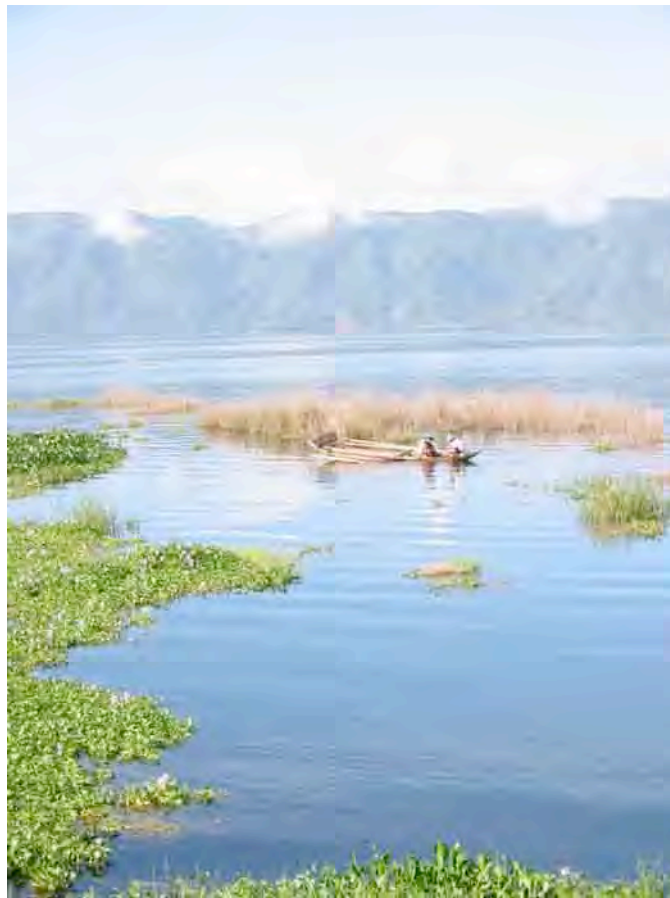


**PHILIPPINE WORKING GROUP (PWG)
on promotion of localizing natural resource management (NRM)**

**Partnership Building towards
Sustainable Management of Lake Mainit
Lake Mainit Development Alliance
Agusan del Norte and Surigao del Norte
PWG-NRM Alliance Documentation Visit Report**



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Environmental Science for Social Change



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in community-based natural resource management*

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Background and Overview

The Lake Mainit Development Alliance was formed for the sustainable development and management of Lake Mainit. Lake Mainit is the fourth largest lake in the country, and is shared almost equally by two provinces, Agusan del Norte and Surigao del Norte. While it is not a proclaimed protected area under the NIPAS system, the stakeholders feel that the lake ecosystem is significant and therefore have taken the approach of alliance building for the management of the area. Applying for protected area status under NIPAS was considered, but due to the mineral rich resources in the area, some believe that such an application will not push through.

Formation of the Group

The roots of the Lake Mainit Development Alliance (LMDA) were established in 1999, when the University of the Philippines conducted an Environmental Impact Assessment training for the municipalities in the area. The municipalities were also inspired by the Provincial Agricultural Investment Center or PAIC which was a collaboration of municipalities in Surigao del Sur (Carrascal, Cantilan, Madric, Carmen, Lanuza and Cortes). The PAIC was an alliance that helped facilitate the said municipalities access to agricultural investments.

With that local alliance in mind, the provincial governments of Surigao del Norte and Agusan del Norte, and the municipal governments of Sison, Mainit, Tubod, Alegria, Kitcharao, Santiago, Jabonga and Tubay decided to form an alliance for the protection and management of the lake. The decision to collaborate was prompted by some proposed development initiatives that would have had adverse impact on the lake environment.

The stakeholders of the Lake Mainit Development Alliance signed a memorandum of agreement formalizing the alliance in March 1999. The Alliance was also recognized by the Regional Development Council (RDC), per RDC resolution No. 11, series of 1999.

