Neighbors to the "Poor" Bajau: An Oral Story of a Woman of the Cebuano Speaking Group in Davao City, the Philippines (Reconsidering Social History of Maritime Worlds in Southeast Asia: Perspectives from the Sama-Bajau)

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INTRODUCTION

This paper offers the reader an oral story of Colorita, an ordinary citizen who lives in Davao City, the Philippines. She has developed a sense of “being a neighbor” with people of a “poor” ethnic minority, specifically the Sama (more commonly referred as to the Bajau), through her involvement in a community-based development aid project. Becoming a neighbor here means taking a series of actions through which one approaches others, especially the vulnerable with different socio-cultural identities and less political and economic prestige. As a neighbor, one listens to them, thinks with them, and tries to work with them for a better life. In other words, it refers to a delivery of one’s commitments (cf. Drèze and Sen [1989]) to others. Or perhaps, it is such interaction itself that leads to the creation of a public forum, where people with various socio-cultural backgrounds and interests meet to promote dialogue and find their common goals in the society. Despite one’s passion and enthusiasm though, it is not always clear whether one’s commitment positively contributes to the uplifting of the underprivileged in the long run. Colorita’s oral story is meant to show such dilemmas that anybody who wants to help one’s neighbors out of good will would possibly face.

Ethnically, Colorita is a native speaker of the Cebuano language. Cebuano is the name of the language mainly spoken in the Central Visayas and Northern Mindanao areas. The Cebuano speaking people (the Bisaya, as they are called) forms the majority in Davao City, while the Sama speaking group (Bajau) belongs to the marginalized ethnic minorities. The Sama belongs to the lowest income class in the local context. Because of this socio-economic boundary, the Bisaya has only limited contact with the Sama. Most of the contacts between
them happen when Bisaya people are approached by Sama vendors, if not beggars, in the street. When I offered to hire her as my research assistant for a long-term fieldwork on the Sama, Colorita accepted with little hesitation. It was a research on the “poverty” of the Bajau and lasted for two and a half years from August 1997 to December 1999\(^1\). We also worked together to collect various kinds of data on the Sama’s conversion to Christianity by fieldwork, intermittently carried out for over four years from July 2002 to January 2006 (seven times in total)\(^2\). These experiences eventually led her to work as a project officer of a local nongovernmental organization (NGO) that initiated a development aid project for the ‘Bajau’ (the Sama) in the research site in 2005. Her involvement in the aid actions has enhanced her sense of ‘being a neighbor’ with the Sama and engendered dilemmas as well.

This oral story of Colorita is intended as part of my preparation to write an ethnography of local people’s efforts in helping their poor neighbors improve their well-being in the contemporary context of Davao City. Although the framework has yet to be developed in my future writings, the concept of the present paper has grown out of such academic concerns.

The significance of this oral story lies in the following aspects. First, earlier studies on the Sama/Bajau have conventionally focused on the cultural change or everyday practice of the people in various local contexts. By contrast, I will redirect the focus onto a non-Sama local resident who has come into contact with the Sama so that the interactions between the two actors could be reexamined from a different point of view. Second, there has been a vast tradition of research on Philippine society, which has been often said to be segmented by various factors such as income class, ethnicity and kinship (which is often inseparable from the former two in nature). I would not emphasize this type of segmentation here, but rather explore the process in which social cohesion, or a sense of being neighbors, among different groups emerges somewhat beyond their asymmetrical relations in power and interest. Third, I will shed new light on ordinary citizens who have the potential to show a commitment as actors to bridge the donors and the recipients in development aid projects. As ordinary citizens, they belong neither to highly professional aid practitioners nor to the communities of the target recipients. The concept of participatory development and the role of civil society were put on the agenda by the international aid community for some time now. Nonetheless, ordinary citizens have never been a popular topic in development

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1) See Aoyama [2006] for details.  
2) See Aoyama [2005].
aid studies because these people are not always organized and therefore remain invisible to the donors in the distance. These actors should be considered different from so-called aid brokers or middlemen in aid studies: their roles in participatory development are rather vague as they explicitly pursue their own interests in their everyday lives. Studying the oral stories of such people will help us understand how a development aid project could have wider impact on the lives of people in the community other than those of the targeted beneficiaries. Ordinary people also hope and try to change the world: they may not usually think about creating alternative institutions (e.g. Dr. Yunus of Grameen Bank); but they will try their best to care for their neighbors in their own ways.

This little oral story was gathered through an intensive three-day (a total of fifteen hours) interview on February 26, 28, and 29 in 2008 basically as narratives to the author, Waka, whose name will repeatedly appear in the course of her story. Due to time limitations, Colorita and I chose to follow the unconventional procedures for oral story taking: 1) the interview was taken in a dining space of Colorita’s house in a quite informal atmosphere with her family and visitors around: 2) no recording device was used, and instead of making transcripts, the interview was immediately dictated and entered into the computer as Word data by the author; and 3) although Colorita kindly offered to speak English to help the author speed up the encoding, very often, we ended up conversing in her mother tongue. Most of the time, Colorita translated her words into English. If not, we simply wrote down any English translation that came up to our mind first so that we would not block the narrative line in her head.

Aside from Colorita’s oral story, the data collected during the following periods will be used to provide the background information in this paper: 1) from August 3 to September 19 in 2005, a preliminary study was done; 2) from March 22 to April 2 in 2006, an updated area map and the list of the residents were made for the prospective household survey; 3)

3) This paper is originally a product of the research group named Studies on Poverty and Disparity (led by the author) under the Research Project entitled “The Mechanism of Resource Distribution and Fairness” (headed by Jin Sato, the University of Tokyo). This research project was organized as one of the Research Projects (Section IV-3) for the Promotion of Humanities and Social Sciences by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Sciences (JSPS) from the fiscal year 2004 to 2007. This paper was reorganized and presented at the 3rd Annual Forum, Hakusan Anthropological Society (Reconsidering Social History of Maritime Folks in Southeast Asia: Perspectives from the Sama-Bajau) at Hokusai-Kaikan, Hakusan-Campus, Toyo University, on February 10, 2010. The workshop was co-organized by the Research Project on “Comparative Area Studies on Maritime Southeast Asia.” I am indebted to all parties involved.
from August 4 to September 18 in 2006, a survey on the all households was implemented to investigate the impact of the interventions of development aid agencies; 4) from August 5 to August 17 in 2007, final reports and other documents related to a development aid project delivered by a local NGO were collected; and 5) from September 2 to September 14 in 2007, records on micro lending were collected.

This paper comprises two parts, namely, a summary of our previous studies on the Sama in Davao City, 1997-1999 as the background data (part one) and Colorita’s oral story mainly on her experience of working for a development aid project for the Sama (part two). In the present paper, I purposely retain the original voice of Colorita and the trace of our collaboration as narratives with a minimum of corrections. A little editing has added, though, to keep the events in chronological order. In doing so, I hope to invite the reader to hear her narratives without much confusion and see how the changes in her life have been interwoven with her experiences of interacting with the Sama in everyday life.

I SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS STUDIES ON THE SAMA IN DAVAO CITY, 1997-1999

1 The Sama as the Marginalized
1.1 The Sama as the Bajau in the Literature

The Bajau in the literature on sea nomads were in most cases referred to as Sama Dilaut, or a subgroup of Sama speaking people, who used to live in houseboats [cf. Lapian and Nagatsu 1996]. However, it has been revealed in recent investigations that identifying the “Bajau” based on the traditional image is no longer appropriate because most of them have abandoned boat-dwelling to live more sedentary lives in different milieus. Their living conditions have become more diversified nowadays4). The “Bajau” in the present study is not an exception: it includes, aside from those who had practiced boat-dwelling before, those who had always lived on land (Sama Deyaq). Nonetheless, they almost uniformly have come to be identified as the “Bajau” by surrounding non-Sama populations since they

4) It is known that the self-identifications of the Bajau change dynamically and constantly according to the situations they are in. Nagatsu [2001] shows a detailed case study of the Bajau in Sabah, Malaysia. Refer to Aoyama [2006] for a case from the Bajau in Davao City.
migrated to Davao City\(^5\). In part one of this paper, I will use the Sama and the Bajau interchangeably according to the context, while the identifications Colorita used originally to refer to them in any specific context will be retained in part two.

1.2 Impoverishment of the Sama in Today's Philippines

The *Sama Dilaut* in a village of Sabah, Malaysia, a group of Sama people originally from the Philippines, is said to have uplifted their social status after they embraced Islam. As the official religion, Islamic faith has been promoted by the governmental religious organizations. In the history of Sabah, the Bajau used to be discriminated against by dominant ethnic groups (mostly the Tausug and the land-based Sama) until the dissolution of the Sulu Sultanate in early twentieth century [Warren 1981]. Conversion to Islam, however, has led to reconfigure their identities as “legitimate Malay” and concomitantly provided them a strong vehicle to move upward in the local society [Nagatsu 2004]. On the other hand, there is no similar case reported on the Bajau, or more precisely the *Sama Dilaut*, in the Philippines. As a matter of fact, the Philippine “Bajau” have been known for its impoverishment and marginalization. The name of the “Bajau” may be even used as a synonym of “beggar,” a derogatory term [Nagatsu 2001: 226]. Unlike the *Sama Dilaut* in Malaysia, the Sama in the Philippines lacks an official vehicle for upward social mobility.

Government policies for ethnic minorities in the Philippines are considered rather advanced in Southeast Asia. As a normative framework, the 1987 Constitution stipulates that the rights of indigenous communities and cultural minorities and their diversities should be respected\(^6\). As an institutional framework, the nation is known for its “Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997” (Republic Act No. 8371), which acknowledges the rights of such communities to their ancestral domains. Moreover, an autonomous region has been officially created for Muslims in the Southern Philippines. Despite the establishment of these formal frameworks however, most of the ethnic minorities are still tantalizingly out of the reach of the benefits of social integration [UNDP 2004: 68]. This is partly because these frameworks implicitly set the prerequisite of community organization.

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\(^5\) It is impossible to trace back the origins of the Sama in the present paper simply by the name of the “Bajau.” For the details of their background, see Aoyama [2006]. Also refer to Nagatsu [2001] and Nimmo [2001] for more discussion on their autonym.

\(^6\) For reviews on normative and institutional frameworks of the state policies for indigenous peoples in the Philippines, see ILO [1993], Eder and McKenna eds.[2004].
before they can exercise their rights as individual members of a minority group moving towards social integration. In reality, there are quite a few groups of ethnic minorities who find it hard to organize themselves. One of them is the Bajau. It has been often noted that its social organization is rather loose and transient with leaders who individually lead only a small number of families.

1.3 The Sama in Davao City

Furthermore, it is difficult for the government to provide protection for the "Bajau," including the present case in Davao City. Most of them are originally refugees, who fled their home waters or lands due to the deterioration of peace and order and the subsequent economic predicaments in Sulu and Zamboanga regions. Davao City is well-known for its "Kadayawan," which is an annual festival featuring the diversity of local ethnic and cultural communities with various kinds of presentations such as parades in the streets and handicrafts in trade fairs. But it does not seem that the Sama (Bajau) in Davao City is fully recognized as such an ethnic minority with such "marketable" cultural resources. People tend to think that the "Bajau" poverty is due to its "laziness" or "apathy." In fact, people commonly adopt a negative image of the "Bajau" way of life and attitudes and attribute its poverty to "poor" or "bad" culture. In this social milieu, even if the Sama is selected as a target group for any poverty eradication program of the government, it may be simply treated as part of the urban poor with no specific cultural traits to appreciate. Besides, resources for the urban poor are not only limited but also unevenly allocated. Because the Sama seldom votes, it lacks connections with politicians and this deprives it of access to various resources. Small in number and politically unimportant, the Sama is disadvantaged in competing with more dominant ethnic groups over the distribution of the government budget and resources that aid agencies from the outside bring in.

2 Living Standards of the Sama before the Missionaries and the NGOs Intervened, 1997-1999

The following four sections summarize the findings from the fieldwork which Colorita and I carried out using separate but related approaches over the two and a half years from August 1997 to December 1999. This summary is aimed at providing the reader with background information about the research site before the entry of evangelism at the turn of the century and the more recent intervention of NGO development aid workers.
2-1 Research Site

Davao City is located on Mindanao Island in the Southern Philippines. Blessed with natural resources (e.g., minerals, and farm and marine products) and other natural advantages in Mindanao, the city is known as a center of the development in the region, serving as one of the leading production bases of agri-industry and also as a major trade-oriented port city in the country. As of May 2000, it was home to a population of approximately 1.15 million people and ranked fourth in size as a single chartered city nationwide and the first in Mindanao.

With relatively stable peace and public order, Davao City absorbs migrants and refugees from trouble-plagued areas such as the southwest regions of Mindanao and other inland regions, where political stability is yet to be seen. During the 1970s, the armed conflict between the Philippine government and the Muslim separatists reached a peak: it ravaged local communities, resulting in the evacuation of the people from Zamboanga and Sulu to other cities like Davao. Some of the pioneer migrants to the research site in our study were refugees at that time. Due to the destabilized political situation and the accordingly deteriorating economies in those areas, people continued to flock to Davao City. The "Bajau" and their Muslim neighbors in the present paper can be equally considered as refugees in this sense. They both form, more or less, the urban poor problem in the local context of the city.

The research site is situated in an islet called "Isla Bella," which is a squatter area on the eastern shore of the city. As of 1997, the islet had an area of about nine hectares. The estimated number of households was 1,300 with a population of about 10,000 people. By ethno-linguistic grouping, approximately 60% of the total population belongs to major Muslim groups (e.g., Maranao and Tausug). In other words, the Muslims are the majority in the "Barangay" (the smallest administrative unit in the Philippines), although in the larger context of Davao City they are extremely small in number against Christian populations (mostly the Cebuano). Indeed, the Captain and seven of the Barangay...
Councilors were the Maranao at the time of our first household survey conducted. The area is known as a Muslim-dominated area in the city.

This disadvantage of the Bajau against the non-Bajau in educational background may be directly reflected in its inability to gain employment in the local government, given its comparatively poor human capital and low level of potential productivity. While the non-Bajau experiences the diversification of livelihood after he/she migrates to Davao City and is gradually absorbed in the urban labor market, the Bajau goes through only a limited and slow shift of livelihood. Most of the household heads were fishermen in their places of origin (71.4% of the respondents), and even after they came to the city, the ratio decreased very little: 51.2% of the Bajau household heads claim to be still engaged in fishing in our survey. In addition, inter-generational occupational mobility is extremely low among the Bajau compared with the non-Bajau.

