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Jolo, Sulu PHI: A Terrorism and Trading Spot

The Philippines is an agricultural country that has a lot of natural resources to use at their disposal. Out of its 298,170 km² land area, 41.72% of it is agricultural land. However, not every Filipino has access to it. Natural calamities, political factors and lack of proper infrastructure are just few of the factors that hinder the availability of agriculture and food security in the country and these factors vary depending on the region.

Somewhere in the south-western of the Philippines, there lies an island called *Jolo, Sulu* that takes up 126.40 km² total land area of the country. It is under the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) with a population of 125,564 as of 2015. It is a community mixed of Muslims and Christians. As seen in the map, it is just a small isle but it is rich in terms of agriculture and fisheries. The island's main livelihood is focused on fishing since it is surrounded by different bodies of water and the Sulu Sea is accordingly one of the richest fishing grounds in the country. Tausugs are quite good farmers. They grow a lot of vegetables, coconuts, durians and lots of exotic fruits. Although they engage in it, many Tausugs have settled for the efficiency that trading system brings. They produce the raw materials, they harvest it and then export it somewhere for someone else to process it into manufactured goods that they will probably buy in the market or in the groceries in the next following weeks. A typical Tausug family owns a family farm with a main crop for exportation while Badjaos are the best fishermen in town. There is no such thing as illegal fishing nor illegal logging in Sulu, thus its seas and forests are still pristine and in a good condition too. The forests and the seas have not yet been explored to their full extent because of the terrorism going on around Sulu. Military joint operation usually happens in the forest wherein the target group goes into hiding and causes disruption to agricultural activities — the main reason why many of the land areas there are not being used properly in agricultural methods. Terrorism is what hinders the accessibility of the natural resources to the people. For a while now, terrorism existed in the vicinity of Sulu with the people of Sulu living in a war-zone between the target groups and the militaries. They have been living with fear and it affects their livelihood which leads to food insecurity.

According to Britannica, *Terrorism* is the systematic use of violence to create a general climate of fear in a population and thereby to bring about a particular political objective. Terrorism in Sulu comes in many forms. It lives in the guise of kidnapping, murder, bombing etc — but all for the same goal to ruin humanity and gain dominance against the government. The problem is, it is not just the human lives that are at stake, it also causes destruction of infrastructures and resources which results in deterrence of food production which is a necessity for basically anyone. Terrorism activity remains high despite the actions of the government regarding the situation in Sulu. The peace process that they are conducting is, of course, supported by many including the Tausugs. Because clearly, terrorism should be eradicated and be torn up by its roots in the community. The strategy in dealing with terrorism is not questioned however the effects of the conflict between the government and the target group is a different story. Time to time, terror breaks out and it brings disruption to the food system. When Tausugs go into evacuation to get away from the chaos that terrorism brings, food scarcity follows. Stores would close, agricultural and fishing activities stop and there is a total lock-down of the town. No vessel, airplanes or vehicles are allowed to go in or out of Sulu which impacts the food supplies. Furthermore, Tausugs are dependent on

imported manufactured foods. There are not many Sulu-made products that you can find in the Philippines however, they are huge exporters of the materials used for the products sold in the groceries. So, total lock-downs is not an option for the Tausugs. Although it happens once in a while but for a community that is highly dependent on imported goods, Tausugs will starve themselves in times of evacuation.

Global trading system was present since time immemorial and is part of the culture of mankind. In fact, trading of goods has played a big role in the history of the Philippines and has greatly affected the lives of most Filipinos back then. Even before the Spaniards came and introduced the Galleon Trade, such culture already existed particularly in the south-western part of the country. Tausugs were one of the first Filipinos who engaged themselves in trading system. Through trading, they were able to buy and swap things from other neighboring lands such as China, Borneo, Java, Siam etc.. Exchange of culture also occurred between the traders. Other countries who took part in the trading introduced a new lifestyle that seems efficient and facile to the Filipinos. Colonizers had come and go but the trading did not end there. Trading has deeply become part of the culture and identity of the Filipinos. Until now, Philippines still takes part in trading of products in and out of the country that widely affects its economic standing. And Sulu is not an exception. But it is hard to say that their trading system is doing them any good. As a matter of fact, trading makes the Tausugs indolent and dependent on others. They are settling for the efficiency that trading brings rather than turning their exports into something more of their own.

“The presence of terrorists and lawless elements explain why, despite huge financial and logistic resources the government has put into the province, it is still underdeveloped and a majority of the people remain poor and under-educated” said Jaime Laude in an article at Philstar Global back in 2007, referring to Sulu and its economy. But looking back at history, aside from being one of the first trading places in the Philippines, Sulu was a more dominant and developed town when compared to Manila at that time. And according to the Sulu Online Library, it was considered as “The Heart of Trading Zone” because it was the center of international commerce in the late 19th century. Its natural resources captured the interest of other countries in Europe and China which is why they have developed dominance in trading activities. Due to trading, Sulu enjoyed a quite luxurious life and regional sovereignty in the country. Sulu as such a powerful territory that it was given the privilege of naming the nearby sea, The *Sulu Sea* to prove the supremacy of the isle back then. So basically, Sulu went from being one of the richest isles ruled by esteemed Sultanates in the Philippines to being just a rudimentary isle now. Terrorism changed things from what they were before. History proves that Sulu can improve more in the next following years if terrorism does not exist in the isle at all.

