



PROCEEDINGS 2026-23

Local Regional Studies Network

Proceedings of *Kulokabildo*: Central Visayas Conference on Non-governmental CDD Initiatives

29 November 2025 | 9:00 AM

Golden Prince Hotel and Suites, Acacia St. Cebu City

Brynych Bonachita



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Feedback session between LRSN Cebu and NGOs in Central Visayas, LRSN Cebu
2025

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----|
| About the Proceedings | vii |
| Rationale of the Event | vii |
| Welcome Remarks | 1 |
| <i>Dr. Regletto Aldrich D. Imbong</i> | |
| Women in Male-Dominated Fields: Local Women Leadership and Resistance in Cebu | 3 |
| <i>Mari Elise Gwyneth Lim</i> | |
| Presentation Proper | 3 |
| Open Forum | 4 |
| How Civil Society Organizations in Central Visayas Strengthen Community-Driven Development through Communication | 7 |
| <i>Asst. Prof. Dominic Yasay</i> | |
| Presentation Proper | 7 |
| Open Forum | 8 |
| Development as Deception: Aesthetics of Gentrification in the Carbon Public Market | 11 |
| <i>Asst. Prof. Dan Ian Niño Jaducana</i> | |
| Presentation Proper | 11 |
| Open Forum | 12 |
| Revisiting Faith-based Approaches to Community Development in Cebu and Bohol | 15 |
| <i>Patrick Gerard Torres</i> | |
| Presentation Proper | 15 |
| Open Forum | 17 |

Politics of Development: Insights from Farmers' Organizations on Non-Governmental Community-Driven Development 19

Alyssa Soler

Presentation Proper 19

Open Forum 20

From Alleviation to Liberation: The Liberational Concept of Development among Peasant Communities in Cebu and Bohol 23

Prof. Regletto Aldrich Imbong

Presentation Proper 23

Open Forum 24

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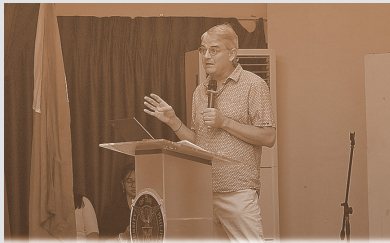
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Local Regional Studies Network

How Capitalism Affirms its Hegemony: The Imperial Mode of Living

Public Lecture Proceedings

02 September 2025 | 1:00 - 5:00 PM

Performing Arts Hall, University of the Philippines Cebu
(Hybrid - Face-to-Face and Zoom)

Mari Elise Gwyneth Lim



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DISCUSSION PAPER

How Capitalism Affirms its
Hegemony: The Imperial
Mode of Living



DISCUSSION PAPER SERIES 2020-11

Development as Deception

Aesthetics of Gentrification in the
Carbon Public Market

Dan Ian Niño B. Jadcana



Local Regional Studies Network

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PROCEEDINGS

Development as Deception:
Aesthetics of Gentrification
in the Carbon Public Market

About the Proceedings

The event is a roundtable discussion (*kulokabildo*) organized by UP CIDS through its Local Regional Studies Network – UP Cebu, bringing together civil society organizations (CSOs), non-government organizations (NGOs), people’s organizations (POs), and representatives from government agencies. Participants come from various areas, including Cebu City, the District 3 municipalities, Pinamungajan, Toledo, Balamban, and even Bohol. The purpose of the gathering is to present preliminary research findings from focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted from July to September, verify and validate these findings with the communities involved, and encourage open dialogue where stakeholders can provide critiques, corrections, and insights. The event includes discussions on a wide range of development-related topics, and government offices were invited to listen and respond to community concerns. Ultimately, the event aimed to produce people-centered, community-validated research that genuinely reflects the needs and experiences of grassroots organizations.

Rationale of the Event

For 2024, the Local Regional Studies Network (LRSN) in UP Cebu prioritized engagement with civil society organizations (CSOs), particularly non-government organizations (NGOs) and people’s organizations (POs) from Cebu, Central Visayas, and nearby areas such as Bohol. This event serves as a *kulokabildo* or consultative forum that brings together researchers, grassroots organizations, and invited government agencies to collectively examine development issues emerging from earlier focus group discussions (FGDs).

The primary purpose of the activity was to validate and verify research findings gathered from previous FGDs before being finalized and submitted for publication. Instead of a purely academic exercise, the event ensures that the perspectives, experiences, and concerns of NGOs and POs are accurately represented in the research outputs. Through a series of presentations on diverse topics, such as women’s issues, land, and urban concerns (including the Carbon Market in Cebu), organizational practices, and regional development challenges, participants are given the opportunity to critique, clarify, and enrich the studies during the forum.

