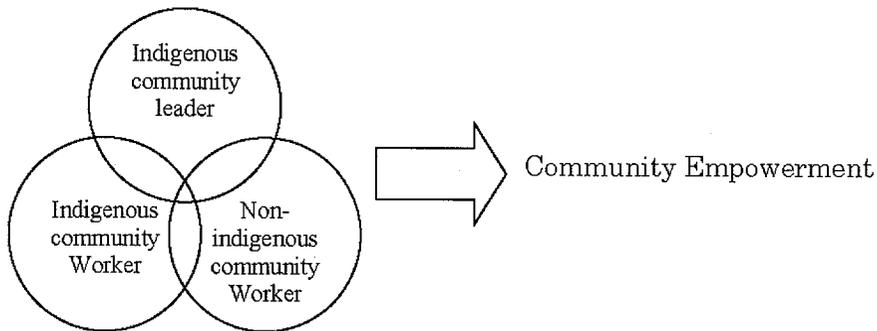
Since 1998, I have worked as a “non-indigenous community worker” with PAFID in order to support indigenous tribes struggling with the issue of the encroachment of

their ancestral land. Non-indigenous community workers come from industrialized countries and can be regarded as “outsiders” by indigenous peoples. To promote internal change in an indigenous community, non-indigenous community workers might not be the candidates to assume this role. According to Ife & Tesoriero (2006), an external community worker will then need to be aware of the limitations of her/his position, and the danger of community work becoming colonizing and disempowering rather than empowering. An example of such type of a worker is a non-indigenous community worker attempting to work with an indigenous community. Therefore, genuine indigenous community development must ultimately be carried out by the community members themselves, and the potential role of non-indigenous people, however well intentioned, is necessarily limited to a secondary supportive function.

With respect to Ife & Tesoriero’s internal change theory for indigenous people’s community development, non-indigenous community workers should concentrate on playing roles to support indigenous community leaders. However, non-indigenous community workers are expected to play active roles for a severely marginalized indigenous community in the Philippines. Given their country’s long history of struggle with various issues of land ownership, poverty, malnutrition, etc., indigenous people often view the non-indigenous community worker as a “savior.” When non-indigenous community workers arrive at indigenous communities, the people expect them to solve all the types of issues that their communities face.

However, non-indigenous community workers should be restricted to playing a back-up role to indigenous community leaders. Non-indigenous community workers should collaborate with traditional leaders and act as “organizers,” not as “leaders.” Indigenous communities are directed and guided by its leaders, who are spiritually connected to their ancestors’ souls and to the ancestral land. Non-indigenous community workers need to organize collective actions to encourage indigenous leaders to take the lead in their communities.

There are two types of community workers that can play supporting roles for the development of indigenous communities: indigenous community workers and non-indigenous community workers. Indigenous community workers are recruited from within tribal communities and trained by local NGOs such as PAFID. Non-indigenous community workers are from outside of the community, and could also come from outside the Philippines. Indigenous community leaders and the two different types of community workers should work cooperatively and as a team approach the various tasks for solving the multiple issues that indigenous communities face.

**Figure1: Collaborative Team Approach**

### III. Collaborative Team Practice: Community Empowerment

Indigenous community leaders and community workers, and non-indigenous community workers can form a team together to develop indigenous Filipino communities through the sharing of roles. However, in order to promote indigenous community development, a collaborative team approach requires a theoretical backbone that shifts the focus from changing one individual group to building on the community system as a whole.

As a theoretical framework, community empowerment applies in collaborative team practice. Rappaport (1987) defined empowerment as “a process, a mechanism by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over their affairs, and involve themselves in the democratic processes of their community and employing institutions” (p.122). Empowerment acknowledges that individuals, groups, organizations, and communities are capable of taking control over what they are doing by recognizing how social structures repress and influence everything they do (Solomon, 1987 p.79). In the Philippines, many outside developers are not interested in a collaborative relationship with indigenous tribes. The fundamental structures of outside sectors prioritize profit making. They tend to neglect the rights of indigenous people, and consequently, marginalize and deprive them. In this sense, the practice of empowerment must focus on political and structural change as well as individual, organizational, and community change.

In addition to political and structural factors, culture, history, beliefs, and values are important factors in promoting the empowerment of indigenous communities. In fact, traditional beliefs, such as a spiritual connection to their land, lead to a strengthening of identity within indigenous communities. Viray & Reyes (2006) introduced the concept of “community re-empowerment,” which placed value on the reawakening or the realization of the sustainable indigenous knowledge and practices of the tribal communities, which unfortunately have been modified by outside constraints (p.13).

Indigenous people are under constant pressure from outsiders and are in danger of losing their traditional knowledge and beliefs. Therefore, rediscovering their tradition is one of the main themes of indigenous community development.

