

# Asset-based community development in diverse cultural contexts: learning from Mindanao, The Philippines

Cite as: Hill, A., Mercado, A. B., Fuentes, A. S., & Hill, D. (2022). Asset-Based Community Development in Diverse Cultural Contexts: Learning from Mindanao, the Philippines. In *Languages, Linguistics and Development Practices* (pp. 59-86). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

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## **Abstract**

This chapter is about asset-based community development (ABCD) in Mindanao. Specifically, it is about a locally adapted ABCD approach that has emerged from development practitioners adapting and translating ABCD concepts and methods to make them more culturally relevant. The chapter examines the use of language and other communication tools and local emphasis on empowerment and the role that these things have played in enabling a more culturally relevant form of ABCD. Our chapter opens up a space of conversation between linguists, development scholars, ABCD practitioners, and a larger research community. It invites wider application of learnings from Mindanao and furthers thinking on the application of linguistics in development theory and practice.

## **Keywords**

communication tools; cultural diversity; development; language; Mindanao

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## Introduction

Asset-based community development (ABCD) is a development approach that has been widely adopted around the world to help communities harness and build on local strengths, skills, practices, and knowledge, in order to realise positive development outcomes. ABCD originated in the USA, yet it has been used extensively in varied Western and non-Western contexts such as the Philippines, where the approach has been adapted to suit local contexts. To date, little has been written about the specific ways in which ABCD has been adapted. Part of this, as highlighted elsewhere in this book is to do with the limited analysis to date of the linguistic dimensions of development practice methodologies. There is a need for further research in these areas, and for further research into the role that language and other communication tools play in development methods. This chapter contributes to expanding knowledge about the application of communication tools in development, and it does so, by focusing in on one key global development approach (ABCD), and then exploring how this approach has been adapted to make it more relevant in a diverse cultural context.

In the chapter we examine ABCD ideas, methods and empirics from the perspective of Mindanao based development practitioners, and we consider the role that language and other communication tools play within the Mindanao ABCD approach. In our writing and analysis, we engage in a research conversation that places development researchers, linguistics, and ABCD development practitioners in the Philippines in conversation with one another, and in conversation with a wider research community of social scientists, agricultural scientists, international aid agencies, and anyone interested in enhancing development practice today.

To set up this conversational space, let us introduce ourselves and the methodological process by which we have constructed this chapter. Ann is a community education and development researcher who has been working with research partners in Mindanao over the past 14 years. She

was invited to contribute to this book based on her interest in re-thinking models of development, and her on-going commitment to using participatory action research methods such as the asset-based approach in her work.

We began the thinking process by placing the development researcher (Ann) and the linguist (Deborah) into conversation in the second half of 2020. Ann and Deborah read various writings and poetic reflections of Anselmo, one of Ann's research partners, and a long standing ABCD development practitioner in the Philippines. Anselmo and the organisations he has worked with have been applying and adapting the ABCD approach in Mindanao since the early 2000s. Ann and Deborah laid out an outline for the chapter, wearing our disciplinary hats, and based on our understanding of the ideas and practice reflected in Anselmo's work. Then we established a Google document to check our understandings and to enable to and fro between us authors. It was at this point that our fourth author (Anne Shangrila, known as Shang) came on board. Shang brings rich gender analysis and experience of working with Indigenous women farmers and other marginalised groups in conflict vulnerable communities in Mindanao. In her development practice, working with various research partners including the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR), Shang has adapted the ABCD model. Drawing on our various experiences we all added thoughts, local language terms, notes on process, poetic words, metaphors, and even visions, to our Google document. The result was a rather unruly set of chapter 'notes' which we were tasked with presenting back to the book editors and our co-authors at a book writing workshop on Zoom, February 2021. The workshop enabled us authors to reflect to the group what we felt our chapter was trying to do. It also enabled us to gathered useful feedback from the development and linguistics research community. Beyond the workshop we then worked between us, again with to and fro, to draft and redraft the chapter through to completion.

Our co-authoring has itself been a research conversation and is one model for working across languages and across disciplines. For us it has been a positive, exciting one. The methodological process of creating this chapter models the broader research conversation our chapter contributes to. It is very much an exploration and we invite you to position yourself in conversation with us.