Nevertheless, some of the Bajau household heads shifted their livelihood from fishing to non-fishing activities. The Bajau, working in non-agricultural sectors concentrates on the self-employment sector: 33% of the households reportedly run some kind of business of people) and Sama Dilaya 0.0024% (28 people) (NSO 2000). In the context of Davao City, non-Christian populations are considered as minorities. In terms of indigeneity in Davao, Christians originally from North (the ethnic Cebuanos mostly), lowland Muslims (the Maranao and the Maguindanao), other ethnic groups from Zamboanga and Sulu (the Sama, the Laminusa and the Tausug) are should be categorized all as migrants[cf. Hayase 2008].
their own ("nigosyo"). This relatively high ratio of self-employment can be found in the non-Bajau households as well. It should be noted, however, that the variety of business is extremely limited in the case of the Bajau. There are practically only two types of business: 1) shell and pearl vending (18.8%); and 2) used-clothing vending or "ukay-ukay" in the local Cebuano language (9.4%).

Another typical livelihood the Bajau engages in is begging (5.9%). There are many public markets of various sizes in major population areas of Davao City where various kinds of fresh food are sold. This affluence in the local markets makes it possible for the Bajau not only to beg for spare change but also for about-to-be-discarded items: vegetables, fruits or fish no longer fresh enough to be marketable. Cassava and rice, their staple food, though, have longer shelf lives and cannot be procured from begging. In reality, there are obviously more Bajau beggars than our questionnaire survey grasped, and most of them roam the markets and streets begging for their survival. One of the factors behind this tendency lies in the decline of fishing among the Bajau. Unless he/she switches to another livelihood quickly, the line of least resistance would be for the individual members of the household to beg to make ends meet somehow.

The disadvantage in the limited type of livelihood among the Bajau naturally confines them to a lower socioeconomic status than the non-Bajau as shown in some indicators of economic standards of living. For instance, the average income per day of the household head from his/her main livelihood was 177.7 pesos among the non-Bajau, whereas it was only 153.9 pesos among the Bajau\(^\text{10}\). Other indicators including the level of expenditures, the access to the credit market, housing conditions and the possession of durable goods confirm that the Bajau is generally disadvantaged compared to the other ethnic groups.

\(^\text{10}\) As of November in 1999, the exchange rate was US$1= about P40 (one peso is about three yen). The legitimate minimum wage in the non-agricultural sector was 158 pesos a day. The poverty line was defined as the level of income required to meet one's nutrient requirements and other basic needs. As of 1997, the poverty line in the Southern Mindanao Region (including Davao City) was per capita annual income of 10,440 pesos. The date on the household income collected in our questionnaire survey should be considered to be higher than the actual level of income that the respondents were earning. This is partly because the data were gathered by self-assessment of each respondent, and also because we assumed in the quantitative analysis that the respondent could regularly earn the amount of the income they claimed. Through a long-term participatory observation later, we came to learn that the level of monthly household income (with more than one gainful earner) could widely vary from the maximum of 20,000 pesos (as an exceptional case) to the minimum of 2,600 pesos.
2-3 Inter-Group Relations within the Bajau Community

Local authorities and NGOs often would assume that the Bajau homogenously belongs to the poorest of the poor in Davao City. But in fact, the Bajau community has experienced diversification in the adaptive process to the urban economy, resulting in growing internal disparity. The inter-group relations within the Bajau community are much more inhomogeneous than the outsiders might expect. In order to prove this rise of inequality, we conducted a research on social status by collecting data on a subjective scale of social order among the Bajau respondents. The results suggested that social status of each household should be presented not as the rank of the household in general, but as the rank of the group where the household belongs (Table 1).

In this research, we also tried to reveal the factors that the Bajau themselves consider as criteria for higher social status, or better quality of life in other words. The results indicate that "better life" was associated above all with material possessions (e.g. house and durable goods), availabilities of cash and cashable jewelries, and sufficient supplies of food. Criteria for higher social standing also included factors such as participating in relatively gainful economic activities (mostly non-fishing activities), receiving aid from outside the community (e.g. government agencies), and having been converted to Christianity as well. On the other hand, savings, credit, ability to make plans and educational attainment were given little appreciation. These are components that the government agencies are promoting to help the Bajau improve his/her socioeconomic standing; but they do not seem to be the major concern of the Bajau at the moment. It could be said that there is a wide discrepancy in perception on development between the Bajau as a recipient of resources and the government agencies as donors.

Another finding is that whereas the outsiders might think that there is an organized community of the "Bajau" in the area: the Bajau actually lack a social safety net as a communal resource to provide security for themselves to cope with daily needs and occasional crisis. The results of our study indicate the Bajau community can be divided into five groups as the respondents themselves pointed out (as shown in Table 1). The five groups distinctively differ in livelihood. In each group, there are visible leaders in each category of their socioeconomic life (e.g. fishing, religious activities and traditional medicine), but there is no leader who can integrate the five groups as a political entity. This loosely structured social organization hinders the "Bajau" from attracting
Aoyama: Neighbors to the “Poor” Bajau

Table 1 The Rank of Subjective Order of Social Status by Group: Origin (Self-Identification) and Livelihood by Sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank by Group</th>
<th>Origin (Self-Identification)</th>
<th>Male Livelihood</th>
<th>Female Livelihood</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Type of Operation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>Sama Deyaq</td>
<td>Shell and Pearl Vending</td>
<td>Vending at the Counter in a Hotel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>Sama Deyaq</td>
<td>Shell and Pearl Vending</td>
<td>Vending at the Counter in a Hotel or Peddling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3</td>
<td>Sama Dilaut</td>
<td>Shell and Pearl Vending</td>
<td>Vending to Cargo Ships or Peddling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 4</td>
<td>Sama Deyaq/Dilaut</td>
<td>Bubu and Palangre Fishing</td>
<td>Self-Employed with Private Boats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 5</td>
<td>Sama Dilaut</td>
<td>Pana Fishing?</td>
<td>(Seldom Operated)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The table made by the author based on the result of the research.

Note: Sama Deyaq refers to Land-Based Sama, while Sama Dilaut, to Sea-Based Sama including those who used to live in houseboats.

development aid agencies, because it is difficult to identify leaders who could be the local intermediaries for these agencies.

The research also found out that top two of the five livelihood groups are originally land-based Sama. It was not surprising that they had a relative advantage in socioeconomic status over the three groups in the lower ranks, considering the historical background. However, it should also to be noted that the gap in economic standards of living and lifestyles between Group 3 and Group 5 is getting bigger, though they both can be considered as the sea-based Sama (Sama Dilaut) from about the same places of origin.

Cross-checking the criteria for higher social standing and the socioeconomic characteristics obtained in our earlier questionnaire survey, we reached an important finding that Group 3 has a number of the Bajau converted to Christianity. Through the reference to the criteria for lower standing, we also learned that Group 5, or the lowest group, still adheres to indigenous beliefs (umboq, or ancestor-worshipping and animism),
but is gradually forced to see the degradation, or abandonment even, of the rites due to the financial constraints.

2.4 Inter-Group Relations between the Bajau and non-Bajau
With neither communal nor individual household surplus, it was only natural that the Bajau, as a vulnerable group, should seek resources outside the community to cope with the risks and emergencies it inevitable faces in its daily life. For the Bajau to access economic, social and political resources beyond their community, it should seek better inter-group relations with non-Bajau in a larger society. But in reality, the relations between the Bajau and non-Bajau are rather strained. The Bajau is isolated at the bottom of the ethnic stratification as the least privileged in the local society. As we have discussed already, the Bajau is less presented in the local market as well.