The main actors in the LMDA are the Provincial Governments of Surigao del Norte and Agusan del Norte and their member municipalities, plus selected government line agencies: the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), National Economic Development Authority (NEDA), Philippine Information Agency (PIA), Department of Tourism (DOT), and Department of the Agriculture (DA). The Alliance also has other partners, such as the academe (Surigao Norte College of Arts and Technology (SNCAT), the business sector and the NGOs and people's organizations through the Lake Mainit Civil Society Network.

The Design of the Group

As for the design of the group, the Alliance has a Board of Trustees, which has the provincial governors, municipal mayors and the Regional Director of NEDA as the members. The function of the BOT is purely ministerial, to make final decisions on items put forth for discussion by the technical working group.

The day-to-day operations of the Alliance are handled by the Project Management Office. This is based in Kitcharao, Agusan del Norte. The PMO has a project director

and two deputy directors (one for each province). Currently, a Voluntary Service Overseas volunteer is also placed at the PMO to provide technical assistance on database development. There is also an administrative and finance unit, and because of the presence of the Philippine Australian Community Assistance Program (PACAP)-FOCAS project in the area, the FOCAS Management Committee is also stationed at the Kitcharao office.

There is also a technical working group that is responsible for most of the work of the Alliance. Basically, the technical working group recommends items for action by the Board, who then give their approval. The technical working group is formed of persons from each member municipality (usually the municipal planning and development officer, the municipal agriculture officer and the Sangguniang Bayan representative), plus some personnel from selected line agencies (like DENR, BFAR, DA and NEDA).

The Alliance also works with the NGO sector, through a network or coalition of NGOs. Most of the NGOs working in the area are not local, but rather based in Butuan City or Davao. It is a loose network of NGOs, no legal papers and not formalized as a legal organization, but they have a manifesto to protect Lake Mainit.

As for working with people's organizations, the fishers and farmers are represented through the Municipal Agriculture and Fisheries Councils.

The Group's Overview and Strategy

Natural Resource Context

The lake and its watershed are located in the northeastern portion of Agusan del Norte and in the southern part of Surigao del Norte. Its land aggregate is 72,372 hectares; the watershed area is 87,072 hectares and the water surface area is 14,700 hectares. The lake has a shoreline length of 50 kilometers, a mean depth of 128 meters, deepest part is 223 meters, and a water volume of 18 cubic kilometers. The lake has 28 river tributaries, which drain to the 20-kilometer River Kalinawan.

The lake is very scenic and its water has remained generally clear and clean. Heavy rains start from November until February and cause flooding. At times, floods reach up to the highest portions of the lakeshore communities. The highest temperature is 35 degrees C and the lowest is 21 degrees C. The average annual rainfall is 3,949.43 millimeters.

The lake is famous for freshwater fish called *pidjanga* or goby regarded as a delicacy of both the local and visiting folks. Other endemic fish species in the lake is freshwater eel (*kasili*), carp, *bito*, *dalag*, *bugwan*, shells, *tilapia* (nilotica) and other mollusks. It is also the habitat of rare fish species: the *puyo* or climbing perch and *gabot*. There are also wildlife species in the area surrounding the lake that include cave bats, Philippine deer, wild boar and mighty hawks. The freshwater flowers such as the pink and white *Pagosi* (sacred lotus) and the *tabukali*, which are water hyacinth or water lily, are abundant in the area.

Points of Environmental Degradation

While the Lake Mainit ecosystem is still quite clean, with the water quality assessment giving it an A classification, there are already some indications of environmental degradation.

One of the primary concerns has to do with the fishery resources, since majority of the lakeshore communities are dependent on fishing for their livelihoods. At present, it is not clear whether the fish catch is really declining, or whether the population of fishers in the area is simply too great for the lake to support. Fishers say that the local fish, pidjanga, are now very rare, and some of the endemic species are no longer found. There have been efforts to designate sanctuaries where fishing is not allowed. There is a so-called natural sanctuary, which is not disturbed by waves or storms, and that is a breeding ground for fish. The sanctuary was the initiative of the local government, and the municipality of Mainit was tasked to manage it, but the management is inconsistent.