By inviting representatives from relevant government offices, such as the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), Department of Agriculture (DA), Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), local government units (LGUs), and the provincial government, the event also aims to foster dialogue between grassroots organizations, researchers, and policymakers. This creates a space where development issues, particularly recurring concerns like land tenure and resource governance, can be heard by institutions with the mandate to respond.

In sum, the event is grounded in the principle of people-centered and participatory research. It seeks to produce research outputs that are socially grounded, responsive to community needs, and useful for policy and advocacy, especially for grassroots organizations. Through collaboration, verification, and open dialogue, the activity strengthens the link between research, civil society, and governance in pursuit of inclusive and holistic development.

Event organizers

- Local Regional Studies Network (LRSN), University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS)

These proceedings were prepared by Brynch Bonachita.¹

¹ Brynch Bonachita (brynchbonachita@gmail.com) is a paper writer at the UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS) Local Regional Studies Network (LRSN) UP Cebu.

Welcome Remarks

Dr. Regletto Aldrich D. Imbong

Project Leader, UP CIDS - LRSN

Dr. Regletto Aldrich D. Imbong welcomed the participants and expressed his gratitude for their continued engagement in the event, noting that many attendees had also participated in previous activities conducted from July to September. He acknowledged both long-time partners and new participants, including representatives from various areas in Cebu and nearby provinces such as Bohol.

In his remarks, Imbong introduced UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS) as the policy research arm of the University of the Philippines, emphasizing its mandate to conduct development-oriented research across multiple sectors, including urban and rural development, women's issues, agriculture, fisheries, education, and governance. He highlighted that UP CIDS aims to produce research outputs that are responsive to the needs of the people.

In discussing the Local Regional Studies Network of UP CIDS, he identified UP Cebu as one of its active nodes since its activation in 2024. For the current year, he explained that the project focuses on strengthening engagement of CSOs, particularly NGOs and POs from urban and rural communities.

Imbong clarified that the primary purpose of the event was to validate and verify data gathered from previous focus group discussions before finalizing research studies for publication. He explained that *kulokabildo* was designed to ensure that research findings accurately reflect the experiences, concerns, and insights of partner NGOs and POs.

He outlined the program for the day, which included six research presentations covering a range of topics such as women's issues, concerns in Carbon, organizational practices, and broader development issues in Central Visayas. Each presentation would be followed by an open forum to encourage feedback, critique, and recommendations from participating organizations.

Imbong noted that representatives from relevant government agencies and LGUs were invited to listen to the discussions, particularly on recurring issues such as land concerns. He concluded by expressing hope that the event would result in meaningful, people-centered research that genuinely serves the needs of grassroots organizations and contributes to inclusive development.

PRESENTATIONS

Women in Male-Dominated Fields: Local Women Leadership and Resistance in Cebu

Mari Elise Gwyneth Lim

Junior Research Associate, UP CIDS - LRSN

Presentation Proper

Ms. Mari Elise Gwyneth Lim's study on women's leadership and resistance in Cebu focused on women's roles in traditionally male-dominated fields and community-based development. Drawing from previous and ongoing research projects, including focus group discussions conducted with partner organizations such as the Women's Resource Center of the Visayas (WRCV), the presentation examined the lived experiences of women leaders and volunteers in local communities.

The study highlighted that a significant number of community volunteers and facilitators, particularly in programs like *Kapit-Bisig Laban sa Kabirapan - Comprehensive and Integrated Delivery of Social Services (KALAHY-CIDSS)*, are women – many of whom are mothers and wives. While these programs often promote women's empowerment, the research revealed persistent gender and economic struggles faced by women, including lack of compensation, household conflicts, and limited opportunities after project completion. These realities challenge mainstream development narratives equating participation with empowerment.

Lim contextualized her findings within broader development and gender frameworks, critiquing traditional models such as "Women in Development," which often confine women to supportive and domestic roles despite claims of promoting gender equality. She emphasized that rapid urbanization and development in Cebu frequently marginalize communities, even as women leaders emerge at the forefront of resistance against land issues, environmental threats, reclamation projects, and large-scale infrastructure developments.

The presentation underscored the existence of strong, organic, and collective forms of local leadership led by women, particularly within women's organizations, farmers' groups, and environmental advocacy movements. These organizations demonstrate alternative, community-defined notions of development rooted in care, participation, education, and shared responsibility between men and women.

