
“What can the CNMI do to strike a sustainable balance between land preservation and land development?”

Since ancient Chamorro times, the land has been our livelihood. The land has existed long before we have and has given us what we need to survive by providing us with food, water, and shelter, proving its significance to the Chamorro culture. The land has become our culture, and without our land, we are nothing. Unfortunately, in recent times, our people have forgotten what the land truly means to us as the battle between preserving our culture or sacrificing it as a means to further land development has arisen and has divided us as no clear answer has been provided. However, our duty as Northern Marianas Descendants is to determine what we can do with our land that will be beneficial to us and future generations to come. What can we do to not only preserve our land but also help our island grow and develop, just as our ancestors had done? I believe that it is possible to balance the two. It is just a matter of finding the right investors and implementing different alternatives such as limited development with conservation subdivisions to preserve land development.

Although many investors do not like to be told how to do their business, it is important to find investors who consider implementing land preservation as part of their business plan to build their business in the CNMI. For example, during the Japanese administration, Haruji Matsue established a sugarcane industry that promoted economic development within the CNMI and preserved land for the people of the NMI. The land was provided to the local workers to grow sugarcane and sell it to the company as income. After fulfilling their contract with the company, the local people could keep the land and establish their own businesses, which allowed

them to make a living. Using this as an example, if we focused on finding investors who are willing to implement land preservation into their business plan to benefit them and the people of the CNMI, land could be preserved and developed simultaneously.

Once we find the right investors, the investors can be offered two types of alternatives that could be done to implement their business plan. One of these alternatives is called limited development. Limited development is a process that can be done in four ways, but only one will be discussed for the sake of this essay. The first method, which is to buy, restrict, and sell, could be something business owners can choose that will meet the land preservation aspect of their plan. This method would be altered as land cannot be sold to people outside of the CNMI but rather leased for a certain amount of years. DPL can identify and retain some of the conservation value lands, establish a conservation easement, and lease the remaining land to these investors. This alternative will allow land to remain conserved while at the same time making use of land for land development.

The other alternative that can be offered to investors would be the conservation subdivision. Conservation subdivision is the process in which land is divided in half. One half has the potential of being a buildable area, and the other half consists of a cluster of small lots that can be built for residential use. Depending on what kind of business they are building, investors can consider this alternative if their target consumers are the local population. They will be building their business next to the community, which will benefit them. This alternative will allow the land to be preserved for the people of the NMI while also providing economic development as investors can build on the remaining land.

Balancing land preservation and land development continues to be controversial as opinions have been divided between one being more important than the other. However, the land

is essential to the Chamorro culture. As NMDs, we need to decide how to maintain our culture while allowing room for economic development. By finding the right investors who can implement land preservation as part of their business plan, we can provide our land to business owners who value land preservation as much as we do and will acknowledge and honor it. Offering options for investors to look into, such as limited development and conservation subdivision that will be following their business plan and land preservation, will allow them to explore alternatives that will promote their business while also benefiting the people of the CNMI. We need to explore further options for land conservation and implement them now before it is too late. Our job is to follow our ancestors' footsteps and continue protecting our land while also helping our islands develop, for we are the people of the land, the *tåtåo tanu*.