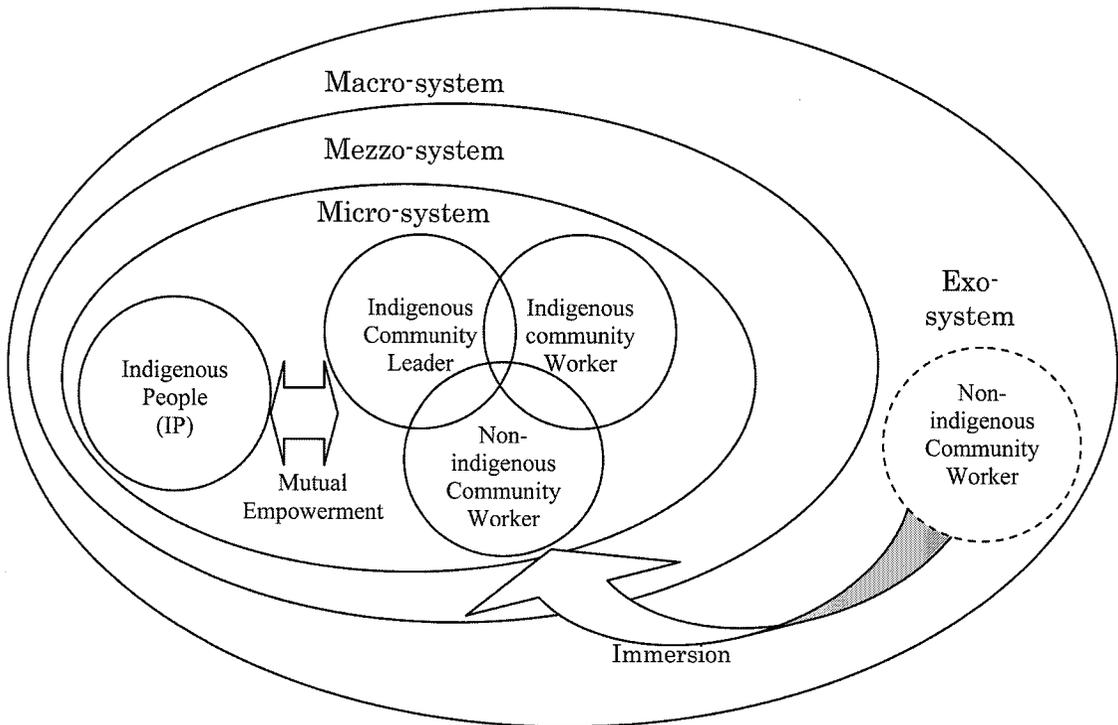
Considering Solomon's concept of empowerment and Viray & Reyes's re-empowerment theory, a structural model of community empowerment practice for indigenous communities is created (Figure 2). Anme's Community Empowerment System Model (2005, p.17) also applies to this model. According to Anme, community empowerment is an aggregate "system" composed of 4 subsystems: the **micro-system**, the **mezzo-system**, the **macro-system**, and the **exo-system** (p.16). The micro-system consists of community members and community supporters and their relationships. The mezzo-system is composed of the environmental factors of communities that directly influence the micro-system, such as the living environment, educational conditions, economic status, health status, etc. The macro-system is a social context, which impacts both the micro-system and the mezzo-system. Two types of factors influence the macro-system: 1) value factors, such as history, culture, and values, and 2) political and structural factors. The exo-system interacts with the micro-system through the mezzo-system and exerts influence from outside. The exo-system indirectly influences indigenous communities, and it consists of outside supporters or interest groups seeking profits from community activities.

The main factor of the micro-system is the indigenous people themselves, who continuously interact with environmental factors, i.e., political and structural factors, and social context factors. It is important to clarify how they interact with external factors, and how their needs change through such interactions in order to plot the strategy of community empowerment. Building relationships among indigenous community leaders, indigenous community workers, and non-indigenous community workers is the key to the promotion of community empowerment at the micro-system level. These individuals need to collaboratively as a team approach and share the roles of community workers. Indigenous community leaders and community workers, and non-indigenous community workers should realize the importance of the sense of "mutuality" introduced when they promote community empowerment and work as a "team" of community workers. Community empowerment is always a two-way affair; hence the process of change, not only changes the community members, but also changes the values/mindsets of the community workers. It is important to highlight the fact that this is a mutual learning process between the indigenous people the team of community workers, which leads to the development of working relationships.

Furthermore, it is also important to identify the position of non-indigenous community workers in the structural model. If non-indigenous community workers fail to build good working relationships with the indigenous people, the indigenous community leaders and community workers, they remain complete outsiders and

function as the exo-system. This means that their empowerment actions are forced upon the indigenous people and possibly considered as acts of colonization. In order to prevent such a situation, they should make efforts toward “immersion.” With the support of indigenous community workers, they need to learn how to act in the community with respect to indigenous values, knowledge, and tradition. They should spend time living together and discussing with the indigenous people until they are accepted. It is a time-consuming but necessary task; after which, they can think of collaboratively developing empowerment strategies suitable for indigenous communities.

**Figure 2: The Structural Model of Community Empowerment Practice for Indigenous Communities**



**IV. Role Sharing of Community Workers in Indigenous Setting**

In order to collaborate as a team and to empower communities, it is necessary to clarify what specific roles, indigenous community leaders and workers, and non-indigenous community workers each play. There is a variety of activities and multiple roles for them to assume in indigenous settings. There might be a clash if they

simultaneously play similar roles in the same community, which could possibly lead to the collapse of partnerships. They need to work cooperatively and share roles based on an understanding of their positions.

Figure 3 is a description of the suggested practice model of “role sharing” for community workers in indigenous settings. The conceptual framework is Ife & Tesoriero’s four clusters of community work roles: **representational, facilitative, educational, and technical** (2006, p.288). The term representational role is used to denote the role of the community worker in interaction with the external bodies on behalf of the development of the community (Ife & Tesoriero, 2006, p.302). The facilitative role means stimulating and supporting community development by becoming a catalyst for action (p.288). The educational role requires workers not simply to help the development process along but to have direct input in terms of people’s knowledge, skills, and experience (p.298). The technical role involves the application of a variety of professional and technical skills to aid the process of community development (p.307). Indigenous community leaders and community workers, and non-indigenous community workers collectively play their allotted share of roles for community empowerment, although their roles as community workers change dynamically according to their position in the community.

### **1. Indigenous Community Leader**

Community leaders for indigenous tribal groups in the Philippines are the heart and soul of their communities. They lead members in making important decisions for the community. They have a spiritual relationship with their ancestral lands, which constitute the principal source of their livelihood and origin. Thus, they should be responsible for community development to conserve their culture and their traditional lifestyles.

In fact, the issue of indigenous community leaders acting as community workers is debatable. Although the primary role of community workers is considered to be supporters for indigenous community leaders, community leaders can adopt the knowledge and skills of community workers in order to empower their community members. For when a community leader acts in a manner consistent with the roles of a community worker, this phenomenon is generally viewed as strength in their community (Staples, 2000, p.22).

