



## Allah Valley Alliance Building for Landscape Development

The major river systems traversing the provinces of Sultan Kudarat and South Cotabato are both a blessing and a curse to the people. The rivers are a blessing because they provide abundant water for the adjacent rice and corn fields. But they become a curse when the water levels rise and inundate the farms.

So far, the inhabitants have suffered two major flashfloods and have witnessed massive soil erosion along the riverbanks. The intermittent flooding and siltation cost an estimated P5 million of damages to productive rice lands yearly. These problems affect 65 barangays along the Allah and Banga rivers as well as 30,000 hectares of irrigated rice land. And the risk posed to productive rice lands and public infrastructure facilities have worsened because of the erratic climate conditions.

These problems were traced to the massive changes to the 252,034-hectare Allah Valley watershed. Among the human-induced factors include massive tree cutting and

land clearing in the uplands and agricultural production along riverbanks. The low level of community awareness about the importance of protecting upland areas and river systems exacerbated the problem. The destructive practices stem from poor environmental management and weak policy implementation of environment protection measures by the authorities.

The only way to reverse the damage was to institutionalize watershed management and bring stakeholders together to implement the required changes. This was achieved when the Allah Valley Landscape Development Alliance (AVLDA) was created in 2003. The AVLDA brought together two governors, nine mayors, five regional directors of national government agencies, and the chair of the Coalition of Social Development Organizations in South Cotabato (CSDO-SC). Together with two *Sangguniang Panlalawigan* representatives, they compose the Board of Directors of

AVLDA who meet every quarter of the year.

The AVLDA was created to address the pressing problems being experienced in the Allah Valley in a cooperative and coherent manner. Its primary function as an alliance is the protection and management of the Allah Valley Landscape through interventions anchored on environmental, economic, social, cultural and organizational development and institution building through an integrated approach.

A Project Management Office (PMO) serves as the Secretariat of the AVLDA. It is tasked to oversee the day-to-day operations and pursue the implementation of the Environmental Management Plan and annual operation plan.

In the ensuing years, the AVLDA employed technical and social methods to address environmental problems. It developed critical thematic maps based on the 2002-2005 satellite images as well as from the 1,000 aerial photos it took. These maps formed the basis for environment, socio-economic and comprehensive land use planning. The AVLDA also conducted information and education campaigns in 70 LGUs and undertook a flood hazard assessment. It has also mobilized the private sector and involved the communities in project planning and assessment, project site studies and observation, disaster management, forest and upland management, and river management.

Its most popular project is the Riparian Zone Revegetation, which entailed the planting of bamboo stalks along the banks of major rivers. The project aimed to protect rivers and streams from erosion, improve water flow, and minimize

siltation. This project elicited support from 19 Barangays, 1 banking institution, 2 water districts, 2 electric cooperatives, 2 mining companies, 1 agro-industrial company, 4 agricultural cooperatives, 4 NGOs and 2 civic groups. They shared their labor, time and money. The program resulted in the planting of 15,000 bamboo hills in a 30-kilometer stretch at the banks of major rivers. The AVLDA also pursued the construction of dikes at critical sections of the rivers and the re-channelling of water flow to save prime lands, settlements and infrastructure facilities. Other projects include the Reforestation and Upstream Resource Management (RURM) program which aimed to improve forest land cover, reduce river siltation and provide livelihood opportunities to upland dwellers.

The AVLDA has encouraged closer cooperation among the political leaders despite their differing political inclinations. In fact, from the original LGU membership of 11, the alliance now has a total of 13 LGU members, when two LGUs joined the alliance in 2006. The mayors formulate and implement similar policies and strategies at interconnected areas to create a substantial impact. Regular meetings, discussions, planning and assessments led to a better understanding of issues and problems and to the development of common solutions and strategies.

The program could never have succeeded without the cooperation of many stakeholders. Since its inception, many LGUs, NGOs/POs, civic groups, private businesses, and community members participated in the situation analysis, project

planning, project implementation, monitoring and assessment.

At the time of its creation, the alliance included the Coalition of Social Development Organizations (CSDO) in South Cotabato, which represented civil society. Last year, the Board approved the membership of the Sultan Kudarat Environment Protection Network (SKEPNet) which is also a group of NGOs operating in Sultan Kudarat province to balance representation at the provincial level. The membership of these NGOs ensures widespread, active and steady involvement of civil society in the promotion, protection, conservation and development of the Allah Valley watershed. It also ensures linkages between LGUs and NLAs, which strengthen the integration process of projects and plans for local development and environmental sustainability at the grassroots level.

The Community Based Resource Assessment Mapping was employed to ensure community ownership of planning documents. The CBRAM was conducted in 11 barangays. The workshops had an average of 25 participants composed of barangay council members, purok leaders, senior citizens, youth, women, health

workers, day care workers, farmers, and civil society groups. The municipal planning officers and personnel also participated. The resulting documents provide comprehensive information about the Barangays and become bases for LGU planning and investment programming.

The foundation for program sustainability has already been established. The AVLDA Board passed key resolutions for all members to consider for implementation. The Provincial Development Councils of the two provinces and Regional Development Council of Region 12 have already approved and endorsed the projects of the AVLDA. The landscape maps are already substantial bases for watershed planning and management of LGUs, NGO/POs and NGAs operating in the Allah Valley. The maps projected inseparable, integrated programs of public service organizations.

The program can easily be replicated in other areas which are experiencing similar problems and issues. But the key stakeholders and local leaders must agree to come to terms and draw up one common agenda.

**CONTACT**  
**Governor Daisy P. Avance-Fuentes**  
Tel. No. (083) 228-3754  
Fax No.(083) 228-2620