There are also Bantay Danao (lake wardens), however again, their activities are on and off depending of the availability of funds for patrolling.

Another livelihood activity is quarrying. The PENRO has actually already designated an area for sand and gravel extraction. Still, many continue to get sand and gravel from anywhere, and not solely in the designated area. Incidentally, the sand and gravel extraction is not only a cause for concern in terms of environmental management, but it is also problematic as a livelihood activity: the work is very difficult, carrying sacks of sand to the shore, but the earnings are hardly worth the effort at only PhP 2.00 per sack.

Illegal fishing gears are also used in the lake, particularly the beach seine, which is similar to the trawl. At present, there is no control over fishing activities in the lake.

Some areas of the lake are also affected by mining activities.

The Group's Response and Strategy

The Environmental Management Plan (EMP) was formulated under the Lake Mainit Alliance Building Project funded by the Region 13 CIDA-Local Government Support Program (LGSP) of CIDA. Essentially, the project was a capability-building program for the 34-member Technical Working Group (TWG) composed of staff and officials from the LGU-members.

This EMP provides the Lake Mainit Development Alliance (LMDA) with the framework and a common environmental management agenda/plan of action for the next five years. With the intervention of the Governance of Philippine Agenda 21 (GOPA 21), another project of CIDA focused on strengthening the alliance, the EMP was enhanced to integrate other Plans of the Local Government Units to come up with a sustainable development plan for the lake that will include the social, economic, technological, human, political, cultural and spiritual dimension into the EMP. The Environmental Management Plan serves as a general guide for the protection and sustainable development of the lake. It has also its own Manual of Operations.

With the entry of PACAP, a FOCAS Strategic Framework for the Lake Mainit area was drafted. The Framework adopted the improved version of the Lake Mainit Environmental Management Plan but with more focused on several aspects. This was the result of the series of activities conducted by the Alliance with the other sectors of

society in the area. The activities are meetings, consultations and multi-stakeholders fora. The overall goal of FOCAS is to properly manage the Lake Mainit ecosystem and develop potential resources in order to reduce poverty and improve the quality of life of the people in the area.

The EMP has several project components that were determined by the Alliance together with other sectors through meetings, consultations and multi-stakeholder fora. The components are:

- Upland and lowland development and management which focuses on the effect or impact of activities in the uplands on low-lying areas and bodies of water. Degradation in the uplands and diminishing forest resources seem to aggravate siltation in rivers and cause flashfloods.
- River management: activities under this component support the upland interventions to minimize siltation and pollution in the lake, but also in Kalinawan River. These rivers are used as fishing grounds for communities living along the river.
- Lake management: activities here deal primarily with Lake Mainit as a source of income for the fisherfolks in the 31 lakeshore barangays.
- Solid waste management: addresses the impact of improper waste disposal that pollutes the lake and rivers.
- Institutional strengthening: this focuses primarily on the need of LMDA to provide mechanisms to ensure coordination and cooperation among the various sectors with a stake in the proper management of Lake Mainit.

Under each of these components, there are identified sub-components, targets or goals, a five-year timeline, and the identified responsibility centers. In terms of monitoring and evaluation, it seems that the reporting on the various activities is done by the identified responsibility center, and that the PMO is in charge of collating all these reports.

LMDA Partners

As mentioned earlier, the Voluntary Service Overseas has designated Lake Mainit as one of its focus areas. A volunteer placement is working with the PMO to help develop a natural resource database for the area.