Indigenous community leaders should be able, with training, to play all four types of roles, but a highly prioritized function would be to play representational roles. In indigenous Filipino communities, no other people except the indigenous community leaders are appropriate representations of the interests of their communities. They need to confront the constant pressure from outsiders and protect their community in order to perform advocacy and build networks. They need to lead community members in

negotiating with outside developers and local and central governments so as to avoid land conflicts.

It is also important for indigenous community leaders to play facilitative roles for developing their communities. They can adopt the necessary skills and knowledge widely used in participatory development fields, but the indigenous community already has their ritual ways of activating and stimulating members. Most importantly, they should reinvigorate their traditional style of facilitation.

## **2. Indigenous Community Worker**

Indigenous community workers are recruited from local indigenous communities. They are trained by local NGOs such as PAFID, which ensure the empowerment and participation of indigenous communities to manage social resources effectively. They work in cooperation with indigenous community leaders, acting as “coordinators,” with much of the focus on efforts and resources to build the capacity of indigenous communities. They encourage leaders to establish networks with social resources at local, national, and international levels. They also play the important role of “translators” for non-indigenous community workers. With fluent English skills, they can also act as “mediators” to gate keep non-indigenous community workers in order to build working relationships with leaders and increase understanding about indigenous culture.

In this sense, indigenous community workers mainly focus on playing facilitative roles and educational roles. In terms of facilitative roles, their primary concern is to be good supporters of community leaders and non-indigenous community workers. Sometimes, they indirectly need to play an educational role, while working with indigenous community leaders by providing appropriate information about available social supports.

## **3. Non-Indigenous Community Worker**

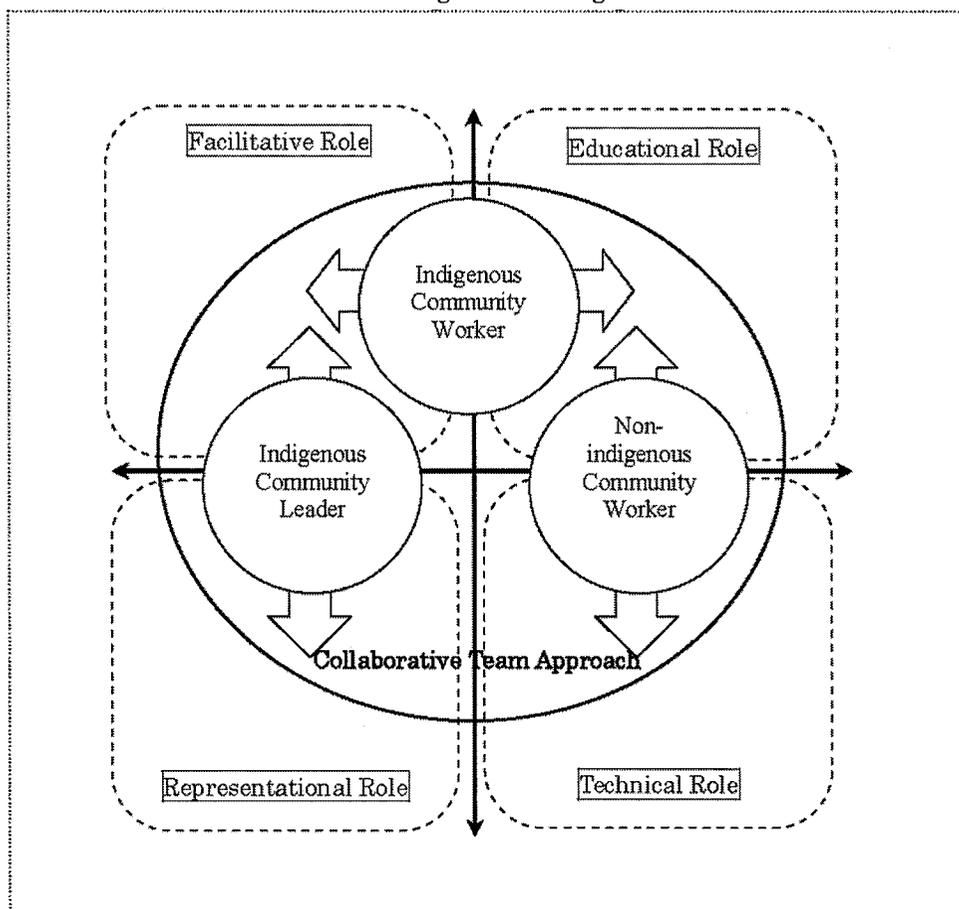
Non-indigenous community workers come from outside of indigenous tribal communities. They have no biological or social relation with tribal groups. In many cases, they work in partnership with local NGOs, such as international NGOs or GOs that provide financial supports. There are some rare non-indigenous community workers who visit indigenous communities for travel or research, first, and then develop strong relationships with the indigenous people and eventually become working partners with these people.

Non-indigenous community workers play educational and technical roles in indigenous communities. They provide training opportunities for community members that can be adapted to community development, such as farming skills. Their primary technical role is that of a “catalyst” to promote the development of indigenous

communities through the use of outside resources that the indigenous people have never accessed by themselves. Although finance is a major part of their support, there are several other aspects, such as disseminating information about the situation of the indigenous communities in the Philippines, raising the level of international attention, and bringing the technical assistance of experts in farming, medicine, etc. to indigenous communities.

Non-indigenous community workers should be aware of promoting dependency and disempowerment of indigenous people if they misplay these educational and technical roles. They can play such parts only if the needs of community members exist. They should always maintain a sense of respect for the indigenous culture and for the people's right to self-determination.