Lim emphasized that women's contributions to development extend beyond domestic roles and are central to community organizing, political action, and social transformation. She argued that women's leadership in Cebu offers important insights for feminist and community development discourse, particularly in redefining development in more inclusive, sustainable, and socially just terms.

Open Forum

The open forum following Lim's presentation centered on clarifying the scope of her research, validating its findings through lived experiences, and deepening the discussion on women's leadership and resistance in community development.

The first question raised concerned the types of women's organizations included in the study and their representativeness. In response, Lim explained that due to confidentiality agreements with respondents, she could not disclose specific organizational names. However, she assured the participants that the organizations involved were legitimate, community-based, and actively working with their respective barangays. She added that clear sampling criteria were applied, including the organization's length of existence, engagement in development projects, and the presence of women leaders within their structure. She also noted that recognition by formal government agencies does not always reflect an organization's legitimacy or impact at the community level.

A representative from a women's organization in Carbon shared a manifestation, affirming the study's findings on resistance. She described how women are often compelled to resist due to threats of demolition, lack of relocation options, livelihood loss, and experiences of intimidation and deception linked to modernization and privatization programs. These conditions, she emphasized, leave communities with no choice but to resist to protect their homes, livelihoods, and families.

In response, Lim acknowledged these shared experiences and emphasized that similar patterns emerged across both rural and urban women leaders in the study. She reiterated that women's resistance is closely tied to their roles as caregivers and providers, with issues of housing, livelihood, and family welfare directly shaping their leadership and activism. She also highlighted the long-standing struggle of women leaders in Carbon against privatization, particularly its implications for their economic security and future.

Another question focused on whether the research documented the processes, enabling factors, constraints, and best practices that shape women's leadership in community development. Lim explained that while these elements are embedded in the data, the current paper primarily focused on women's perspectives on development and their concrete roles within organizations. She noted that fully mapping best practices and leadership trajectories would require a broader, province-wide study and deeper policy-oriented research.

An additional insight from a Carbon woman leader reinforced the idea that the Carbon issue is fundamentally a women's issue. She stressed that women, as "household budget managers," are directly affected by market privatization, as it would raise food costs and worsen family expenses. She credited women-led resistance for delaying privatization efforts and underscored that the struggle is not only for vendors but for all women and the broader public who rely on Carbon as a public market.

PRESENTATIONS

How Civil Society Organizations in Central Visayas Strengthen Community-Driven Development through Communication

Asst. Prof. Dominic Yasay

Research Fellow, UP CIDS - LRSN

Presentation Proper

Asst. Prof. Dominic Yasay of the UP Cebu Communication Program presented his study titled “How Civil Society Organizations in Central Visayas Strengthen Community-Driven Development through Communication.” Drawing from focus group discussions with various civil society and people’s organizations in the region, his presentation examined how everyday communication practices serve as a central driver of community-led development.

He emphasized that communication is not merely a support activity, but a foundational force of development. He explained that community-driven development is realized through continuous dialogue, such by talking, listening, deciding collectively, and acting together. Based on the narratives shared by participating organizations, the study highlighted how CSOs intentionally create inclusive and safe spaces where members are free to express opinions without fear of judgment or exclusion. These spaces go beyond physical settings and foster trust, openness, and participation.

The presentation identified several key communication practices that strengthen Community-Driven Development (CDD). First, CSOs regularly hold meetings and use multiple communication channels, such as group chats, text messages, face-to-face discussions, and home visits, to ensure information reaches all members, including those who are new, shy, or unable to attend meetings. These practices help cultivate a strong sense of belonging and ensure that community voices are heard.

Yasay also noted that organizations transform community conversations into collective decisions. Decision-making processes are characterized by open discussion, consensus-building, voting, and regular project reviews. Importantly, information and research findings are communicated back to the community before decisions are finalized, ensuring that actions are evidence-based and collectively owned rather than imposed by external actors.

The study underscored the deliberate inclusion of marginalized voices, such as women, farmers, fisherfolk, and drivers. Civil society organizations treat everyday experiences as valuable sources of knowledge and create protective spaces against intimidation, harassment, and political pressure. Efforts are also made to keep absent members informed through follow-ups and representation, reinforcing inclusivity despite work, health, or caregiving constraints.

Yasay further argued that communication itself constitutes development. Regular dialogue, forums, and meetings are not just components of development initiatives, but are development in practice, as they enable shared understanding, collective agency, and community leadership.