In relation to the local government agencies, the Bajau is also in a disadvantageous position even at the Barangay level of politics. The Barangay is unconcerned with people who do not vote. At one time, for instance, when a household survey (Minimum Basic Needs Survey) was conducted by the Barangay to collect the baseline data for community development plans, but it did not send enumerators to the Bajau-dominanted areas. There were no items on ethnicity in the questionnaire and it could not be used to tabulate the results by ethnicity to clarify the gap in the standards of living between the Bajau and non-Bajau. The Barangay officials are mostly Maranao who belong to the ethnic majority in the area. So it is difficult for the Bajau, being politically weak, to induce policies favorable to them from the local government unit.

Aid agencies such as Caritas (a Catholic based NGO for outreach programs) and social workers from the City Social Services and Services Development Office (CSSDO), have been working in the research site and can hold a relatively neutral position regarding the area's ethnic relations. Nonetheless, both of them have difficulties with the effectiveness and consistency of their programs under the constraints of finance, limitations of staffing, communication barriers and other related problems.

Whether the aid agencies are government institutions or NGOs, their purpose for the interventions is common: the uplift of the standards of living, which can be measured by objective and general indicators. Oriented to their own beliefs in development, they are often utterly oblivious of the fact that the “Bajau” is a group of Sama speaking people that are the minorities in a Muslim dominated area. This misperception occurs more often with
Christian and other non-Muslim agencies. The lack of basic information on the focus group may lead to poor communication between the aid agencies and the Bajau in the research site. In other words, there is a tendency that the outsiders attribute the distressed condition of the Bajau to its value systems and behavioral patterns, typically expressed in a statement like "they are poor because they are lazy," rather than to the situations imposed by the surrounding society (e.g. neglect by the local administration). Although there is no explicit institutional discrimination against the Bajau, it cannot be denied that they are subject to social and psychological oppression.

As we have argued above, the Bajau in Davao City are an example of the people marginalized in several ways: it is marginalized from national policy for indigenous peoples; from socioeconomic development policy; from the major religious groups that classify it as pagan; and from the mainstream Filipinos (speaking Filipino and English, and having faith in Christianity). Under this situation, it is interesting to note that the entry of Christian evangelism in the research site began to show a swift progress around the year 2000. In 2005, a local NGO followed to bring in a development aid project for the Sama.

II ORAL STORY OF COLORITA

On Her Experience of Working for a Development Aid Project for the Sama

1 Personal Background Information of Colorita

My name is Colorita Sama Anombo. I was born into a Cebuano (Roman Catholic) family of farmers in Pikit, North Cotabato, on November 26, 1957. My mother died at the age of 57 in a car accident when I was about to graduate from high school. I finished my elementary (education) at Magpet Elementary School in North Cotabato. I graduated from Magpet National High School in North Cotabato. I took my college education in Holy Cross Davao College in Davao City and graduated in 1983 with a degree of BS in Education.

Before I finished my college, I used to work with Youth Organizing in Piapi, which was operated by an NGO (local) related to POPCOM (Population Commission, a government agency) in 1979. After the POPCOM, I was also a youth organizer in one of the NGOs run

11) The information of her family and household as of January 2008, which was included in her original narratives, is withheld to protect her privacy. She has a husband and three children.
by the Jesuits, Mindanao Development Center (MDC, Mainland Development Center as registered) from 1981 to 1983.

In the years from 1986 to 1997, I was a regular employee of MDC. I was assigned in Matina where all the NPAs (guerillas of New People’s Army) were around (Martial Law from 1972 to 1981). In Matina, I was working as a community organizer (CO), evangelizing the poor to bring faith and justice, with rosaries and Bibles. I was working for social cohesion but not for converting the people (they were Catholic anyway) for one year and a half.

Then I went to Agdao and Piapi as a CO focusing on the economic uplift of the poor. I brought Micro Finance. We bought sacks of rice and distributed them to the project beneficiaries as loans payable to MDC on one-month term (one sack of rice cost 800 pesos before, in early 1990s).

I voluntarily resigned in 1997 because I was offered to work as a Barangay treasurer under Barangay Captain Kaman Panabo (Maranao). I also started working with Waka as a research assistant in Isla Bella. I worked there till 2001 when the captain lost in the local election. I have a lot of friends in City Hall now. After Waka was gone in 2000 (Waka paid 6,000 pesos per month for three years till the end of year 1999), I worked as a project officer with a local development NGO, Comprehensive Development Services, Philippines, Inc. (CDS) from February 2005 to March 2006. Since then, I have been offering voluntary services to the community of the Bajau in Isla Bella.

2 Working with an NGO, 2005 to 2006
2-1 Encountering a Local Development NGO: We know, but They do not Know
At the end quarter of year 2004, Dra. Elisa Samora of CDS came to the Bajau area and asked the people about the existing NGO contacts like Naomi Oliva, Waka and her assistant (we were not NGO workers but very often mistakenly identified as so by our informants). Dra. Samora came to know the area through Roming Largo of Urban Poor (President Commissioner for the Urban Poor (PCUP), a national government agency. Lucy, the former executive director of MDC (Mainland Development Center (MDC), a local NGO) has been working as the head of this office), special project director at the time.

After that, she personally visited me at our house and invited me to conceptualize the proposal on the mainstreaming of the Bajau. Series of meetings were conducted for consultations on the budget and conceptualization of the project. The proposal was sent to
Canada International Development Agency (CIDA) through the Internet first and later the book bound version was mailed as well at the end of 2004 (the contract was signed on the 7th of December, 2006).

Ms. Saming Belo, a "Bajau" (actually, her father is Tausug and her mother a land-based Sama. They do not call themselves Bajau in the community. She belongs to Gwapo's group (Group 1): Gwapo is a cousin of her mother Emily's in China Pikas of Isla Bella) is a young female working with the Home Site Division of City Planning Office as an area researcher (she graduated from Rezal Memorial College with BS in Elementary Education). Saming met Roming and gave him a copy of the preliminary report written by Waka in 1998 (in which Colorita's name was mentioned as her assistant). Roming had spot maps of the urban poor in Davao City because Habitat (Habitat for Humanity, an international NGO) offered a housing project for the Bajau. Dra. Samora was a former project manager of the Habitat, Philippines, while Roming used to be connected with Habitat, and they had known each other for a quite a long time.

I was asked to add or delete some points in the proposal. It took us three meetings to finish it. The Bajau did not join this process because we could not identify the potential leader who could work on the proposal making. Anyway, I do not think that they could contribute to this process, for they are not used to getting involved in the delivery of the issues. They cannot identify what their problems are. Well, even if they know their problems, they do not know the solutions.

It was Dr. Samora (Dra. Samora's husband who serves as CEO of CDS) who decided to focus on the Bajau. When he visited the area, he was very depressed to see their houses. He thought that even his dog's kennel would look a lot better than their houses and so he could not eat upon imagining the situation the Bajau were in.

I think that CIDA was chosen by Dr. and Dra. Samora as the funding agency because there were many Canadian co-sponsors for the project. That's why the total contribution of CIDA reached more than one million pesos for the first year of the project (it eventually turned out to be the final year later). The counterpart of CDS shown in the proposal was mostly "showcase" (there was no disposable budget from the NGO, indeed).