**Figure 3: Practice Model of “Role Sharing” for Community Workers in Indigenous Settings**



The aim of describing the role-sharing model is not to identify who should play or what roles they should play in any indigenous Filipino community. In fact, community workers need to be generalists rather than specialists if they are to play multiple roles at the same time. In certain settings, indigenous community leaders and community workers, and non-indigenous community workers interchangeably play all four types of roles. The delineation of community work roles can be seen to provide a vocabulary that allows for a fragmented practice within an old paradigm, and that can discourage a more holistic approach (Ife & Tesoriero, 2006, p.287). However, it is still necessary to explain the variety of roles community workers must play as a “team” and the dynamics of role sharing among them. The focus of this discussion is on working as a team and building collaborative relationships among indigenous community leaders and community workers, and non-indigenous community workers, rather than delineating the roles of community workers.

## V. Case Study

### 1. Methodology

Since the summer of 1998, I have had the opportunity to work with an indigenous community, the Higa-onon Taalandig Tribal Council (HTTC), as a voluntary community worker. As the first Japanese person to enter the HTTC, I lived in the community and ate the same food as these people for two months. After which, I periodically visited the community at least once a year and worked with them.

This study is the product of my actual fieldwork as a non-indigenous community worker. I adopted the method of ethnography to analyze the situation of the HTTC. Ethnography is a useful methodology for me because it allows researchers to learn from those whom they are studying and to understand their perspectives, customs, and behaviors, and the meanings within the context of their culture (Thornton & Garrett 1995, p.68).

Ethnographic research includes three methods of data gathering: interviews, participant observation, and analysis of written documents. I conducted open-ended group discussions with community members. An indigenous community worker constantly worked with me as a translator, and the information gathered from interviews was recorded in field notes. Information was also collected from participant observation through the experience of living in the community and having friendly and casual conversation with community members. There are not a lot of available written documents about the HTTC, but I investigated some written documents by a local NGO, PAFID, who supported the application of ancestral domain claim for the HTTC.

## **2. Many problems that Indigenous People (IP) face in the Philippines**

The main problems that indigenous people face arise from the mining of their land, the construction of dams that flood their land, the deforestation of their land by logging, or the creation of tourist resorts that leads to them being ejected from or restricted in access to their own land. These activities can lead to a conflict between the indigenous people and new settlers who often use military force to evict them out of their land. The harming of indigenous people sometimes occur as the result of conflict.

These problems stem from the lack of agreement on the meaning and the value of land. To the indigenous people, land means “life.” In their language, the word for “land” is *bugta*, which means the source of survival. The land produces everything they need to sustain their life. Their spiritual connection to the land is also important. They believe that all the spirits of their ancestors remain in the land, and that they continuously support current and future tribal members. Thus, they believe that the land must not be owned by any individuals.

In contrast, new settlers, such as local governments and business groups, are more focused on the economic value of the land. Because land can possibly produce a vast amount of wealth, the valuation of land is judged by professionals in terms of the basic quality and its natural resources. The development of modern science brought new attributes for land valuation. Outsiders began to use scientific techniques to “control” the economic value of the land. For people who see the land as something to be controlled, it is not a symbol of spirituality. They see the land as a commodity. Moreover, the phrase “individual ownership” originates from modern people, who believe that they “own” the land and need to take care of it. This perspective is derived from modern settlers’ egoism that they can control the land in any way they want to.

## **3. Higa-onon Taalandig Tribal Council (HTTC)**

The HTTC is an indigenous tribal community in the Philippines, whose community members have experienced extreme hardship for many years because of the loss of their ancestral land. Fifty years ago, their land was taken by the local government in the name of an agricultural development project. The loss of the land brought multiple socioeconomic issues to the people: poverty, malnutrition, psychological letdown, etc.

The Higa-onon Taalandig community is situated in Musuan, a community in the municipality of Maramag. It is located 40 km south of Malaybalay, the provincial capital, and 130 km south of Cagayan de Oro City, and is readily accessible to the southeastern coast of Mindanao, which is the largest southern island of the Philippines. Their claim on the ancestral land is approximately 400 hectares. This area is currently part of the campus of the local university.

The Taalandig community is constituted of 113 families and 581 people.

Traditionally, farming is their main activity. They harvest rice, corn, and various fruits in any available areas. Some people work for private farms to earn an income. They are paid 60–65 peso (about \$1.5 USD) a day, which is only enough to cover one or two meals for one person.