He concluded with recommendations to further strengthen communication practices, including maintaining regular and inclusive meetings, enhancing transparency in decision-making, documenting and sharing decisions, using multiple channels to gather concerns, building negotiation skills, creating organizational handbooks, and fostering a culture of reflection and learning.

Open Forum

The open forum following Yasay's presentation focused on the practical application of communication practices, challenges faced by organizations without stable meeting spaces, and the risks posed by external interference in community organizing.

One participant expressed appreciation for the presentation's emphasis on strengthening and "refreshing" meeting practices, noting that while senior leaders may be familiar with these processes, many new leaders, especially among farmers, lack the said experience. The participant asked whether the materials could be shared with their organization. In response, Yasay affirmed that the materials could be provided and further suggested conducting tailored trainings, workshops, or facilitation sessions to help organizations strengthen

their communication and meeting practices. This proposal was welcomed, particularly to capacitate new leaders.

Another question raised concerned organizations whose members do not share a common physical community or meeting space, such as workers who disperse to different locations after work. The participant asked whether such groups were included in the study. Yasay clarified that most organizations in the research had regular meeting spaces, but cited an example from Bohol where an organization continued functioning even after losing its physical meeting place due to Typhoon Odette. While the study did not fully explore organizations without common spaces, he acknowledged this as an important area for future research.

Another issue raised by a participant who shared a case from Lapu-Lapu City, where a community organization was disrupted and eventually dismantled following interference by external actors, particularly through civil-military operations. The participant explained how the presence of uniformed authorities in meetings caused fear, division, and confusion among members, ultimately leading to the organization's collapse and the demolition of their community. This testimony highlighted how militarization and outside intervention can undermine trust, communication, and unity within grassroots organizations.

In response, Yasay acknowledged the seriousness of these challenges, emphasizing that issues such as militarization and land grabbing were also encountered by other organizations in the study. He stressed that despite such threats, many organizations have survived by sustaining dialogue, collective communication, and solidarity among members. He concluded by underscoring the importance of continuous communication and dialogue as essential to sustaining organizations and resisting forces that seek to fragment communities.

The open forum reinforced the relevance of communication not only as a development tool, but also as a means of organizational survival and resilience.

PRESENTATIONS

Development as Deception: Aesthetics of Gentrification in the Carbon Public Market

Asst. Prof. Dan Ian Niño Jaducana

Research Fellow, UP CIDS - LRSN

Presentation Proper

Asst. Prof. Dan Ian Niño Jaducana's presentation examined the concept of development as a contested and sometimes deceptive process, using the Carbon Public Market in Cebu City as a case study. He began by emphasizing that development does not have a single, shared meaning. While some sectors view new infrastructure, modernization, or beautification as signs of progress, others experience these changes as harmful, especially when they result in exclusion, displacement, or loss of livelihood.

In his analysis, Jaducana introduced the theory of gentrification, originally articulated by Ruth Glass. Gentrification occurs when wealthier, more powerful groups (the “gentry”) move into a space, leading to the displacement or marginalization of lower-income communities. He outlined key characteristics of gentrification: promises of development, infrastructure-centered change, profit-driven and capitalist motives, elitist tendencies, alignment with state power, environmental and livelihood disruption, and the attraction of outsiders or foreign interests.

A central concept in his presentation was the “aesthetics of gentrification,” where development is packaged as visually appealing and “modern” to gain public acceptance. This form of development, he argued, often prioritizes appearance over function, resulting in spaces that look attractive but fail to serve the needs of ordinary people. Such projects may be “pretty” yet socially hollow, masking exclusion and inequality beneath the surface.

Applying this framework to the Carbon Public Market, Jaducana described Carbon as the economic “lifblood” of vendors, workers, households, and small businesses prior to 2021. However, the Joint Venture Agreement (JVA) between

the Cebu City Government and Megawide Construction Corporation marked a shift toward privatization under the guise of modernization. He argued that this process reflected gentrification, as improvements in infrastructure were accompanied by restrictions on vendors' rights, rising rent, additional fees, reduced selling spaces, and increased prices of basic goods.

Although vendors were not directly expelled, Jaducana explained that unequal arrangements, such as higher rental costs, shared or rotating stall spaces, and strategic placement favoring those who could pay more, effectively marginalized small vendors and workers. The commercialization of the market, increased accessibility for tourists and foreign investors, and the preference for servicing outsiders over local consumers further intensified inequality. He also noted tensions and repression experienced by vendor groups, including militarization and attempts to silence dissent.