Housing was part of the CIDA proposal components, but the housing item was actually on a separate budget from Habitat. CDS and Habitat are both NGOs, but their focuses are different. Habitat is concerned with housing mainly.
2-2 Delivery of the Development Aid Project: Working with non-Bajau people

Why have I been working with NGOs always? You are right...why? My training was NGO. And maybe because of my family background. When I was a child, there were a lot of relatives who were staying in our household because of poverty. Our house was like an orphanage. Come to think about it, it was like an NGO, too. We helped them because we had a farm where those relatives worked. They also helped us with farming (planting and harvesting, etc). Most of my relatives in Pikit are landless. For one thing, there are a lot of Muslims (Magindanao) and they own big pieces of land in Pikit. Because they came in earlier, they control the land also, and so the Christians have difficulty. There were always wars (Black Shirts (Muslims) vs. “Ilanga” (Christians)) in 1970s. I do not think that NGO jobs are high-paying jobs except for those who are in high ranks such as managers and directors. I started in 1984 with 300 pesos a month and the highest pay I have ever got is 6,000 pesos a month with Waka. For your information, I received 8,000 pesos a month when I was working with the Barangay. There is a lot of money there (Look at mansions that Barangay Captain has built since he took his office, for example. There is a lot of “commissions,” which everybody takes for granted). If you work with the government, you can get paid more, and the work is not as hard as ours (NGOs).

OK, now, how did we do staffing for the CDS project? We had difficulty in hiring staff. We identified former NGO workers coming from old NGOs here in Davao like Nining Lima (a former organizer of TACDRUP: Technical Assistance for Community Development in Rural and Urban Poor), preschool teachers from MDC (Riza and Mae as part-time teachers because they had jobs with the government, we later also hired a new graduate for a full-time teacher), Daks from SURALLA (a local NGO) through Habitat (an organizer for T’boli, an indigenous people Daks himself belongs to), Imelda from Habitat. We also contacted local people (Bajau) for para-teacher positions: Lila, July, Lily and Jolo. Criteria setting was also difficult. I doubted that they would qualify for the criteria set by Dra. Samora (perhaps she set such “high” criteria to measure up to the international standard in the proposal).

Since I am from here (the neighborhood close to the Bajau area in the same Barangay), Dra. Samora left it to me to hire the staff for the project. The only person I did not know before was Daks. He later exited from the project when his contract was terminated after one year, but he was rejected when he applied for another position in CDS because of his record (he borrowed money from the core group’s lending fund, using a Bajau’s name and
ran away without paying). He was a NGO worker who also suffered from poverty. His wife was not working and stayed at home as a housewife. She was not sickish, but she had a lot of children. I do not know where he is now. I did not have any major problems with the rest of the staff. I started looking for the staff three months ahead of the approval of the proposal as Dra. Samora had requested. During the time, I was working on a volunteer basis. I am used to that. There are different categories of NGOs.

When I decided to take the young Bajau, the other Bajau did not complain. They simply accepted it because they knew they are illiterate and therefore not qualified for the position.

We started the project in January 2005. We had project orientations for the staff and the Barangay officials. We met in various places according to the component we were focusing on (six components in total: health, education, livelihood, environment, land security and housing). Among the staff, it was not difficult to communicate with one another and to understand the concept of the project.

The Barangay officials have different orientations and understanding of the Bajau. They think that the Bajau are a burden to the community development. They cannot use them for the election because they do not vote. Some of them voted in the latest election, but they needed to be guided. They don't have their own decisions in choosing whom to vote for during the election. Even if they vote, they are very unpredictable voters.

So far, the government has made efforts to help the Bajau through education and livelihood through CSSDO, but none of them has succeeded. Why? The government workers are “socially blind”: they do not know the culture of the Bajau. One mistake they made with their micro lending program is that it was a group lending. The amount was also too big (4,000 pesos per head) and the term was too long (one year). The people did not understand the scheme (Grameen Bank) except for a few who had been already running business on their own.

2-3 Why is it So Hard to Help the Bajau? : Their Problems? Our problems?
We were implementing our project as if we were singing one song in different tunes. It was very hard to implement the project. For one thing we (the NGO staff) all had different backgrounds of working, and for another it was aggravated by the language barriers. It is not easy for the Cebuano and the Bajau to have mutual communication. They do not understand us, while we do not understand them.
In the course of the implementation of the one-year project (as expected so at the beginning), we held a lot of training seminars for capability building for the beneficiaries (all the residents in the area, including some non-Bajau). We expected them to be capable of tangible skills such as communication, camaraderie (they have a different sense of neighborhood), but the trainings were not enough. The meetings themselves were not regularly held because the people would not come regularly. Each time, we saw new people attending while the old ones were missing, though this is normal for community meetings. It was difficult to sustain the training seminars because it cost a lot of money for food as incentives for the people to attend, venue, speaker’s fees, etc. This is not only the case with the Bajau, however. The major hindrance was in fact the language barrier, which is a problem particular to the Bajau. Although we hired interpreters (Lila and others as Sinama-Cebuano bilinguals from the local community), very often their interpretation was inappropriate. There were a lot of communication barriers.

Nining had very hard time organizing the Bajau, because he never worked with people as poor as indigenous people before, and it was the first time for him to work with people in extreme poverty. I think he had culture shock also. Everybody who visits the area for the first time gets culture shock. Remember, we got it, too (Waka and Colorita). One time, there came two seminarians and they saw a naked old woman without a bra. They entered her house and got shocked, and said “ah, naa ra diay ang pobre diri” (ah so, this is where poverty is!). It was first time for them to see a really poor person. It was Vilma’s house (Vilma belongs to Group 4 and her house is tiny even for a Bajau house in the area). Even for me, I had no experience of handling IPs as an NGO worker. In other cases like Piapi, people get to understand much more easily because there is no language barrier.

In the Bajau area, this situation gets even more aggravated by their hygiene and appearance. They know non-Bajau think the Bajau are dirty. They know it from their experience as vendors (very often they get discriminated against). Nining and we kept trying to organize them for one year, but it proved to be extremely difficult. Some were organized, but others were not.

There were also many “leader-leader” (self-claimed leaders with or without support from others) in the area. There were pastors, assistant pastors, and Muslim religious leaders aside from the core group leaders identified by Nining for the CDS project.
Talking to Pastor John

Pastor John, Senior Pastor of God's People Bajau Fellowship in the area, was also invited to join the project as a core leader. He joined the local Barangay official consultations three times at the Barangay Hall. He also joined the costal clean-up with the community people, which turned to be the only help he has extended so far. He was not interested in the project because he did not have a direct link with the operation of the project. He wanted to have direct financial support just as much as the Barangay officials. Pastor John sent instead Pastor Timothy, who knows how to read and write, to become a core leader in the community meetings. Pastor John was not a hindrance to the project: he was unconcerned with the project implementation.

Pastor John was against the housing project because he thought it would physically dislocate the church structure and the members' houses. He was afraid that it would disturb the connection between the church and the members as well. He also repeatedly stressed that the beneficiaries would certainly fail to pay five pesos a day for 20 years for the housing loan. Based on the CDS survey, the people said they could pay that amount, however.

For housing, the stakeholders such as Maranao and Cebuano neighbors also joined the meetings (where focus group interviews and rapid appraisals were used). We asked them if they would accept that the Bajau would be the only beneficiaries of the housing project. At first, they were against it, but later they agreed to give priority to the Bajau in terms of implementation.

