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## **Insurgency Recruitment in Sadanga: Opportunities and the Effects of the Government Interventions**

**Alban C. Fanao<sup>1</sup> & Robino D. Cawi<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Criminology Department Mountain Province State Polytechnic college Bontoc Campus, Bontoc, Mountain Province, <sup>2</sup>College of Criminal Justice Education University of the Cordilleras Legarda Road, Baguio City

albanconot555@gmail.com

**Abstract.** This study is about the insurgency recruitment in the municipality of Sadanga. The qualitative design, especially the narrative approach was used to determine the opportunities that provided the insurgents to recruit and the effects of anti-insurgency intervention programs to the insurgency recruitment in Municipality of Sadanga. Rebel returnees and elected officials in Sadanga were interviewed and from their responses, it was found that remoteness, territorial dilemma, poverty and family support are the factors seen by the rebels to recruit in the communities of Sadanga. However, with the government programs on anti-insurgency, release from threat, economic improvement and employment are seen as the effects of the intervention programs that restricted the insurgents to advance their recruitment in the municipality of Sadanga. The existing intervention program is providing the village employment and security assurance especially for the parents who are sending their children in school. They are no longer worried on the threat posed by this group recruiting their sons and daughters to join their organization. The study then recommends that the government will continue to bring development in remote places to eliminate reasons for residents to join in the left leaning group.

**Keywords.** communist party, ELCAC, insurgency, intervention programs

### **Introduction**

Insurgency is a global concern, not only to the country where rebels persist, because its influence can spark other catastrophes worldwide. Morales (2013) posited that Philippines is afflicted by the communist New People's Army (NPA) and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) that are known to be the longest running insurgencies in the world. The communism in the Philippines emerged in the first half of the 20th century during the American Colonial Era of the Philippines. The communist movement has had multiple periods of popularity and relevance to the national affairs of the country, most notably during the Second World War and the Martial Law Era of the Philippines. Currently the communist movement is underground and considered an insurgent movement by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (Magno, 1986) and by the Australia, Canada, US, European Union, the United Kingdom and Philippines (Maoje, 2021).

Insurgent groups often pursue some common objectives to undermine the legitimacy of the government and bolster their own standing with the population (Magno, 1986). The CPP-NPA remains active in mountainous and neglected areas countrywide (International Crisis Group, 2011). This affirms the position of Domingo (2013) that the prevalence of extremely poverty and lack of governance in the countryside sustained the activities of the CPP-NPA for four decades.

It was reported in the Mapping Militant Organizations in 2018 that the CPP-NPA are building support in the countryside where they teach and work with peasants while guarding them from thieves. Furthermore, Lade Jean Kabagani wrote in her news article in the Philippine News Agency last May 27, 2021 that Noel Legaspi, a former NPA member, revealed that rebel lairs are found in Indigenous Peoples communities that are geographically and topographically conducive for guerilla warfare. Legaspi, according to the report, also said that the insurgent group's education program promotes the destruction of genuine peace in far-flung areas.

While Malet (2010); Melsin (2017) and Dearden (2016) consider the betrayal of national culture as one of their recruitment preference. Aside from these, Ana M. Arjon and her colleagues (2008) came also to reveal that the controlling factors critical in the rebel recruitment are greedy, community structure and grievance such as economic, ethic, and religious and the ability of the armed organizations to rule specific areas and their inhabitants has positive effect also on the willingness of individuals from among the populace to join them. Their entry process to carry them to target victim/s are to offer various services such as scholarship, free education, free adventure, free medical and dental check-up, free labor and free gun tutorial. Once the victim/s were enticed with these services, the next process is to bring them in their community attaining their organization's very wide and torturing objectives (Metz, 2012).

On the other hand, the fight against insurgency is a growing concern worldwide because the terrorists and rebels are finding connections beyond their realms. The International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1999 to establish a criminal offense and its corresponding punishment under domestic laws (United Nations, 1999).