There are however other donor agencies supporting various projects in the Lake Mainit area:

- Philippine Council for Aquatic and Marine Research and Development (PCAMRD), in partnership with Mindanao State University-Naawan (conduct of a Lake Mainit limnological and water quality assessment, and a lake-wide rapid appraisal-Lake Mainit Fisheries Resources Assessment Project Phase I)
- Department of Agrarian Reform/International Fund for Agricultural Development-Northern Mindanao Community Initiative and Resource Management Project (DAR/IFAD-NMCIREMP)
- Foundation for Philippine Environment with Caraga Consortium for Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development (Lake Mainit Biodiversity Project)
- Cotabato-Agusan River Basin Development Project with Department of Public Works and Highways (Assessment of Lake Mainit for Flood Control Project)

- Instituto de Promocion y Apoyo al Desaceollo (IPADE) in partnership with Convergence (Sustainable Rural Development Project-Program of Infrastructure and Promotion of Economic Sector in Rural Areas)

However, one of the largest, and perhaps most active projects in the area is that of the Philippines-Australia Community Assistance Program. This is working in the eight municipalities traversing Lake Mainit, through the Focal Community Assistance Scheme (FOCAS).

PACAP does not finance the activities of the Alliance. So, the Alliance at present is not receiving external funding from the donor agency. Rather, PACAP implements projects that are within the Lake Mainit area. It is currently pursuing six projects in Surigao del Norte and Agusan del Norte, through various NGOs that are part of the network – and are therefore partners - of the Lake Mainit Development Alliance. Most of these projects focus on livelihoods and environment.

Mechanisms to activate change

The EMP has the various project components and sub-components, which are meant to address the different concerns in Lake Mainit. The LMDA is primarily responsible for coordinating activities between the two provinces.

The LMDA has no police power, so they are unable to apprehend those who are engaged in illegal activities. However, the PMO has the capacity to source projects for their areas and as the clearinghouse of all information on the area they are operating in, their effort is to ensure that all barangays are able to access these different interventions. The Alliance works with existing people’s organizations, so that there is no creation or organization of new POs just to avail of projects. The Alliance also tries to avoid duplication of projects in the same areas.

There have already been some achievements in terms of their efforts to improve solid waste management: 13 hectares have already been developed as dumpsites, garbage collection systems and receptacles have been established and a study has been completed on waste recycling and marketing.

Policy to Implement

There have been efforts to formulate policy but this has been quite difficult to do. For instance they tried to develop a unified ordinance for the lake. The process took three years, but they could not achieve any unification. The problem in Lake Mainit is that there is a disjoint between the executive and legislative branches. The members of the Sangguniang Bayan have business interests in the lake and because of these vested interests, it is difficult to stop illegal activities.

Another difficulty experienced by the LMDA is that their ordinance was based on the RA 8550 or the Fisheries Code. However, that is a more tailored to marine and coastal areas. The Philippines does not yet have a comprehensive law for inland bodies of water.

Views to Future Sustainability

Political: Will the change of political leadership after elections in May change the effectivity of LMDA in implementing programs? Yes, because as told by the PMO director that in most of his transactions with LGU heads, personal connections have proven important and effective. But any change may not be significant because of the MOA and the perceived crucial importance of the lake to the lives of the people.

The director of the PMO plays an important role in the Alliance. He has the capacity to deal with technical issues, but having also been immersed in politics (he was a former vice-mayor), also has the political savvy to work with the different key stakeholders in the area.

Economic: LMDA gets an annual contribution of PhP 50,000.00 from each of the eight municipalities and P150, 000.00 from each of the two provinces. The amount is allotted mainly for the operational expenses of the PMO. Other funds from PACAP and other donor institutions are directly coursed through the LGUs or NGOs/POs implementing the programs/projects in the local communities.

In a sense, there is not just one but two financial operations independent of each other. One is that of the PMO, which receives an annual contribution from the LGUs and has its own staff (from the office itself) to manage and disburse the funds according to its budget plan and using its own financial system. The PMO Director approves all the release of money for budgeted expenses. Those not in the budget may need the approval of the Board or whatever body delegated by the BOD.

The other is that of the implementing PO or NGO. They receive funds from PACAP and have their own system and plan to follow in the management and disbursement of the money intended for the implementation of the program.

Some questions remain: Does the group have the funds to support programs on a long term basis? As for the immediate future, LMDA can manage well because of PACAP-funded projects, which can be renewed after every three years. Other projects are initiated by the LGUs and line agencies which are important to keep the LMDA active on the ground even when programs funded by groups from outside become absent. The stability and effectivity of the PMO is crucial because the office is the one tasked to make project proposal for funding.