Education

We were able to implement the education component without major problems. The only problem is that the project was not sustained because of the termination of the budget. It was only a one year project, but it should have been a three to five year project to get a successful result for each component. When the project terminated after a year, the educational component was out, too. So, there are no more schools and teachers in the area.

At least, those children (around 20 children) who attended the CDS schools were sent to Zona Elementary School as first graders with partial support of CDS (CIDA was no longer involved. This assistance was personally extended by Dra. Samora). Since then, there has been no support for the children. It is hard to support as many as twenty first graders. It would cost a lot, supplies, uniforms, school shoes, projects. Public school is not
really free. They will collect at least 500 pesos per head at the end of each school year (this is called “miscellaneous” for PTA and maintenance of the school facilities. No budget for the repairs from the government until they scrap it and build a new one again). If you do not pay the 500 pesos, you will not be allowed to be promoted to another grade.

When we started the project, Dra. Samora asked me how many years it would take to make the project effective. I answered that it would take three to five years. But the proposal was approved only for a one year. The second proposal to apply for the grant for the school structure from the Japanese embassy was approved, but it was only for the infrastructure (700,000 pesos). The school was inaugurated on May 18, 2006 when the first phase with CIDA was already over. There were no more teachers to teach the Bajau. I wish that they could have come together (with the educational component in the CIDA-financed project earlier). Dra. Samora was hoping to sustain the educational component personally. Because her husband got sick, however, she was forced to change her plan. Presently, the school is being used by Maranao and Cebuano children. Although there are a few Bajau children enrolled, the initial purpose was not fulfilled.

2.6 No Volunteers from the Community
It could be better if there were volunteers from their own community. But what kind of volunteers could they be if they did not have the money to buy their own clothes or shoes? I pity the Bajau para-teachers if they are not paid. Even if there were a project, the Bajau would not volunteer to work.

One time, some male Bajau who worked to construct the foot bridges in the area got really angry because they were not paid for their labor. We only gave them rice. We did not directly implement this work and it was Kagawad Malcong (“Kagawad” means a Barangay Councilor) who handled it in the site. It seems like they did not understand each other clearly before they started working. The Bajau came up to me to complain, and I confronted Kagawad Malcononi. He told me that there was no other budget for labor (he did give the rice provided by CDS). The materials were free, and they would walk there for free, but they still complained. It should be the Bajau themselves to offer their labor. They are different from Christians in this aspect. Because of their hunger, they cannot be mobilized on a volunteer basis. They were only given rice, but they did not have the money to buy fish. They had no time to earn income because they spent their time on the construction of the foot bridges. Maybe from the beginning of the CDS project, they
expected that they would be always paid. They perhaps thought of it as an income generating project.

2-7 Livelihood and Micro Lending
About livelihood, at least 40,000 pesos stipulated in the proposal was implemented as livelihood loans. Out of the 40,000, 10,000 pesos went to the core leader lending and the rest, to the micro lending meant for other ordinary people in the community. The loan started on November 11 in 2005. It was extended through Small Market Vendors Multipurpose Cooperatives (SMVMC), because the funder (donor) requested the receipts. I know the manager of the SMVMC, Pina, who is our next door neighbor. We started an individual lending with 500 pesos (50 pesos interest per month) and accommodated 40 persons. We paid 2% of the interest to the SMVMC as cooperative charge monthly, and 2% to the administration (mine as monitoring fee) and 1% to the collector (our scholars first, Daisy and Alma, and then Becky from group 2, Tiroso’s niece).

I did not follow any specific existing scheme of micro lending. I made the policy of this CDS micro lending based on my experience (overall) and through the consultations with the board members of the SMVMC. As a matter of fact, I was the one to register the SMVMC when I was working with MDC. We set the criteria for borrowers in those days. For example, if you do not have your own house, you cannot borrow, because we cannot find you. For the Bajau, I have applied the same lending policy. At least, they have their address, although they could be still so highly mobile. Dra. Samora did not agree to have a complicated policy, and that’s why we keep our policy simple. Simple people have simple ideas like the Bajau.

The Bajau now use their poverty to attract aid. Even non-Bajau neighbors joined and they pretended to be Bajau to the outsiders who could not identify ethnicity. But I think they know it’s better to have business than to merely receive aid. Begging is their last resort now. There used to be more Bajau beggars, but City Mayor (Rodrigo Duterte) is very strict about mendicancy and so there are fewer Bajau beggars compared to 1997.

It has turned out that the Bajau are good payers. For an indicator, they have now bigger houses. Look at the house of Bing and the house of Rosa (her husband has a Japanese friend who donated a lot, though), also the house of Ponay, for example. They had skills even before the project came in. Take their ukay-ukay (used-clothing vending)
business for instance. They know how to color, how to repair and how to convert from long-pants/sleeves to short-pants/sleeves. They only lack the capital.

We could not accommodate everybody for the micro lending because we have limited money. We could accommodate only twenty persons for a loan of 1,500 pesos each at present. See, it’s very small. We do not have the funds to expand, while we occasionally receive personal donations from Dra. Samora (1,500 to 2,000 pesos at a time) and Waka (10,000 pesos for Christmas gift once and 2,000 pesos twice). I converted Waka’s Christmas gift of 2,000 pesos for Pastor John last year (2007) to the loan fund without telling him (without telling Waka, either). Well, they are good payers. It takes them longer to pay up, though.

Most of the borrowers are women because women usually sell ukay-ukay. They can earn steadily (daily) even if the income is small. In the case of fishing, it depends on weather and season. So, we cannot expect them to pay back regularly. Actually, we lend to women, but sometimes it is their husbands who vend ukay-ukay or pearls. Perhaps, men hesitate to borrow from me because I am a woman. If the project officer were man, there would be a lot of men who would borrow.

Before the implementation of the micro lending, we held a meeting with our projected borrowers in Jolo’s house (a preschool para-teacher). We explained the criteria for beneficiaries to avail of the loan and the mechanics of the loan. They seemingly understood our explanation because we made it simple for them. After we started the lending, we held a foundation day and Christmas party in December to highlight the financial stability of the project. Romeo Lacoste (Kagawad, Finance Officer of the Barangay, Christian, he is deceased by now) and Nusa (Kagawad, Maranao) attended. By January 2006, I was left alone in the area because the CDS withdrew when the project was terminated.

2-8 Micro Lending: Its Short-Term Effects and Direction in the Future
The beneficiaries built houses, and they have capital for their business. Look at Fatima (Martes) and Jaya, now they have a “sarisari” store (a little grocery shop), they also own a sewing machine (an ukay-ukay repair shop), and they live in a bigger house than the one they lived when their mother Bilaia was alive (Group 2).

In contrast, Group 5 (the poorest group in the area) has too many children and old people. They are all dependents. They are unskilled even in ukay-ukay business. Unlike Jamel’s group (Group 2) who are really skilled. Magsahaya’s group is behind with the
payment of the loan. They have a different sense of social integration. "Isa isa daw sila (they are individualistic)." Even if they are family or siblings, they want to be independent. They want individual lending. I wonder why they are like that. I wonder if this is related to their poverty (Waka explained a bit about social organization of mobile fishermen compared to those of sedentary farmers).