However, with the revival of the defunct results of peace negotiation between government and insurgency group initiated in 1986 at Mount Data, Mountain Province by the government agencies through various intervention program, their organization has slowly weakened (<https://peace.gov.ph/cba-cpla/introduction/>). For the effectiveness of non-combatant strategies in deterring terrorism in the Philippine particularly in Cordillera is the ceasefire agreement between the government and the CPLA- a split organization from the NPA, in 1986 during Cory Aquino administration. During this ceasefire agreement there were thousands of NPA who surrendered and joined the CPLA organization. On 2001, by virtue of this agreement they were absorbed in the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

Yet, it surfaced in the report of International Conflict Group in 2011 that the military counter-insurgency of more than 40 in the Philippines is clearly not working and that peace can only be achieved through peace talks for both sides (insurgents and the government). However, the government continues to counter the insurgents through various programs such as peace talks, and livelihood projects. The National Task Force in Ending Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) has been through series of changes from the Philippine government's program and framework for peace and development (PAMANA) to Enhanced Comprehensive Local Integration Program (E-CLIP) to ELCAC. The PAMANA focused on providing livelihood interventions to remote communities affected by conflict groups while the E-CLIP

aims to help rebel members of CPP-NPA-NDF and Militia ng Bayan to restore their allegiance to the Philippine government (DILG-R12, n.d.).

These intervention programs were all designed to campaign to the active members of the insurgency to surrender under the folds of the law as they will be given livelihood project or will be integrated in the military service. In Mountain Province, the provincial local elective officers under the leadership of Hon. Leonard Maya-en came up with provincial resolution in absorbing CPP-NPA surrenders to be accommodated within the provincial level in response to the national anti-insurgency programs and most of the surrenders benefited under it were the surrenders were hired as Bantay-Gubat personnel from 2002 up to present.

In the municipality of Sadanga from 2001 onwards various anti-insurgency intervention programs had reached them. Recently, the Sadanga local elective officials under the leadership of Hon. Mayor Gabino Ganggangan, supplement this, when they enacted Municipal Executive Order No. 1 declaring CPP-NPA as *persona non-grata* within the municipality to sum up all received anti-insurgency programs within the municipality and to be used as medium in controlling CPP-NPA activities from advancing in remote barangays of Sadanga.

Among the intervention program that reached the municipality of Sadanga in 2001 is the civil returnee's integration in the AFP of which 36 of the civil returnees within this municipality were absorbed in the military service. The other programs that opened the door for some active members of the Sadanga to surrender are PAMANA, ELCAC and ECLIP. With inclusive benefits these programs are providing to the surrenders, all Sadanga active NPA members who did not surrender in 2001 were inspired and surrendered under them including the two high ranking officers.

Therefore, it is a need for the academic institutions to design activities which may bring ideas to the leaders and who would-be terrorist to understand that offensive attacks or posing fear to the people is not worth any cost for them to achieve their objective especially if they want to replace the democratic form of the government for communism where rights are equally distributed, especially for wealth.

Thus, it is the intent of this study to examine and promote anti-insurgency programs taking their impacts to the life of the Sadanga people as a model for their adaption in continuing peace building processes. It specifically to determine the opportunities that provided the insurgents to recruit in the Municipality of Sadanga and determine the effects of anti-insurgency intervention programs to the insurgency recruitment in Municipality of Sadanga.

This study embraces the Neoliberalism framework provided by Harvey (2007: 22) as cited by William (2015) that political economic practices proposing that human well-being can best be progressed by the intensification of entrepreneurial freedoms in an institution. This framework explains the opportunities seen by the insurgents to advance their recruitment at Sadanga, Mountain Province where life is not as easy.

The study is also anchored on the causes and prevention of crime. Wherein, the root causes of crime must be determined and address. Thus, in suppressing CPP-NPA organization their recruitment preference which they long used to increase their population must be determined and address. At present the government, under the leadership of President Rodrigo Roa Duterte, signed Executive Order no. 70 into law which is institutionalizing the whole-of-the-nation approach in attaining inclusive and sustainable peace, creating a national task force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict, and directing the adoption of a national peace framework. This captures the effects if the inclusive benefits program extended to the CPP-NPA surrenders.

Thus, for the other municipalities and for the national government to continue framing a paradigm of peace process under them, their impact to the long infected municipalities must be revealed as a based preference to continue budgeting programs designed to address CPP-NPA recruitment preferences solely to heal the rift that divided the nation for peace and development.

The paradigm in figure 1 portrays that government initiatives thru anti-insurgency programs is believed to weaken the opportunities that provide insurgent group to recruit in remote communities. The government programs are breathing hope into the community members to get out of the hardships of life. As an effect, poverty is eased and peace in the community is achieved and sustained.