Institutional: Does the group have the needed structure and system to sustain its programs? Although very lean, the PMO office seems to be in a good position to execute coordinative and secretariat functions. The MOA is an important document that in effect seals the bond between the stakeholders and partner-organizations. At present, it seems as if this basis is adequate to ensure the stability and sustainability of LMDA programs.

The plan of PACAP to hand over projects to LGU after three years to be integrated into the Municipal Development Plan also helps ensure sustainability of the programs. Capability building and strengthening of local organizations also form part of the people's development program towards sustainability of the alliance.

Organization resources - LMDA has its own office (since 2001) located on the third floor of the annex of Kitcharao Municipal Building. Office personnel consist of the PMO Director, the Assistant Director, and two other staffers. A VSO volunteer is also part of the team. It is able to get free paper and ink supplies from PACAP-funded projects that are processed in the office. Other facilities are shared by the office with the other government offices occupying the building. For communications, the office uses internet and cell phones.

Community – To sustain interest and support from all stakeholders, quite important are updated information fed to them and opportunities to get involved in various activities where they experience being part and useful to the overall objectives of the LMDA.

Questions for the LMDA

- Stance of LMDA on IPs in the area. Is the Alliance for IPs' self-preservation and self-determination or for their assimilation into the mainstream society?
- How to deal with other groups like the Church's which somehow reinforces value of dependency and "spiritualization" of events?
- LMDA selects as project beneficiaries those POs and NGOs identified with the present administration. How do you help develop credible groups not from the administration? What is their place in the whole scheme of LMDA?
- How to manage the upland in the face of impending mining and other development projects geared towards economic prosperity of the municipalities and the provinces?
- The PMO does not have police power so it cannot run after illegal fishers and other violators of the EMP. The LMDA relies on the LGUs to enforce laws. How does LMDA tie up with the LGUs on this particular issue or gap?

Key Learnings

- The importance of the PMO's role as a hub of information on their area is critical. The PMO in Lake Mainit recognized that it was in a position to advise external partners on where to implement projects and what kinds of projects were appropriate for particular municipalities or barangays. This way, replication of projects is minimized, and interventions can be implemented where they are meeting actual needs.
- Again, the information gap for local alliances was raised as a problem. A limnological assessment was conducted for the lake, however, this has not been regularly updated. Perhaps stronger links with academic institutions who would have the necessary skills, or even training for some of the technical persons who are involved in the alliance would be beneficial in terms of developing the information base of the alliance.
- Among the alliances visited, only Lake Mainit and the Agusan del Sur provincial government have taken the initiative to develop a natural resource database. Such a database of information relevant to natural resource and environmental management is critical for local alliances.
- The alliance's ability to communicate, not only the information about its area, but updates on its activities, projects and programs is also critical in ensuring that the stakeholders are aware of current initiatives. From the interviews, no clear mechanism or system to provide avenues for exchange of information and knowledge among LGUs, POs, NGOs, and communities engaged in projects and programs in the alliance, aside from the regular meetings. This is another area where

the PMO can exercise its coordinating power to facilitate exchange of information and knowledge among alliance's members and between LMDA and other outside groups. These mechanisms for information sharing will help to facilitate greater awareness of the alliance, and help broaden the group's impact.

- The LMDA has tried to assess what form their alliance should take, whether they should remain a local multi-stakeholder alliance, or whether they would be more effective in their operations by taking on a different structure. Some possible changes would be to change the structure into an authority (similar to the Laguna Lake Development Authority). This would give them a wider range of powers – policing, law formulation and enforcement – as well as an allocation in the national budget. However, based on their assessment of their needs and on their study of the alternative structures, the PMO decided that they wanted to maintain the local character and nature of the alliance, rather than go national the way an authority would have them do. There was a feeling that by turning into an authority, they would complicate the nature of their operations and perhaps become less effective because of this.