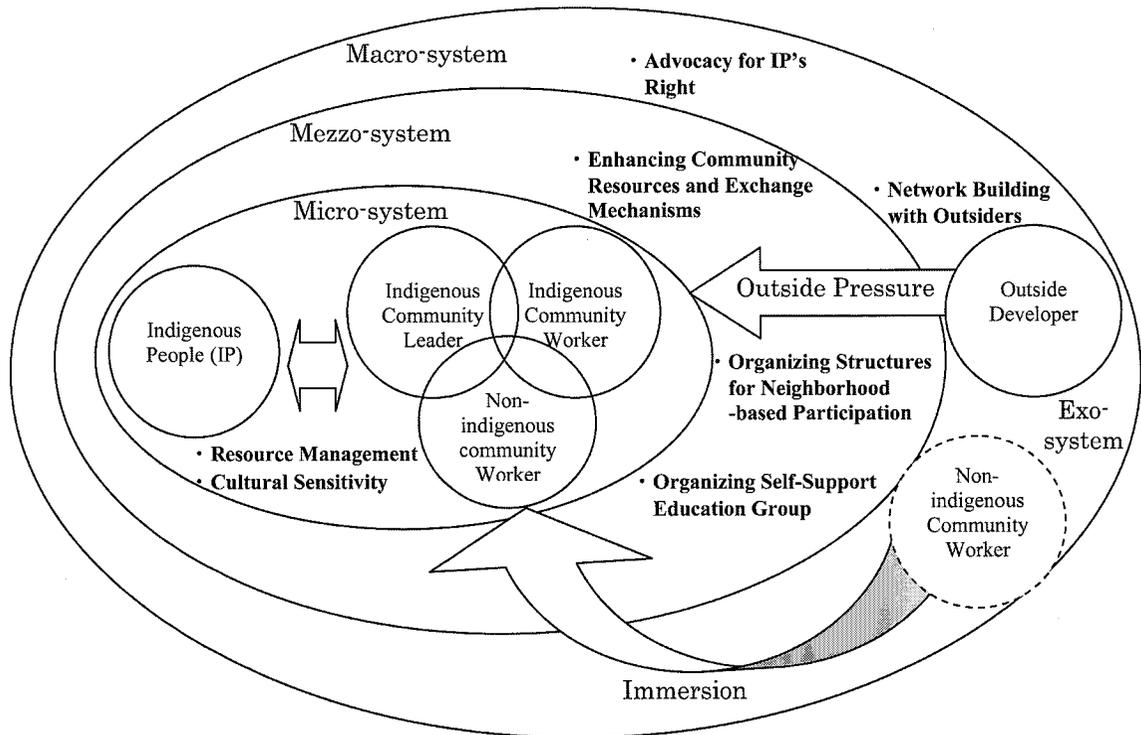
In 1997, Taalandig community members tried to resettle inside their claimed ancestral land no matter what happened to them. Despite the presence of armed guards, they were able to enter the disputed area and rebuild their houses. However, local authorities sent demolition teams to evict them. Despite all their living instruments being confiscated and incurring minor injuries as a result of the demolition, the Taalandig group stayed in the area to demonstrate to local authorities that they were steadfast in their ownership of ancestral land.

So far, there is no response from the national government of the Philippines about the indigenous people's ancestral domain claim. They have taken legal action to reclaim their land ownership. This case is already before the Supreme Court, but no judgment has been made yet, and the people are still waiting too long for action under severe living conditions.

#### **4. Structural Analysis of Community Empowerment Practice for Higa-onon Taalandig Community**

Although their living conditions have deteriorated while living in this disputed area, the Higa-onon Taalandigs have never been discouraged by the local university's relocation forces. As a volunteer community worker, I teamed up with an indigenous community leader and a community worker to practice community empowerment. The structural analysis of the Higa-onon Taalandigs is conducted in accordance with each of the 4 subsystems for the promotion of community empowerment. (Figure 4)

**Figure 4: Structural Analysis of Community Empowerment Practice for Higa-onon Taalandig Community**



#### 4-1 Community Empowerment Practice in Micro-system

The micro-system focuses on community members and supporters, and their relationship. However, non-indigenous community workers need to be aware of the limitations of their position and the danger of community work becoming colonizing and disempowering rather than empowering (Ife & Tesoriero 2006). Especially non-indigenous community workers from international NGOs and GOs must know that their power to provide funding possibly reinforces indigenous communities' dependence on external resources. The existence of external aid may cause the indigenous people to foster false impressions that the community worker is an expert who will provide any needed support.

In order to avoid disempowerment and to promote the empowerment of indigenous people, I, as a non-indigenous community worker, teamed up with an indigenous community leader and worker and cooperatively developed the indigenous communities. Community empowerment practice that focuses on a collaborative team is based on the following.

### ● **Resource Management**

Non-indigenous community workers can bring external resources to indigenous communities, such as funding and technical support from international NGOs and GOs, which could be harmful for indigenous communities if they devalued local initiatives and autonomy. In order to get non-indigenous community workers involved in empowerment rather than disempowerment actions, the information from external resources should be shared by indigenous community leaders and community workers.

Before starting community development, I had a team meeting with an indigenous community leader and an indigenous community worker to discuss what kinds of resources I could bring and how these could be effectively used. I explained my position that I did not possess any financial resources. The resource I could bring was a network with NGOs and GOs in Japan. Another resource I offered was that I could act to disseminate information about the situation of the Filipino indigenous communities as a way of increasing people's attention at an international level. At these meetings, discussing the use of resources helped the community leaders to clarify the roles they would play in community development. Although tensions arose because of different perceptions regarding the use of resources, intensive discussion resulted in an understanding of how each individual could contribute to community development. Discussion was time-consuming, but was required for the building of relationships.

After the meeting, the community leader explained to community members the aims of my visit and what types of resources I could bring. Because of the meeting, indigenous people's potentially excessive expectations were minimized.

### ● **Cultural Sensitivity**

The collaborative team approach is also used for valuing indigenous culture and norms. In order to work with indigenous communities, non-indigenous community workers need to be "culturally sensitive." As a non-indigenous community worker, I had to spend much time learning about the culture and norms of the indigenous communities. Before visiting the Higa-onon Taalandig community, I had a cultural discussion with a non-indigenous community worker to increase our mutual understanding and cultural sensitivity. We talked about our culture, norms, values, beliefs, etc. to identify the similarities to and differences.

After entering the Higa-onon Taalandig community, an indigenous community worker played the role of "cultural mediator." This person supported me in building working relationships with a leader and with community members and in avoiding cultural conflicts.

## **4-2 Community Empowerment Practice in Mezzo-system**

The mezzo-system consists of the environmental factors of indigenous communities.

The main factor is the issue regarding their ancestral land. The Higa-onon Taalandig community has strong ties to their lands. However, they are in danger of losing it due to development by outsiders. The condition of the ancestral land affects other environmental factors. Members of the Higa-onon Taalandig community need to go out of their community to find jobs, which means that it is almost impossible to develop their healthy living environment in their ancestral land.

Many community members struggle with poverty and malnutrition. In terms of education, most of the children have to give up the opportunity of going to junior high school. They also have no access to the health care system, and cannot go to hospitals because they are poor. They use natural herbs to heal minor injuries, but those do not protect against disease. Their housing conditions are shabby at best, as the people live in hand-made huts. In addition, they are always frightened by the local authorities organizing armed force to try to evict them and demolish their houses.