The aim of this chapter is twofold. First, the chapter aims to explore one locally adapted ABCD approach that has emerged from development practitioners adapting and translating ABCD concepts and methods to make them more culturally relevant. Second, the chapter employs linguistic tools to foreground learnings from Mindanao that may have wider application. Section One provides a brief overview of asset-based community development. Section Two explores the Mindanao approach, coined ‘ABCD+E’ and introduces language and communication tools through examples. Section Three drills down further into the role language and other communication tools play as key components of ABCD+E application in Mindanao. Section Four provides a conceptual analysis of ABCD, as practiced in Mindanao, to explain the Mindanao experience of ABCD to those who don’t share Mindanao language and culture. The conceptual analysis is provided to promote wider discussion of ABCD and its use within diverse linguistic and cultural settings.

## Asset-Based Community Development: a brief overview

Over the past few decades development discourse has been heavily informed by a needs and capabilities approach. The ‘capabilities approach’ developed by economist Amartya Sen in the 1980s focuses on ‘what a person is able to do or be’ based on key indicators related to health, education and income levels (Sen 2005: 153). The Human Development Index developed by Sen and Mahbub-ul-Haq in 1990 captures human capabilities in terms of these three indicators. It has remained a key yardstick used by organisations such as the United Nations to measure economic development and growth needs in poorer regions (Sen 2005). This focus on health, education and income levels and needs in contexts like the Philippines is positive in one sense. It expands economic measures out from national economic indicators such as Gross Domestic Product and aims to uncover development inequalities, and to maximise opportunities for local skills, education and income. But one of the big challenges of these indicators is that they often translate into a focus on the lack of those things or what is missing in communities. This is often coupled with encouraging communities to put faith in external solutions such as economic growth through exports and outmigration, to solve local ‘problems’ such as unemployment.

The asset-based approach to development came about in the 1990s in response to over emphasis on the needs and problems in communities, and concern among development practitioners about the detrimental effects this was having. It was originally conceived as an approach to support community development in the United States in cities experiencing high rates of crime, violence, joblessness, welfare dependency, and homelessness. Development practitioners were concerned that images of needy, problematic and deficient neighbourhoods and needy, problematic, deficient people inhabiting those neighbourhoods, were being presented as the whole truth of those people and places. This perceived whole truth in turn was creating a perception that people in those places were clients in need of external programs and solutions that would fix and solve problems. But what was evident to many, was the focus on trying to solve problems through external solutions and one size-fits all programs and policies, wasn't working. The problems and needs didn't go away. The release of *Building communities from the inside out: a path toward finding and mobilizing a community's assets* by John Kretzmann and John McKnight was ground breaking as it proposed a radically new way of assessing and responding to development needs. It proposed assessing development needs not in terms of the lack of resources, employment, education, health and so forth, but rather in terms of how existing resources already at hand such as local labour practices, skills, materials and networks could be built upon to maximise community wellbeing and livelihoods (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993).

One of the key points of emphasis is that asset-based community development is not a one size fits all model of economic development that necessitates taking a particular approach to development with a focus on big business, export agendas, or growth through scale up. ABCD is more akin with bringing to light and building on diverse ways of supporting wellbeing and livelihoods. It emphasises starting where people are, with what they have, and finding out what people in a particular place want to foster and build on.

Another key point of emphasis in ABCD is people are no longer positioned as clients in need of external deficiency-based programs but instead, as empowered citizens who can work together to reverse internalised powerlessness, and strengthen opportunities for collective endeavours (Mathie, Cameron and Gibson 2017). An asset based approach encourages communities to drive their own (re)assessment of what is already working in their community and what makes for 'a

good life.’ It prompts collective consideration of what could be done to further engender social, economic, and ecological wellbeing in context. It prompts consideration of how local community can be involved and take the lead in initiating positive changes. Outside experts, finances, and resources might be called upon, but they are enrolled as, and when, needed. Their initial absence does not prevent a community development process from beginning (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993; Gibson-Graham 2006; Hill 2021).

## ABCD in Mindanao: adaptations and examples

In the 1990s as asset-based community development gained momentum, news of this approach spread across the United States, and into Canada where researchers at The Coady Institute picked up the ideas and applied them in their research partnering with universities in places like Mindanao, the Philippines (for example, Mathie and Cunningham 2003). Anselmo was based at one of Coady’s partner universities, Xavier University in Northern Mindanao, where he was Dean of the College of Agriculture, Director of the Southeast Asia Rural Social Leadership Institute (SEARSOLIN), and actively involved in the long running cooperative movement in Mindanao. He became very interested in ABCD and in its application in Mindanao. He then went on to apply and adapt the ABCD approach over the decades that followed, working with various communities, cooperatives and other groups in the process. Today he continues to apply the ABCD approach in his capacity as President of Mindanao’s First Community Cooperative Community Outreach Foundation. In this section we present some of Anselmo’s ideas and experiences of adapting ABCD in Mindanao and provide examples.