Knowing that there is such disparity within the community, I adjusted the term of the loan for the Bajau. Usually, the term is one month, but I made it three-month for the poorest. Interest is the same for the three-month term. The money is then sleeping because it cannot move, stuck in the hand of the borrower. This is a common barrier to cooperatives in any place. That’s why most of the cooperatives are always in the red. They pay more than they receive.

I am preparing to accredit this micro lending for the Bajau with the CDA (Cooperative Development Agency) within this year. At first, we plan to have it affiliated with the SMVMC, but we just found out that their operations are not doing well. They lack manpower for collection and monitoring.

Once it gets registered at CDA, it will grow bigger because receipts can be issued for donations. Maybe, Pastor Pancho (from the U.S.A.) will donate to affiliate Pastor John’s group with the cooperative. Actually, his wife, Sarah said once to me that they were looking for a qualified person to handle the livelihood project for the Bajau. They cannot do this kind of project through Pastor John; for they know that he sometimes appropriates their offerings for his personal use. Remember, one time, he borrowed 500 pesos from me, but he would not pay back and so I deducted it from Waka’s house rental. He is so used to dole outs, whenever he receives money, even if it is loan, he will never pay back. This is a true observation.

2-9 Donors’ Visit to the Project Site
Two representatives from CIDA in Manila visited the area one time when the project was about to end (around November 2005). They stayed in the area for two hours and they were impressed. We knew that they would come and we did a lot of preparations. We prepared souvenirs such as bags and mats made by the Bajau. Bajau children danced and sang for them. They did not have a chance to observe an ordinary day of our operations. I wish they could have seen it. It was prepared and it was “plastic.” They were afraid of kidnapping, and so, they informed us of their visit in advance. So, we arranged it, I don’t
think it’s a good thing. Their visit should be a surprise one so that they could see the real project operation. It was only a ceremony; there was a program to follow.

2-10 Mat-Weaving
As to the mat weaving project, it was stopped soon after we started it. We failed in marketing and quality of the products. Look at the bags now at souvenir shops, there are a lot of well-designed and fascinating bags. The capital for this component was then diverted to the capital share of the micro lending and was deposited to the SMVMC (2,500 pesos as net profits). The rest of the materials were converted to slippers and purses when orders were placed. Sometimes, Dra. Samora personally orders bag-making (1,000 pesos), and Waka, too. There are still some materials left for mats and slippers. It is usually old women from Group 5 who are called upon for weavings.

2-11 Health and Nutrition
As to the health and nutrition component, we started with identifying community health workers (CHWs) among the Bajau. Dr. Salam (Tausug mix) was in charge. He trained CHWs, Jena (Gino’s wife), Dina (daughter of Sibil) and Lily (Bing’s daughter) and July (Sumariya’s daughter) and Rajema. They were all from Group 2 because they were the only ones who knew how to document and to monitor malnourished children through weighing, which was part of the training of the first aid. Based on the proposal, we had to have 100 children as beneficiaries of the project, mostly malnourished children. We put bracelets on the wrists of the malnourished children for intensive monitoring because there were indicators in the final report we had to come up with.

2-12 Their Life and My Life after the Withdrawal of the NGO
After the termination of the project, the situation has been back. There are malnourished children, garbage accumulated, etc. The cycle goes like this: if it is dirty, you get sick, and if you are sick, you cannot work to earn, no livelihood, if there is no livelihood, you cannot eat and you get more sick. How can we break this cycle? That’s what we have been studying (laughter).

There are no institutions after NGO comes? There is one institution at John’s church just to receive resources from outside agencies, mostly missionaries. Pastor John has different orientations. He is unconcerned with livelihood of his members. He even reminds
us always that it would be a waste for us to offer capital to his members or other Bajau. He says that they do not know how to spend wisely. Instead, he insists on receiving money himself.

One time, I preached to him at a thanksgiving lunch at Cathy’s restaurant in Lanang. I had been looking for a chance to talk to him for a long time, and finally I had one. Based on the Bible, I preached. Although I cannot recall the details now, I talked about the housing project, hygiene and relationships, because sometimes church members quarrel with each other because of misunderstanding. Now, look at Bob and Artie (Pastor John’s elder brothers), they have not been helped much by Pastor John. Bob suspected that Pastor John has a bigger share in any church project than he claims. Pastor John is Senior Pastor and he implements projects for the church members. Bob went to other places like Bohol, maybe he is looking for his own opportunity to become an independent leader.

Come to think of Pastor Biela, he spent so much time and money on training John as a pastor. He had such dedication. It seems like Pastor Biela has returned to the area and he now lives in the clinic next to the church. I do not know why he came back, but my analysis is that he is concerned with the situation in which Bob left his house and sold it to Pastor John.

3 Reflections after 10 years of Our Research
3-1 Return of the NGO
I will continue to extend voluntary assistance to the Bajau for the coming project of 300,000 pesos from CIDA for six months. I am not sure if I will be paid; but even if I will not be paid, that will be OK. There has been already the project proposal written by Dra. Samora and also the project budget. We only have to implement the project following the proposal. We are going to read the proposal perhaps by the end of this month. I have an email message from Dra. Samora to show you (in which Colorita was practically invited to work with CDS for any project. For the next project, Dra. Samora wrote that she could “slice” honorarium for Colorita from the project budget. She asked Colorita to help her write up proposals because there are a lot of donors asking her for proposals. Since she has been handling a lot of projects especially in ARMM (Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao), she is short of personnel for new projects. The framework of this coming project cannot be diverted. We cannot use the budget for the micro lending.
3-2 Using Poverty as a Resource to get Aid?

Ten years after we started our research in 1997, it is now even more difficult to help the Bajau in the area because there have been a lot of people, mostly missionaries from other countries (South Korea and North America) and religious people from local churches who engage in dole-outs. (Waka also regrets giving them cash or in kind in exchange for her research. She thought the exchange is completed each time, but it seems to last forever).

The Bajau people tend to easily develop dependency on aid (they do not care whether it is from NGOs or missionaries) because they lack social capital. The very basic social capital is education, even if it’s only elementary level, so long as they can read and write, that’s OK. Why do they beg, while there are other IPs (Indigenous Peoples) who do not beg? I think that’s because they used to catch coins from the people in the boats, who are usually foreigners. They used to live in the boat on the sea and fish. Though they have diving skills, they have no more opportunities to use them. Based on their experience, it’s very easy to earn by begging. It’s instant, compared to any kind of small business that would require them more procedures.

The Bajau use their poverty so that they could get aid. It is like that Pastor John uses God to get offerings from foreigners. This is natural because there is no social institution where they can get lending. They have no social structure, compared to the Bisaya (Cebuano). There are a lot of lending institutions for the Bisaya from pawn shops to credit cards. The Bajau, on the other hand, have no access to the credit market because they have not yet been empowered politically. They have no idea of social dialogue.

While the CDS project was going on in the area, there was supposed to be social dialogue among the beneficiaries and stakeholders. But it did not go well. It was not very successful in implementing the mainstreaming of the Bajau. The participants had their own principals and interests. That’s why Dra. Samora wrote in the final report to the CIDA that there was a lot of hindrance to implement the project. The Bajau themselves are not organized in the first place. What can we do?