There are very minimal things community workers can do to improve these people's environment. However, a collaborative team has taken some actions.

### ● **Enhancing Community Resources and Exchange Mechanisms**

For the marginalized and deprived Taalandig community, a first priority is often access to basic goods and services, such as food, clothing, medical care, housing, etc. However, simply importing resources to meet basic needs is disempowering, since it might create a dependence on the more affluent person's largesse (Graber, Haywood & Vosler, 1996, p.69).

The problem is that the term "resources" is defined based only on financial and material means. This creates a difference between people who "have" and people who "have not." People who "have" resources provide financial and material support to people who "have not." However, people who "have not" cannot return resources because they do not have any. It is just a one-sided movement of resources and the "have not" people will never be self-sufficient.

The collaborative team is trying to organize a volunteer self-help group. The group invites fellow neighbors who would like to volunteer and creates a link between business and health care agencies willing to accept volunteers. Our responsibility is not to pay volunteers but to provide support when volunteers and their community are in an emergency situation. This strategy is a form of non-cash insurance support for volunteers. The Taalandig community, especially the young people, can gain a variety of work experience and learn how to be self-sufficient through this natural educational experience. So far, volunteers are not many, but include the local minister.

### ● **Organizing Structures for Neighborhood-based Participation**

A key component in the development of the community is to establish a democratic

process whereby each person is important as a citizen, and has a right to be involved and heard (Graber, Haywood & Vosler, 1996, p.67). The first step in building a neighborhood-based participatory decision-making process is a series of discussions or forums in which neighborhoods are asked to articulate what they perceive as issues that need to be addressed, what they want to change, and how changes might be made (Graber, Haywood & Vosler, 1996, p.68).

In fact, the Taalandig community has already held discussion sessions with local governments and the president of the local university to address multiple issues. However, their voice and opinions are simply not heard or ignored by them. The fundamental problem is the structure of the decision-making system. A centralized decision-making system is so commonly practiced. The Taalandig people use community discussion sessions to bring their voice to them. After they complete the process, all they can do is to wait for the government's response. Under this decision-making system, their voice will never be an influential factor in the development of the community as a whole.

In order to institute a meaningful community discussion session, a democratic structure is needed to link all interested neighborhood residents in partnership for planning, decision making, and for continuing evaluation and program development (Graber, Haywood & Vosler, 1996, p.68). A collaborative team is planning to organize a discussion session that includes people from the political, economic, legal, health care, educational, and human service sectors who should have an equal voice. Usually, community leaders who initiate collaborative partnerships in the discussion session are chosen from among participants in a democratic way. However, in this case, a neutral individual from the community system (such as a worker from the national or the international level of the NGOs) should assume a leadership role for the purpose of eliminating possible efforts by authorities to exert control.

### ● **Organizing Self-Support Education Group**

Marginalized and deprived people often identify quality education as a top priority after their basic needs are met (Graber, Haywood & Vosler, 1996, p.70). However, the Taalandig community may be reluctant to attend a program or course that is conducted by outside experts because formal education promotes modernization, which might possibly hurt their traditional values and norms. They believe that the spiritual power of the ancestors leads the Taalandigs to inherit their traditional values and norms. The young Taalandigs also learn how to lead their lives based on the elders' storytelling; this practice, clearly distinct from formal education in their minds.

However, the fact that most of children cannot complete junior high school is not good in terms of human resource development for the Taalandig community. The community needs its members, not only to inherit their culture, but also to negotiate

with outsiders such as governments and developers for opportunities in higher education. Based on consideration of this educational situation, the collaborative team is organizing as a self-support education group. The teachers of this group are students who can afford to go to junior or senior high school. After school, the students share the knowledge they acquired with other children who reluctantly drop out of school due to economic reasons. Sometimes elders can be teachers to help young people inherit traditional knowledge and norms. In this way, members of the Taalandig community can establish a combined educational knowledge base that includes both modern and traditional knowledge.

#### **4-3 Community Empowerment Practice in Macro-system**

The macro-system is the social context that exerts an influence on both the micro-system and the mezzo-system at national or international levels. One factor is values. Outsiders have values different from those of the indigenous people; it is obvious how their values differ in terms of land. Outside developers, in this case, local governments and business groups, focus on the economic value of land. In contrast, the Higa-onon Taalandig group considers land to be synonymous with "life" and they believe that land must not be owned by any individuals. This difference in values often leads to conflict.

Other factors are the political, structural, and social contexts. At the local level, the hierarchical and bureaucratic structure of the local government denies opportunities for the Taalandigs. Fifty years ago, governments executed local land reconstruction for agribusiness development by simply neglecting the issue of the Taalandig people's rights. In other words, it was a community project designed just for the economic and governmental sectors, not for the people who lived there. Currently, the local government has started listening to what the Taalandig people have to say and are trying to solve problems. However, the government lacks resources to implement projects or local development, because it is under the control of regional and national governments. As a result, they cannot do anything without the consent of "the people at the top." At the national level, because of the "development first" approach by the national government of the Philippines, most of the ancestral domain claims are not accepted or are simply neglected. In the Philippines, indigenous communities regain the ownership of their land if their ancestral domain claim is legally accepted and recognized by the national government. However, there are only a few cases in which the indigenous communities are awarded the titles of land ownership. The Higa-onon Taalandig community is no exception.

The conflict over the value of land and the political neglect of the indigenous people's ownership of land creates a negative impact on the Higa-onon Taalandig community. In order to develop the strategies of community empowerment in the

macro-system, a social action approach is needed at local, national, and international levels. The following is an example of the social action taken by the collaborative team.