Anselmo began using ABCD in Mindanao around the year 2000. One of the first steps was to adapt ABCD to the Mindanao context by giving it a local name: *Kabtangan sa Katilingban alang sa Kausbawan sa Katawhan* in Visayan language or ‘KKKK’ translates into English as ‘assets of the community for people’s development’. As local methods and ideas evolved, there was a further name change to the current usage of *Kaabag sa Kamalambôan Pinaagi sa Kabtangan sa Katilingban* which translates as ‘partners in development using assets of the community’. Anselmo and the development practitioners he worked with felt it was important

that local language was used to communicate the key messages of the ABCD approach, especially in working with *Lumads* (Indigenous peoples) and *Barrio* (rural) people. Anselmo and colleagues believed that people had the right to use their own language and to be heard in their own language. Adopting the language of KKKK was a way to encourage and promote this.

Another important local adaptation was a shift from ABCD to ‘ABCD+E’. For Anselmo the ABCD approach to development in Mindanao, begins with ‘assets’ but should always result in ‘Empowerment’ (E). Within ABCD+E, a key idea is that assets are not assets straight away. They are first thought of as resources that have potential to become something. A building, for example, can be considered a resource that has the potential to become any number of things. If and when an idea of building, improving, or expanding a local school emerges from within the community, the building might be imagined as an asset in the development of the school. The idea is that resources become assets when they are used and applied by the community, for the benefit of the community. The key to resources being used well and applied well is the developed sense of empowerment within the community to build, grow, and improve things from the inside out, starting with what they have at hand.

Sometimes resources being used well and applied well means ensuring different resources can work together hand in hand. In the case of developing the school, the vacant building becomes a much more effective asset when it is combined with other things: students, teachers, education programs, materials and equipment. All of these things become assets in tandem, working together around a common goal such as quality teaching and learning. Not only do they work together, they are interdependent. Without willing and able teacher labour, and students keen to learn, and without programs and materials fit for purpose, the school building cannot realise its potential as an asset for quality teaching and learning. Anselmo and his colleagues emphasise that enacting the kinds of interrelationships and interdependencies identified above is a crucial aspect of the ABCD+E approach.

To convey the importance of interdependencies, Anselmo and his colleagues use Filipino analogies that are widely understood such as *pinakbet*, mixed vegetables eaten hand in hand with meat to nourish the body, and *halo-halo*, a Filipino favorite mix of different colorful sweet treats combined that energises the body (admittedly with a lot of sugar hence why it is regarded as an occasional treat). In earlier research work in Mindanao, Ann came across another example, namely, the use of a traditional song called *Bahay Kubo*, the Nipa Hut children's song, by local workers promoting ABCD. The song describes life in a traditional Filipino house characterised by a roof made from thatched *nipa* palm leaves, and describes diverse vegetables and plant proteins purposefully grown around the house to support the wellbeing of the household (for more on this example see Hill 2011). With each of these analogies, focus is on a diversity of things working together to produce some kind of benefit. Shedding light on benefits and on different ingredients or resources coming together for collective benefit, is a key aspect of empowering people to drive their own community development through ABCD. In Mindanao, collective empowerment and benefit is re-enforced through emphasis on ABCD+E. Below we provide two examples of Mindanao communities where these ideas have come to fruition and an ABCD+E approach has been applied to support cultural diversity and community wellbeing and livelihoods.

The *Bukidnon Tagoloanon Mula Hay Ha Kabukalagan Agricultural Cooperative (BUKTAMACO)* is described on BUKTAMACO's social media home page as 'the economic arm of Bukidnon Tagoloanon Ancestral Domain'.<sup>1</sup> The term Ancestral Domain refers to land belonging to the *Lumad* people of that area. This might sound simple enough but the issues surrounding ancestral domain claims in Mindanao are complex, and they have incited national debate and armed conflict over several decades. The Philippines government's Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997 does state *Lumad* people have rights to their lands and to self-governance but enforcing the law is still a work in progress. There is opposition to it, even among government. With this in mind, we can see why empowering *Lumad* and other marginalised peoples through ABCD is crucial for supporting their wellbeing and livelihoods.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.facebook.com/Bukidnon-Tagoloanon-Mulayah-Ha-Kabukalagan-Agriculture-Cooperative-105950487974722/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/Bukidnon-Tagoloanon-Mulayah-Ha-Kabukalagan-Agriculture-Cooperative-105950487974722/?ref=page_internal) viewed 9 September 2021.



