



## SUCCESS STORY

# Forestry Law Built on Consensus

### Religion and local culture are integrated into environmental law



Regional Secretary Kabuntalan Emblawa, second from left, and other officials sign the Implementing Rules and Regulations for the Forest Management Act.

***“We should be happy and proud of the Mindanao Sustainable Forest Management Act because this is the first time in our province that legislation resulted from consultations with each other,” says Vice Governor Hadji Jilkasi Usman of Tawi-Tawi.***

Telling Our Story  
U.S. Agency for International Development  
Washington, DC 20523-1000  
<http://stories.usaid.gov>

Located in the southern Philippines, the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao comprises two mainland and three island provinces. Because many live in poverty in rural areas, they depend upon access to forest resources for survival. But unchecked use of critical natural resources can produce serious environmental consequences.

It was clear that this region needed legislation to regulate the responsible use of land and forests. But simply passing a law to protect forests would not be enough: residents affected by the law needed to fully understand its benefits to encourage them to abide by it. Otherwise, this legislation, like others requiring people to change the way they gathered food and fuel, would be difficult to enforce. With this in mind, USAID sought to ensure that the new legislation incorporated local traditions, religious laws, and other cultural norms.

USAID worked closely with the government of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao to solicit advice and opinions from local government units, Muslim legal specialists, social scientists, and community leaders in an effort to address the concerns of all involved.

The product of these efforts — the Muslim Mindanao Sustainable Forest Management Act — successfully incorporated a range of opinions and concerns from across the region. The law represented a landmark in the history of forest management in the Philippines because of the participatory process used in drafting it. Working together, parties with apparently competing interests agreed upon a number of compromises to satisfy divergent needs in creating an effective environmental governance plan.

The legislation drew from principles rooted in Islamic and customary laws, as well as community-based management approaches. As a result, it has empowered local communities to address the destruction and degradation of forests while permitting those most dependent upon the forest for basic needs to use its resources in a responsible fashion.

Photo: USAID