- **Advocacy for Indigenous People's Rights**

Considering the two different perceptions of land, it is unrealistic to expect these two groups integrate with each other without any social action. The two different perceptions can coexist only if the Higa-onon Taalandig can attain a secure living environment. However, a campaign for integration is highly promoted by local authorities such as local governments, big business groups, and the local university. In this case, the term "integration" means that they focus on the economic value of land and try to convince citizens to use the land for the purpose of enhancing its economic value. The biggest problem is that their way of convincing citizens includes the use of force such as military action.

Considering this situation, it is important to maintain the network between local and national governments and to advocate for indigenous people's rights. PAFID makes efforts to engage the national government, therefore we asked them to report the case of the Higa-onon Taalandig community as a human rights violation. It was documented and submitted by the national government.

The collaborative team uses international pressure as a catalyst to mobilize local neighborhood actions. One example is to launch a campaign to obtain signatures and to report to the international NGOs, GOs, and the United Nations. Because, the more local neighbors are free from the authorities' pressure, the more people will sign up in support of the Taalandigs. Some people might even join the campaign activity. If the Higa-onon Taalandigs can gain neighborhood support for this campaign, they can work as a community action team to establish harmonious living environments for the Higa-onon Taalandigs and all their neighbors.

#### **4-4 Community Empowerment Practice in Exo-system**

For the Higa-onon Taalandig community, the exo-system can be outside supporters or outside developers seeking profits from development activities. Although it is not easy to do, the collaborative team needs to forge relationships with both outside supporters or outside developers.

- **Network Building with Outsiders**

The collaborative team needs to establish contact with both outside supporters and outside developers. It is important to seek backing for community development from outside supporters such as national or international NGOs and GOs, or organizations of the United Nations. The team, then, might participate in an international conference

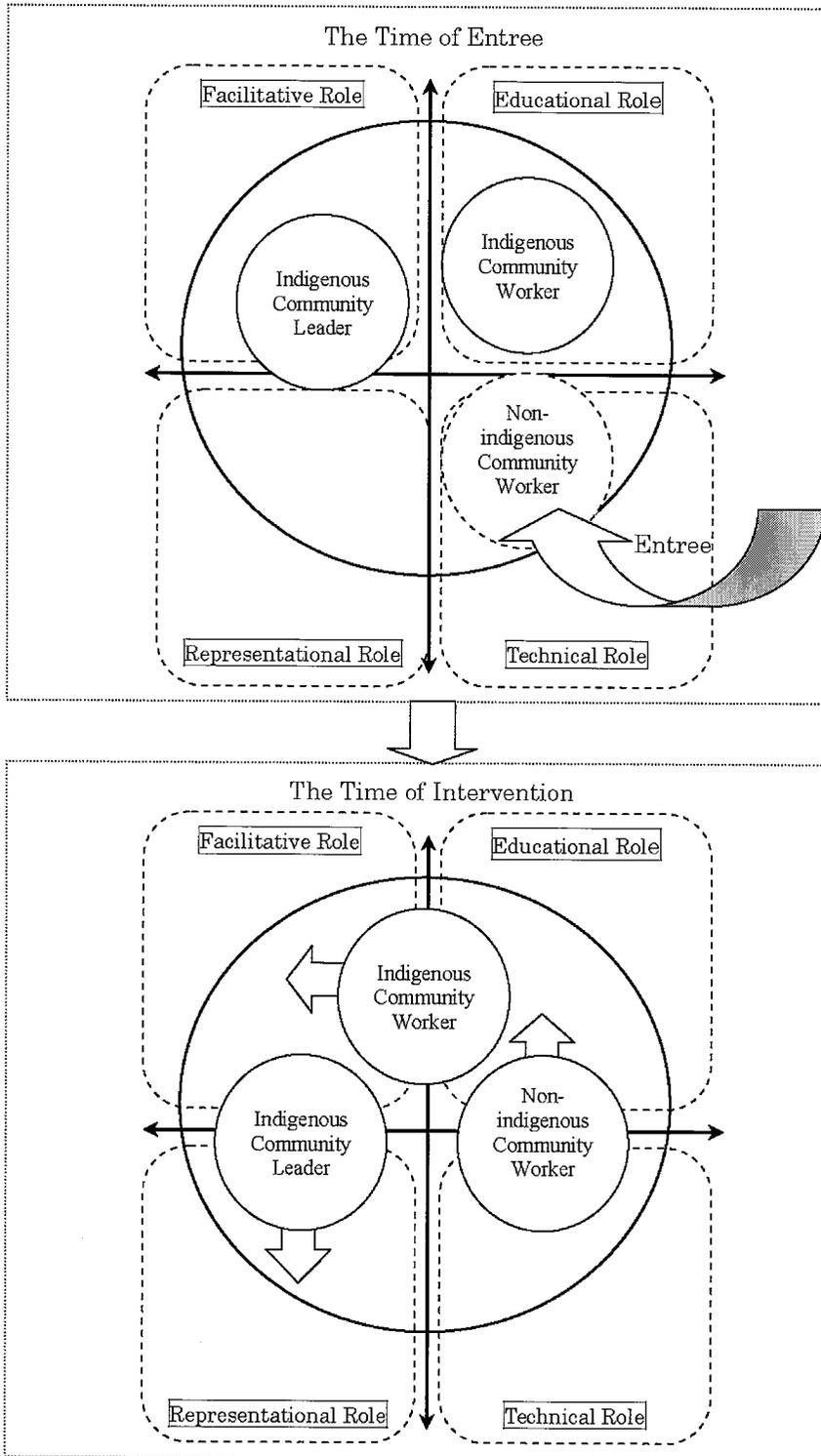
or training organized by external support groups and has access to the available support. They might even provide funding if the team makes plans for development. However, the team should beware of becoming dependent upon outsiders. The team should seek support to promote self-sustainability. It is even more important for indigenous communities to approach outside developers to be involved in the process of decision making on development, although this is not an easy task. Unfortunately, plans for development are mostly developed in the conference rooms of agencies, not in the indigenous communities. However, community workers always should try to initiate discussion with outside developers and make suggestions from the local point of view.