BUKTAMACO has a cooperative office and agricultural store in Malaybalay, the capital of the agricultural province of Bukidnon, but it represents and supports *Lumad* cooperative members from across a larger area of Northern Mindanao. This area includes different municipalities of Bukidnon province, and the Municipality of Tagoloan in the neighboring province of Misamis Oriental.

BUKTAMACO'S vision is to develop its ancestral domain through sustainable programs that are in keeping with its Indigenous culture and tradition. It aims to improve the economic condition of its members and the same time as to enable members to continue to live as Indigenous People, with a focus on passing on cultural knowledge and values to the next generations.

Key to achieving BUKTAMACO's aim and vision has been the identification of various resources already within the community, and then realising these resources as assets in local development efforts. Resources identified in ABCD+E training include: Indigenous cultural knowledge, beliefs and values; Indigenous sharing, reciprocity and governance practices; strong Indigenous leaders and leadership skills including the skills of a *Lumad* leader who is also a lawyer; and a 900-hectare parcel of ancestral domain land. These resources have been harnessed as assets in the development of BUKTAMACO as a *Lumad* cooperative, described as a *mestizo* or hybrid cooperative because it blends local *Lumad* culture and values with cooperative organising and operating principles.<sup>2</sup> Some of the *Lumad batasan* or Indigenous values underpinning the cooperative include: *pabaton-batonâ*, a mutual responsibility to lift one another up; *pauyag-uyagâ*, a commitment to mutual help and reciprocity; *pabulig-buligâ*, a community support system to help those with greatest need and; *Patawil-twailâ*, complementarity and cooperation between members.

Having established a strong internal foundation based on their own Indigenous values and practices, BUKTAMACO has been able to link effectively to external resources that support its vision and aim. As well as gaining access to Mindanao cooperative development practitioner knowledge and experiences of elsewhere, BUKTAMACO has also gained technical support and

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<sup>2</sup> For more information on Mindanao cooperative organising principles and experiences, see the work of FICCO of which Anselmo is currently a member and the Director <https://www.ficco.org/>.

financial assistance from government and other institutions. These external resources have enabled cooperative members to undertake diversified farming. Cacao, bananas, other food crops, as well as giant bamboos, are successfully being grown on the cooperative's ancestral domain lands, where members live and work together to support each other's livelihoods. They have established a vermiculture or worm composting project and other agroecology projects are being planned for.

The *Higaunon Lumad* community in Barangay Samay is another example of the application of ABCD+E in Mindanao. *Higa* or living, combined with the words *unon* /mountain people, translates as 'mountain dwelling people'. This community is located in the mountains of Balingasag, about 480 meters above sea level, and 17 kilometers from the centre of Balingasag Municipality, Misamis Oriental. The *Higaunon Lumad* community is currently led by their *datus* or tribal leaders.

Prior to adopting an ABCD+E approach *Higaunon* Samay people were dispersed across their 14,000-hectare ancestral domain and living in traditional nipa huts which were in a state of disrepair. There was no electricity, and access to fresh, safe drinking water was limited. Today these people live in new family dwelling units with electricity and running water. Housing improvements were made possible through funding from The National Housing Authority of the Philippines.

At first glance we might think of this example as typical of 'business as usual development' with the housing authority/external development agency providing around PHP 200,000 (equivalent of AUD 5,500) funding per dwelling to address a development need that the community could not financially meet themselves. On closer inspection we see the empowerment of the *Higaunon* Samay people and how they were able to drive the development process through maximising opportunities associated with external support. In this case, external resources at the start of the development process became a collective asset that was put to use for collective benefit.

In conjunction with the housing development, the *Higaunon* Samay people began intentionally working to maximise collective benefit and harness opportunities for ABCD+E. One way in

which this was done was through the decision to create a communal housing site and to ensure the 60 family dwelling units were built in close proximity to one another. The communal housing site created a new sense of community with greater opportunity for social interaction, mutual support, and communal participation in cultural ceremonies.

One of the collective benefits of this is that the *Higaunon Lumad* culture and value system is being kept alive and strengthened. Communal members share in their respect, faith and devotion to their *Magbabaya Bai* (Omnipotent Generous God). In almost every community event, they perform a ritual prayer with some live animal offering. They also share in great respect for their elders and leaders, and vice-versa, their leaders show respect for community members and support them in actively participating in decision-making on community livelihood projects. A combination of closer dwelling proximity, dynamic leadership, increased community spirit and participation, and maintained community of faith and spiritual beliefs, is generating an internal sense of empowerment in this community.