Despite these challenges, Jaducana highlighted the resistance and agency of the *Carbonhanong Alyansa*, an alliance of vendors which emerged to oppose the JVA and advocate for reforms. The group developed an alternative development plan proposing improved infrastructure without displacing vendors or increasing the cost of goods. This plan demonstrated that inclusive, people-centered development was both possible and more affordable than privatization. He also acknowledged the support expressed by current local leadership toward market vendors.

To conclude, Jaducana emphasized that development is often shaped by conflict and struggle. True development, he argued, must confront power imbalances, resist the erosion of livelihoods, and center the needs of workers, vendors, and ordinary citizens. For Jaducana, the ongoing struggle in Carbon reflects a broader fight for a form of development that serves the people of Cebu rather than excluding them.

Open Forum

The open forum following Jaducana's presentation centered on the lived experiences of Carbon Public Market vendors and the role of local government in addressing the impacts of privatization and gentrification.

A vendor representative expressed gratitude for the discussion and for the presence of Mayor Nestor Archival, whom she described as a key defender of Carbon vendors. She recounted the intense struggle against the privatization

of Carbon and shared that vendors celebrated Archival's election as mayor, viewing it as a victory for their livelihoods. According to her testimony, conditions in Carbon have improved under the new administration: vendors are no longer forcibly restricted in their selling hours and can sell until their goods are finished. She also noted that they have experienced less harassment, wit cleanliness provided and order maintained.

Mayor Archival responded by sharing his personal connection to Carbon, explaining that he himself grew up as a vendor in the market. As a former city councilor, he opposed the JVA even when it was approved by the majority, citing lack of transparency and incomplete data, particularly the absence of a clear and comprehensive list of vendors who would be affected. He stressed that his main concern was protecting vendors' livelihoods and ensuring that all affected vendors were accounted for in any agreement.

The mayor further explained that the modernization plan would inevitably raise costs due to entrance fees and other charges, which would ultimately burden both vendors and consumers. He pointed out that vendors were already paying multiple and often illegal fees collected by various entities, placing them under severe financial strain. He emphasized his current efforts to renegotiate arrangements, reduce exploitative fees, and demand clearer, more detailed plans that specify vendor placement and stall allocation to avoid displacement and confusion.

A representative from the Cebu Urban Poor Women's League (CUPWOL) raised a concern regarding "*ladlad*" or sidewalk vendors, particularly those who prefer to sell during the day due to the nature of their goods. Mayor Archival acknowledged the issue and stated that these concerns would be addressed through consultations with Elconjim "Elcon" Concha, Administrator of the Office of the City Markets in Cebu City, and the Carbon Alyansa. He emphasized the need to balance inclusion of displaced or informal vendors without displacing those already occupying designated spaces, and assured participants that these vendors would be considered and supported.

A question was then directed to Jaducana regarding the roles of local authorities and people's organizations in the process of gentrification. In his response, Jaducana explained that gentrification in Carbon emerged from conflicting class-based visions of development. He noted that tensions between government decisions and the interests of vendors and workers were especially evident during the 2021 JVA, resulting in resistance, public contestation, and

partial policy reversals. These conflicts, he argued, demonstrated how people's organizations played a crucial role in challenging and reshaping development outcomes.

Mayor Archival added to this response by emphasizing that the crisis stemmed largely from the lack of transparency in the previous administration. He explained that plans presented to the city council focused only on attractive infrastructure, without clear details on vendor relocation or livelihood protection. This absence of information, coupled with the urgency of vendors' daily income needs, intensified resistance and mistrust. He concluded that meaningful development requires transparency, open communication, and coordinated efforts between government and constituents, conditions that were missing during the approval of the JVA.

PRESENTATIONS

Revisiting Faith-based Approaches to Community Development in Cebu and Bohol

Patrick Gerard Torres

Research Fellow, UP CIDS - LRSN

Presentation Proper

Mr. Patrick Gerard Torres presented initial findings from his study on faith-based approaches to community development in Cebu and Bohol, positioning them as an alternative and complementary framework to state-led and secular models of Community-Driven Development. He began by situating the discussion within the broader CDD framework, which historically emerged from state and international development institutions such as the World Bank. He noted that these models often reflect a government-centered view of development that does not always align with how communities themselves understand progress.

Torres proposed faith-based approaches as another lens through which development can be understood and practiced. His study concerned the following: (1) the origins and core values of faith-based approaches and how they differ from secular or state-led models; (2) how faith-based initiatives facilitate community participation and inclusion, especially of marginalized voices; and (3) the contributions and limitations of faith-based approaches as alternatives or complements to dominant development frameworks.

