

Foreign Land Ownership Aggravates Mindanao Poverty

Sunday 10 May 2009, by [Afrim](#) (Date first published: 8 May 2009).

The current undertakings of the House of Congress to amend the 1987 Philippine Constitution and allow foreign ownership of land pose threats to Filipinos' access and control to the country's land and resources.

House Resolution 737 authored by Speaker Prospero Nograles proposes to amend the economic provisions under Article XII, Sections 2 and 3 of the Philippine Constitution that will pave the way to full foreign land ownership in the country. Presently, foreign corporations are only allowed 40% ownership of enterprises.

If successful, the proposed charter amendment will do away with any limitation on foreign land ownership making the country's natural resources free-for-all. This reflects government's misguided development strategy, opening up to foreign control the country's natural resources and using land for purely economic gains.

The country's liberalized investment policies in fact already threaten the environment and livelihoods of poor farmers and indigenous peoples. Allowing foreigners to own land will further lead to the poor's marginalization as well as environmental degradation.

Foreign-led extractive industries have been operating in Mindanao for several decades now. At present, government is pushing for the implementation of 23 mining priority projects, 11 of which are in Mindanao. Principally funded by foreign corporations, the mining projects cover some 600,000 hectares of highly mineralized lands in the country.

Aside from mining, agribusiness plantations are also increasing in number and in land cover in Mindanao. Oil palm, banana and pineapple plantations are some of these mono-culture crops covering vast lands including forestlands, agricultural lands and ancestral domains of indigenous peoples.

Now, agricultural lands and ancestral domains are being converted into monocrop plantations to supply industrialized countries' demand for agrofuel. Based on AFRIM's on-going research, there are presently around 661,000 hectares of land planted to crops dedicated for agrofuel production in Mindanao. These cover approximately 33 percent of the 2 million hectares of land being targeted by government for agribusiness plantation expansion in the island.

Land is an important asset for the poor and therefore, government should give utmost importance to land distribution that will benefit small farmers and indigenous peoples. Government should focus on developing local industries and promoting sustainable resource use and management rather than exploiting resources and passing on its responsibility to foreign investors or corporations. Genuine sustainable development that promotes greater community control over land and resources should be prioritized over further economic liberalization.