In today's global and national Philippine context, many traditional cultural practices and beliefs are under threat and regarded as outmoded, particularly among younger generations seeking to move from rural and remote mountainous regions to cities in search of a better life. The drive to modernise through housing improvements, access to utilities, and other things such as televisions, motorbikes, computers and internet, can itself be regarded as something that has the potential to undermine and threaten traditions. In the *Higaunon Samay* example, maintaining traditions while also making modern improvements has been possible. The internal strength and empowerment of the community and its leadership is what has made this possible. In turn, strengthening and empowering the community has been made possible through the application of a culturally adapted ABCD+E approach.

In the next section we drill down further into what a culturally adaptive approach entails. We consider specific tools that Anselmo, Shang and other development practitioners use in their ABCD+E work with Mindanao communities such as those described above.

## Language and other communication tools as a key component of ABCD+E in Mindanao

The Philippines is a multilingual nation. There are 186 languages, 184 of which are still ‘alive’, and 175 Indigenous languages (Eberhard *et al.* 2021). The official languages are Filipino and English. The diversity of languages and the cultural attuned practices associated with different languages is something that has been highlighted by development scholars. For example, the Monsoon Asia Keywords project identifies local language terms from across Asia that signify diverse economic practices. It highlights the valuable role local language termed practices continue to play in supporting communities facing a range of development challenges, including disasters and climate change (Gibson *et al.* 2018). It includes an analysis of *Kamañidungan* a reciprocal labour house building practice in the Batanes region, in the remote north of the Philippines where the *Ivatan* people have survived extreme weather and isolation for centuries. It explains how their survival has necessitated particular housing designs, and building practices and artisanal skills that are still being used today. The Monsoon Asia Keywords project is just one example of work which highlights the importance of maintaining local languages and cultural practices aligned with those languages in the present day.

The importance of working with local languages and culturally attuned practices is not a new argument. Linguists, anthropologists, and social scientists more generally, have long acknowledged the importance of researchers understanding and working with local language and cultural context (Bamgbose 2014; Bearth 2008, Brehm 2019; Khan 2014; Krijtenburg 2017). Attending to this argument is important in the context of development work, and specifically within ABCD because this work is explicitly about community empowerment. This means the tools we work with in ABCD+E need to be tools that empower the people we are working with. What we are signalling here is, in addition to descriptive, knowledge expanding uses of language in development such as in the Keywords example above, we also need to focus on the methodological uses of language. To date this area has been under researched. In the remaining part of our chapter, we explore the methodological role language and other communication tools can play, first in the context of ABCD+E in Mindanao.

To begin with, it is important to establish that much of the development practice work that takes place in Mindanao operates in a multilingual context. This multilingual context spans official languages Filipino and English, the national language Filipino, regional languages such as *Bisayâ also known as Cebuano*, and local Indigenous languages such as those of the *Teduray*, *Bagobo-Klata*, *Tboli*, *Subanen*, *Mandaya*, and *Mansaka*. Within this multilingual context there is a hierarchy of languages. Because of its historical and current role as the language of education, English is positioned at the top of the hierarchy, and often associated with ‘intelligence’, being educated and being globally connected. The role of English as the medium of instruction in schools began under American colonial rule (1901-1945), and continued until 1974, when a bilingual policy was introduced. A multilingual language policy was introduced in 2009. This policy called for the use of a students’ native or regional language in the first three years of schooling (Tupas and Tabiola 2017). Filipino is positioned on the next rung, as the national languages that everybody understands. National television broadcasts are in Filipino. Most Filipinos know Filipino so this language is usually employed by people whenever they are unsure of the first language of the Filipino person they are speaking with. Indigenous languages are usually relegated to the lowest rung in the hierarchy. Indigenous people strive to learn a more ‘mainstream’ or commonly spoken language, for example, to learn *Ilonggo* or Filipino in Mindanao, in order to ‘belong’ or to enable them to access employment and other opportunities. This is commonly framed in literature as an indicator that language carries power, the higher up the hierarchy language abilities are, the more access one has to power, resources and opportunities (see for example the critique of a Job Enabling English Proficiency (JEEP) project in Mindanao (Tupas and Tabiola 2017).

The way Shang and development practitioner colleagues make use of language in their ABCD work, is through adopting a multilingual approach. A conscious methodological decision is made to reverse the order and status of languages through putting people’s first language first. Encouraging people to use their first spoken language where possible and to use local language over others in ABCD activities, is seen as a way to shift the power dynamics and give local communities a sense of ownership of the process. In using participatory methods such as ABCD, it is crucial that researchers and development practitioners understand choice of language as something that can make or break people’s ability to participate and engage meaningfully. But

this can be tricky for the researcher or development practitioner, especially when they don't understand or speak the local languages being used.