He explained that for a long time, particularly within Western development discourse, religion was viewed as a barrier to development, associated with backwardness or resistance to change. However, beginning in the mid-2000s, development studies began to recognize that religion and faith can play a dynamic and enabling role in development processes. Research has since identified several contributions of faith-based organizations (FBOs) to community development.

First, Torres emphasized that faith-based organizations enjoy high levels of trust, legitimacy, and credibility within communities. Religious leaders and church-based groups are often perceived as more trustworthy and less corrupt than state bureaucracies or external NGOs, making communities more receptive to development initiatives introduced through them. Second, FBOs have deep and wide community reach, as religious institutions are present even in remote rural and urban areas, allowing them to engage communities that are often beyond the reach of government or secular organizations. Third, faith-based approaches offer an alternative vision of development that is rooted in local values, beliefs, and lived experiences, rather than externally imposed plans.

In the Philippine context, Torres highlighted the historical role of churches, particularly Catholic and Protestant institutions, in shaping alternative understandings of development. During periods such as the Marcos-era “New Society,” state-led development emphasized discipline and top-down transformation. In contrast, church-based perspectives emphasized human dignity, dialogue, and development defined by communities themselves. He noted that much of Philippine civil society historically emerged from church-based social action initiatives, which later evolved into broader NGOs and people’s organization networks.

Methodologically, the study drew from document reviews of church pronouncements, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews. Initial findings showed that many faith-based development organizations originated from religious calls for social action and retained faith-based orientations even after becoming institutionalized as NGOs.

Torres found that faith-based perspectives strongly emphasize participation, inclusion, and community-defined development. Development is communicated through faith-based language centered on dignity, livelihood, land, and daily needs, making it more accessible and meaningful to community members. Faith also functions as a unifying force, enabling solidarity across geographically distant communities and strengthening collective action.

However, Torres also identified limitations and challenges. As faith-based organizations become institutionalized and align with formal development frameworks, they risk losing their distinct faith-based identity, becoming indistinguishable from secular organizations. Additionally, churches and faith-based groups are sometimes perceived as external partners rather than integral parts of the community, which can weaken genuine community ownership, particularly if the poor are treated as beneficiaries rather than co-actors in development.

In sum, Torres argued that faith-based approaches continue to provide valuable spaces for articulating alternative, people-centered visions of development. While not without challenges, these approaches remain important complements to dominant development models, especially in promoting participation, inclusion, and solidarity grounded in shared values and lived realities.

Open Forum

During the question-and-answer session, participants engaged with Torres on the practical and historical role of the Church in community development.

A participant shared a personal experience during a demolition incident, emphasizing how the Church, through the presence and support of local priests, actively stood with the community. Despite challenges, such as interference from corporate actors during a mass, the Church's role in advocating for community rights and providing spiritual support was seen as crucial.

Another participant raised a historical question about the Catholic Church's definition of development, referencing documents such as Pope Paul VI's *Ulurong Pobresyo* (1967), which emphasized integral development encompassing spiritual, social, and economic dimensions. The participant asked why, despite these clear pronouncements, the Church's influence on actual development outcomes seems limited.

Torres responded by acknowledging that while the Church's documents define development comprehensively, internal differences within the Church and external secular pressures often affect implementation. Even within church ministries and programs, approaches to development vary, and some initiatives may be isolated or underemphasized. He noted that the realities of governance, political interests, and community dynamics can sometimes limit the Church's practical impact, as seen in cases like the Carbon mass incident where external actors tried to suppress faith-based advocacy.

Torres reiterated that faith-based approaches remain valuable but are not without limitations. Their strength, he noted, lies in offering alternative and complementary frameworks to state-led models, emphasizing participation, inclusion, and community-defined development. He highlighted that genuine development can only occur when the communities most affected are actively engaged and heard, consistent with the Church's pronouncements and teachings.

PRESENTATION

Politics of Development: Insights from Farmers' Organizations on Non-Governmental Community-Driven Development

Alyssa Soler

Junior Project Associate, UP CIDS - LRSN

Presentation Proper

Ms. Alyssa Soler presentation titled “Politics of Development: Insights from Farmers’ Organizations on Non-Governmental Community-Driven Development,” focused on how farmers perceive development in relation to politics, land, and autonomy.

