Identifying Research Sites for Climate Change Adaptation, Dispossession, and Displacement (CiCADD) Project in Northern Mindanao and Caraga, Philippines

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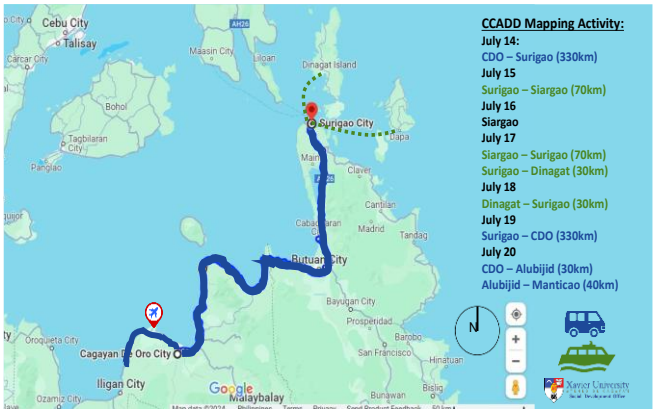
To understand how climate change adaptation interventions are implemented locally and their unintended consequences on displacement and dispossession, the Philippine Team travelled through Northern Mindanao and Caraga provinces in the Philippines to identify potential research sites from July 15 to 22, 2023. This part of the Philippines was chosen to highlight a region of the archipelago that does not usually receive full attention in adaptation research, despite experiencing numerous climate-related disasters.

Northern Mindanao and Caraga have been repeatedly devastated by climate-related hazards—such as Tropical Storm Sendong in 2011 and Super Typhoon Odette in 2021. As a result, these areas have undergone rehabilitation and reconstruction following these major events. Significant infrastructure investments and adaptation programmes have been introduced. Therefore, they are dynamic zones where nature and culture, politics and science, humans and non-humans interact, and where issues of climate adaptation, governance, land use, tourism, and socio-political tensions intersect in complex and unpredictable ways.

In Northern Mindanao, Misamis Oriental and Cagayan de Oro stood out because they were experiencing rapid growth, faced flood risks, and were the sites of major flood control projects, such as the Flood Risk Management Project for Cagayan de Oro River (FRIMP-CDOR) project.



Map of Misamis Oriental, Northern Mindanao and Siargao Island, Caraga showing the route the team took during the mapping.

Caraga displayed a distinct set of political and ecological dynamics: ongoing land tenure problems, mining-driven political economies, and land speculation driven by tourism, particularly on the internationally renowned tourist destination and surfing paradise, Siargao Island. The overlapping risks and responses made both regions ideal for further exploration of the opportunities and dangers of climate change adaptation.

The Method Behind the Mapping

The process of identifying project sites involved both systematic research and community engagement. The initial desktop assessments examined satellite data, typhoon tracks, population density, and previous efforts to adapt to climate change. Following this initial research, there were field visits, discussions with local leaders, and informal meetings with NGOs and local government employees.

Instead of simply identifying areas with high hazard exposure, the team asked where adaptation interventions are being implemented. They also questioned where these responses have caused unintended consequences. For example, has the construction of seawalls, the promotion of eco-tourism, or the establishment of marine protected areas inadvertently caused displacement, increased living costs, loss of livelihoods, and social exclusion? Where has speculative real estate and tourism outpaced local incomes and lifestyles, putting additional pressure on already vulnerable populations?

Based on these layered criteria, the team shortlisted potential study areas: Del Carmen, General Luna, and Pilar in Siargao; San Jose and Basilisa in the Dinagat Islands; Surigao City; and Alubijid, Manticao, and Cagayan de Oro City in Misamis Oriental.

These locations were mapped not only because they are vulnerable to disasters but also due to the rich experiences of the inhabitants and the importance of their continuous adaptation efforts.

Scoping as a Political and Investigative Process

The mapping exercise involved a deliberate and careful approach to examining the complex reality of climate change adaptation and maladaptation. It aimed to understand not only how adaptation efforts are carried out but also how they affect the existing social, political, and economic conditions.

For instance, protecting and promoting mangrove ecosystems in areas like Siargao provided clear ecological benefits and opportunities for nature-based solutions, such as mangroves serving as storm barriers and erosion controls. However, these efforts coincided with the socio-political dynamics of disaster capitalism, escalating land prices driven by tourism and development pressures, which made it increasingly difficult for low-income residents—and even local governments—to access land for resettlement.

One mayor said, "It took us ten years to prepare for a four-hour storm." This shows how long it takes to build community resilience and how even the best preparations can be tested by more catastrophic climate events, such as super typhoons or just a tropical storm.

The mapping process was based on a commitment to examining these complex political, economic, and ecological dynamics to foster better, more inclusive, and just adaptation strategies.

From Mapping to Inclusion

This scoping mission was a vital first step in selecting appropriate study sites for the CiCADD project.

The mapping exercise was grounded in an ethical commitment to prioritise the voices of affected communities and to emphasise conditions that challenge the usual, optimistic stories of climate adaptation. Each site offers an opportunity to explore whether adaptation can be inclusive or if it risks worsening existing inequalities and creating new forms of social exclusion.

In mapping the relationship between climate change adaptation, displacement, and dispossession, the team concentrated on the socio-political context surrounding climate change adaptation efforts. They traced narratives—complex and urgent to examine further, ideally with input from local communities, to collaboratively find solutions.

The Philippine CiCADD Team during the mapping mission in Northern Mindanao and Caraga Regions.

Pictures: *Taken by the Philippine CiCADD team except for the drone shot taken by Trip ni Tonio*
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