In the Indigenous communities where Shang works, the Indigenous language is always inaccessible to her. She often has this dilemma: she goes to visit a community where they speak *Blaan*, *Tboli* or *Teduray* and she doesn't know how to speak that language and then she wonders how to best communicate with them. While everyone in the Philippines knows basic Filipino, Shang recognises that using Filipino can lead to local people feeling disconnected from her. Where possible she speaks in a regional language, a Visayan settlers' language<sup>3</sup>, usually *Hiligaynon* or *Ilonggo*, as she feels that brings a greater sense of trust and belonging as she is at least speaking peoples second language. If she cannot manage to communicate fully in a Visayan language, she supplements with Filipino words and phrases. The Indigenous people, who usually understand the migrant settlers' language, appreciate the discussion even more as they can share their ideas freely and spontaneously. In the case of Moro communities however, Filipino or *Tagalog* is the preferred language as this is more familiar to them rather than Visayan languages. Whenever possible though, the team speaks in the local language such as *Maguindanaon* or *Tausug*.

It is not just researchers and development practitioners but also *Lumad* community members themselves who adopt a multilingual approach. Rodil (2015) highlights this with a significant historical example. In 1986, when fifteen of the then known eighteen tribes of Mindanao came together to discuss governance and self-determination issues, they decided to adopt the term *Lumad*, the *Bisayâ* term for Indigenous or native, as a collective name. Rodil notes that it is rather ironic that the *Lumad* peoples of Mindanao chose a collective noun by which to identify themselves, from the *Bisayân* language, the language of the migrants from the Visayas that led to the *Lumad* dispossession of their lands. He explains the reason in linguistic terms: when diverse *Lumad* tribes come together in big assemblies, they spontaneously shift to *Bisayâ* as their lingua franca as this is the best means by which they can communicate effectively between one another

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<sup>3</sup> With the waves of migration from the Visayas region of the Philippines to Mindanao, different regional languages for example, *Hiligaynon*, *Ilonggo* and *Bisayâ*, travelled to Mindanao and were used more commonly among people living in Mindanao.

(2015:5). The term *Lumad* as discussed by Rodil (2015) is agreed upon by the Indigenous people themselves and used as a collective noun in the same way terms such as ‘women’ and ‘workers’ have been used to lobby for change and address injustices.

Clearly there are complexities around which language is used when and by whom in development interventions. Understanding the political dimensions and power relations around which language is used and how, is key. Some community members may be silenced, not deliberately, but simply because the choice of language doesn’t allow for a more open discussion with them. Shang notes that Indigenous and other marginalised people are often uncomfortable sharing in development activities when the language used is less familiar to them. Hence in their work in *Lumad* communities, Shang and her team have local site facilitators who know the local language and can communicate with local people effectively. In instances when the site facilitators do not know the Indigenous language well, having a local translator helps tremendously in facilitating a more active interaction.

In Shang’s project work the criteria for choosing site facilitators are crucial. These people are ‘the face’ of a research project in the community. They must be locals so that they know the terrain of the community, understand and speak the language, and have strong, positive existing relationships and networks they have developed over time. All of this puts them in a position of trust. While the element of trust is important in any community development work, it is especially important in the context of conflict-vulnerable areas as mistrust can be high, discouraging cooperation amongst and between various groups such as Indigenous peoples, and Muslims and other migrant settlers. The community develops more trust in working with a project team when team members speak their language. Close bonds can result from the effort project teams have made to learn local language and to communicate in local language, as opposed to expecting communities to adjust to the spoken language of project workers. One good indicator of trust earned in a community is the noticeable inclusion of jokes in a conversation. This is often regarded as a sign local people have become comfortable with a project team and no longer see them as complete outsiders.

As well as adopting a multilingual approach development practitioners and researchers in Mindanao adopt a multimodal approach, by incorporating symbols, pictures and visual methodologies in workshops and training exercises. Shang's experience of conducting farm-based training sessions has led her to reflect on the 'seeing is believing' visual aspects of language and farmer training. Shang's experience is that farmers understand 'seeing' a model farm much more than they understand technical language explanations. They see and experience human-plant interactions on farms, often in ways that don't require words to mediate interactions and generate understanding.