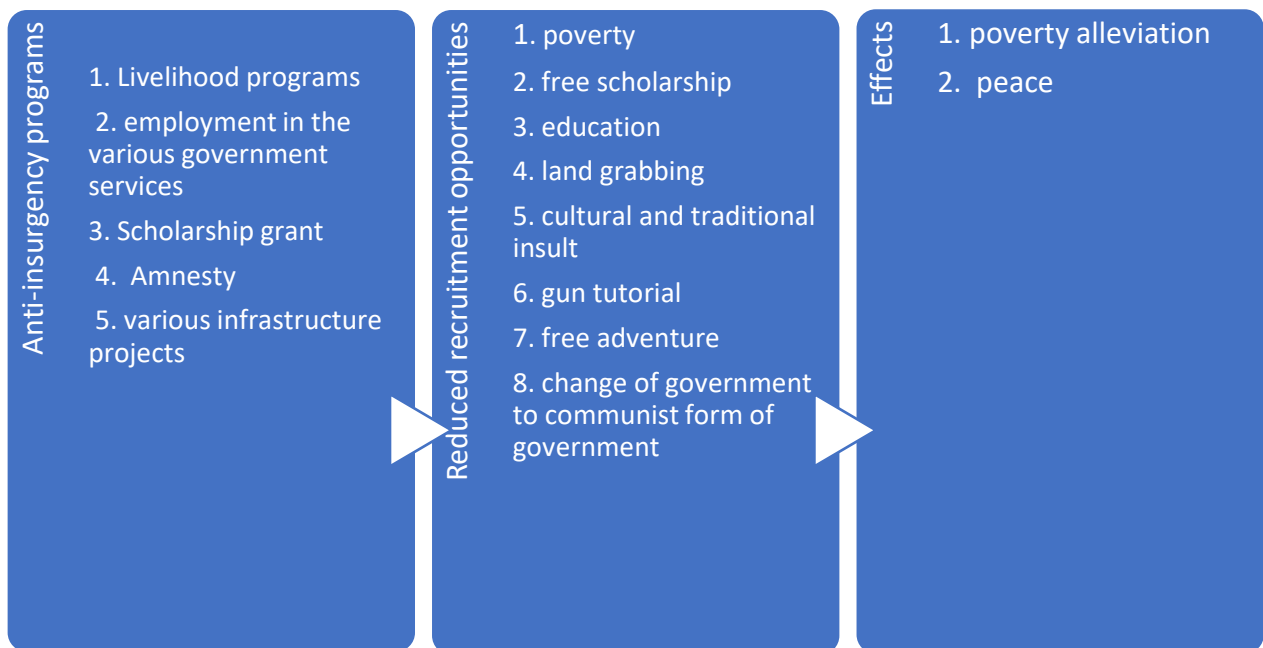


Figure 1. Paradigm of the Study

**Method**

**Participants**

The researcher interviewed eight rebel returnees and four elected officials in the municipality of Sadanga in Mountain Province, Philippines. The rebel returnees have submitted to the folds of the law for more than ten years so they are capable of giving information needed in the study. All of them are from the different barangays of Sadanga. The elected officials interviewed are well-versed on the history of insurgency recruitment in their locality.

**Design**

The qualitative research designed was used in this study since it aims to determine the opportunities that provided the insurgents to recruit and the effects of anti-insurgency intervention programs to the insurgency recruitment in the Municipality of Sadanga through narrative analysis.

**Materials**

The interview was used as the main data collecting instrument. The data gathered from the rebel returnees were validated through the testimonies of the officials. It was also triangulated through document analysis from existing literatures.

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the collected data. On this process, the researcher used coding to determine the similar responses of the participants. A re-coding was done to make sure that all responses are well clustered before themes were derived for analysis.

### **Procedure**

The participants were verbally informed on the intent of this study before they were formally interviewed. Their consent was taken before the researcher recorded the interview. After which, the responses were transcribed and translated for analysis. The minimum health requirements of the Covid-19 protocol were strictly observed during the course of this study.

### **Results and Discussions**

#### **Opportunities that provided the insurgents to recruit in the Municipality of Sadanga**

From the results of the interviews, the following are the themes that describe the chances that gave the insurgents to recruit at Sadanga:

**Remoteness.** According to the participants, the inaccessibility of their residence in Sadanga is a potential avenue for the insurgents to recruit. Remoteness of a place means hard-to-access, thereby, government amenities are poorly served in the place due to rough roads and lack of roads. According to participant A, *“In the 1970’s we need to carry the crops from the fields and wait for the jeepney to ferry the goods to the market.”* This was supported by participant E when he said, *“Education was hard because we walk on the rice paddies to reach school. If it rains, the pathway is slippery because it was built of mud from the rice field.”* These statements portray that some barangays in Sadanga were not easily accessible that people need to carry the goods that they buy from the market and the products they need to trade. With this, participants A and F admitted that they joined in the NPA organization to pursue their education and to skip the hardship in life as promised to them when they were recruited. According to them, the remoteness of their residents was used by the insurgents to recruit in their barangay because they were encouraged to join the NPA for them to fight for their right to geographical development.