Soler framed her discussion by revisiting historical agrarian politics in the Philippines, starting with Presidential Decree No. 27 in the 1970s and the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) in 1988. While these reforms were meant to transfer land ownership to farmers, many farmers experienced partial or ineffective redistribution, lack of capital, and continued dominance of land monopolies. Incidents like the Mendiola Massacre (1987) reinforced skepticism among farmers, who often view state-led development as politically biased and contested, rather than neutral or purely technical interventions.

From her field research in three communities, Soler highlighted three key insights. First, development is political and contested, such that farmers see development not as neutral aid, but as a process that favors certain groups. Historical experiences of unfair land distribution and repressive measures against farmers contributed to distrust toward government programs.

Second, land and autonomy shape farmers’ understanding of development. Soler noted that development is tied to having control over land, production, and livelihood decisions. Sharecropping and irregular land holdings historically limited farmers’ decision-making power, reinforcing their desire for autonomy through ownership and cooperative management.

Third, Soler highlighted the limits of NGO-led development without political engagement. While NGOs assist communities, they often depend on government structures and decisions. Farmers reported situations where NGO support could not overcome bureaucratic or political barriers, underscoring that development interventions without political engagement are insufficient.

She concluded that community-driven development approaches assume communities can define priorities and manage resources democratically, but in areas with persistent inequalities and patron-client systems, empowerment is constrained. She emphasized that understanding development requires both community-level action and awareness of broader political dynamics.

The presentation also linked to a policy brief with potential recommendations for improving NGO and CDD approaches, which Soler suggested could be incorporated into her ongoing research.

Open Forum

The open forum portion focused heavily on the historical and ongoing struggles of farmers in the Philippines.

Representing farmer leaders from Farmers Development Center (FARDEC), a participant recounted the long history of resistance, beginning with the implementation of Presidential Decree No. 27 in 1972, through the Mendiola Massacre, and the introduction of CARP in 1988. Despite these programs, farmers often faced bureaucratic delays, corruption, militarization, and red-tagging, which limited their ability to access land, assert autonomy, and participate fully in development initiatives. The participant emphasized that farmers' persistence in defending their communities and asserting their rights has been a constant, even under extreme threats.

Another speaker raised concerns about the conversion of agricultural lands for residential or industrial purposes, noting that such practices undermine farmers' livelihoods and threaten equitable development. In response, Soler acknowledged the importance of revisiting and strengthening agrarian policies and reforms to ensure they genuinely serve farmers. She also highlighted the difficulties NGOs face in reaching farmers in militarized or inaccessible areas, which limits the effectiveness of community-driven development initiatives.

A representative from DAR provided the government perspective, noting that modern reforms and programs, such as the New Agrarian Emancipation Act, aim to protect farmers, facilitate land title distribution, and lift debts. The DAR representative also emphasized the availability of provincial and regional offices for farmers to address land disputes, while acknowledging that historical inequalities and delays in title distribution continue to pose challenges.

From Alleviation to Liberation: The Liberational Concept of Development among Peasant Communities in Cebu and Bohol

Prof. Regletto Aldrich Imbong

Project Leader, UP CIDS - LRSN

Presentation Proper

Prof. Regletto Aldrich Imbong's presentation, "From Alleviation to Liberation: The Liberational Concept of Development among Peasant Communities in Cebu and Bohol," examined how rural farmer communities conceptualize development beyond mere material provision, emphasizing both immediate needs and deeper structural empowerment. His study focused on multiple peasant communities and people's organizations in Cebu and Bohol, many of which are politically conscious and collaborate with NGOs. The research aimed to understand how these communities perceive development in a context of political pressure, how development itself is politicized, and how these insights could inform policy.

Imbong framed his work within the backdrop of shrinking civic spaces in the Philippines, particularly under the Duterte administration, noting that CSOs, especially those critical of the government, faced intensified scrutiny and harassment. The shrinking of civic spaces restricted democratic participation, affected human rights, and limited governance engagement for people's organizations. Within this climate, he asked how development work is practiced, what concepts of development these communities hold, and under what conditions they risk becoming targets of state repression.

The study relied on three rounds of FGDs conducted between December 2024 and mid-2025, key informant interviews with NGO leaders, and the use of digital humanities tools to analyze transcriptions of community discussions. Participants included representatives from NGOs such as Cebu Archdiocese and Social Advocacies (CASA) and FARDEC, as well as five POs from Cebu and Bohol.