The Higa-onon Taalandig community maintains good communication with outside supporters such as local NGOs, PAFID, and several international NGOs. However, their relationship with outside developers has deteriorated. The demolition organized by developers hurt the indigenous people physically and mentally. This is the reason why community workers should assume the role of gatekeeper, to promote community members in negotiating with outside developers. At the very least, community worker teams should continue discussions with them to prevent further demolition and to sustain a peaceful environment.

### **5. Role Sharing of Community Workers in Higa-onon Taalandig Communities**

In the case of the Higa-onon Taalandig community, the collaborative team of an indigenous community leader and a indigenous community worker, and a non-indigenous community worker, collectively, play a role in the practice of community empowerment. However, shared roles are not always the same but rather are constantly changing. In this section, I analyze the dynamic movements of roles among team members according to the time period. (Figure 5)

**Figure5: Role Sharing of Community Workers in Higa-onon Taalandig Communities**



### **5–1 Time of Entrée**

At the time of my entrée into the Higa-onon Taalandig community, I made efforts to immerse myself in the community as a non-Indigenous community worker. I had preliminary discussions about my resources, and I was still learning about the people's culture, values, and norms. At this time, it was almost impossible for me to play the clear role of a community worker, except in building relationships. I tried to speak with as many community members as possible through an indigenous community worker (translator). Members of the community welcomed me because they considered me as a “saviour” and expected me to play an experts role. I explained to a community leader and community members that I could not solve all the problems by myself, but that I could work with them through the use of my resources. These can be explained as the actions of immersion.

At the time of my introduction to the community, the leader held many community meetings to discuss what actions they should take to regain ownership of the land. He played the role of “facilitator” in natural and traditional ways. After they performed ritual ceremonies and before the discussion started, community members equally participated in intensive discussions and always reached a consensus. It seemed to me that the community was very organized, with good leadership. At this time, I did not observe that the indigenous community leader played the role of representative to a great extent. I supposed the reason why the community did not commit to a lot of networking activities with outsiders was because they were pessimistic about achieving a good result through discussions with outsiders.

An indigenous community worker trained by a local NGO, PAFID, played the role of “educator” for me. He taught me about indigenous values, ethics, and norms. With fluent English skills, he also played the role of mediator to support me in building working relationships with leaders and community members. Because of the presence of an outsider, the indigenous community worker mainly assumed educational roles, such as informing and training. He provided me with a lot of information about the Higa-onon-Taalandig community. Furthermore, he almost assumed the role of supervisor as he provided me with field training opportunities.

### **5–2 The Time of Intervention**

After the community successfully built working relationships and started working as a team, the roles of each community worker changed. The plan for community empowerment provided the team with a clear vision of its goals. I worked as a “non-indigenous community worker,” and mainly attempted to look for external supporters by disseminating information about the Higa-onon Taalandig community. I also tried to help the children build self-support, education groups. This could be

assuming “technical” and “educational” roles. In order to disseminate information to the community, I needed to use the special skills of presentation. To work with the children in the community, I tried to raise their consciousness. However, my roles were constantly changing, depending on the situation of community.

The indigenous community leader was more confident in the building of a network, so he was willing to take the “representational” roles, such as advocacy. Sometimes he used the media to disseminate information about their community and to raise people’s awareness.

The indigenous community worker acted as a source of support to the community leader rather than as a teacher. He still played the role of mediator for me, but he was more concerned with building and supporting community empowerment. He also provided information about available support from the local NGOs so that he might be positioned in the center between the facilitator and the educator.

## **VI. Conclusion**

In the face of the globalization of the economy, many Filipino indigenous tribes are in danger of losing their ancestral land as outside settlers move into their area. As they struggle to defend their land, much of it is in regions of forests or mountains that are rich in natural resources. Thus, conflicts often arise between these tribes and the outsiders, many of them based outside the Philippines, including Japan, who want to exploit those resources, mostly without the consent of the indigenous peoples.

This paper reports my fieldwork with indigenous Filipino communities and examines community empowerment practices from the viewpoint of collaborative team building. Analysis is conducted into what kind of roles the collaborative team plays in terms of community empowerment. Indigenous community leaders, indigenous community workers, and non-indigenous workers collectively play their allotted roles in the empowerment of the community. Indigenous community leaders are expected to play representational and facilitative roles. Indigenous community workers, who are recruited from inside indigenous communities and are trained by local NGOs, mainly focus on playing facilitative and educational roles. Non-indigenous community workers, who come from outside of indigenous communities, are expected to play educational and technical roles by working as a “catalyst” with the use of outside resources. They interchangeably play these roles through the process of collaborative team building.

An Example of community empowerment practice is also given for the case analysis of the Higa-onon Taalandig Tribal council (HTTC). The community leader, indigenous community worker, and the non-indigenous worker have worked together as a collaborative team and practiced community empowerment actions within the multiple

levels of systems: the micro-system, the mezzo-system, the macro-system, and the exo-system. Their sharing of roles as community workers has changed throughout the time in which they have practiced in the Higa-onon Taalandig community. At the time of entrée, the indigenous community leader naturally played facilitative roles. Then, the indigenous community worker acted as an educator to support the non-indigenous community worker. But at the time of intervention, the community leader practiced advocacy actions and played more representational roles. The indigenous community worker focused more on supporting the community leader. Technical and educational roles are played by the non-indigenous community worker, with the use of outside knowledge, connections, and resources.

The practice model of the collaborative team approach in indigenous settings cannot be generalized for all indigenous tribes because of the specific conditions of the Higa-onon Taalandig community. However, I expect that this study might be useful in helping community workers find clues about community empowerment practice in indigenous communities. Further case studies of the indigenous Filipino communities are required for the development of a practice model.

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