The problem on the remoteness of some barangays in Sadanga surfaced as an opportunity for the insurgents to recruit in the statement of Sadanga Mayor Gabino P. Gangangan, who said in a media interview, that those who opposing the funding for the Barangay Development Plan is like encouraging the CPP-NPA to recruit in remote villages that stays undeveloped and impoverished (Moaje, 2021). This strengthens the findings of Domingo (2013) that lack of governance in the countryside sustained the activities of the CPP-NPA for four decades.

**Territorial land dilemma.** Another municipal situation that this NPA organization came to advance was their recruitment in Sadanga is the territorial dilemma since they know that Sadanga people hold true to their culture despite its remoteness. Participant D recalls, *“I joined the NPA recruitment sometime in 1980’s to support my educational needs and to oppose the government in the construction of the Chico Dam project during the Marcos regime.”*

According to Malet (2010); Melsin (2017) and Dearden (2016) the insurgency groups consider betrayal of national culture as one of their recruitment preference because they believe minority groups consider culture as life. Wherein the land which is the main source of their culture if romanticize will perish them. Thus, this NPA insurgent group used it as an opportunity to recruit and became successful in recruiting majority of its residents. They knew that the people in the barangays of Sadanga are in the twilight of needing help and rationally thinking combat as the ultimate recourse for them to defend their territorial lands which supports the

testimony of Noel Legaspi, a former NPA member, that rebel lairs are found in Indigenous Peoples communities that are geographically and topographically conducive for guerilla warfare (Kabagani, 2021).

**Poverty.** From the responses of the participants, poverty is among the reasons why they joined the insurgent group. Sadanga, being in a remote area and a municipality with a rich culture, belongs to the fifth class municipality which means that it obtains an annual income of two million pesos to three hundred fifty million pesos compared to the annual income of a first class municipality as described in the Senate Bill No. 251 in 2019. This also shows that the municipality of Sadanga is poor that the residents are looking for ways to escape the adversity.

According to Arjon et. Al (2008) the controlling factors critical in the rebel recruitment are greedy, community structure and grievance such as economic, ethic, and religious. These factors advantaged the armed organizations to rule specific areas and their inhabitants and obtained the willingness of the community to support and join the insurgency. The presumption that could perhaps explain why individuals who are suffering from this situation are easy to be recruited is their disposition for change in the community for the future of their children. Participant E revealed, *“I was swayed by the promise of the NPAs who recruited me that they will help me and my family fight for equality for our children. I joined the group since I pity the kids who tend the fields while others are being educated in the school.”* On the other hand, Participant A said, *“I was inspired and eventually join the NPA command in 1979 when I thought I can continue my studies and stay long in their command as one way for me to oppose government corrupt activities that made us continuously suffer from poverty.”* These again suggest that poverty is among the causes why people take arms against the government, especially in villages where life is difficult.

**Family support.** Family relations in Sadanga is close-knit. The people there support the endeavors of the family. In an interview with Participant F, she said revealed that her husband joined the NPA group so she followed him in the mountain to fight for a common cause which is to bout for their community. Similarly, Participant E and D have siblings who are NPA members and they followed them as a form of support. These situations affirm that, according to Matisek and Reno (2018), the insurgency recruitment committee have long played on ideological commitment, search for meaning, following family and friends, slick recruiters, and adventure seeking as a pattern where they process their recruitment. The individuals are recruited on this dilemma because what made their life full is love togetherness. Thus, this organization have seen this as one preference in recruiting target victims in Sadanga.

From the presented results of the study, the situation of the municipality and the experiences of the individuals became an avenue for the NPA to recruit in the area. It is tied back to the Neoliberalism framework that political economic practices proposing that human well-being can best be progressed by the intensification of entrepreneurial freedoms in an institution but in Sadanga, economic development a slow-pace and that the situation led the people to incline to the leftist organization that console them.

### **Effects of anti-insurgency intervention programs to the insurgency recruitment in the Municipality of Sadanga**

**Release from threat.** For a long time, the safety of the residents of Sadanga who joined the insurgent group were threatened by the rebels that they or their family members will be killed if they go back to the community and under the folds of the law. Lopez (2020) cited in his news report for the Philippine News Agency in November 1, 2020 that rebel returnees who just surrendered contend with threats from their previous companions who are still insurgents and consider them as “traitors” of the organization.

