



## SUCCESS STORY

### Peace now reigns in War-Prone Community



When news of the brutal killing of Barangay Mandulan's captain and his wife broke out in late 2003, some of their family members organized a group to avenge their deaths and take the law into their own hands. Armed conflicts were common in these remote Muslim communities in the southernmost part of the Philippines, due to which it is said that all men folk in these villages own a gun and that a rifle is a higher priority in households than food on the table.

In further retaliation, the victims' survivors planned to steal the renewable energy systems installed by USAID's Alliance for Mindanao Off-grid Renewable Energy (AMORE) from the communal solar battery charging stations to the solar-powered streetlights to the solar home system installed in the community center.

Fortunately, in December 2003, AMORE had federated all its Barangay Renewable Energy and Community Development Associations (BRECDAs), composed of program beneficiaries, in the entire

municipality of Bongao in the province of Tawi-Tawi, Barangay Mandulan included. Former police colonel Julficar Ladjahali, BRECDA Chairman of Barangay Laganan, was elected Chairman of the Municipal BRECDA Federation.

The BRECDAs primarily take the lead in sustaining the renewable energy systems and other development projects in their respective communities. AMORE aims to contribute to peace and development in Mindanao, and the BRECDAs are envisioned to be agents and catalysts for such.

When the plans of the victims' family reached Mr. Ladjahali, he immediately met with the captains of the 10 neighboring barangays. With the assistance of Padjing Juwak, Chairman of the Association of Barangay Chairmen in the Municipality of Bongao, he arranged for a dialogue with the leader of the avenging group.

During the negotiations, Mr. Ladjahali appealed to them to abandon their plans and seek the help of the proper authorities to solve the issue. He also sought their cooperation in the protection of the renewable energy system installations in Mandulan. "Since I was elected Chairman of this federation, it is my responsibility to take part in resolving the conflict so that the installations would be protected from theft and damage. I would like to preserve their trust in me and in the AMORE Program," said Mr. Ladjahali in Tausug, the local dialect.

Convinced that peace is indeed better than war, the avenging group abandoned their violent plans and turned over the problem to the authorities. By mid-February, local police have arrested the suspected criminal in nearby Barangay Lakit-Lakit.