They should be educated so that the Bajau’s social capital can be enhanced. Education is the very basic social capital. Once they get educated, they can vote and then they will not be ignored by the government any more. They will become people. They are not people yet. They are outcasts.
3-3 “Nahurot ba ang Atong Kaluoy?”
Nahurot ang atong kaluoy (our pity have run out). We always pity you (the Bajau). The question is when our pity will end? Nahurot na ba (has it run out yet)? Wala, listen, as long as we stay missionaries, there is no end to our pity. That is base of our faith. One time a priest said, “if you want to help a poor person, you will give one “pan de sal” (local bread) every morning to your less fortunate neighbor,” and it is difficult to do. Sometimes, you might forget, at other times, you might not have enough resources for yourself, you have nothing to give, and so you cannot give. There is a limit in your budget. We are not the ones to help the Bajau, it has to be the Bajau themselves who help themselves.

We do not want to them to starve, but when can we see the third generation of the Bajau rise? Will that really happen? We will be 80 years old by then, if God permits us to be alive.

The pastors from other countries are highly individualistic. It seems that there have been no consultations among the pastors working in the area. For one thing, we (Waka and Colorita) have never seen Pastor Salesio (Cebuano) and Pastor Pancho (American) coming together in the area. They do not share the information. So, there is room for the Bajau to take even more advantage. To be more precisely, Pastor John as the entry point, can take a lot of advantage. It seems that Pastor John does not communicate so much with Pastor Salesio now because he wants to own all resources given to the Bajau by other missionaries. Pastor Salesio is like a NGO worker. You can consult him easily, but Pastor John does not want such consultation. It’s hard. We are caught between aid agencies.

3-4 What Has Happened to the Poorest Group?
There some Bajau women who have so far sustained using the micro lending provided by us. Group 2 has been successful as expected. Most of the rest are still dependent. But take Ponay for example, she is from Pastor John’s group. It seems that she is a “kampong” (perhaps a cousin) of Pastor John. Pastor John extends help to her family, but he does not help her with the livelihood of her husband. Her husband is a pearl vendor. They have a lot of money now. He vends on the beach. One day, Ponay wanted to pawn earrings and visited me at our house, and said she would rather borrow money from me that pawn, because she had heard that I had lent money to Magsahaya’s group.

I lent money to Magsahaya’s group first because they were the poorest in the area. Perhaps, Ponay was the first one to ask for the loan from Pastor John’s group. Pastor was
doubtful about the loans, it looks like he thought I was a Catholic nun and his members might be lured away. But since he understood that he himself could also borrow, he even started to recommend the loan to his church members.

Today, we visited the area. What has happened to the garbage? The Cebuano houses have space surrounded by a fence to store the garbage. The Bajau have no brain. I mean, they do not know what to do with their garbage. We saw children scavenging in the area. Junk shops do not receive plastic bags, cellophanes, rubber products or Styrofoam, while we can sell metal, plastic hangers and plastic wares to them. So, the Bajau should avoid throwing what the junk shops would accept. If they are industrious enough, they can make composts. But they would not do this. The situation is even worse now, and that's why people keep getting sick. A lot of children suffer from measles, cough and diarrhea. There were a lot of sick people in 1997 and now there seem to be even more sick people. They die young and easily, too. After ten years, a lot of our informants have died.

Remember Mania (Group 4, Kaluman’s wife)? She looked very healthy, she was fat, but she died unexpectedly after she gave birth to Chabelita.

They die easily because they lack access to health institutions. They hesitate to go to hospital because they do not have money. Look at that malnourished baby of Abalita’s. If she were Bisaya, the baby would be admitted to the hospital and the treatment would be free. The baby could get food supplement, too. What do the Bajau lack? The mothers should take basic training on motherhood: what they should feed the baby, how they keep the baby clean, etc. Balanced food is indispensable to the development of the child brain. They will be retarded when they grow up because of malnourishment. Well, the problem is, even though you teach them, they do not have the money to buy the food they need, however.

3-5 Helping the Sama without Learning about Their Life
It seems like there has been no intensive research or any kind of research on the poverty of the Bajau by any governmental agency so far. Although the city government sent social workers before and they even tried out their own micro lending, they did not do any baseline survey before they came in. This is not only the case with the Bajau, though. There were no existing documents on the Maranao in this area, either, when we started our research in 1997. There is no incentive for the government to research the area. There is always hazard to health, too. One time, Ruby, Officer Three of CSSDO, visited the area. She found it very hard to walk there because of the poor infrastructure. Since then, the
infrastructure in the area has been improved by the missionaries and NGOs, while the
government has kept quiet, saying that there are a lot of NGOs (including
missionaries) working for the Bajau in the area.

3.6 Helping the Bajau through Giving?
Usually, based on my experience, NGOs do not dole out (goods and services). We (NGOs)
always focus on people’s capability to use local resources. It is true that there are funders,
but they do not dole to the NGOs, either. If it had been MDC that delivered the feeding
program to the Bajau, it should have included the parents. They should have offered their
counterparts to get their children fed by the program. This time, we did not follow this type
of procedures, because the CDS proposal that would allow free-feeding without parents
participation was approved by the donor. Moreover, when I was helping Dra. Samora write
up the proposal, there was little space for me to revise the component which had been set
already. Now, after the program, I think it was a good experience for me to learn that it
dole-out would never work well. It was really first time for me to dole out, well, it was not
my job to handle this component after all.

It was hard for me to tell Dra. Samora about my thoughts. For one thing, I would like
to respect her. She might have different orientations, and I just met her (not like Lucy at
MDC). Dra. Samora worked out the six components in the proposal based on her
experience. It is important to recruit the staff with similar backgrounds and orientations
so that we can understand one another easily. The birds of the same father flock together,
they say, right?

So, I wonder what I should do with the micro-lending. Shall I let them get garbage for
the loan? I know some people are negative about the NGOs, because NGOs are dependent
on the funders. There are also NGOs that just dole out. Yes, sometimes NGOs also take
advantage of the projects (for moral capital or reputation, and other resources).

If possible, it would be better if all those who wish to help the people in the area could
coordinate and also get the Bajau involved in the process of making plans and proposals. If
there is no aid, they would be all right, but there will be no change in their life. We don’t
know. We are worried about them, but they do not know that we are worried about them.
“Samokan lang sila nato (they are only bothered by us)”. We would rather leave them. I
wonder if the micro lending has been working for them or not? But when I see them
building a new house with the loan, I feel happy for them.
Well, about the coming 300,000 pesos project, I cannot suggest that Dra. Samora should divert the project proposal. “Naulaw ko niya” (I cannot tell her because it might offend her pride). I know, though, this new project might further complicate the situation in the area and that the micro lending would be better. That’s what they need, just a small amount of credit. If I were still working with Barangay, I would get budget for garbage extraction for the Bajau in the area.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this paper, an oral story of a Cebuano woman named Colorita, a long-time research assistant to the author, has been presented. Her narratives mainly focus on her involvement in the Sama (Bajau) community as a program officer for a development aid project. As the background information, a summary of our research on the Bajau in Davao City from 1997 to 1999 has been also provided. Since this paper is meant essentially for part of my preparations for a future work on the interactions between the Bajau and the outsiders in the globalized context, the original voice of Colorita was purposely maintained with minimum editorial changes. Through this attempt, I have intended to suggest the redirection of our perspectives on the Sama research from the “Sama-Bajau perspectives” to the perspectives of the outsiders who have come into contact with the Sama-Bajau. This is of course not to deny the significance of the former perspectives. I will integrate both perspectives in an analytical framework in my future writings on the Bajau in Davao City.

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