During the interviews with the participants, all of them admitted that their safety was threatened when they were still serving as members of the NPA. Participant B said, *“I attempted many times to return back to the community but my boss told me that if I go down in the village, they will hunt me and kill me or any of the members of my family.”* Participant G also recalled:

*“I told our commander that I was home-sick. What they did was to let us pass-by our community and allowed us to view the place before we move forward to another community just so that our home-sickness be eased. After any encounter with the military, they conduct an open forum where we share our problems but they embrace us and tell us that the issues will be addressed. During those times, our confidence to the organization comes back to life and we again risk our life in another encounter with the military groups.”*

From the interviews, release from threat, in the context of this study, is described as the freedom from harm on the part of the rebel returnee including the members of their family. Through the various intervention programs of the Philippine government against insurgency, the rebel returnees who availed of the programs are now living freely and peacefully in their communities where their former organization cannot hurt or threaten them.

**Economic improvement.** For development, the intervention programs against insurgency addressed many of the municipality’s concerns such as irrigation, school buildings, farm to market roads and other minor projects. According to Hon. Gabino Gangangan, mayor of Sadanga, the continuous implementation of anti-insurgency initiatives in the municipality started in 2001 which slowly released the municipality from the choking threat posed by the NPA which had bandaged them for development. The Manila Standard, in November 15, 2021, reported in their article that:

*“We see this (BDP) [Barangay Development Plan] as a kind of reward. After liberating our communities of insurgents since 1986, this (BDP) is a big thing,”* Sadanga Municipal Mayor Gabino Gangangan from the Mountain Province said, referring to the fund received by barangays in his municipality in the amount of P20 million each from the task force’s BDP which can be used for basic necessities of their communities such as farm-to-market roads.

This again suggests that the ELCAC program is helping the municipality to be developed in order for the economy to grow. Through the program, the residents realize that the government did not neglect them. Participant A admitted, *“I still prefer our kind of government than communism that was taught to us in the organization (NPA). What I only want is transparency and to avoid the corruption of the government fund.”*

**Employment.** To address the problem on poverty which urged many Sadanga residents to join the insurgent group, employment is among the aim of the intervention program, such as the existing NTF-ELCAC. Doga-ong (2013) reported in his article that 42 rebel returnees wanted to renew their partnership with the Mountain Province government headed by Governor Leonard Mayaen. This program was covered under EO No. 53, the Rebel Returnee Livelihood Program, which provided rebel returnee beneficiaries a monthly allowance of P5,000 in exchange of the community services rendered in the barangays such as cleaning of pathways and roads, irrigation maintenance, tree planting and other services assigned to them by their barangay captains. It was also mentioned in the article that the Provincial Social Welfare Officer of Mountain Province said that the rebel returnees prove their worth in the community and provincial affairs.

The rebel returnees are now in the different communities providing support to their families. According to Hon. Agustin Agpaoan, Brgy. Captain of Betwagan, a home place of the

majority of the rebel returnees, in the municipality of Sadanga, he attested that the sons and daughters of the returnees are now pursuing their academic studies while they are economically moving forward. Conversely, what worries him is that NPA members might use economic improvement as a turning point to process their recruitment, especially nowadays that with the advent of technologies, they can bring messages secretly to the sons and daughters of their former comrades since they believe that revengeful behavior is in their blood. Thus, he suggests that the only remedy to fully let this barangay maintain peace and safety, is the reconstruction of the destroyed bridge constructed sometime in 2012 under PAMANA program. With this, the community will be spared from recruitment opportunities as this bridge connect them to development.

### Conclusion

The geographical location and culture of the municipality of Sadanga and its economic status was seen as an advantage by the insurgents as a recruitment opportunity since they can sway the people to take arms against the government. However, with the anti-insurgency programs that reached the municipality, it continuously helped the community to step forward in their economics. As an effect of the returnees 'integration in the military service and occupation in other government agencies, the communist party recruitment in the place has slowed down. The PAMANA, E-CLIP and ELCAC addressed concerns like employment, farm to market road, school building, irrigation and some small projects that encouraged many rebels to return home. It is seen in this study that other communist party members will revoke their orientation and principles against the government if development is seen in far-flung areas where poverty is alleviated giving people no reason to join the insurgent group.

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