The findings revealed that peasant communities hold a dialectical concept of development, encompassing both alleviation and liberation. Alleviation addressed immediate material needs, such as water systems, a common community project identified across multiple sites, ensuring access to essential resources. Liberation, however, involved broader concerns about autonomy, land rights, and resistance to structural inequalities.

Imbong emphasized that the issue of land emerged as the most frequently discussed topic among farmers, linking access to water directly to ownership and control over land. He highlighted that mainstream development programs, such as those under KALAHI-CIDSS funded by the World Bank, primarily focus on alleviation through infrastructure projects, leaving structural issues like land disputes unaddressed. In contrast, POs pursue development with both alleviative and liberational dimensions, making their approach politically sensitive and sometimes a target for state scrutiny. Some communities had even experienced militarization or the creation of state-supported organizations aimed at limiting the political dimension of their work.

Imbong argued that development is inherently political when it moves from alleviation toward liberation. Actions that challenge structural inequities, such as asserting land rights or advocating for systemic reform, can trigger state repression, highlighting the tension between people's organizations and state-backed development models.

For policy, he recommended revisiting counter-insurgency frameworks that criminalize legitimate reform efforts, ensuring the meaningful participation of NGOs and POs in local development councils, and implementing genuine agrarian reform to secure land tenure.

Imbong concluded that a truly liberational approach to development must address immediate material needs while simultaneously challenging structural injustices, placing social justice at the center of rural development in Cebu and Bohol.

Open Forum

During the open forum of Imbong's presentation, the discussion focused on the pressing issues of land ownership, agrarian reform, and land use conversion, which were central to his study on the liberational concept of development for peasant communities in Cebu and Bohol.

The first speaker expanded on Imbong's presentation by sharing specific examples from Cebu, highlighting the ongoing struggles of farmers even under CARP. In some cases, declared lands covered a larger number of families than the official beneficiaries, leaving many without formal access to land. This was compounded by the threat of land being converted for commercial purposes, such as tourism developments or livestock operations, jeopardizing the security of farmer communities even when they held legal titles. The speaker emphasized that harassment, militarization, and red-tagging of peasant organizations remained persistent threats, underscoring the need for strong organizational solidarity among farmers to defend their rights and ensure the continuation of their struggles for land.

Another participant from Bohol raised further concerns regarding land use conversion, stressing that agricultural lands awarded under agrarian reform were increasingly at risk of being reclassified for commercial or industrial use. He pointed out that errors or delays in DAR coverage, combined with insufficient legal protections, created opportunities for wealthier actors to acquire land originally intended for farmers, thus undermining the objectives of agrarian reform. He suggested that Imbong's research could benefit from integrating this legal and policy dimension to more fully capture the risks faced by peasant communities.

Another participant elaborated on the administrative processes behind land conversion, explaining that regional offices approve conversions while local governments maintain land use classifications. Illegal land conversions were highlighted as a significant problem, particularly in Cebu, further complicating the security of agrarian reform beneficiaries. The participant also noted support mechanisms for farmers, including farm-to-market roads, access to machinery, and coordination with agencies such as the Department of Science and Technology (DOST), all aimed at increasing productivity and showcasing the contributions of peasant communities.

The discussion also touched on the individualization of land titles. Collective Certificates of Land Ownership Award (CLOAs) were being converted into individual titles, which clarified legal ownership but created the potential risk of land being sold back to wealthier entities, particularly after the mandated non-transfer period expired. Illegal or improper land conversions, especially in protected areas, were raised as persistent challenges requiring intervention from both the DAR and the DENR.

Imbong acknowledged these concerns and indicated his intention to integrate these dimensions into his study, particularly the issues of land use conversion, illegal conversion, and gaps in legal protection for farmers. He expressed interest in obtaining more data on illegal conversions to strengthen the policy relevance of his research.

Center for Integrative and Development Studies

Established in 1985 by University of the Philippines (UP) President Edgardo J. Angara, the UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS) is the policy research unit of the University that connects disciplines and scholars across the several units of the UP System. It is mandated to encourage collaborative and rigorous research addressing issues of national significance by supporting scholars and securing funding, enabling them to produce outputs and recommendations for public policy.

The UP CIDS currently has twelve research programs that are clustered under the areas of education and capacity building, development, and social, political, and cultural studies. It publishes policy briefs, monographs, webinar/conference/forum proceedings, and the Philippine Journal for Public Policy, all of which can be downloaded free from the UP CIDS website.

The Program

The Local Regional Studies Network (LRSN) aims to create a network of research programs engaging in local and regional areas of study, involving scholars and research centers based in the different UP System constituent universities.

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