In workshops, symbols, pictures and drawing play an important role as communication tools. Shang observes that drawing is often a more powerful than words; through drawing farmers can more easily convey their ideas. Shang recalls a mapping session where farmers were asked to describe their community and what resources could be found there. A drawing shared among farmers proved highly effective and interactive. Anselmo and Ann have also had experiences of this. They organised ABCD community food mapping workshops where community members interacted with a GIS base map and then used markers to draw symbols representing key resources and assets they could identify on the map (see Hill 2021 for more on this). The visual processes generated rich discussion and interaction. Workshops were also filmed and uploaded on YouTube and shared on social media which generated further discussion and interaction.

More recently, with pandemic induced travel and mobility restrictions, Shang and site facilitators have adopted online field-based training workshops and used videos to teach farmers about organic vegetable production and seaweed production. When training can't take place in situ, videos, photos, and symbols are invaluable training and communication tools. Pictures and symbols speak volumes to people with lower literacy. Just as songs, paintings, oral storytelling, have been used for thousands of years, pictures and symbols have too, and part of their power is that they help ideas to travel among people with limited reading and writing skills. These non-word-based communication modes allow room for (re)interpretation, imagination, innovation and experimentation and this is one of the strengths of a adopting a multimodal approach.



The linguistic tools described in this section demonstrate the complexity of development communication, the variety of ways in which development workers communicate, and the reliance on speakers of different languages in a highly multilingual setting, where no single development worker is likely to have command of the many languages they will encounter in their work. In the next section, we use the linguistic tool of conceptual analysis to describe asset-based community development in English that is easy to understand and easy to translate.

## Conceptual analysis of ABCD

The ABCD approach to development work is inherently flexible, allowing it to be adapted in linguistically and culturally diverse settings, such as Mindanao. The central notion of starting with the strengths of a community, that is, starting where you are with what you have, suggests that appropriate language choices and communication tools are necessary components of ABCD. As noted above, an asset-based approach encourages communities to drive their own (re)assessment of what is already working in their community and what makes for ‘a good life’ – using one’s own language, or preferred language, is part of this.

A conceptual analysis is a linguistic tool that can be used to explain cross-linguistic concepts. In the case of ABCD, we have seen that this approach originated in the USA but has been adapted to suit local contexts. A conceptual analysis can provide an explanation (called an explication) of the concept ABCD to Mindanao communities, and to those who have no experience of ABCD or Mindanao development work, as a way of making the methodology and thinking behind it visible. The conceptual analysis is in effect a paraphrase of a Western concept that is being adapted in a diverse context. It can be written in English (or any language) and translated into the language of any community that ABCD is used in.

A conceptual analysis can help us to clarify our own thinking (e.g. ‘when I say ABCD, this is what I want to say’). The conceptual analysis below is written in English, but the words chosen

are those that are easy to understand and easy to translate. It is written in Minimal English, which has a defining vocabulary that is associated with the combinatory properties of the terms that together constitute a Minilanguage and comprise a Minimal language of a particular language which is easily understood without needing further explanation. The Minimal English vocabulary of about 300 words include semantic primes (65), (i.e. words that cannot be paraphrased and are expected to be lexical universals) (Goddard 2018; 2021), semantic molecules that seem to be near-universal and that reflect our shared human experience (perhaps 60–80 semantic molecules), and culture-specific semantic molecules. For example, in Filipino it could be that *pinakbet*, mixed vegetables eaten hand in hand with meat to nourish the body (referred to above), is a semantic molecule because of its cultural significance and widespread recognition.

For an English speaker who comes across an explication for the first time, the language may not sound quite ‘natural’. This is because there may be more common ways to express something in English, but this ‘common way’ is not necessarily one that can easily be translated. The explication, if successful, should also be one that can be linked to a broader discussion of the concept. In this case, writing the conceptual analysis came from listening to other authors (Ann, Anselmo and Shang) of this chapter and reading what they wrote about ABCD. The script was then checked with the authors to establish whether what is presented here reflected their understanding of ABCD as used in Mindanao.

ABCD is both an approach, reflecting a certain way of thinking, and a process. The discussion in this chapter presents both the thinking that underpins ABCD, and the processes undertaken in implementing this development approach in Mindanao. The conceptual analysis below was written as an attempt to capture the thinking behind ABCD. There are four sections to the explication: the first one [A] describes what people think and the second one describes what people can say about this place [B]. These two sections reflect the point that ABCD focuses on ‘assets’ – what the community already has, and also that ‘assets’ include people, place, and ‘good things’. The second section identifies what some of the good things are, and reflects the ABCD process of taking stock of community assets. Section [C] focuses on the point that by doing things, the community can make decisions and take actions that can improve their lives in

the ways they choose. In addition there are ‘some people, not from here’ (e.g. development workers, NGOs, agricultural extension workers, outside experts), who can play a role in this process. The final section [D] explains that there can be change and improvement, maybe ‘not in a short time’ based on doing things, as a group of people who already have some ‘good things’, to improve their lives.