In a regular grocery store in Sulu, it is not uncommon to see products from other countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, China and Vietnam. The best way to improve the status of an economy is to patronize local products rather than the imported goods from other countries. Tausugs must strive for innovation and go beyond what is usual in the isle. More local products will ensure an improved economy and stable food system. Innovation must be encouraged to have a sustainable and upgraded food production too. Innovation, according to Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), “cuts across all dimensions of the production cycle and along the entire value chain - from crop, forestry, fishery or livestock production to the management of inputs to market access.” However innovation in the food system slowed down a long time ago in Sulu for three reasons: terrorism, lack of proper infrastructures and tools for food production and corruption. One, terrorism affects not only the people but also the peace and order, livelihood, education, economy and the food system. While many

other nations are evolving remarkably, the impact that terrorism brings put a strain on the growth of the isle. This has to be resolved immediately. If terrorism is gone, then it will lead the quality of the food system to improve as well. Two, Sulu is one of the underdeveloped provinces in the Philippines. They lack the proper infrastructures and even the basic tools for food production. So, people resort to exportation instead of processing products on their own. And third, corruption is also a big factor that affects the flow of innovation in the isle. Corruption of the budget allotted for projects such as in agriculture and fisheries. Many community projects and action-plans have been declined due to insufficient funds where in fact there should be enough funds for the people since there is not much project imposed by the government.

Hypothetically speaking, even if the trading system stopped and no one is out there to process nor import manufactured goods to Sulu, food insecurity will not be a problem at all. If the early Tausugs planted their way into life during the agricultural revolution, there is no reason why people of this generation can not do the same. They have all the natural resources that they might need to survive famine for the next couple of years. There is a whole lot of fish and sea foods in the ocean and a wide arable agricultural land for them to grow crops on. Sulu is rich with foods. The people there just have to work their way into producing more food and make it sustainable as much as possible. They do not have to depend on the goods that are imported from other countries, they can make them — if provided the necessary materials and machineries. There is an allotted national budget to each region that is centered for agricultural sustainability and fisheries. Government officials should distribute the budget and provide the needs of the different sectors that generate the food in the community.

In terms of terrorism, eradicating it will not be easy however it is not impossible. It will take time before terrorism will be completely gone. Through terrorism Tausugs have been deprived of peace in their own land. Everyone's lives, dreams, food security, education and future are at stake and it is also up to everyone to take a step and do something about it. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security has a national campaign called "If You See Something, Say Something" wherein people are expected to report any suspicious activities to the authorities to raise social awareness and avoid attacks or anything of that sort. This will be an appropriate campaign for Sulu as well. Because the problem is, most Tausugs know something about terrorism and who the terrorists are because most of the rebels are from the isle itself. But they choose to stay silent and to not say something for one reason: Fear. People in Sulu live with fear. They value safety rather than bravery despite the amount of desire they have for freedom, peace and security. They would rather not say something than to put their life in danger with the fear of the target groups resting vengeance upon them. But living with fear and cowardice will not guarantee a terrorist-free or a peaceful isle. The better option is to tell the proper authorities when they know something regarding the terrorism in Sulu. Staying silent is not the key. The government should apply this campaign to Sulu and conduct seminars to educate the Tausugs of how this can help eradicate terrorism in the isle.

Sulu cannot achieve the peace and order alone. Many have fought and died with a goal of which to preserve life and create a secure land. Many opportunities have been wasted and billions had been disposed as ransom money to save a life, yet the criminality still remains. It will take more than just the people to reduce the amount of terrorism going around Sulu. The government must take a stand together with the Tausugs and fight against terrorism. Strengthen the security and the military forces around Sulu. Encourage everyone to speak up when they know something about the terrorist. It is high time that they give the peace and security that every Tausugs are asking for.

Tausugs have not yet fully unleashed their full potential in terms of producing foods. They could be something more rather than just being mere exporters of materials that other people use to manufacture goods and sell in the market. They can be the manufacturers themselves. With the determination, proper tools, upgraded infrastructures and support from the government, they can process their own resources and would not have to be fully dependent on other countries for a sack of rice or a can of sardines. Not only it will improve the economy of the isle but it will also enhance the flow of the food system. However all of this would not be possible if terrorism still exists in the isle of Sulu and if the local government continues corrupting the allotted national budget for the sectors of agriculture and fisheries. Because in spite of the innovation being present in the minds of the Tausugs, if they still live in fear and they do not have enough resources to use then all of those aspirations to make Sulu sustainable with food security will be rendered useless. Innovation will not be put into action. It is time for the Tausugs to emancipate from the life of terror and start living free from fear. In that way, they can excel more in life and improve their economy and lifestyle just like every other developing cities in the world. After all, Sulu's global competitiveness was proven once in history and it could happen again.

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