## **Asset Based Community Development approach**

### **[A] WHAT OUR PEOPLE THINK**

It is good if people in one place think like this:

We people live in one place together.

Our place is a good place.

Our people are good people.

Here, in our place, there are many good things.

Here, in our place, many people know many things, can do many things; many people here think like this, we are “one people”

**ALL THESE IMPLY THAT PEOPLE APPRECIATE WHAT THEY HAVE AS THEY PERCEIVE THEM.**

### **[B] WHAT OUR PEOPLE CAN SAY ABOUT THIS PLACE**

If we people want to know more, have more, do more, be more, we can think like this

Many things in our place are good

We can say what some of these things are: some things like water, trees, soil; some things like schools, churches, markets. We can’t say what all these things are; there are many things.

**HERE, THEY ARE AND THEY CAN CTUALLY IDENTIFY THEIR RESOURCES OR ASSETS (THE “GOD THINGS” THEY HAVE).**

### **[C] WHAT OUR PEOPLE CAN DO**

We can do some things together in this place.

We can think about some things we want to do;

We can think some things we want to do now;

We can think some things we want to do later.

Some people here know many things; we can do some things together with these people.

Some people, not from here, know many things; we can do some things together with these people too.

**HERE, THE PEOPLE SENSE SOMETHING THAT THEY CAN DO, AND IF DONE TOGETHER, CAN BE POSSIBLY DONE AND WILL EMPOWER THEM. (“ALONE WE CAN DO, BUT TOGETHER WE CAN DO MORE.”).**

#### **[D] WHAT CAN HAPPEN IN THE FUTURE**

When we think like this, do things like this, do things together in this place, at some time, maybe not a short time from now, our lives can be good, our children’s lives can be good, our place can be good.

**HERE, THERE IS A REALIZATION THAT THE JOURNEY WILL BE LONG AND TOUGH, BUT THEY ARE HOPEFUL AND THEY ASPIRE FOR A BETTER LIFE FOR THEM AND THEIR CHILDREN.**

**ALL THE ABOVE, THE “APPROACH” AND THE “PROCESS” ARE VERY POSITIVE (HOPEFUL), AS WELL AS REALISTIC AND PRACTICAL, OR HAS A “DOWN-TO-EARTH” OUTLOOK, AN ACCEPTANCE OF THE CHALLENGES OF THE LONG JOURNEY FOR A BETTER LIFE). IN SHORT, IN A SENSE, THIS IS THE ABCD+E (KKKK) “JOURNEY”.**

## **Conclusion**

ABCD emphasises starting where people are, with what they have, and finding out what people in a particular place want to foster and build on. This chapter has explained the development of ABCD and its adaption to Mindanao, with a focus on the role of language and communication tools as part of the adaption. The Mindanao adaption began with translating the term ABCD into KKKK, a new term for a new location and language. A focus on using local languages was part of the adaption from the outset of Anselmo’s work, especially when working with *Lumads* and *Barrio* people. The chapter has explained the importance of incorporating terms that speak to the experiences of Mindanao people when explaining the interdependencies of the assets a

community has in this approach (e.g. *pinakbet*, mixed vegetables eaten hand in hand with meat to nourish the body), the identification of Indigenous cultural knowledge, beliefs and values as an important resource in ABCD+E training, and the reciprocal benefits of ABCD+E approaches to the maintenance of Indigenous cultures (e.g. *Higaunon Lumad* culture).

At the same time, in a highly multi-lingual society, Indigenous languages are not always inaccessible to development workers, as Shang explained. A multi-modal approach (e.g. the use of songs, paintings, oral storytelling), and collaborative partnerships with translators and interpreters are therefore necessary elements of the ABCD approach in Mindanao. And finally, ABCD is a complex but flexible approach to development and this chapter has introduced a conceptual analysis, using words that can be easily understood and translated, to demonstrate another kind of linguistic contribution to explaining the use and adaption of ABCD in Mindanao.

This chapter has brought together the experiences and perspectives of four authors to examine the role of language and communication tools in the adaption of ABCD in a culturally and linguistically diverse setting. Through examining one widely adopted development approach, the chapter has furthered methodological conversations between linguistics, and development scholars and practitioners in the Philippines and elsewhere in the world, with a view to enhancing development practice today.

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